

## **Introduction**

When we are not feeling well, usually someone has a “prescription” that will show us what we must do to feel good again. When we are very sick the doctor will give a prescription for medicine to treat our illness. Jesus said, “It is not the well who need a doctor, but the sick... (Matthew 9:12)

God’s Word provides prescriptions for us all, but we must admit that we need His help – we must admit we are “sick”. In this second booklet on biblical prescriptions for our problems, we are going to study a few of God’s prescriptions; for marriage, fathers, depression, salvation from our sin, adversity and for our character. It is my prayer that this booklet will get you into God’s Word and God’s Word into you, because it is in His Word that we can find His prescriptions that will show us how we can solve our many problems.

### **MINI BIBLE COLLEGE**

### **INTERNATIONAL BOOKLET TWENTY-ONE**

### **PRESCRIPTIONS OF CHRIST**

**(Part 2)**

### **Chapter One**

### **“A Brief Prescription for Marriage”**

In the third chapter of First Peter, the Apostle Peter writes a brief marriage prescription for women with husbands who do not obey the Word. Peter’s prescription for these women begins with the word, “likewise”. This word “likewise” refers us back to the last verse of chapter two, which states that we have returned to Christ, the

Shepherd of our souls.

According to Peter's prescription for women with husbands who do not obey the Word, the most important relationship in her home, after she has a relationship with Christ, is her relationship to her husband. Peter addresses the challenge, that the many roles of such a woman, who may also be a mother, is often frustrated by a husband and father who does not obey the Word of God. In his brief biblical prescription for these women, Peter bases his teaching on a metaphor that presents Christ and the church as the model of the relationship these women should have with their husbands.

In this passage, Peter essentially writes to women with husbands who are not obeying the Word: "Do you see that model of Christ and the Church? In that model, you are the church. Let your husband shepherd you as Christ Shepherds the church. As the church relates to Christ, you relate to your husbands likewise, or in the same way."

In the seventh verse of this same passage, Peter shares a word with the husbands of these women. Peter begins his prescription to the husbands of these women with that same word, "likewise". This means that Peter is essentially writing to those husbands: "Do you see that model of Christ and the church? In that model, you are to be as Christ. As Christ relates to the church, you relate to your wives, likewise, or in the same way."

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul, writes this same prescription to husbands regarding their relationship to their

wives: "Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, when He gave Himself for the church." In other words, Paul is essentially prescribing for husbands, "Love, even as He loved. Give, even as He gave, and be to your wives even as He is to the church." These words, "even as" in the original language mean, "in exactly the same way as."

When Peter and Paul prescribe this model, by which they are both saying to husbands, "Be to your wives even as Christ is to the church," who do you think has the most challenging assignment? It is ludicrous for the apostles to give this assignment to husbands - unless Christ lives in them. However, if Christ does live in them, then they have the potential to love even as He loved, to give even as He gave, and to be even as He is. In fact, there is a sense in which we should expect the apostles to prescribe this behavior for husbands in whom Christ lives.

Husbands, I have an assignment for you. Study First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen, especially verses four through seven. You will find fifteen virtues there that tell you how the love of Christ behaves. Every place the Apostle Paul uses the word "love", in this love chapter of the Bible, substitute the word "Christ". Pray through those virtues one at a time and ask the Christ Who lives in you to give you the grace to love your wife in that way. If you will do that, you will find yourself loving, even as He loves, giving even as He gives, and being to your wives even as He is.

In one word, the biggest problem in marriage is “selfishness”, and the most important corrective in marriage in one word is “selflessness”, or to give of yourself, even as He gave. How much did Christ give of Himself to save the church? He gave all. He died for the church. Husbands, you give yourselves to your wives in the same way, and you will be giving even as He gave, you will be loving even as He loved, and you will find yourselves being to your wives, even as He is. All of this is implied in that one word, “likewise”.

However, Peter is not addressing wives with husbands, who love them in the way Peter and Paul prescribe. This may imply they are married to men who are not believers, or this may mean their husbands are believers but are not obeying the teaching of these apostles. The fact that Peter also has instruction for these husbands implies that these husbands are believers.

Observe that Peter is not prescribing that these women are to fix their husbands by preaching to them. Peter actually writes: “Win them without a word by your godly example.” And he essentially writes to their husbands, “You husbands should not try to fix your wives.” Even if you are an expert on what she needs to know and do, you will discover something: she does not want to hear your “expert opinions”. In fact, it is probably true that the harder a husband tries to convince his wife that he knows all the answers, the less she wants to hear his answers. A woman does not want a man to always be telling her how he is right and she is wrong. The same is true for

men. There is something in the male ego that does not want to hear about all his faults from a woman.

### **A Vital Principle of Marriage Counsel**

There is a principle of marriage counsel that is implied by the inspired marriage counsel of Peter, and that is that each needs to “stand” in their place. Let me explain it this way: When Gideon defeated more than two hundred and fifty thousand Midianites, with only 300 committed men, the key to their miraculous victory is described when we are told that the three hundred committed warriors of Gideon, “Stood every man in his place.” (Judges 7:21) There is a place in which every wife and husband is to stand in a marriage. When they both stand in their God-appointed places in their marriage, the problems in their marriage can be conquered.

After focusing the problem that the husband of the woman he is addressing is not standing in his place, Peter prescribes several ways the wife can stand in her place. She is to be spiritual, sweet, submissive, and silent. By submissive, he means that she is to let her husband shepherd her as Christ shepherds the church. By silent, he means that she is not to push, pull, preach, scold, or shame her husband into his place.

Peter knows those methods will not work. He also knows that the woman is not really responsible for her husband assuming his place in their marriage. The strategy of his inspired marriage counsel is that if anything is going to motivate this husband to stand

in his place, it will be the Christ-like example of his wife. He is counseling the wife to accept the responsibility for the only person she can control, and for whom she is responsible: herself. His wise counsel is that she is not to be “over responsible” for her husband and “under responsible” for herself. She is to be spiritual so that she can trust the Lord to help her to be all that she can be in Christ. Peter wants to redirect her priority focus from her husband and his faults to herself and how she can be everything the Lord wants a wife and mother to be.

Perhaps, the number one cause of arguments in our marriages is that the husband is too busy telling the wife all the things she is doing wrong, and the wife is too busy telling the husband all the things he is doing wrong. The wife is trying to drag or nag the man into his place, and he does not want to hear it. And of course the opposite is also true.

This wise counsel of Peter is based on a teaching of Jesus (Matthew 7:1-5). Jesus taught that we must first get the log out of our eye, and then maybe we will be effective in helping other people with the speck of sawdust in their eye. Jesus did not teach that we should never judge others. The essence of His teaching was that we must judge ourselves first.

It is very possible that if you, as a husband, will ask God for the grace to love your wife and family the way Christ loved the church; to give yourself to them as He gave Himself to the church; to be to them what He is to the church; that may motivate your wife to

stand in her place.

If you, as a wife stand in your place, that may motivate your husband to accept the responsibility for himself, and stand in his place. It does not always work out that way because your spouse has a free will, but it works better than the way pushing and pulling them into their place does not work.

After addressing six verses to the wives, the Apostle Peter writes one verse to the husbands: “Likewise you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto your wife as unto the weaker vessel that your prayers may not be hindered.” (7) Even though he only addresses one verse to the husbands, he gives them a challenging assignment in that one verse.

When Peter tells the husbands to “dwell with their wives,” you might think at first that he did not need to state something so obvious, and that it is an unnecessary part of his prescription. Peter means more than the obvious fact that the husband is to live with his wife. Some husbands spend less and less time with their wives as they live out their married life together. I think the old pastor Peter is wise when he prescribes: “Dwell with them. That is why you married them!”

He then adds to this prescription when he writes, “Dwell with them according to knowledge.” I wonder, husband, how well do you know your wife? And then, how well do you understand your wife? Peter’s prescription actually implies, “Dwell with them with understanding.” Do you understand your wife? Do you know and

understand the woman you live with? You may not always understand your spouse. They may not understand themselves. But, we can know our marriage partner, even when we do not understand them.

Then he prescribes, “Honor your wife.” I think this is profound. In some cultures, men exploit the physical weakness of women, by using them like slaves instead of treating them with love and respect. Now Peter prescribes something here that is as revolutionary today as it was then. He essentially writes: “Do not exploit their weakness; honor their weakness.”

There are, however, many senses in which women are stronger than men, such as bearing pain. My mother, who had eleven children, often said: “If the man had to take his turn bearing children, there would not be more than three children in any family.” Peter is prescribing: “When you see these weaknesses, honor them; do not exploit them, honor them.” Affirm your wife and help her to overcome and work through problems when you see that she has certain weaknesses. That is why God gave her a husband, to be the covering for which the heart of a woman truly longs.

He then prescribes that we are to be “heirs together of the grace of life.” That is the most eloquent definition of marriage in the Bible. “The grace of life” suggests that none of us deserves life; the life that we receive, one day at a time, comes to us as a result of the grace of God. We do not deserve, merit, or achieve life. Life is given to us by the grace of God. This metaphor defines marriage as

two people equally inheriting the grace of life, day by day together, as a married couple. The wives are the beneficiaries of this inspired metaphor Peter is prescribing for the husband. What he is really essentially prescribing for the husband is, “Love your wife.” Then he makes the observation, that if this metaphor is a reality in their relationship, their prayers will not be hindered.

The Apostle Paul writes this prescription in the marriage chapter: “Occasionally separate yourselves and give yourselves individually to prayer and fasting. Then come back together again, and you will find that your marriage will be stronger.” (I Corinthians 7:3-5) The relationship that makes a believing couple one in Christ must be a vertical, individual relationship with Christ before it can be a relationship they experience together in the context of their marriage.

There is a sense in which the most intimate relationship we have in this life is not our marriage; it is our relationship to God. Our spiritual bond as a couple is as strong, or as weak as our individual relationships to Jesus Christ.

The most important institution on earth today is not the church, but the home that is supplying the church with spiritual people. Many churches today are dividing into small groups because they do not believe a large congregation can adequately experience the quality of fellowship, or spiritual community, the risen Christ intends for a local church. Long before we ever thought of doing that, as part of His creation of the world and this planet, when God

populated the earth, He broke everything down in small groups called marriage and the family. The Psalmist describes this plan of God, when he writes: “He places the solitary in families.” (Psalm 68:6)

Working together, and with God, wives, make your spouse the priority relationship of your life. Husbands, make your wife the priority relationship in your life. As you both work on your marriage, your approach should not be to try to fix each other. Ask God to fix you, put you in your appointed place, and then pray that God will use that to motivate your spouse to stand in his or her place. Then watch God work as the blessing of God passes through you, your partner, and your marriage to the church, to the city, to the nation, and to the world (see Psalm 128).

## **Chapter Two**

### **“Prescription for Fathers”**

In this study I have a prescription for fathers. Fathers are the key to God’s blessing as God’s law of marriage and family has its impact in the world. The greatest problem in marriage today is not wives and mothers who will not fill and take the prescription written for wives in our previous study. The greatest problem in the marriages of believers today is the husband and father who will not

assume the responsibility assigned to him by God to be the leader of his family.

We find God’s prescription for fathers beginning with the last verse of Matthew chapter five, which comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. I believe the Sermon on the Mount was given to men, because on that mountaintop Jesus taught those who heard His words about their wives. He did not talk to those who heard Him about their husbands. Jesus was speaking to men when He said: “Therefore, you must be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

The word “perfect” is found twice in that verse. Some say, “I could never be perfect.” Others say, “I am perfect and you had better be perfect too.” The perfectionist not only makes himself sick; he destroys all those from whom he demands perfection. But the real thrust of the verse can be seen if we drop that word “perfect” and it comes out this way: “You must, therefore, be, even as your heavenly Father is.”

Jesus gave this great verse to men immediately following His most challenging ethical teaching. He had recently taught that we are to love our enemies. He essentially taught: “If you only love those who love you, that does not take any grace. That is only human love. It does not take any grace to love those who love you.

“If you really want to love with God’s love, and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, then love your enemies. If they smack you on one cheek, say, ‘God bless you,’ turn the other cheek,

and then take it on the other cheek.” He was concluding that teaching when He essentially told those men: “You must, therefore, be even as your heavenly Father is. You must love the way God loves; or, you must be godly.”

I suspect that many of those men were fathers and grandfathers. A few verses later in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus taught them to pray the Disciple’s Prayer, He taught them to address God this way, “Our Father.”

As a pastor, people have come to me and said, “Pastor, I have a problem with prayer. When I pray, ‘Our Father,’ I begin to lose my peace and I find it difficult to pray.” I have always asked the question, “Well, what was your earthly father like?” I have heard some tales of despair in answer to my question. After telling me about their earthly father, neither of us wondered why they lost their peace when they addressed God as “Father”.

Observe the words “Our Father Who is in Heaven.” Fathers, that is why we must be, “Even as our heavenly Father is,” not as our earthly father was. A contemporary worship song describes a father kneeling by the side of his sleeping son singing, “Father, I want to be like You because he wants to be like me.”

For all the thousands of Scripture verses addressed to mothers and fathers, there is one passage addressed to fathers that both Jewish and Christian scholars consider the most important passage of this kind in the Bible. It is a passage that Rabbis and Jewish scholars consider the greatest sermon of Moses. This sermon is and has been

the centerpiece of worship for devout Jewish people for thousands of years.

“Hear, Oh Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words, which I command you today, shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

This sermon is called “The Shema”, (pronounced “shim-mah”), because it begins with the word “hear” and the Hebrew word for hear is “shema”. Why has a short sermon that is addressed to fathers been at the heart of the worship liturgy of Jewish people for nearly four thousand years?

To answer that “why” question we must ask another “why” question. That question is, “Why did Moses preach this sermon? Moses preached this sermon because for forty years the children of Israel had wandered in a desert wilderness they should have crossed in eleven days. God had ordered them through Moses to cross that wilderness and conquer pagan warrior nations in the fortified cities of Canaan. But they lacked the faith to invade the land of Canaan. So, for forty years the children of Israel went around in circles of unbelief in that desert.

Moses preached this sermon because he was determined that the horror they had recently experienced would never be repeated. The horror they had experienced was that during that wilderness wandering, a whole generation of Israelis had died in that desert!

Moses' great sermon charges fathers with an inspired plan for communicating to their children the convictions and values they should be learning from the Word of God. That plan is built on four solid foundations, which I have labeled: responsibility, relationship, reality, and revelation.

The point to this great sermon of Moses to fathers is that God has given them the responsibility for the nurture and spiritual education of their children. Isaiah also agreed that God wants the fathers teaching the Word of God to their children (Isaiah 38:19). If everything a child learns about God is learned from a woman, is it any wonder, that in the opinion of many adults today, church and spiritual things are for women and children? God has good reasons for insisting that the fathers should teach their children about God and the Word of God.

There is no way the fathers can teach their children the way Moses has instructed them to teach, without having a relationship with their children. This teaching is not to be a formal lecture kind of teaching, but the teaching that takes place in the context of a relationship. Frequently in the Old Testament, fathers are instructed to teach their children in answer to the questions their children ask (Joshua 4:6). God has placed a curiosity in the hearts of children.

Fathers are to use that curiosity by teaching in response to the questions of their children.

Moses challenges fathers that these words of God must first dwell in their own hearts and be a reality in their own lives, before they teach them to their children, because the model is the message. If you want to know what you are teaching your children, you should stand in front of a mirror. Most of the values we pass on to our children are learned not so much by the things we say as by the things we do.

Finally, all the truth they teach their children must be based squarely on the foundation of the revelation God gave to Moses that is known as the Law of Moses, the Law of God, and the Word of God. In application of this great sermon of Moses, fathers have been teaching their children the Word of God for more than five thousand years. The greatest legacy you can leave your children is a personal knowledge of God, and of the Word of God. You can see why Jesus would say to men, "You must, therefore, be as your heavenly Father is."



### **Chapter Three**

#### **“A Prescription for Depression”**

As we read through the Bible, in the fourth chapter of the first book of the Bible, we read that Cain, the first man who was born naturally, is asked the question, “Why are you depressed?” (Genesis 4:6) As we continue to read, we find Moses so depressed he is praying that he might die (Numbers 11:15). Further on, we read that the great prophet Elijah is sitting under a juniper tree so depressed he is also praying that he might die (I Kings 19:4). Still further on in our reading, we meet Job, who is depressed as a consequence of his grief and suffering. We find him also asking God to take his life (Job 3:11-13). We read that the courageous prophet Jonah prayed this same prayer (Jonah 4:3).

As a believer, if you are experiencing depression, you are in good company. Moses, Elijah, Job, and Jonah are Old Testament heroes of faith and they experienced depression. There is no need to feel shame, or to isolate yourself and your problem from other believers because you think your depression means you have weak, little, or no faith at all. Even our Lord and Savior prayed: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.” (Mark 14:34) Jesus prayed that prayer that was prayed by the great men of God I have referenced.

When we read the Psalms, we hear the ancient Psalmist asking his soul the question, “Why are you cast down, oh my soul?

Why are you disquieted within me?” (Psalm 42:5,11; 43:5) In other words, “I am depressed, but why am I depressed?” Depression is a problem as old as the Bible. We are not going to solve the problem of depression in a few minutes, but we can focus on God’s prescriptions for depression. As we focus a prescription for depression, obviously, the first thing we must focus is the reason for the depression.

The source of the problem can be physical, chemical, or biological, and there can be a medical solution. There are many physical conditions that can cause our depression. Thyroid problems, for example, can cause depression. If your metabolism is out of balance it can lead to depression and severe emotional problems. If you have a drinking problem, alcohol is a suppressant, or a depressant actually, and so you can be depressed because you are drinking. A side effect of certain medications can be the source of our depression.

It is cruel to tell a depressed believer to read their Bible and pray when the source of their depression is a defective thyroid. If you are depressed, even before you see your pastor, you need to see your medical doctor. Always check the physical dimension of life first. If the cause of your depression is a physical problem, then it requires a medical solution. You may not find the solution to a physical problem in the Bible, prayer, or fasting.

Another possible source of depression can be psychological. The word “psychological” means “the study of the psyche” or the

study of the mind. When I say, the source of our problem of depression could be psychological, what I am saying is that the source of depression could be in our minds.

Do you think people who talk to themselves are crazy? A friend of mine said that he talks to himself because that is the only time he talks with an intelligent person, and about an intelligent person. Actually, we all talk to ourselves all the time. And when we talk to ourselves, our self talks to us. When we talk to ourselves we often repeat thoughts or ideas that describe who we think we are. Sometimes we think bad thoughts about ourselves.

When we may make “bad person” statements about ourselves, those statements affect our minds negatively. I have heard people do this for many years. When people have come to see me, every time we met, at least a dozen times they say, “I am a bad person.” They have been telling themselves that for years. Now if you tell yourself you are a bad person and you tell yourself that hundreds of times a week, do you not think that will have a negative impact on how you think about yourself? If you have been making these bad person statements to yourself about yourself for many years, thousands and thousands of times, is it any wonder that you start feeling like a bad person?

There was an old farmer that came to see me often because he was depressed. He said, over and over again, “I am lower down than a dog.” He would say that at least ten or twelve times, every time, we met. “I am lower down than a dog.” Well, if that is what you are

telling yourself about yourself, is it any wonder that you start feeling that you are lower down than a dog?

Did you know that every thought you think is recorded in your memory bank and it stays there forever, and that we all have perfect memories? Our ability to recall what is in our memory bank varies greatly, but we never really forget anything. Under the influence of certain drugs, we can recall the thoughts we have deposited in our minds. If you have planted negative thoughts in your subconscious mind, thousands and thousands of times, those negative thoughts are like a tape recorder that plays worthless statements in your subconscious mind: “I am worthless. I am worthless.”

And then that negative tape recorder starts playing in your conscious mind. That can lead to what we call depression. The worthless statements soon lead to the hopeless statements: “I am no good. Nothing good has ever happened to me and nothing good ever will happen to me. My life is hopeless.” You see, if your “self” is making statements like that to you because you have been making statements like that to your “self” for years, is it really strange that you feel depressed?

Ask yourself, “What is the basis of my depression?” There is truth in the old expression, “You are what you eat.” If you have bad eating habits, you are going to be overweight or sick. And if you do not have good thinking habits, you are going to become a depressed person. That is sometimes the psychological source of depression.

Some depression can simply be the accumulation of undisciplined thinking habits.

Jesus said, “The lamp of the body is the eye.” By the eye, He meant your outlook, or the way you see things. Because He went on to say, “If the eye is single (or healthy or whole) the whole body can be filled with light, but if the eye is evil (if it is defective), if the way you see things is defective or evil or negative, the whole body can be filled with darkness. And when the light that is in you is darkness, how great that darkness can be.” (Matthew 6:22,23) What an accurate profile of what we think of as depression.

Consider the inspired wisdom of the Apostle Paul when he gives us a prescription for healthy thinking. He tells us to think about things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, and good news. He is also prescribing that we not think about things that are untrue, dishonorable, unfair, ugly, and bad news (Philippians 4:8). Think of the thousands of negative thoughts we would not have in our memories if we followed these prescriptions of Jesus and Paul for healthy thinking habits.

However, I repeat that the cause of our depression may be physical, chemical, the side effect of medication, a defective metabolism, or any number of physical causes. And it is cruel to tell a believer who is depressed that their depression is physiological or spiritual when they may have a problem that can be treated by a medical doctor.

But of course, there are many times when the source of our depression is spiritual. If you do not understand the Gospel, if you have never heard it, I would not marvel that you are depressed. One of the primary causes of depression can be guilt. There is really no other solution to the guilt problem than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can solve our guilt problem.

In Psalm 51, David prayed a tremendous prayer of confession and repentance. In that prayer, he offered this profound petition: “Blot out my transgressions.” Those Hebrew words are difficult to translate. The closest you can get to a good paraphrase would be, “Un-sin my sin,” meaning, “Remove it completely! Make it as if it never happened.”

It is amazing how David had the prophetic insight and foresight to see that this is precisely what God planned to do. In the Book of Romans the Apostle Paul used a word that David also used in his Psalm of repentance (Psalm 51:4). That word is “justified.” The word, “justified” can be paraphrased: “Just-as-if-I’d never sinned.” God can make our sin just as if we had never committed it. He can blot it out as if it never happened. He can “unsin” our sin. He can answer the petition of David.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus did not come for good persons; He came for bad persons. He did not die for good persons; He died for bad persons. “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” (Matthew 9:12) So if you are a bad person, then the Gospel is addressed to you. The whole life and

ministry of Jesus was designed with you in mind.

I am amazed at the number of people who have believed the Gospel for years, and yet when they are depressed, and the pastor gets involved, searching for the source of their depression, they will have one sin in their life that they think God will not forgive. They think God never heard of their particular sin. No matter what your sin may be, God has forgiven that sin thousands of times.

The only sin God will not forgive is the sin of unbelief. If the source of your depression is spiritual because you are overwhelmed with guilt, if you will believe the Gospel, that will relieve the problem of your depression. If the Evil One has convinced you that you have committed the unpardonable sin, or a sin that is so terrible even God cannot forgive it, defeat the Devil by accepting the gift of faith, and believe the Gospel.

There are some stronger prescriptions written in the Scriptures when the source of the depression is in the realm of spiritual warfare. Jesus taught that we should pray every day, "Deliver us from the Evil One." (Matthew 6:13) Sometimes the problem should be called "oppression", by which I mean that the source of the depression is the oppression of our enemy, the Devil and his demons. When Jesus said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death," the source of that sorrow had to be oppression. The Wicked One did not want Him to go to the cross. If the source of your problem is oppression, what is the prescription? It has to be the deliverance of the Living Christ, for which Jesus

instructed us to pray every day as His disciples.

Suppose there are people in a mental hospital and their problem is spiritual oppression. Are they ever going to get cured simply by medicating their symptoms? How are they going to experience a cure for their depression, if it is caused by spiritual oppression, and the people treating them do not even acknowledge the reality of the problem, and the only cure for that problem? There are times when the solution must be spiritual because the source of the problem is spiritual.

Observe how frequently the Scripture speaks of the joy of the Lord. Why would Nehemiah and all those people in the Old Testament say, "The joy of the Lord is the strength of His people?" The fruit of the Spirit is love and then, what comes next? Joy!

A favorite author of mine wrote, "Pain and suffering are inevitable, but for a believer, misery is optional." Do you know why misery is optional for a believer? Because a believer has the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit is joy. This joy has been called, "The happiness that does not make good sense," because this joy is a happiness that is not based on what happens to us. Is it possible for the Holy Spirit to give us joy, a kind of joy that could overcome depression?

The prophet Isaiah preached: "You ought to exchange the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Isaiah 61:3) What an insight! If you have the spirit of heaviness, if you are depressed, try this. Praise God anyway. Start praising Him, even if you do not feel

like it – even if you feel as if you stopped breathing but you cannot die - start praising God! I challenge you to try it!

The spiritual and biblical solutions I have offered are a message the prophets and the church have been preaching for thousands of years. I remind you one more time that it is cruel to prescribe spiritual, psychological, and emotional solutions for a depression that has a physical source, or cause, and a medical solution. But if the depression is spiritual, be assured that God's spiritual prescriptions will always work.

## **Chapter Four**

### **“Prescription for Inner Healing”**

Many years ago, a man named John Quincy Adams was crossing a street. He was in such poor health it took him five minutes to reach the other side. A friend who was passing that way asked, “How is John Quincy Adams this morning?” He replied, “John Quincy Adams is doing very well. The house he lives in is in sad bad condition. In fact, it is so dilapidated, John Quincy Adams may have to move out soon, but John Quincy Adams is doing very well, thank you!”

John Quincy Adams had good theology. To make a clear distinction between the inward man, (our spiritual man who is

eternal), and the outward man, (our body which is temporal), and clearly value the inward man above the outward man, is a vital dimension of the eternal values the Apostle Paul shares with us in his inspired writings.

The health of our inward, spiritual man is a greater value than the health of our outward, physical man. We can experience inner healing as a direct result of our salvation. Our own personal faith in the Gospel can bring us that inner healing of salvation. Our assurance of forgiveness, and the experience of the new birth, which makes us new creations from the inside out, by, in, and for Christ, should result in a miraculous experience of inner healing (II Corinthians 5:17,18).

Psychosomatic illness is an illness in the body (Greek soma) when the cause of the illness is in the mind, or the soul (Greek psyche). Two of the most prevalent sources of psychosomatic illness are guilt and a revenge-seeking rage. Therefore, two of the primary dimensions of inner healing, or the healing of psychosomatic illness, are forgiveness, and the grace to forgive. One of my mentors called these two spiritual therapies, “the healing of the memories”.

Cannon James Glennen, of Sydney, Australia, coined a new word. In his book on healing, in a chapter on inner healing, he used the word, “unforgiveness”. Mr. Glennen writes: “The greatest obstacle to inner healing is unforgiveness. We may be experiencing unforgiveness because we lack the assurance of God's forgiveness, or the forgiveness of people against whom we have sinned. The

source of our unforgiveness may also be that we will not forgive people who have sinned against us.”

Consider the perfect wisdom of our Lord when He taught His disciples to pray every day, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” (Matthew 6:12) The Greek scholars tell us the forgiveness petition in the Disciple’s Prayer could actually be translated, “Forgive us our sins as we have already forgiven those who have sinned against us.”

That insight into our Lord’s teaching about forgiveness presents a great challenge to people who have been brutalized. I have heard victims of extreme abuse share that their hateful vengeance only added to their emotional trauma, and that hate and rage retarded their own inner healing. They confessed that it was only when the obstacle of unforgiveness was removed, that their inner healing could begin. Do you think Jesus knew that when He made reconciliation and forgiveness a vital part of His prescription for prayer and inner healing?

When we sin, we need to look up and believe the first fact of the Gospel, which is the Good News that God forgives our sins because Jesus died for our sins. Then we need to look around, forgive those who have sinned against us and seek the forgiveness of those against whom we have sinned. We also need to look in our own hearts, and forgive ourselves. Forgiving ourselves is the most difficult dimension of forgiveness when we have grievously sinned.

When we confess our sins and place our trust in the death of

Jesus Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, we need to forget what God forgets and remember what God remembers. God forgives and God forgets our sins. We have God’s Word for that.

In the New Testament, we are instructed to confess our sins and we are promised that, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9) In the Old Testament, God clearly tells us, “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:34)

However, God remembers that we are sinners. We forget we are sinners. That is at least one reason why we fall into sin again and again. When we confess our sins, we show that our faith is flawed when we remember our sins and carry our guilt baggage with us long after God has forgiven and forgotten our sins.

I once heard a story about a Monsignor in Paris who was told he had a nun in his spiritual community who claimed she talked to Jesus every night. The nun was called in and when she confirmed the rumor, the Monsignor said, “The next time Jesus talks to you, ask Him this question: ‘What sin did the Monsignor commit in Paris before he became a priest?’”

Several days later the nun requested another appointment with the Monsignor. The Monsignor asked the nun, “Did you speak with Jesus again, my child?” The nun replied, “Yes, holy father.” “And did you ask Jesus my question?” The nun said that she had indeed asked Jesus that question. The Monsignor then asked her,

“And what did Jesus say?” The nun replied, “Jesus said to tell you that He does not remember.” If we believe the Old and New Testament that is the answer we should expect to hear to the question of the Monsignor. Is that the response you expected to hear?

When we apply the Gospel of salvation to our sins, we simply must discipline ourselves to remember what God remembers and to forget what God forgets. We must implement that spiritual discipline, and receive the assurance of forgiveness in the three directions I have described. – To repeat them, we must look up and receive God’s forgiveness. We must look around, and forgive others as God has forgiven us, and we must also receive their forgiveness when we have sinned against them. Finally, we must look in and forgive ourselves.

The combination of these two spiritual disciplines will result in an inner healing, which will convince us that salvation leads to an inner healing that is more important than physical healing.

## **Chapter Five**

### **“Prescription for Salvation”**

Every culture, every religion around the world tries to offer prescriptions for man’s greatest need – the need for eternal personal salvation. God’s Word tells us that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world, and when His Son was here, He told us He came into the world to save the world (John 3:16-18). The Savior Who died on a cross for our salvation also gave us a prescription that shows us how to apply that salvation personally.

History or a good encyclopedia will tell you about the seven ancient wonders of the world, the seven modern wonders of the world, and the seven natural wonders of the world. The Bible tells us that the most important dimension of life is spiritual, and that the true wonders of this world are the Seven Spiritual Wonders of the World.

#### **The Greatest Design in the World**

The first spiritual wonder is the greatest design in the world. Scientists who study this world are intrigued by the majestic, beautiful, and complex design and order they observe through their telescopes and under their microscopes. When we consider the phenomenal design in the macrocosm and the microcosm of this world we can observe today, it takes more faith to believe this world just happened (an accident), than it does to believe in an Architect

and a Creator of all that we can see on earth, and in our universe. People of faith believe the spectacular design we observe all around us is the signature of God, written on the canvas of His creation.

The dictionary definition of the word “self” is: “The uniqueness, the individuality of any given person that makes him distinct from every other living person.” In the New Testament, Jesus is quoted asking the questions: “What does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?” Almighty God has created you and me with a potential individuality that can make us different from every other human being on earth. Jesus told us that we should not trade our true self, or our God-given unique identity for the whole world.

God is the Architect and the Creator of this world, and of you and me. It is only consistent with the character of God to believe God has a deliberate purpose for everything He designs and creates. The unique design God tells us He has for every individual human life is *the greatest design in the world!*

A clue to our designed and intended individuality is the fact that there are more than sixty billion fingers on this earth today, and every one of those fingers has a unique fingerprint. Each one of the more than six billion human beings living here on earth today has unique fingerprints, voiceprints, and DNA. The profound biblical claim that God has a unique design for the six billion lives being lived out on earth today, had such a plan for all who have lived before us, and will have a plan for all who will follow us, is one of

the spiritual wonders of the world. (Mark 8:36,37; Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5; Romans 12:1,2)

### **The Greatest Divorce in the World**

You may be wondering, “How can there possibly be a God, or order and design, behind a world like ours that is filled with alienation, divorce, fractured families, crime, murder, nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction, wars, refugees, riots, incurable diseases, and perplexing, mind-boggling problems that completely baffle and overwhelm us? If God has a design for everything and everybody, why is our world so filled with the kind of suffering that seems to say that the events of our personal lives are not planned, but simply random chaos? Why are so very many people in this world hurting, depressed, confused, alienated, lonely and unhappy?”

The Bible answers those questions. You will not find a more realistic view of life, or better answers to those questions anywhere than in God’s Word. The Word of God tells us that God wants us to live our lives in alignment with His design for a human life. But God has also given us the freedom to choose or reject a relationship with our Creator, and His design for our lives. We can use this freedom God has given us to go our own selfish ways, do our own thing, and declare our independence from God. We can actually divorce ourselves from God and from God’s design for our lives.

The hard reality that God creates us with the freedom to make



the wrong choices, and then permits us to divorce ourselves from our Creator and His plan for our lives, makes this epidemic divorce between ourselves and our God *the greatest divorce in the world* - and one of the spiritual wonders of the world. The reconciliation of that divorce is what the Bible is all about. (Genesis 3; Isaiah 53:6; John 3:19; Romans 1:24, 26, 28; 3:23)

### **The Greatest Dilemma in the World**

The God revealed in the Bible, Who is the essence of perfect love, earnestly desires a love relationship with His children. However, the God of the Bible is also a God Who is holy, or the essence of perfect justice. Biblical descriptions of the character of God give us an absolute standard by which we can measure what is right and what is wrong in our world and in our lives. There is no way a loving and holy God can ignore the greatest divorce in the world.

As the perfect heavenly Father, there is a sense in which God faces a dilemma. In some ways, God faces a dilemma that is quite similar to the dilemma faced by many parents. When we, as parents, want to have a love relationship with our rebellious children, how do we show our rebellious children godly, unconditional love and acceptance, without violating what we believe and have taught our children to be right?

Similarly, how can our God, Whose character is the essence of perfect love and perfect justice, respond in a way that is consistent

with His essential character to our serving Him with divorce papers? *That is the greatest dilemma in the world* - and another spiritual wonder of the world. (Genesis 3:8-13; Luke 15:11-24; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 3:19,20)

### **The Greatest Declaration in the World**

*The greatest declaration in the world* is the central declaration of the Bible that God has resolved the greatest dilemma in the world, and reconciled the greatest divorce in the world! In the Bible, you will find the great declaration of Jesus, that when He died on His cross, He was God's only Son, offering God's only Solution for the problem of sin, and God's only Salvation from sin to this sinful, alienated, and hurting world in general, and to human beings, individually and personally.

The message of the Bible is the Good News, that when Jesus died on the cross God did something that was consistent with His perfect love and His perfect justice. When Jesus died on the cross, God laid on His only beloved Son all the chastisement (punishment) we rebellious human beings rightly deserved for our sins. In this way, God exercised and satisfied His perfect justice. God certainly expressed His perfect love when Jesus died on the cross, and most important of all, when Jesus died on the cross, Jesus gave all of us access to the only way we can reconcile our divorce from God.

This is the way Jesus communicated the heart and thrust of

His great declaration: “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” The greatest declaration in the world makes the cross of Jesus Christ the most important spiritual wonder of the world. (John 3:14-21; Matthew 20:28; Isaiah 53:6; I Peter 2:24; II Corinthians 5:18-21)

### **The Greatest Decision In the World**

Jesus focused the greatest decision in the world for us when He told us that each one of us must personally believe the greatest declaration in the world. Immediately after proclaiming that He was God’s only Savior, speaking of Himself, Jesus said, “He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he does not believe ... And this is the condemnation ... ”

The decision to believe this great declaration of Jesus has to be *the greatest decision in the world!* This is true because according to Jesus, if we believe His declaration, we have solved our sin problem, which divorced us from God. However, if we do not believe Him, we are condemned. We are condemned precisely because we do not believe the Good News that was declared by Jesus. If the decision we make to believe the great declaration of Jesus is the difference between our eternal condemnation and our salvation, then that decision to believe, or not to believe, is *the greatest decision in the world* – and another one of the spiritual

wonders of the world. (John 3:16-19; 1:12; Acts 16:30-32; Romans 10:9,10)

### **The Greatest Direction in the World**

If you are following the logic with me, you may very well be asking yourself the question, “How can I know when I have made the greatest decision in the world?” Jesus answered that question for you and me when He spoke these two words: “Follow Me.” The spirit of the covenant with which Jesus challenged those who professed to believe in Him was, “Follow Me and I will make you ...” Essentially, Jesus was saying, “Follow Me. That is your part. I will make you. That is My part. You follow Me. That is your responsibility. I will make you. That is My responsibility.” Those short sentences are my paraphrase of the verbal contract with which Jesus began the spiritual faith journey of those who showed that they truly believed in Him when they made the commitment to follow Him.

When you make the decision to believe and the commitment to follow Jesus, if someone could show you what you would be doing twenty years later, you would be filled with awe. What may seem impossible to you at the starting gate of your faith journey is possible, because Jesus will always do His part, when you believe, make the commitment to become a true disciple of Jesus Christ, and follow Him.

When the people who told Jesus they believed in Him heard

those two words and considered that covenant with which Jesus challenged them, they soon discovered that following Jesus meant they had to turn away from their sins, offer an unconditional surrender of their lives to Jesus, and then follow Jesus. Many of the people who told Jesus they believed in Him were not willing to validate their faith by surrendering unconditionally to Jesus, and by following Jesus, on His terms.

However, the committed minority who did make the commitment to believe and follow Jesus made a discovery. The authentic disciples of Jesus Christ made the very exciting discovery that following Jesus gave meaning, definition, direction, purpose, and value to their lives. Those who profess to believe in Jesus, and are willing to make the commitment to follow Jesus, will always discover that the direction of following Jesus is *the greatest direction in the world!*

If you carefully observe the dramatic changes in the lives of professing believers who follow Jesus, and the lack of change in the lives of professing believers who do not follow Jesus, it will be obvious to you that the direction of following Jesus is another vital spiritual wonder of the world. When you make the decision to believe and follow Jesus, and He makes you everything He saved you to be and empowers you to do everything He wants you to do for Him, you will have personally proven that *the greatest direction in the world is the direction of following Jesus.* (Matthew 4:19; Revelation 1:5,6; John 8:30-36; Luke 5:1-11)

## **The Greatest Dynamic in the World**

Although the death of Jesus Christ is the most important spiritual wonder of the world, the most exciting truth about Jesus Christ in the New Testament is this very Good News which, according to the Book of Acts, was preached by all the apostles: After He died and was buried, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead!

The risen Christ lives on earth in His disciples today. He is responsible for all the changes in their lives. The living Christ is also the Power Source, Who is responsible for the impact and influence of His disciples all over the world today, and in every generation. The risen Christ, living His life in and through His disciples, is *the greatest Dynamic in the world!* The fact that the same risen Christ desires to live His life in and through the likes of you and me today is the most exciting spiritual wonder of the world!

According to Jesus, those who experience this great Dynamic have been “born again.” If you have not been born again, make the decision to believe in Jesus Christ, and make the commitment to move in the great direction of following Jesus. That is your part. When you take those two critically important steps, you will discover that the risen, living Christ will then direct and empower your life. That is His part and promise. Surrender your life to His control and direction. In His time and in His way, you will be born again. You will also reclaim that great design God always has willed for your life, which for you is *the greatest design in the world.*

When you make the commitment to believe and follow Jesus,

and you live your life in alignment with God's design for your life, there will not be anyone on earth like you. The life you live as a follower of Jesus Christ will be distinguished by a beautiful diversity. The beauty of the diversity of your new life in Christ will far surpass the beautiful diversity of your fingerprints, your voiceprints, and your DNA.

Do you want to be born again? Are you ready to make the greatest decision in the world, and believe the great declaration of Jesus Christ? Are you willing to offer an unconditional surrender of your life to Jesus? Have you decided that you now want to receive the greatest Dynamic in the world and make the commitment to begin moving in the direction of following Jesus? If you want to begin your spiritual faith journey with Jesus, sincerely and from your heart, pray this prayer to God:

“Loving heavenly Father, I confess that I am a sinner and I trust Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be my Savior. I place my complete trust in His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead for the forgiveness of every one of my sins. I now forsake and turn away from all my sins. I want to reconcile my divorce from You. Right here and right now, I declare by faith that Jesus Christ is my Lord and my Savior, and I surrender my life, unconditionally, to His control and direction. Bring my life into perfect alignment with that great design You have always willed for my life. Help me as I follow Your Son, Jesus Christ, to rely on His power and authority, to live to exalt Him, and for Your glory. Thank You for providing this

great and eternal salvation for me. Amen.” (John 3:3-8; 1:12,13; I Peter 1:22-3:3; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Ephesians 2:8-10)

If you have prayed this prayer tell someone about your decision, then contact us. We have more helpful literature that will help you as you now begin your journey of faith in following Jesus Christ. (Acts 2:21; 16:30,31; Romans 10:8-13)

## **Chapter Six**

### **“Prescription for Adversity”**

Listen to these words of the Lord Jesus as He concludes His greatest discourse, the Sermon on the Mount: “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain came down, the streams rose and the strong winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on rock. But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice, is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose and the strong winds blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash!” (Matthew 5:24-27)

If you were a gifted artist, and I furnished you with a canvas, paints, brushes, and all the tools you need to paint a beautiful picture, if I spoke the word “life” and then told you to paint whatever came

into your mind when you heard that word spoken, what would you paint?

When Jesus concluded His Sermon on the Mount, He painted His portrait of life: Two houses standing side-by-side, with storms beating down on both those houses. That is life, according to Jesus. In His portrait of life, Jesus makes the statement that these houses look alike - before the storms come. But when the storms hit, you discover that they are not alike. One of those houses falls with a great crash, but the other house does not fall. The difference is, the house that fell was built without a foundation, while the house that did not fall was built upon a solid rock foundation.

If young people painted their portrait of life, their picture might be idealistic, like someone surfing on the crest of a large wave. The portrait painted by their parents, or grandparents, might be pessimistic, like someone in a boat that is sinking, 80 kilometers from the shore, with no help in sight. The life-portrait of Jesus is not idealistic or pessimistic. It is realistic. Life is tough. Life is storms, according to Jesus. And according to the life portrait of Jesus, nobody is immune to the storms of life - especially the followers of Jesus.

When some devout disciples of Jesus experience storms, they believe those storms should not be happening to them because they are dedicated disciples of Jesus Christ. There is a popular theology around today that is called, "Prosperity Theology", which teaches that God's people should never suffer or be sick, should always

prosper, be healthy, and even wealthy. Many are being taught that Jesus promised them a life that will be free from all adversity. They are convinced that life is not supposed to be difficult for a believer, and that when they decided to believe and follow Jesus they were given an immunity regarding the storms of life.

Jesus dispels that myth by the way He concludes His Sermon on the Mount. In that conclusion, He also makes a profound statement about the consequences of adversity. He taught that many people think the life He was promising His followers begins at a wide gate, which is followed by a broad easy way. But that is not true. Jesus taught that the broad, easy approach to life leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

While teaching this same metaphor, Jesus promised that His disciples would discover that the quality of life He promised begins with a narrow gate, which is followed by a difficult, disciplined way of life. But He also promised that the disciplined, difficult life of a disciple of His would lead to the abundant life He promised those who would follow Him (John 10:10). He was realistic enough to teach that only a few would follow Him and find this quality of life.

A careful reading of the New Testament and church history shows, that the few who followed Jesus, did discover that quality of life when they made the commitment to follow Jesus through the narrow gate, and travel the difficult, disciplined road of discipleship, on His terms.

### **Formula for Adversity**

People generally believe that their adversity leads directly to their consequences of life. They typically say, things like, “I lost my job and I am depressed. I am so depressed I am thinking about killing myself.” Essentially, they are saying, “My adversity has led directly to my emotional consequence of depression.”

This teaching of Jesus disagrees with that perspective. Adversity does not lead directly to emotional or other consequences, according to Jesus. He profiles two men with exactly the same adversity. He uses the very same words to describe their adversity: the rain comes down, the streams rise, the storm winds blow and beat against the two houses that represent their lives. The very same thing happens in both cases, but with opposite consequences.

Have you observed how often Jesus disputed the belief system of His disciples when He was teaching them about faith? This great metaphor about storms at the end of Matthew chapter seven is followed in Matthew eight by a storm story: “And then He said, ‘Let us go over to the other side of the sea.’ So He got in a boat and His disciples followed Him. Without warning, a furious storm came up on the sea, but Jesus was asleep in the boat. The disciples went to Him and woke Him saying, ‘Lord, save us. We are all going to drown!’ ‘Why are you so afraid? Where is your faith? Do you not even yet believe in Me?’ Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and there was a great calm.”

I have been fascinated by this story for a long time. It starts out with a great storm. It ends with a great calm, and in between the great storm and the great calm, there is a great question. The way Luke reports it, the question is, “Where is your faith?” One translation asks the question this way: “When are you going to start believing in Me?” The essence of this great faith question was, “How does your faith relate to this storm?” He was clearly challenging the belief system of His apostles.

The old church fathers saw much allegory in the Bible. When they considered a biblical story to be an allegory, they were not saying it was a myth. They defined an allegory as a story in which the people, places, and things have a deeper meaning that instructs us spiritually.

They considered this story to be an allegory of the Church, or the redeemed people of God. When Jesus says, “Let us go over to the other side,” that is a picture of Jesus taking us to the other side, or into the eternal state. This is an allegory that pictures Jesus in the ship with us, as we are all journeying to the other side. Jesus is also teaching that life is difficult, and that we may have many storms on the way to the other side. Some believe Jesus is teaching that life itself is a storm through which we must pass while we are traveling from this life to our everlasting life in heaven.

There is another story about a storm in the Gospel of Matthew. We read that on this occasion, Jesus had told the apostles to get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side of the

Sea of Galilee. After He dismissed the five thousand hungry families He had just fed, He withdrew in solitude to the side of a mountain to pray (Matthew 14:22-33).

When evening came He was still there alone, but the boat was now a considerable distance from land, beaten by waves, because one of those sudden storms, for which that sea is infamous, had swept down on their boat. During the fourth watch of the night (around four o'clock in the morning), Jesus went out to them walking on the water. When the apostles saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. The original language tells us these seasoned fishermen shrieked with fear when they saw Jesus walking on the water in the middle of that terrible storm. Jesus told them to have no fear because, "It is I."

Peter said, "Lord, if it is really You, invite me to walk on the water to You." Jesus issued that invitation to Peter. Then Peter got down out of the boat, and walked on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You little faith." He said. "Why did you doubt?" When they were both safely back in the boat, the wind died down and this great storm also became a great calm.

There are times in our ministry and mission as sent ones, where He calls us to "walk on the water". When He calls you to walk on the water – do the impossible - make sure it is the Lord, and be very sure He has invited you to walk on that water. You are going

to drink a lot of water if those two conditions have not been met.

But there is another thing that Peter learned about walking on water. He had to keep his eyes on the Lord. We read that when Peter saw the wind. Actually, Peter did not see the wind and so it is with us, when we take our eyes off Jesus. We see things that are not there. We start focusing on the "what ifs" of life. Peter did see the waves of the stormy sea. When Peter cried out to the Lord to save him, immediately, Jesus reached out His hand, caught him, and He gave him a nickname. He had already given him the nickname "Peter." His name was Simon when Jesus met him and Jesus called him "Peter." Peter was unstable when he met Jesus, but Jesus called him "Peter" ("a rock") for three years until he was a rock. Here He gave him another nickname: "You little faith." I believe Jesus had a great sense of humor and that He was smiling when He gave Peter those nicknames.

In the Greek, when Jesus asks Peter, Why did you doubt?"

The words are literally, "Why did you think twice, Peter?" The personal application is, once you know it is the Lord, and that He is leading you to walk on the water – to do what you and others might think impossible, never think twice. Walk on the water with Jesus. When Jesus caught Peter by the hand and said, "You little faith. Why did you think twice," I think He was smiling and essentially saying, "You almost made it Peter. Why did you think twice?"

How do you think they got back to the boat? Do you think

Jesus carried Peter like a baby, or do you think Peter might have walked on the water with Jesus to the boat? It is interesting to ponder. This is more than a story of a great miracle. I agree with the old church fathers when they consider this storm story to be an allegory of the sent ones. To them this is an allegory that profiles the faith challenges of those who “walk on the water” with Jesus as they obey His Great Commission.

A great missionary statesman called the miracle of those five thousand hungry families Jesus had miraculously fed, “an allegory of the missionary vision of Jesus for the world.” The hungry families represented the world and all its need. Jesus took a little boy’s lunch broke it and blessed it. He then passed it through the hands of the apostles, and through their hands to the hungry multitude. If we include women and children, Jesus fed perhaps twenty thousand people with that little boy’s lunch which was probably five small biscuits and two sardines.

Having fed the multitude, Jesus went to the mountain and prayed until about four o’clock in the morning. What did He pray about? Again, this is only conjecture, but I believe He prayed about the world that was represented by that multitude He had miraculously fed. And I believe He also prayed for those twelve men, who were out there fighting that storm. I have that conviction because His missionary vision and strategy was that everything He had to give this needy world He was going to pass to this world through those twelve men.

### **In Summary**

In the great storm metaphor at the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, and in these two storm stories, Jesus is obviously teaching, “Look, life has its storms. You cannot be spared those storms, because if you had immunity from the storms of life, you and your faith would never grow.”

The way Jesus teaches and demonstrates His prescription for adversity is something like this: You must process your adversity through your belief system. We could say that we must process our adversity through our faith, through prayer, or through the entire Bible. All of those expressions of faith are part of our belief system.

As we walk on the water with Jesus, taking His Gospel to the world, we are instructed to go to the throne of grace boldly, fully expecting to receive mercy for our failures and grace to help us in our times of need (Hebrews 4:16). Receiving the grace we need obviously contributes dynamically to our spiritual growth. When do we receive the grace that grows us spiritually? It is when we are experiencing those storms, and evaluating these storms through the prism of our belief systems that we receive the grace of God that grows us spiritually.

The Christ, Who lives in us is fiercely committed to the proposition that you and I are going to grow spiritually. That is why He permits, and sometimes even directs storms into our lives. We can always count on the prescription of Jesus for adversity to point the way through our storms to the spiritual growth He wants us to



experience, when He permits, or directs our journey of faith through those storms.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **“Prescription for Character”**

“I asked for strength that I might achieve; but I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health that I might do greater things; but I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; but I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; but I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; but I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I asked for but everything I had hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered and I am among all men most richly blessed.” A soldier wrote this poem in 1862.

One of the reasons why our lives and our prayers are as this soldier described them is because God is fiercely committed to this proposition. He wants to see the perfect character of His Son developed in you and me through the power of the Living Christ and the Holy Spirit. He will permit anything to come into our lives that will develop that character in us.

Now read some profound words of Jesus about how character is formed. As you read these words, realize that Jesus is simply stating in another way the prescription for adversity we considered in our last chapter: “Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the tradition of men - the washing of pitchers and cups, making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition, which you have handed down. And many such things you do.’” (Mark 7:1-3, 5-8, 13)

Later, Jesus explained to the people what He had been saying to the religious leaders: “When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, ‘Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear! (14-16)

“When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, essentially, ‘Can you not see that anything that goes into a man from the outside cannot make him unclean or defile him? For it does not go into his heart.’ He went on, ‘Whatever comes out of a man, that is what makes a man defiled or unclean, for it is from the inside-out, from men’s hearts and minds, that evil thoughts arise, and lusts and theft and murder and adultery and greed and wickedness, deceit, sensuality, evil, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean.’” (17-23)

When Jesus spoke these words, which were addressed to the religious leaders of the Jews, He was comparing the inspired Word of God to “their traditions”. He was confronting these religious leaders when He said: “You make the Word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down.”

Jesus gives this challenge very clearly when we get into the essence of this teaching about how character is formed. According to Jesus, character is either going to be determined by the commandments of men or the commandments of God. And of course, the greatest definition of character the world has ever been given is Jesus Christ. That is why He did not simply suddenly appear one day and die for our sins. He could have done that in one afternoon. He lived here for thirty-three years because He wanted to teach and model the character of God, or the will of God about how a human being should live.

How is character developed? Jesus models two dimensions that determine character. There are inside out, and outside in dimensions that form character. Jesus was emphasizing the first dimension, and the religious leaders were emphasizing the second dimension. Today we call that second dimension, “environment”. There are many sociologists and social workers who are absolutely convinced that changing a persons environment will change their character.

Why is it that you can expose two people to the exact same environment, in terms of home life, education, poverty or wealth, and you get two totally different responses from the inside out? Poverty can be blamed for shaping criminal behavior, but it is also attributed to forming some of the greatest character this world has ever seen. What is it within a human being that makes the difference in the way they respond to their environment? Jesus said, “That is the vital dimension of character building.” It is not primarily the outside in factors that form character. They are important, but it is the inside out response to all that is coming from the outside into the lives of people that builds their characters.

What makes it possible for us to have the proper inside-out response to all those outside-in forces? The proper inside-out response to the outside-in forces that impact our lives requires a miracle in our hearts, according to Jesus - and according to the entire Bible.

The word “heart” is found more than one thousand times in the Bible. When the Scripture refers to the heart, it is referring to the mind, will, motives, and emotions that drive so many of our ambitions, decisions, and choices. Consider these references to the heart in the Bible: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life. ... A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. ... For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. ... “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. ... But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45; Psalm 119:11; Romans 10:8-10)

When the Scripture refers to the heart, it is primarily referring to what Paul calls “the inward man”. According to Jesus and Paul, we all have an inward man and an outward man. It is in our inward man that we decide how we are going to respond to all the outside-in influences that impact our lives. The pure essence of what Jesus said was: “There is nothing outside a man that coming into him can defile him. It is what comes out of his heart that defiles a man.”

It was Jesus Who said, “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) In other words, you can tell what is in a person’s heart by what they say. All the actions of people are determined by what is going on in their hearts.

In the Old Testament, we hear prophets like Jeremiah preach that the heart of man is desperately wicked, and so deceitful that only God can know our hearts. We hear David ask God to show him the truth about his inward, hidden part. When God does, David exclaims that he was a sinner when he took shape in his mother’s womb, and that he was a sinner when he was conceived. That is why we see God give people new hearts in the Old Testament, and we hear David ask God for a miracle work of creation in his heart (Jeremiah 17:9,10; Psalm 51:5,6, 10).

As you educate your children from the outside in, you should realize, that if you have three children, you need three miracles. If you have two children, you need two miracles. The miracle you need is that God will give into their hearts the gift of faith. That they will believe the Gospel in their hearts and confess with their mouth that Jesus died and rose again for their salvation. They must be born again and receive that miracle of creation for which David prayed.

If you are mentoring spiritual children, you need and you must pray for the miracle that God will shape their spiritual characters by giving them the inside out dynamic to respond to all the outside in forces they encounter every day. This is where we must all find the values, and the Dynamic that forms our characters.

At the outset of this chapter, I suggested that this teaching of Jesus is a different way of stating His prescription for adversity. You may be asking how these two teachings are related. People almost universally equate their happiness, serenity, and general well being to their circumstances. In this prescription of Jesus for character, Jesus is really teaching that same metaphor with which He concluded His Sermon on the Mount. When He painted that realistic picture of life with those two houses experiencing the same storms, He was teaching that it was not the outside in stresses that determined their characters. It was that foundation, or lack of a foundation, that could not be seen, which shaped and revealed their characters.

This is really the same teaching stated a different way. As the two houses pictured two lives with the identical same outside in problems, it is not what comes against us through our outward, adverse circumstances, which forms our characters. It is when we find within our hearts the dynamic to respond to those outward circumstances that our character is determined. According to Jesus, Jeremiah, and David, our hearts are where we find our greatest problem, and it is in our hearts that we need a miracle solution. We must therefore agree with David and Jeremiah when they show us our heart problems, and pray the prayer of David for a miracle of creation in our hearts.

Jesus taught this same truth about human nature and the only solution for human nature when He told Nicodemus, “That which is born of the flesh is (only) flesh, so, marvel not that I say that you

must be born again.” When the Scripture uses the word “flesh” in this way, it means, “Human nature, unaided by God.” When Jesus confronted the religious leaders and when He met with Nicodemus, He consistently taught that our biggest problem is our heart, and our only solution is, “You must be born again.” The new birth is the prescription of Jesus for character and adversity.

I challenge you to reflect on these last three chapters of the prescriptions of Christ I have shared with you. Have you accepted and taken the prescription of Christ for salvation? You will never be able to accept and take His prescriptions for adversity and character until you have applied His prescription for salvation. I plead with you as a minister of Christ to make the most important decision in the world, move in the greatest direction in the world, and receive the greatest dynamic in the world. It is only then that you will recover His design for your life and have the heart foundation to withstand your storms of life. When you take that critical step, let us know and we will help you grow in your new life in Christ.