

How Christians Change

... Crisis and Process

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from every sin." -- 1 John 1:9

Christian life is about change

- Salvation – an outside job: justification, adoption
- Salvation – an inside job: regeneration

Not changed enough. What are our options?

- Give up
- Refocus on Position (put up)
- Sanctification (move up)

How does change take place?

- Dawning awareness – the Holy Spirit makes us aware of areas of our lives that need changing.
- Growing conviction – we are being convicted that we need to change
- Crisis decision – So far it was God doing the work. Now it is our turn. We recognize that to delay change any longer would be outright disobedience. When I am fully convinced that God is saying "I'm ready to change you" yet I drag my feet, refusing to be changed, I place myself in spiritual jeopardy.
- Changing Grace stage – When Christians become convinced that God wants to change them, and they make a willful decision to trust His changing power, God acts. Some changes happen right away, and some take plenty of time. God is working in your life, bringing about change.
- Disciplined Obedience – When the change occurs—whether instantaneously or gradual—the change is not complete. God does not make spiritual robots out of us. And He does not ban Satan from further temptations in that area. What He does is free us from the bondage of a specific thought or language pattern, habit, or activity. We are now free to choose God's way.

And what about you, my friend?

Do you see where all this is headed? Do you see what God proposed to do? He intends to make you like Jesus Christ. If you'll let Him. This book outlines various disciplines of holy living. Some chapters will make you aware of areas God will later begin working on you about. For now, these chapters will contribute one more ray of light as you approach the full dawning of God's leading in this area. But for now, you will not feel compelled to act on what you have read. But likely somewhere else in this book lies a chapter just for you. Perhaps it deals with an area God has already been convicting you about. Reading the chapter will bring God's conviction to completeness... you'll be convinced that you must change. It will be time for a crisis decision. I encourage you to open your heart to the Lord. He doesn't want to batter you with His truths. Rather, He wishes to lead you gently on to holiness and completeness if you will listen to His promptings and respond with commitment and trust. Try Him. You can trust Him.

Bible Study

1. Ephesians 2:1-2.

Can you think of a time when your life felt “dead”? What was it like? Why?

How is life without Christ like being “dead”?

2. Romans 5:8.

Can you think of a time when a friend or relative (or maybe even a stranger) demonstrated love? Did you deserve it?

How did God demonstrate His great love for me even before I accepted Him?

3. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

In what ways is the new Christian changed? In what ways is he or she often not changed?

Can you think of some ways that your life has changed?

4. 2 Corinthians 13:9.

What was Paul's prayer for the Corinthian believers?

What do you think Paul was getting at in light of Philippians 1:6?

5. 1 John 3:1-3.

What is our primary relationship to God? What is the "hope" that we can have?

What should that hope prompt us to do?

6. 1 Peter 1:22.

The chapter said that any attempts at self-purification were doomed to failure.

How does this Scripture explain how a Christian purifies himself?

7. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

In this prayer for these Christians, what is Paul praying for?

How extensive does he expect this sanctification to be?

Who does it?

8. Personal Reflection.

In what areas has the Lord been giving me dawning awareness, where I've come to sense that He will eventually do something in these areas?

In what area or two might the Lord be giving me "growing conviction?" I'm not sure yet, but I think He might be zeroing in on these one or two areas:

Is there an area where you believe God has already said "It's your move" and you need to make a "crisis decision" of obedience?

Can you think of a time when you really did all you could, and trusted God, yet you had to wait for His "changing grace?"

9. Final reflection.

Is there something you could or should do in response to the truth you discovered in this chapter?

An action to take?

A promise to make?

RESTITUTION

...Making Things Right

*"...I strive always to keep my conscience
clear before men and God."
Acts 24:16*

Restitution is going back and making things right for things you took or the people you hurt.

- It is "restoring" to the original owner what is rightfully theirs -- property or respect and reputation.
- It is going back and making things right for hurtful things I've said or done.
- It is asking forgiveness from a brother you hurt, a mother you caused heartache to, or a former spouse which you maligned.
- Restitution is confessing and seeking forgiveness from an old business partner, neighbor, or roommate.
- It is seeking forgiveness from the one I've hurt.

Restitution is a discipline in humility. Pride and restitution are incompatible. It's not popular. And it isn't easy. It is one of the most painful disciplines of the obedient life.

But it is biblical. It is the Christian way. Anyone who seriously wants to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ will walk the painful path of restitution from time to time, returning to the offended party to make things right. It's the Christian way.

Jesus confirmed the idea in the New Testament, even recognizing restitution as one of the evidences that "salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

- The reason we don't like restitution is not because it's unbiblical; it is because it is in total opposition to our pride. We hate to be humbled, embarrassed, humiliated. It goes against our nature. So, we would rather save our pride than make restitution.

Knowing that we need to make restitution; the question becomes how do we do it, or how do we do it wisely?

1. Start with the key unmade restitution.
2. Prepare your speech.
3. Pick the right time, place, and means.
4. Don't combine witnessing with restitution.
5. Give a full confession.

The moment we recognize something we don't own is among our things we should return it at once. The moment we realize we have wronged someone in any way, we should do what we can to make it right.

Bible Study

1. What is restitution?

2. Exodus 22:1-8.

What does this scripture say about making things right?

Why was “double” payment or even “four sheep” for one sheep required?

3. Numbers 5:5-8.

There may be a restitution you ought to make, but it is no longer possible to find the offended person or organization. In this case a person might make the restitution to a "close relative" as a representative of the aggrieved person. But, if one could not even locate a close relative, to whom is he to make restitution?

Why is restitution required if the offended person can not even be found?

4. Luke 19:1-9.

Tax collectors during the time of Jesus were a hated lot. The Roman system of revenue collection provided for independent tax collectors and chief collectors who bid for the "business" in their region. They frequently charged far more than the legitimate rates keeping the extra for themselves. Zacchaeus was chief among this despicable lot and had likely cheated many of his fellows over the years. Upon meeting Jesus his heart was burdened by his past wrongs, and he determined to make things right. His restitution was two-fold: both general and specific.

-- What general restitution did he make? (vs. 19:8a)

-- Why might Zacchaeus have made this general restitution?

-- To what specific restitution did he commit? (vs. 19:8b)

-- How does Zacchaeus' specific restitution compare with what the law required for financial fraud in Leviticus? (Leviticus 6:5)

-- What was the observation that Jesus made upon hearing these declarations?

5. Matthew 5:23-24.

The importance of praise and worship is vital to the Christian. To the Jew it was especially important. Offering a gift up on the altar was the supreme act of devotion and duty. Few would imagine any higher duty.

-- However, which activity does Jesus prefer here: worship or interpersonal restitution?

-- Does this principle apply when a brother is holding something against you unjustifiably?

6. Personal application

Is God convicting you about a restitution you need to make? Is there something you took, or an offense you inflicted which you sense God would have you make right? Be careful to avoid working up something on your own. And don't attempt to copy another person's restitution story. The question is what is God saying to you? If He is prompting you about some areas, list them in the following space. If God is tenderly tapping on the door of your conscience, don't ignore His gentle prodding. If you never make a list, you'll probably never make the restitutions either. Is there something you ought to make right? List those candidates for restitution here. If they are private matters, use some sort of code or abbreviations which only you understand, or even use another sheet of paper.

7. Personal Reflection.

What is one thing you could and should do in response to the truths you have discovered in this chapter?

-- An action to take:

-- A promise to make:

Grudges

...Forgiving old hurts

"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

-- Matthew 6:12,14-15 (NIV)

The Trouble with Grudges

If we slow down and reflect a few moments, each of us will come to admit that a grudge is an awful blot on our soul. What do we gain? Why not release our grudge now? Have you been hurt deeply? Ever? By whom? Has this personal injustice ignited resentment in your heart? Has your resentment turned into a grudge? If so, think about these consequences of a grudge.

1. Grudges don't work.

The person who hurt us may not even know how angry and bitter we feel. In fact, they may go on their merry way, completely oblivious to our feelings of resentment. They are happy. We are angry, sour, bitter. The irony: In getting even with another, we hurt ourselves -- spiritually and emotionally, perhaps even physically.

2. A grudge grows like cancer.

Inner resentment is a spreading cancer of the soul. It multiplies its malignant tentacles, spreading to the deepest parts of our heart. A grudge pours its corrosive bitterness into our entire mindset. Soon we open the door for envy, malice, jealousy, bitterness, gossip, and slander -- we will stop at nothing to even the score. Holding a grudge will eat your insides.

3. Grudges generate guilt.

If you have a grudge, yet willfully and continually refuse to forgive the one who hurt you, you won't feel forgiven yourself. People who hold grudges seldom sense that God is satisfied with them. You'll never feel fully forgiven and accepted by God. Why? Because it is a universal law: Those who will not forgive, do not feel forgiven.

4. A grudge handcuffs you to the past.

Holding a grudge keeps life running on rewind. You keep looking over your shoulder at some past injustice you experienced. You recall how awful it was. A grudge handcuffs you to this negative past, causing you to blame your present failures on past misfortunes. "If only they hadn't done that, then I'd not be in this jam now..."

5. A grudge is an energy leak.

Carrying a grudge pokes holes in your energy bucket. You will feel constantly tired, weary, and lethargic. Fatigue is the faithful companion of a grudge. At the end of each day you will collapse in exhaustion, wondering why you feel so fatigued. It is because you are wasting great amounts of unconscious energy maintaining your grudge. All exhaustion does not indicate a buried grudge, but if you've got a grudge, there is a good chance you'll experience fatigue.

6. A grudge usurps God's rightful role.

The ultimate sin in an unforgiving spirit is that we take God's authority from Him. God, and God alone, has the right to condemn men and women. Only God has the right to hold another accountable for sin. Vengeance is His exclusive domain. When we refuse to forgive another we raise ourselves to the level of God, as if we can hold another under charges for their sin.

Bible Study

1. In your own words, what is a grudge?

Can you think of a time when you held a grudge against someone?

Can you think of a time when someone held a grudge against you?

Was it ever resolved? How was it resolved?

2. Matthew 18:21-35.

What is the point of this parable and what does it have to say about grudges?

3. Matthew 6:12-15.

-- On what basis does God forgive us? (verse 12)

-- What promise do you see here? (verse 14)

-- What warning do you see? (verse 15)

4. James 2:12-13.

-- How do these verses relate to our topic?

5. Colossians 3:13.

-- What example are we to use in forgiving others?

6. Luke 23:33-34.

-- Based on this example, how would you answer the question "How far should you go with this forgiveness thing?"

7. So what about you, my friend?

Have you been hurt? Has someone been unjust to you? A parent? Brother or sister? Child? Neighbor? Teacher? Former spouse? Perhaps a group or institution hurt you: a school, church, committee, board, youth group. Have you fully forgiven these people? Do you harbor a bit of a grudge for anyone anywhere in your past?

If so, you can get this monkey off your back for good today! You can decide that from this hour forward you are marking that debt "paid in full." It is in the willing that you forgive. You can do it. You can! In one single transaction you can determine that you will no longer consider that your offender has no "outstanding balance" with you. The debt is "history"... cancelled... paid in full -- turned over to the Eternal Debt Collector. Not because they were right, but simply because you want to obey Christ and please the Father. He has commanded that you forgive others as His Father forgave you. How was that? Completely, wholly, irrevocably. Can you now do the same for another? It's not a question of who's right; it's a question of what's right.

Perhaps your injury was especially deep. Could you at least begin to forgive? Are you telling yourself "I can't forgive" when you really mean "I won't forgive?" Are you truly unable to forgive? Are you willing to be made willing? Is the Lord gently urging you to begin? To start? If so, why not turn the corner today? Why not tell Him right now, "Lord, I'm going to begin my road to recovery...and I shall not turn back until I have fully forgiven that person." The Great Forgiver will help you.

8. Personal Reflection.

What is one single thing you could do in response to the truths of this chapter?

-- An action to take:

-- A promise to make:

Thought Life

... Overcoming Impure Thoughts

*"...and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
-- 2 Corinthians 10:5*

Impure thoughts are not a temptation limited to young men. I once thought this to be so, but experience in counseling many years has taught me otherwise. I have talked with scores of older men who are plagued with this private sin and have suffered for the forty or fifty years since their teen years. Neither is lust the exclusive sin of men. My wife reports from her traveling and speaking schedule that she has counseled with innumerable women, young and old alike, who suffer with habitual sensual fantasies.

If this area of temptation is completely foreign to you, or you are aghast that Christians exist who wrestle with this awful demon, the following excerpts from two letters, may be helpful in describing the depth of this particular fleshly sin:

"I'm desperate for any help you can give me. I am so sick of my obsession with impure thoughts that I've even thought of suicide. I feel so filthy, so dirty, so unworthy after I've given in and dwelled on some memory or daydream about a beautiful woman. My guilt brings me to confess. And I promise God I'll never do it again. But I do. I always do. Sometimes I fight heroically. Sometimes I even beat this monster, but I often fall. Real often.

"Is there help for me? Am I too far gone? Should I simply give up at trying to be a christian? That's how I feel sometimes. This filthy habit has clung to my life for more than 30 years. I've never told anybody else about it. My pastor, the board, the whole church -- even my wife -- all think I am a perfect model christian. But I know I am rotten inside. I feel like such a hypocrite! Is there hope for me? If so, I need it soon."

Or, consider this letter my wife received from a delightfully talented woman.

"I had never even thought of how women have impure thoughts until last week at your session. I always figured that guys were the ones who had problems with "dirty thoughts." But maybe I have a problem too. "There's this handsome young man in our church choir who is not only talented, but pays attention to me. My husband is one of those guys who pretty well ignores me -- especially in public. But this guy treats me like a queen. He listens to what I have to say, looks right into my face, and acts like I am an important person. You know what I mean... he just treats me special.

"Anyway, I wonder if this has become a trap for me. I think about him all the time... while I'm working, during church services, even when I'm with my husband. Not that I think of having sex with him or anything like that. I just invent these intensely romantic scenes in my mind, as if they are happening between this fellow and me. It's exciting! But I wonder if it's wrong. Is it O.K. as long as I don't actually fantasize about the actual sex act? I hope you can guide me on this because I've been troubled about it all this week.

"P.S. All this has made a big difference in how I feel about myself lately. I now have something to get up for in the morning again. Even my husband complimented me recently (believe it or not!) on how nicely I've been dressing. Could these thoughts be wrong when they seem to have so many benefits????"

What would you tell this woman? What would you tell that man?

Bible Study

1. Matthew 5:27-29.

In what way does Jesus here expand the interpretation of the seventh commandment?

2. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

What weapons might Paul be speaking of which can demolish "strongholds" and take "captive thoughts."

3. Psalm 119:9-10.

What preventative for sin is prescribed here?

4. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Is it possible to be in a spot where we are helpless before temptation, unable to have victory?

What is the difference between "resistible temptation" and "escapable temptation?"

5. Colossians 3:5-6.

To what does lust belong?

What are we told to do with lust?

6. Philippians 4:7-8.

Besides guarding our hearts, what else will the "peace of Christ" guard?

What are eight types of thoughts with which we should fill our minds?

7. Colossians 3:1-2.

Where are we to set our hearts and minds?

What can a Christian do to develop a heavenly "mindset?"

9. Personal Reflection.

What is one single thing you could do in response to the truths of this chapter?

-- An action to take:

-- A promise to make:

Restoration

... Restoring a Fallen Christian

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

-- Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

Suppose someone has taken a spiritual tumble in your church. They have fallen into sin and many know about it. A little group gathers off to the side to discuss the tragedy. One opens the conversation with, "Isn't it just terrible? Of all people, who would ever have suspected him?" Another replies, "He should have known better, it was just plain stupid." A third adds, "We've got to hold the whole family up in prayer during this time; you know this was not the first time."

So go the unspiritual, fleshly responses to a believer's fall into sin. We have a difficult time dealing with a brother's spiritual failure in the Christian community. If a leader or minister falls, the difficulty is doubled. What's a congregation to do when one of its own falls?

What if one of our unmarried teen girls gets pregnant? Or how should we respond when one of the board members is being charged with tax evasion in his business? Or how about a fine fellow in our choir who is being charged by his former wife with molesting his children? What do we do when one of our adult Sunday school teachers separates from his wife and files for a no-fault divorce? What would you do if you caught another Christian secretly meeting someone who is not his or her spouse?

Sometimes Christians fall into sin. It is not the norm, and it should not be expected, but it happens. Christians sometime stumble and fall. Temptation, like a mighty gust of wind, can sweep a believer off his feet and send him tumbling. When this happens, what should the rest of us do?

We are to restore the fallen brother. We are to help him back on his feet again. This discipline is both personal and corporate...the individual has a responsibility as does the entire church. We are commanded to help the brother up. This is restoration.

Restoring another Christian is a demanding responsibility; it's a touchy task. How will the person respond? Will they blow up at me? Is the whole thing merely a rumor that I should ignore? It's none of our business anyway, is it? It is indeed our responsibility. God wants to restore the fallen one, and he chooses to use us as his helpers/restorers. The responsibility for restoration lies squarely on the shoulders of other Christians. Yet because of misunderstanding, fear, and lack of training, we often sidestep this command. Instead we bypass the whole issue when faced with another's sin. We must avoid these popular "cop outs."

Now what about you, my friend?

Have you ever slipped off the straight and narrow path of obedience? Did Satan ever sneak up on your blind side and trip you up, sending you headlong into sin? Was there a time when you found yourself entangled in a habit, thought pattern, or attitude which you couldn't seem to shake? Were you ever knocked over and swept away in an act of disobedience?

How did you want to be treated? With searing judgment and condemnation? Would you have been happy to have been simply ignored and "let be" to work it out yourself? Perhaps this is exactly what happened. Wouldn't it have been better if someone who loved you deeply had come to you with a tender and compassionate heart and carefully helped you back on track?

Did someone ever restore you? Certainly God has. We have all been restored by the gentle, strong arm of God. Most of us, many times. Now we who are restored, are to become restorers. Nice touch. We who have known disobedience ourselves now become God's instruments to restore other fellow travelers. It's the Christian way.

1. Galatians 6:1-2.

According to these verses, who should be doing the restoring? Why is that important?

Can you think of an example where someone helping someone else may also be “tempted”?

How is the restoring to be done?

2. Luke 22:54-62.

In light of 1 John 2:23, how serious was Peter’s sin?

3. John 21:15-17.

Reviewing Peter’s restoration, observe what Jesus did in restoring him? What didn’t He do?

4. 1 Corinthians 5: 1-13.

What was the brother’s sin in this case and what are the Christians told to do? Restore him? Why does Paul say this?

5. 1 Corinthians 4:21.

What are the two general methods of discipline mentioned here?

Which method works best with you?

Which method are you generally more inclined toward personally?

Which do you think is the preferred method for restoring Christians?

6. Personal reflection.

Was I ever restored? If anyone ever offered correction or restoration to you, tell about it here. Did they do it wisely? Poorly? Did it work?

7. Personal reflection.

Where are our restorers? Those who are spiritual are the best equipped to do restoring. Who are the people in your local church who you think would be ideal restorers?

8. Personal reflection.

Is there someone I should restore? Using some sort of personal code or observations no one else would understand, list one or more persons for whom you might be a restorer.

9. Personal Reflection.

What is one single thing you could do in response to the truths of this chapter?

-- An action to take:

-- A promise to make:

Ambitions

... Abandoning Selfish Ambition

*"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."
Matthew 20:26 (NIV)*

Do you want to be great? Do you have a burning passion to leave your tracks on the sand of history? Do you hunger for success? Do you desperately want to "make it" in life? Would people call you a "go-getter" or "ambitious"? Are you "on your way to the top"? If these sorts of words describe your quest for success, perhaps you have sometimes wondered if your healthy dose of ambition has tinges of selfishness in it.

There are some people who worry too much about their motivations. These Christians don't get much done in the world because they're always checking themselves for improper motivations. Like hypochondriacs, they constantly invent spiritual illnesses. This is the devil's trick to keep such tender Christians preoccupied with themselves instead of a needy world. I'm not addressing these remarks to such folk. If you have such an extraordinary sensitivity, this might even be a chapter to skip.

However, if you seldom worry about your motivations, and are a hard-driving, success-oriented person, the Lord may have some words specifically for you in this chapter.

1. Holy Ambition:

Holy ambition is ambition that is based upon a mandate from God, when God calls someone to accomplish something for His purposes. It is knowing that God is calling you to do something. You almost can't help it. You got to answer that call. You got to do what needs to be done. This is the kind of ambition that takes risks; the kind of ambition that does what is uncomfortable. Holy ambition is the conviction that God has called you personally to do something specific, and nothing must stop you because you need to do it. You are certain it is God's will for your life. The motivation is not success. The motivation is obedience.

2. Human Aspiration

Human aspiration is a God-given drive to achieve something, whether it is something simple or more likely something great. All of us have this yearning, Christian or not. It is stamped on our nature by the Creator. Jesus clearly taught that the man who buries his potential in the ground will receive strict rejection from his Master (Matthew 25:26). God expects you to invest and multiply the talents and opportunities He has given you. For He is the one who has given you the desires of human aspiration.

3. Selfish Ambition

Selfish ambition is human aspiration that has turned into selfishness. Instead of striving for excellence in order to do our best, we strive for excellence or advancement or achievement for the primary purpose of serving *ourselves*. Selfish ambition is stepping on others in order to get ahead.

For most of us, our aspirations cannot be neatly divided between the three levels: sometimes there is mixed motivation in our desire for achievement. While we may not claim that our ambition is of the holy type, we usually feel it is of the wholesome, human variety. At least, mostly so. Mostly? Herein lies the problem of selfish ambition. Who would say that their ambition is wholly selfish? Few. Such a person is not a Christian at all. But a believer may come to recognize that his ambition is partly selfish.

Satan does not attempt to turn wholesome ambition evil in a day or even a year. Rather, he injects the poison of selfish ambition...one drop at a time. Each tiny additional drop seems minute compared with the whole. We may not even recognize this poisoning process at first. Even when we recognize it, we dismiss this part of our motivation as inconsequential. We then comfort ourselves with the thought that our motivation is "mostly" pure.

Bible Study

1. Luke 22:24-26.

What were the disciples arguing about? What was Jesus' response?

2. Luke 14:7-11

What were the disciples doing here? What was Jesus' recommendation?

3. Philippians 2:3-11.

Scripture does not say to do nothing, it says to do nothing out of what?

What is the difference between selfish ambition and great ambition?

Is it wrong to look after your own interests (v. 4)?

Considering the warnings about wanting to be "great" or doing things to exalt one self, are we reluctant to try to do great things?

How can we safeguard our ambition, to keep it from sliding into selfish ambition? What did Jesus do?

4. Personal Reflection.

What in your life might be termed "holy ambition"?

What desire for achievement do you have which seems to you to be wholesome human aspiration?

If selfish ambition were to creep into your desire for success, where might you notice it first?

Honesty

...Speaking Absolute Truth

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are members of one body. -- Ephesians 4:25 (NIV)

Most Christians would condemn a bold-faced lie. We are not likely to get caught telling such an outright falsehood. But there are other forms of lying which sometimes trip up the believer. Christians are more likely to be tempted to deliver half-truths -- a partially true statement (which is also partially false). Or there is flattery -- insincere praise. There are false excuses -- not giving the real reason for your actions. There are false impressions when the actual words used are technically true, but you mean to give the hearer a totally different idea.

The Christian may be tempted to exaggeration -- stretching facts and stories for effect. There is deceit -- contriving a false reputation for yourself. Sometimes the believer may be tempted to suppress the truth, keeping silent when the truth is needed. I would hope no Christian would be guilty of slander -- false stories told with the intention to harm. But he or she might be caught in a white lie -- a falsehood told for a good cause. The devil is the father of lies and has been exceedingly creative in providing a varied choice of methods for the person who wishes to be less than absolutely honest.

Some Questions to Ponder:

INSTRUCTIONS: Prayerfully answer the questions using the following key:

- T = TRUE of me, sorry to say.
- F = FALSE, this is not true for me.
- ? = QUESTION, I need to think more about this.

- _____ I sometimes say "I'd love to come, but I can't make it," when I really could make it.
- _____ I sometimes tell people "I was sick" when I really wasn't.
- _____ I sometimes quietly pocket extra cash received "conveniently forgetting" to report it for taxes.
- _____ When someone asks "Do you know so and so?" I sometimes say yes when I don't.
- _____ I sometimes lie about my weight to other people.
- _____ My past tax returns are not totally true and accurate.
- _____ I sometimes say "the check is in the mail" but it isn't.
- _____ When a person asks "Have you read such and such book?" I sometimes say that I have when I really haven't.
- _____ My spouse sometimes corrects the facts in my stories.
- _____ I sometimes say "Sure I remembered that" when I had totally forgotten until they reminded me.
- _____ I sometimes say "Sorry I'm late, I was held up" but I really wasn't held up.
- _____ I tend to twist verses to support what I believe.
- _____ My resume is totally honest... even if the national press were to comb it today, nothing is stretched or inflated.
- _____ I sometimes say "I've been praying for you," when I haven't.
- _____ I sometimes give the impression that I give more to the church than I really do.
- _____ I admit a tendency to 'beef up' stories, stretching the truth to get a better response.
- _____ I sometimes tell a "technical truth" which still leaves a false impression to the hearer.
- _____ I sometimes flatter people, dishing out false praise to them.
- _____ I sometimes compliment people when I really don't feel that way.
- _____ I sometimes act like I'm far more busy than I really am.
- _____ I sometimes even lie to myself and to God... for instance, I think I may have lied to myself as I answered some of these questions.

1. Introduction

Mark Twain said a lie can travel halfway around the world while truth is still lacing up her boots.

- Why is it that so many are compelled towards dishonesty?
- When is it most difficult to be truthful? Be honest.
- How are lies destructive in the lives of people?

Proverbs 11:1, "The Lord abhors dishonest scales". Proverbs 12:22, "The Lord detests lying lips". Why is that?

According to John 8:44, where does lying originate? What does this tell us about the dangers or even "slippery slope" of lying?

2. Acts 5:1-11.

Of what kind of lying were Ananias and Sapphira guilty? Why were they punished so severely... does it seem like God over-reacted?

3. John 4:16-18.

In what way was the Samaritan woman's answer to Jesus technically true, and in what ways was it a lie? Give an example of a technical truth in today's world which can also be a lie?

4. Ephesians 4:15.

Certainly we are to speak the truth... but this verse places a restriction how we are to speak it. What is that restriction?

Give examples of how something truthful can be said in a wrong way, at a wrong time, or with the wrong motive.

5. Revelation 21:8

Liars are listed along the same lines as murderers and those who practice magic arts. How does that make you feel? Does this mean a liar is no better of then the murderer or the sexually immoral? Considering the destiny of liars, do you think that God is over reacting?

Jesus said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'." How does simplicity help us in the area of honesty?

Peacemaking

...Mending broken relationships

*"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."
-- James 3:18 (NIV)*

How division develops

No two snowflakes -- and no two people are alike. God is a God of orderliness, but not of uniformity. His creation is one of infinite variety. His crowning creation, man, is especially varied. Humanity represents a broad "spectrum" of assorted fascinating personalities, temperaments, and racial and ethnic traits.

Some of us are shy and passive, while others are outgoing and aggressive. Some are sensitive and emotional, while others, like StarTrek's Mr. Spock, are logical, never letting their feelings show. Some of us are orderly, organized, neat perfectionists. The rest of us are messy, disorganized, and forgetful.

Differences cause interpersonal friction. Friction occurs in interpersonal relationships when we spend time with people different from ourselves. The shy, ingrown person is irritated by the outgoing, boisterous, noisy person. The orderly person thinks the disorganized person is a slob. Energetic hard-drivers think easy-going people are lazy wimps. The easy-going person returns the assessment, considering the hard-driver a fascist dictator who runs roughshod over everyone who gets in his way.

When interpersonal friction occurs, we tend to see another's personality strength as a weakness. The neat are considered "fastidious." Bold people are considered "brash." Sensitive folk are termed "touchy." The humorous become "silly," the cautious are "fearful," and the frugal become "skinflints." The strengths of others become the very targets of our criticism. Nowhere is this seen so clearly as in marriage. Differences cause friction.

We have mentioned only personality traits thus far. What of differing opinions on politics, theology, music, or religious convictions? What of differing personal preferences like when a sensible person ought to go to bed, what one should eat (or not eat) for breakfast? Which way should the toilet paper hang on the dispenser? The possibilities for interpersonal friction are immeasurable! Friction is to be expected in interpersonal relationships. We are to treat these irritations with grace and acceptance, overlooking the irritations. Friction is not sin. The next step is the fatal one.

Friction can cause broken relationships. Constant friction can lead to relational breakdown. If we do not learn to deal with friction appropriately, it will slowly drive a wedge between relationships so that we eventually "break fellowship" with another. One starts to avoid the other. Perhaps both dodge each other. The two begin leaving by separate doors and avoid mutual friends. Eventually each gathers several sympathetic friends, and factions form -- people take "sides" in the battle. Ultimately the whole group may be destroyed, simply because the initial broken relationship between two good folk wasn't faced and repaired. Have you ever witnessed the battlefield of such a broken relationship? Have you ever seen a whole church eventually destroyed because two or more of God's people didn't make peace?

How can we avoid this senseless slaughter? A quarrel, like a fire, can be quenched early with a pint of water. Let go, it will rage out of control, eventually consuming everything in its path.

1. Matthew 18:15-17.

Describe in your own words the four-step procedure for repairing this kind of broken relationship:

2. Matthew 5: 23-24.

What action are we to take when this kind of fracture occurs?

What is not a substitute for right relationships with our brother or sister?

3. Ephesians 4:3.

"Making" peace or "bringing back" unity is what we are to do when things go wrong. However, what even better plan does this verse suggest?

4. Romans 12:18

How can you put this verse into practice?

5. Personal reflection.

Using your own abbreviations or personal writing code, list below any broken relationships you may need to mend:

- Someone who wronged me
- Someone who feels I have wronged them
- Others who have deteriorating relationships
- Entire churches or groups divided into factions

10. Personal Reflection.

What is one single thing you could do in response to the truth of this chapter? Is there a promise you want to make to God?

-- An action to take:

-- A promise to make:

What to do When Your Light ...is Brighter Than Your Life

*"Now unto him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask
or imagine, according to the power that is at work within us."
-- Ephesians 3:20*

We started this book off with a focus on "walking in the light." We outlined the ways God seems to help Christians change, by first giving them "light" on something in their lives that needs changed... put off or put on. Following this "dawning awareness" comes the Holy Spirit's work in producing a "growing conviction" that we must change. We said that when we make a "crisis decision" to change, relying on God's power, He grants "changing grace" to us and then it is our job to keep walking obediently by "disciplined obedience." This is how we "walk in the light."

But what happens when your light is brighter than your life. What are you to do when you clearly see areas in your life out of God's will? What should you do when you know of several qualities and practices clearly missing from your life which a good Christian ought to be and do? What do you do when you've got more light than you can walk in? What do you do when you can't seem to keep up with the light? Like Paul on the Damascus road, do you feel blinded and incapacitated by the light? Is it overwhelming?

Perhaps this book hasn't helped. Chapter after chapter we have examined biblical disciplines of holy living. You may have winced as you read. Perhaps you would read a chapter then sigh and admit you weren't living up to it. When you hurried to the next you only discovered one more area where you fell short. Maybe by now you are ready to give up? If so, this chapter is for you.

1. Don't Cover Up.

Can you think of a time when you tried to "cover up" something that you did wrong?

What's the problem with covering up?

Keith Drury wrote, *"Pretending is the busy person's ultimate answer to spiritual growth. Simply act like these truths are something you long ago came to practice. Discuss these disciplines in a Sunday School class like you've practiced them for ages. Nod knowingly as the pastor preaches on things you've never even tried. Wag your head sternly when some sin is being discussed -- as if you've never even been tempted in this area. Presto! You have instant spirituality"*

- What does this kind of "pretending" lead to?

Psalm 32:3-6a says *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found..."*

- What did the Psalmist experience when he tried to cover up? What was the remedy?

2. Don't Give Up.

Paul wrote to the Philippians (3:12-14): *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already*

been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

- Have you ever felt like giving up in your Christian life? Why?
- What makes you "press on" in the Christian life?
- What instruction does Hebrews 12:2 have for us? How does that help?

3. Reach Up.

What was happening in John 20:19? Why were the believers afraid? What were they doing in response to their fear?

In Acts 1:8 Jesus is basically giving his last words to His followers. Why is He having them "wait"?

In Acts 7:51 Stephen is giving his last words, before the Jewish ruling council, before he was stoned to death. What was he saying? What was the result of their resistance?

Take a quick look at these scriptures. Something is happening that is very different than what was seen in John 20:19.

- Acts 2 1-4; 41.
- Acts 4:31-35.
- Acts 5:12-14.
- Acts 5:28.
- Acts 5:42.
- Acts 6:7.
- Acts 8:4.

To what can we attribute this change?

What does Ephesians 5:18 tell us to experience?

Now what about you, my friend?

This book would not attempt to persuade you to receive something from God you cannot believe and do not desire. But if you do admit to a spirit of resistance to God's work in your life, please give God a fair chance to convince you. Perhaps He is able to do much more than you could even ask Him to do... maybe even more than you could even imagine? Could he do all this through the Holy Spirit's power which is already at work within you (Ephesians 3:20)?

Why not look into His word? Listen to His quiet inner voice. See if He is calling you to this work of His grace. Perhaps there is power you don't have? Is there cleansing you haven't received? If so, see what He calls you to. The God who calls you is faithful... He will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). He really will!

Note from the writer:

I hope you enjoyed this electronic copy of the book *Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. If you did, and would like to have a permanent printed copy for your shelf, or for a Sunday school class to study, just give Wesley Press a call at 1-800-4 WESLEY (1-800-493-7539) to talk to one of those nice people to find out if they have a sale going on right now. Wesley Press also has a nice leader's guide written for each book. In this case, I wrote the leader's guide myself, and people who have used it say it has permanently changed the way they teach adults. I think you'll like it. Enjoy! -- Keith Drury