

GROWTH & HEALING

SEVEN STEPS TO GROWTH & HEALING

A Guide To Recovery
& Wholeness

by David Stiles



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Contents

About the Author	6
Acknowledgements.....	7
Introduction	8
The Seven Steps	11
The Seven Lies.....	12

Part One

1 Looking for God	14
God is interested in us	
2 Responding to God	26
Accepting God's offer to help	

Part Two

3 Discovering New Life	51
God wants us to be free	
4 The Broken Places	70
Looking at areas of growth and healing	

5 **Turning it Over** 85
Barriers to asking

6 **Responding Again**..... 97
Following God

7 **Giving Away**..... 125
Helping others

Conclusion..... 143

Dedication

To those in need of growth and healing.

About the Author

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many people who have helped me in my spiritual journey.

Specifically, thanks to my parents, my wife Sue and our boys. Thank you for being who you are.

Introduction

It seems like there are hundreds of words and phrases that run through my mind when I face difficult situations in life.

Many of the phrases might be called “conventional wisdom”, the string of words that many of us know and pass on to others as helpful “advice”:

- “just buck up and bite the bullet”
- “God helps those who help themselves”
- “good things come to those who wait”
- “there’s no use crying over spilled milk”

Beyond the conventional wisdom, though, there are also other phrases that go through my mind during those difficult times as well:

- “why is this happening to me?”
- “where is God when I need Him?”
- “I’ve tried to do what’s right, this seems so unfair.”
- “how can I get out of this difficult situation?”

And even after life seems to get back to “normal” I sometimes reflect on past hurts and difficulty, asking:

- “how can I make this pain go away?”
- “how can I recover from this situation?”
- “why is life so unfair sometimes?”

Do these questions sound familiar to you? I’m guessing that I’m not alone in thinking them.

This resource is written for those who, like me, are looking for a way to grow spiritually and find healing in the midst of difficulty.

A New Hope

Over the years my wife Sue, and I, have had the opportunity to work with people who were asking the same questions as those listed above.

Sometimes their difficulties were easy to overcome. Other times, their difficulties were around more serious problems of addiction, divorce, job loss, family disputes, abuse, and many other challenging things.

Fortunately, they were able to find someone to listen to their cares and concerns, encourage them when all seemed lost, and be a light in the darkness of difficult circumstances.

That someone was Jesus Christ.

They discovered in the Bible that Jesus cared deeply for them and desired to set them free to be who God created them to be.

Sure, sometimes those same old questions would come to mind when problems and challenges would arise, but they were also able to ask some new questions too, like:

- “how can I grow spiritually and learn from this difficult situation?”
- “how can this difficult situation be used for good?”
- “how should I forgive those who have hurt me?”
- “how can I grow in relationships with others?”

Those are some good questions to ask.

How to Use this Booklet

This resource is designed to be used for individual study or within a small group. Throughout each chapter, questions will be given to help you reflect and integrate the concepts into your own life and discuss with others.

Part One covers the process of how God develops a relationship with people. Part Two covers the process of growing in faith and discovering the emotional and spiritual healing that God offers.

It should be noted that this booklet does not specifically cover the topic of physical healing. When referring to *healing*, I will typically be referring to healing that is emotional, mental or spiritual in nature.

The Seven Steps for Growth and Healing

1. Look for God's presence in your life.
2. Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith.
3. Discover new life in Christ.
4. Identify the broken places.
5. Turn it over to God.
6. Respond to God's direction.
7. Give away what you've learned.

Seven Lies to keep you from Growth and Healing

1. God's not interested in me.
2. I can do it on my own.
3. I'll never change.
4. I'm fine.
5. God won't help me.
6. I can't do that.
7. Nobody's interested.

Part One

Chapter One

Looking for God

Step 1: Look for God's presence in your life

When our youngest son was seven he loved being silly and goofy, especially around bedtime.

When my wife, Sue, and I tucked him into bed we'd sometimes say, "If all of the seven year olds in all of the whole wide world were lined up together in a big long line, do you know which one we'd pick?"

If he was quiet for too long, we'd say, "You!"

Sometimes, however, on those nights when he wanted to be funny, he'd reply, "But what if you didn't *know* me, who would you pick then?"

And we'd say, "We'd still pick you."

Then he'd say, "But, what if I wasn't even *born*, who would you pick?"

And we'd reply, "We'd still find a way to pick you."

"But, what if there was another kid who looked just like me?" he'd ask.

At this point, if we were not already laughing or on our way out of the darkened bedroom, we'd turn and lean down over his bed and say with a serious voice, "Well, that would be tough. I guess we'd have to tickle all the kids that looked the same and find the one who laughed just....like...you!"

Soon his laughter filled the room as we reached down to tickle him.

Then his brother, in the bunk bed above, would say, “What if you didn’t recognize me in the line of all the eight year olds?”

And we’d go through the whole routine again with him.

God is Interested in Us

The Bible tells us that God is actively interested in us. He is interested in building relationships with people.

God, as seen throughout the Bible is active, not passive, in pursuing these relationships.

The myth, or lie, that many of us believe, however, is that “God is not interested in me.”

Lie #1

“God’s not interested in me.”

You may have heard others say,

- “God is not interested in me because I’m not perfect.
- “God is not interested in me because of the way I look.
- “God is not interested in me because of what I’ve done.
- “God is not interested in me because I’m not like another person.

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“God is not interested in me because _____.”

Why do we think that God is not interested?

There are a number of reasons why we might think that God is not interested in us.

One reason might be because of the *difficult circumstances* that we find ourselves in. And we wonder how God could allow us to go through them.

Another reason might be because we feel *guilty* for something that we have done, or not done in life. We may be reminded of past mistakes and failures and think that “God could never love me, or be interested in me, because of what I’ve done.”

Still another reason might be because we have experienced *rejection* from others. With the loss of relationship or respect we may have built mental or emotional walls and barriers, assuming that other people or God will reject us as well, which may lead to even greater feelings of worthlessness and isolation.

All of these experiences could lead us to thoughts and feelings that God is not interested in us.

The Truth

The truth, however, is that God is very much interested in each one of us.

Let's take a look at how the Bible describes this interest.

Our Creator

In the Old Testament, God is described as the *creator* of the universe. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" is how the Bible starts.

(Genesis 1:1)

His creation is something that we can see today and be influenced by.

As the theologian John Calvin once wrote,

"You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness." [1]

Here are two questions to consider about God's creation:

- What about God's creation do you find inspiring?
- Why do you find it inspiring?

Not only did God create stars and planets and beautiful rock formations and mountains, He created people.

According to the Bible, He created each one of us.

Let's think about that phrase for a moment, God created us.

Some might think of the additional phrase in the joke, "and he broke the mold afterwards with me", but that is a different topic.

If we believe that God created us, wouldn't we want to spend some time knowing who our Creator is?

Wouldn't we want to think about what He wants his created beings to be and to do?

John Calvin gives this perspective,

"How can the thought of God penetrate your mind without your realizing immediately that, since you are his handiwork, you have been made over and bound to his command by right of creation, that you owe your life to him?" [2]

Our Sustainer

The Bible also describes God as the *sustainer* of all of life.

- “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.” (Psalm 3:5)
- “The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and widow...” (Psalm 146:9)
- The Lord said, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and rescue you.” (Isaiah 46:3-5)
- “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.” (Isaiah 40: 28-29)

Compassion

The Old Testament describes the Lord as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love”. (Psalm 103:8)

Later in the Bible, in the New Testament, we can read about Jesus, who is described as God’s Son. The New Testament says that Jesus had *compassion* on everyone who came to Him.

Jesus saw people’s needs for healing, for food, for comfort in grief, and many other needs.

In the New Testament accounts of Jesus, we learn,

- “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:14)
- “Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.’” (Matthew 15:32)
- “Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.” (Matthew 20:34)
- When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” (Luke 7:13)

Later in the New Testament we learn that,

- “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)

So, in both the Old Testament and New Testament we can read about a loving and caring God who is the creator and sustainer of all of life.

This leads us to the first of seven steps in our journey.

Step One

The first step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Look for God’s presence in your life”.

Step #1:
Look for God’s presence in your life.

Remember

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to look to see His work.

People are told to *remember* the things that He has done.

Even God’s name helped the people of Old Testament remember what He had done in the lives of their ancestors. In Exodus 3:5 and many other places throughout Scripture, God is called the,

- “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

What else does the Bible say about remembering our past?

- “Fathers tell their children about (God’s) faithfulness...” (Isaiah 38:19)

- “Remember the former things, those of long ago.”
(Isaiah 46:9)
- “Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced.”
(I Chronicles 16:12)
- “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”
(Hebrews 13:7)

Just as the people of the Old and New Testament were called to examine their lives and remember God’s presence and work, so should we stop to remember what God has done.

My Story

For me, I find it hard not to think about God when I see God’s creation. The ocean in particular is moving to me. One of my favorite things to do is to take a long walk along the shore. I love seeing the shifting sands made by the waves and the vastness of the blue water as it meets the horizon. I’m struck by how God made it all.

If you’re stuck on this step:

If you find that you’re having difficulty in this area, you might consider praying the following prayer as you seek to discover God’s presence and work in your life.

Prayer

Lord, help me look back upon my life and see how You have been at work.

I ask that you would help me to remember the times when you have blessed me and comforted me.

Thank you for your incredible love and concern even when I did not recognize it. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "God's not interested in me." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

- Not what I'm thinking
- Somewhat what I'm thinking
- Very much what I'm thinking

2. One author has said, "The question today is not 'Is there a God' but 'What kind of God is there'." [3]

What words come to mind as you think about God?

3. Re-read the section called, "Remember". What things can you remember that God has done in your life?
4. What in your life has been miraculous?

Chapter 1

Notes:

1. John Calvin, “*Institutes of Christian Religion I.3.1*” (1559) as quoted in “*The Reformed Reader*”, William Stacy Johnson and John H. Leith editors, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 34.
2. *ibid*, p. 51.
3. Richard Foster, “*Freedom of Simplicity*”, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1981), p. 15.

Chapter Two

Responding to God

Step 2: Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith

I have a confession to make. I had a hidden agenda in encouraging my sister-in-law to get married a few years ago.

Sure, I thought the guy she was dating was a great guy. I thought that they would get along great and that he would cherish her and love her.

But there was something else too. The guy she was dating was also a...golfer.

"He's a golfer!" I said to myself when she announced her engagement. "Oh yeah, congratulations too." I told her.

His being a golfer was such a relief to me. That meant that on future family vacations when my father-in-law was looking for someone to play golf with, he wouldn't have to rely only on me.

Think for a moment about the absolute worst golfer that you can imagine. Then, think about someone who plays worse than that...that would be me.

Think about a golf game where people don't wager on the score, but on how many golf balls I'd lose.

It wasn't pretty.

It's not like I didn't try hard when I got on a golf course...I did try very hard.

It's just that my golf ball consistently went wide to the right at nearly a 90-degree angle every time I hit it.

My golf balls have come close to taking out windows in the houses next to the fairway, small children who were playing at a nearby park and almost caused four cars to wreck.

So, when my sister-in-law was marrying a golfer, you can understand my joy.

The years before her marriage, when it was just me and my father-in-law, I would try to compensate for my slice. I'd try a different golf club, or a different stance or a different swing. But nothing seemed to work.

As a last resort, I'd aim far to the left, knowing that my ball would slice to the right, toward the green grass of the fairway ahead of me, somewhere near my father-in-law's ball.

"Hey watch it." A few people said as I aimed at them on the fairway to my left, fearful that I would hit a line-drive at them.

But I knew better. I knew that my ball would slice to the right as it always did.

You see, what I really needed had nothing to do with aiming at the wrong hole.

What I needed was someone to help me. I needed a golf instructor who could tell me what I was doing wrong and show me how to do things the right way.

But, I never sought one out or asked for help.

Accepting God's Offer of Salvation

The Bible tells us that God is not only interested in us (as we learned in the previous chapter), He is interested in *helping us*.

He wants to help us by offering what the Bible calls "salvation" and hope for the future.

The myth, or lie that many people believe is that "I can do it on my own."

Lie #2

"I can do it on my own."

For me on the golf course, I also told myself, "I can do it on my own" even as I struggled and lost my temper, and lost my golf balls and nearly caused accidents for the cars driving by.

You may have heard someone say,

- "God helps those that help themselves."
- "I've got it all under control."

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I don’t need God because _____.”

Why do we think that we can do it by ourselves?

There are a number of reasons why we tell ourselves that “I can do it on my own.” One reason is that it is part of our *culture*.

Just look at these lines from the movie, “*The Magnificent Seven*”. In this action packed western, the actor Yule Brynner plays a character named Chris.

One of his friends in the movie speaks remorsefully about being a gun slinger in the Wild West and says, “Home, none. Wife, none. Kids, none. Prospects, zero.”

Then Chris replies,

“Places you are tied down to, none. People with a hold on you, none. Men you step aside for, none. Insults swallowed, none. Enemies, none....alive.”

That’s one tough guy. And someone who thinks he can “go it alone”.

Another reason is our *pride*. Like me on the golf course, we find it difficult to admit that we need help.

The Latin poet Claudianus wrote, “Pride sullies the noblest character.” And Harper Lee, in her famous novel, “*To Kill a*

Mockingbird” wrote, “Folks don’t like to have somebody around knowin’ more than they do.”

A third reason is *fear*. Many people aren’t willing to risk the unknown and trust God.

A final reason is because it is in our *nature*. Just as it was my nature to slice the golf ball, time and time again, our human nature is to be independent of God, to act like our own gods and say consciously or unconsciously, “I don’t need you. I can do things on my own”.

So, here are two more questions for you,

- When have you had difficulty trusting God and asking Him for help?
- Why was it difficult?

Apprehension

My experience is that many people are apprehensive and fearful to trust God. This can be especially true if someone has experienced *rejection* in life.

According to Jesus, though, we should not fear God because He is *trustworthy*.

One of the most common phrases Jesus used when he was teaching 2,000 years ago was “*do not be afraid*”. Such as:

- “Don’t be afraid, just believe.” (Mark 5:36)
- “Take courage, it is I. Don’t be afraid.” (Mark 6:51)
- “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7)
- “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

In addition, the Apostle Paul wrote about God's faithfulness:

- "God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful" (I Corinthians 1:9)
- "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us..." (II Corinthians 1:10)

So, according to Scripture, we can trust God to help us because he cares for His people.

Here are several more questions for you to consider:

- What about God's faithfulness do you find encouraging? Why?
- What about trusting God is challenging?

The Need for Forgiveness

Like my golf swing that had a natural inclination to slice to the right every time I hit the ball, we learn in Scripture that humans have natural inclinations too.

According to the Bible, our natural inclination is to do things apart from God.

In this regard, we "miss the mark" or sin, as the Bible calls it because of our natural inclination to do things that are selfish and rebellious to God.

In Genesis 3, we read about an event called "The Fall".

Here we see human rebellion for the first time against God. Because of that rebellion and humankind's desire to do things "our way", we became separated from Him.

We see immediately after The Fall the result of human sinfulness, as people showed that they were:

- deceptive
- in denial of reality
- selfish
- hurtful to others
- unresponsive to God

Later in the Bible, this rebellion was even more pronounced as humans turned to idolatry and worshipped gods other than the Lord.

Some other questions to consider then, are...

- How have you seen this natural inclination to do things on your own, without God in your life?
- What negative consequences of sin have you seen in your own life and in the life of others?

The Law

In the Old Testament, God provided the Law to help instruct His people in His ways.

Part of the Law contained the Ten Commandments, with commands such as:

- “You shall have no other gods before me.”
(Exodus 20:3)
- “You shall not make for yourself an idol...”
(Exodus 20:4)
- “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD
your God.” (Exodus 20:7)
- “You shall not steal.” (Exodus 20:15)

In addition to the Ten Commandments many other laws were given to the Israelites to guide their daily lives.

These laws included:

- ✓ food purity laws
- ✓ laws for corporate worship
 - regarding priests
 - regarding the tabernacle and temple
 - regarding sacred objects
- ✓ laws for individual worship
 - regarding forgiveness and atonement
- ✓ laws for treatment of the poor
- ✓ laws for resolving issues of justice
- ✓ laws regarding the family

Response to the Law

In the Old Testament, in terms of the Law, there was only one response that was acceptable to the Lord: obedience.

- “Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.”
(Exodus 12:24)
- “Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.” (Deuteronomy 11:1)
- “Be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today.”
(Deuteronomy 11:32)
- Moses said to the people, “If you obey the voice of the Lord your God...then all the blessings will come to you...”
(Deuteronomy 28:1)

As the Law was explained to the people of the Old Testament, God enumerated blessings for following the Law and curses for not following the Law:

- “...the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.”
(Deuteronomy 11:27-29)

Sadly, however, the Law was not followed and the consequences of disobedience and rebellion were felt as the Israelites fell under the “curse”.

Later, the Apostle Paul wrote about the consequences of not following the Law:

- “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.” (I Cor. 16:22)

Today, through our conscience and reading of the Bible, we can know what is right and what is wrong, yet because of our human nature we naturally do things that are separate from God.

Many times we desire to be our own gods, following our own ideas and not God’s.

This separation from God is only one of many consequences of our sinful human nature.

Seeking a Way Out

In the 1970s, a song called “*Woodstock*” was written by Joni Mitchell and made famous by the band “Crosby, Stills, and Nash”. The lyrics of the song used the phrase, “and we’ve got to get ourselves back the garden.”

Looking at human history, we can see time and again people trying to find a way back to the Garden (of Eden) to a time before the Fall, when life was perfect, before the demands and the curse of the Law.

Here’s a question for you...How would you fill in the blank?

- “If only _____ happened (or didn’t happen), my life would be perfect.”

Many answer this question by looking to others. They attempt to create a perfect place in their homes or other areas by tightly controlling their lives and manipulating others, saying, “If only others (my spouse, my parents, my kids) would change, things would be perfect.”

Still others have sought to create new utopian worlds through experiments with political systems, such as Marxism or communism, saying “If only our government would change, our lives would be perfect.”

Some have sought to control their environments through science. “If only we better understood or controlled nature, things would be perfect.”

Similarly, some look to technology. “If only we could make better machines, our lives would be perfect.”

Or, some look to sources within themselves, saying “If only I cared more or helped others more, my life would be perfect.”

Some may look to religious practices. Saying, “If I work harder to be a better religious person my life would be perfect.”

Still others look to relationships. “If I was married to/dating/having sex with that person, my life would be perfect.”

And then there are material things, “If I was able to:

- live in that big house
- buy that car
- get promoted to that higher paying job
- wear those clothes
- pay that bill

...then, my life would be perfect.

But, as perhaps you have found, those things don't make our lives perfect. They just do not work.

As Larry Norman, an early Christian rock and roll musician, sang, “The Beatles said ‘All you need is love’, and then they broke up.”

The reason that those things don't work is because they don't fundamentally change our human nature. All of those systems, techniques or things, depend on our own works; on our doing or getting something.

The problem with this approach, then, is that this is simply another way of stating Lie #2 that we discussed earlier, “I can do it on my own.”

It is clear in the Bible that we *can't* change on our own effort. We cannot remove the curse of the Law nor can we reverse the consequences of sin on our own.

So, if we can't change on our own, who can help us?

The Son

We learn in Scripture that even in the midst of our separation, God the Father, in His mercy and grace offered His son, Jesus Christ, to the world.

We can read the much quoted verse in the Gospel of John,

- “For God so loved the world that He gave his Son that whoever believes in him will not perish.” (John 3:16)

Similarly, John wrote later,

- “And we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” (I John 4:14)

How could Jesus offer this salvation to the world?

There are several reasons that the Bible presents to show us why Jesus was so special, to be able to offer us salvation.

We can read in the New Testament that Jesus was *God*.

Jesus is described not only as “God’s Son” but also as being “of God”, God’s “exact representation” and the “image of invisible God”.

- In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” (John 14:10)

- In Hebrews we read, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word...” (Heb. 1:3)
- Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col. 1:15)

Being “of God” and God’s “exact representation” when he came to earth, Jesus was able to reveal God to us, so that we might understand God and His purposes more clearly.

We can also see in the Bible that Jesus was *human*.

He was born of a human mother named Mary and had brothers and a family. We can even read about Jesus’ genealogy in the New Testament. In the Bible, Jesus is frequently referred to as “The Son of Man” and “Son of David” (a King of Israel).

Because of his humanity we can trust that Jesus understands our feelings and our needs.

And because he was human, he could be our representative.

As the writer, C.S. Lewis noted, “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.” [1]

But in his humanity, Christ was *perfect* and perfectly followed the Law.

Jesus even asked, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46)

The Apostle Paul gave us much insight about what type of person could save us from sin and the curse of the Law. He said that it must be someone who kept the Law to *perfection* and would *willingly pay the penalty for our sins*.

...that someone was Jesus.

Jesus we learn in the Bible was “The Messiah” a word meaning “the anointed one”. In Greek, this word was translated as “christos”, which is where we get the name Jesus Christ.

When John the Baptist first saw Jesus he exclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29)

As the writer R.C. Sproul has written, “Christ is the sin-bearer for his people, the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God) who takes away our sin and satisfies God’s demand for justice.” [2]

Christ paid the penalty for our sins. He took for us the penalty that our sins deserved by dying on the cross.

Again as R.C. Sproul has written, “The cross displays God’s justice (in that He truly punishes sin) and his grace (because he punishes sin by providing a substitute for us).” [3]

We read that Jesus willingly *died for us*. He bore the punishment that we deserved. He was a substitute for His people.

We learn in the New Testament that:

- Jesus “shed his blood for the remission of sin” (Matthew 26:28)
- “...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Paul described it this way,

- “...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3)
- “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Cor. 5:21)
- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (Gal. 3:13)

Death is Not the End

The story, however, doesn't end with Jesus' death. In an amazing and miraculous set of events, Jesus, after taking our punishment and dying for our sins, was raised from the dead.

Paul described it this way,

- “...he was buried and raised on the third day...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more

than five hundred..." (I Cor. 15:3-6)

- because of His death, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Phil. 2:9-11).

Thus we learn that not only is Jesus the "Messiah" (the anointed one of God) who died a humble death, but He is also the *exalted Lord*....the one whom every knee will bow down to worship.

Step Two

This takes us to the second step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, which is simply called, "Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith".

Step #2:

Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith.

Respond with Faith

The response, we are told in the Bible, needs to be simply one of faith...

- Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe." (Mark 1:15)

- Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...” (Acts 16:31)
- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

My Story

For me, I took my first step in faith and recognized my need for Christ to be my savior when I was an awkward young teenager, dealing with issues of acceptance and doubt.

I went with a church group to a Christian rock concert to see a band from Chicago called “*The Resurrection Band*”.

That night, in a crowded high school auditorium in Toledo, Ohio, I affirmed my faith in Jesus Christ. I told God that I was sorry for my sins, asked Him to forgive me.

A Prayer

If you haven’t taken this step in faith, here’s a common prayer that expresses a desire to receive God’s gift of salvation.

“Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.” [4]

The Results

We are told in Scripture that if we believe and trust, God will forgive us.

Theologians describe this as “Christ’s righteousness imputed to those who believe”. That means that His righteousness is *transferred* to His people.

A term that the Bible uses to explain this is *justified*. We are justified by Christ. That means, as Billy Graham has said, God sees us *just as if* we were Christ...sinless. Therefore, there is now no condemnation under God’s Law.

Earning God’s Favor

In approaching Jesus, many still bring the myth of “I can do it on my own” as they think, “I’ve got to earn God’s favor.”

In response to this idea, theologians of the sixteenth century used the phrase “*sola fide*”, which is Latin for “faith alone”.

It is because of the graciousness of God, they affirmed, that we can be saved. Our response is simply, in faith, to trust God in the work that he accomplished through His Son Jesus Christ.

Seeing the big picture, these pastors and teachers of the sixteenth century said that,

- “We are justified (or made right) by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.”

So, we can’t earn God’s favor. We simply accept it.

Jesus Plus

Unfortunately, some do not understand this idea of “faith alone” and speak of additional requirements for salvation.

If their ideas were a mathematical formula it might look like this...

- Faith + Works = Salvation
- Faith – Bad Living = Salvation
- Faith + Good Living = Salvation
- Faith + Church Membership = Salvation

In the Bible, however, the equation is simply,

- Faith in Christ = Salvation.

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to trust Him *alone*.

- “No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.” (Matthew 6:24)
- “Salvation is found through no one else.” (Acts 4:12)
- Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

In terms of his own works and efforts, Paul said,

- “I consider them *rubbish*, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is *through faith* in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” (Phil. 3:8-9)

If you’re stuck on this step:

If you find that you’re having difficulty in this area, ask God for faith, because faith is a gift given by God.

- “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8)

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, “I can do it on my own.” How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

- ___ Not what I’m thinking
- ___ Somewhat what I’m thinking
- ___ Very much what I’m thinking

2. Re-read the section called, “Seeking a Way Out”. How have you sought the perfect life? What about your search has been fulfilling or unfulfilling?
3. What barriers have you seen in responding to God’s offer of salvation?

4. If you've put your faith in Christ, what results have you seen?

Chapter 2

Notes:

1. C.S. Lewis, "*Mere Christianity*", (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1943), p. 154.
2. R.C. Sproul, "*Faith Alone*", (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p. 104.
3. *ibid.* p. 104.
4. Adapted from "*Four Spiritual Laws*", Campus Crusade for Christ.

Part Two

Chapter Three

Discovering New Life

Step 3: Discover New Life in Christ

Television in recent years has had no shortage of crime dramas. These mysteries are on nearly every evening.

NBC currently has the “Law and Order” franchise with:

- “Law & Order”
- “Law & Order: Special Victims Unit”
- “Law & Order: Criminal Intent”
- “Law & Order: Trial by Jury”

CBS has the “CSI” franchise with:

- “CSI”
- “CSI: Miami”
- “CSI: New York”

And several similar shows like:

- “Cold Case”
- “Numbers”
- “Without a Trace”

For me, I miss the television detective mysteries of the 1970’s and 80’s, with their down-to earth characters.

I liked James Garner’s character named Jim Rockford in “*The Rockford Files*”, who lived in a mobile home and Tom Selleck’s character, named Thomas Magnum, a former Navy Seal, in “*Magnum P.I.*”, who mooched off a wealthy writer. I even liked Dennis Weaver’s character in “*McCloud*”, who was a cowboy detective in the big-city

and the show “*Colombo*” that starred Peter Falk as a slovenly dressed detective in a trench coat.

I guess what I liked about these older shows was how their down-to-earth characters solved mysteries.

In the older shows, it seemed like the characters really had to work at figuring out the solution to the mystery.

Now, in today’s television mysteries, it seems like so much of the show is devoted to the personal lives of the characters and other mysteries, that the actual solution to the primary mystery that I’m interested in, just seems so contrived...as actors in lab coats, with just minutes left in the show, say things like,

- “Wait a second, there’s only one place in the city that this sediment from the crime scene could have come from. The old quarry outside of town.”
- “Hold on, I just remembered, this metal shaving we found on his shoe can only be found in the beams at that old abandoned warehouse on Sixth Street.”
- “The kidnapped victim has got to be at the abandoned jetty. That’s the only place in the city where this kind of igneous rock can be found. I’ll meet you there in the helicopter, you take the Jet Ski and the other detectives can meet us there with the Coast Guard ship and the aircraft carrier from the U.S. Navy.”

So, if I understand it right, in order to be a crime scene investigator, as seen in today’s television mysteries, not

only do you have to know some science, you also have to be an omnipotent expert on every square inch of a city.

The Mystery

For Christians, there is a *mystery* that is disclosed in the Bible.

As Paul says, it is “the *mystery* that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.” (Col. 1:26)

And here’s the mystery that was disclosed, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col.1:27). Or as Peter says, “You have been born anew.” (I Peter 1:23)

Christians, then, can experience a transformed life because they have the spirit of God within them.

The Lie

The myth, or lie, that many of us believe is that “I’ll never change.”

Lie #3

“I’ll never change.”

You may have heard someone say, as the musician Bruce Hornsby does in his song “*The Way It Is*”:

- “That’s just the way it is, some things will never change.”

Or maybe you've heard others say,

- "I'll change when my circumstances do."

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

"I won't change because _____."

The Truth

The truth, however, is that if we have trusted Christ to forgive our sins and have asked Him to be the Lord of our lives, we can be transformed by Him.

Paul says that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"
(2 Cor. 6:17)

Christ, Paul says, died, so "that those who live should no longer live for themselves" but can live new lives for God.
(2 Cor. 6:15)

According to Scripture, with God's help we can:

- know God as a friend
- have "the fruit" of being connected with Him
- be free from the bonds of sin
- be incorporated into the Body of Christ

- be filled with the Holy Spirit who will give us insight and wisdom

Let's look at each of these in more detail:

Knowing God

As God's new creations, Christians can know God.

As Mark Virkler has written, "Our God is a communicating God who longs to make His thoughts and His will known to us." [1]

Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, famously, "Our Father who art in Heaven..."

He taught us that God is our father. And we can come to Him in prayer with our needs and concerns. Jesus explained,

- "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11)

Paul encouraged Christians to "grow in their knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10) because you "did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received a Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Father." (Romans 8:15)

Friendship with God

As God's new creations, Christians not only can know God, but can know Him closely, as a friend.

J.I. Packer calls it "truly staggering" that "God's purpose in revelation is to make friends with us." [2]

Dr. Packer continues,

"That God made man to be His friend appears from the third chapter of Genesis, where we find God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, looking for Adam to join Him and share His company (Gen. 3:8). That, despite sin, God still wants human friends appears from Christ's statement that God seeks true worshippers (John 4:23); for worship, the acknowledging of worth, is an activity of friendship at its highest." [3]

This idea of "friendship" with God is not new. The Catholic writer, Thomas a' Kempis wrote in 1530, "Love God, therefore, and hold Him for a friend, for, when all others forsake you, He will not forsake you." [4]

In 1647, Christians wrote that "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." [5]

This friendship with God is truly amazing. The writer Joseph Scriven wrote about this in 1855 to comfort his mother who lived many miles away. His words are the lyrics to the song, "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*",

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry,
Everything to God in prayer!"

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer. [6]

The Fruit

Because Christians are connected to Christ, our lives will begin to demonstrate this fact.

Paul (in Galatians 5:22) describes this as the “Fruit of the Spirit” which he says is:

- love
- joy
- peace
- patience
- kindness
- goodness
- faithfulness
- gentleness
- self-control

Later, Paul tells Christians to, “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Col. 3:12-14)

The Christian life then, is a life that has been and is being transformed; one that is no longer self-focused but one that is marked by love.

Jesus told his followers to “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” (Luke 6:27).

When hearing a man describe what he had to do to gain eternal life, Jesus said that he was correct in saying that one must, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27)

For Jesus, “love was not a demand of discipleship or a condition for forgiveness. It was rather a result of forgiveness.” [7]

Because we have been forgiven and transformed, we can live lives marked by love.

Freedom in Christ

As new creations, Christians will also experience freedom; freedom to live for Christ, freedom to be who God made us to be, and freedom from life-controlling issues as we are being “changed into his likeness”.
(2 Cor. 3:18)

Paul said that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Similarly, G.K. Chesterton explains, “Christianity is a sword which separates and sets free.” [8]

What are we set free from?

According to Scripture, we are set free from condemnation from God and the bonds of sin.

As Richard Lovelace has written, “You are delivered from the bondages of sin through the power of the indwelling Christ.” [9]

Lovelace continues,

“The power of sin to rule our lives has been *destroyed* in the cross of Christ; we have died with Christ, and have been raised up together with him in newness of him.” [10]

Paul wrote that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24)

To Christians he explained,

- “for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” and “now you have been raised with Christ.” (Col. 3:3,1)

And, “you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” (Romans 6:18)

So we no longer need to follow the desires of our human nature.

This freedom lets us be who God made us to be and not conform to the world.

A funny example of the conformity that exists in our world is in the movie, “*L.A. Story*”. Here’s how the characters were influenced by each other as they ordered their drinks at a restaurant:

Guy with neck-support: I'll have a decaf coffee.

Trudi: I'll have a decaf espresso.

Movie critic: I'll have a double decaf cappuccino.

Policeman: Give me decaffeinated coffee ice cream.

Harris: I'll have a half double decaffeinated half-caf, with a twist of lemon.

Trudi: I'll have a twist of lemon.

Guy with neck-support: I'll have a twist of lemon.

Movie critic: I'll have a twist of lemon.

Cynthia: I'll have a twist of lemon.

We are free in Christ to be ourselves; to not conform with others and set free to follow God.

So, here's a question for you,

- How have you experienced freedom in Christ?

Hope to Change

Paul tells Christians that they are free from any bonds of sin. He tells them to,

“count yourself dead to sin but alive in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your

body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:11-14)

It is interesting that Paul had much to say about freedom. Before becoming a Christian, Paul was a persecutor of the early church, and tried to suppress and kill the first Christians.

On a road to Damascus, Paul (who was initially called Saul) was encountered by Jesus who asked him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4)

After this encounter, God transformed Paul into one of the great teachers of Christianity.

Step Three

That takes us to the third step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, which is simply called, “Discover new life in Christ”.

Step #3:
Discover new life in Christ.

We see from Scripture the thought, “I’ll never change” is a lie. As we saw with the example of Paul, even the worst

offenders against Christ and Christianity can be changed by God.

Part of the Body of Christ

As God's new creation, Christians are *not* called to this spiritual journey on their own. Rather, they are called to be part of "the body of Christ" (the church) here on earth.

In the Bible, Paul used the Greek word *koinonia* (fellowship) to describe the close relationship that exists between Christians and Christ as well as the type of relationship that can exist among Christians.

Paul's desire was that each member of the Body of Christ would make a unique contribution to the whole.

For Paul, the life of a Christian, then, is one of interdependence.

- "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." (I Cor. 12:27)

Paul encouraged Christians to care for one another:

- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honor one another among yourselves."
(Romans 12:10)
- "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
(Ephesians 4:2)
- "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with

one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

(I Corinthians 1:10)

- “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2)

For Paul, commitment, love and encouragement were normal characteristics of the life of the Church.

He told the Christians in Corinth, “I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you” and “you are in my heart.” (2 Cor. 7:3-4)

Paul even looked with special joy to the day of Jesus’ return to earth, because he could present to Jesus all who had joined in the fellowship. He explained,

“For what is our hope or joy or crown of exultation before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?

(I Thes. 2:19)

Paul chose these words to encourage Christian fellowship:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:3-5)

Filled with the Holy Spirit

You may wonder, “How can I do this? How can I live an unselfish life and live for God?”

The answer, we learn in Scripture is that it is not by our own efforts, but through the Holy Spirit.

In John 16, we read that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit because He was physically leaving the earth. The word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit is *paraclete* which can be translated as our “Counselor”, “Advocate” and “Comforter” to help Christians and to reveal God’s truth.

In the Book of Acts, we can see that the first Christians were filled and “baptized” by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, though, was not just for the early Church. All Christians, we learn, are filled with the Holy Spirit and are to be “controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit.” (Romans 8:9)

The Holy Spirit “bears witness” to the Scriptures, helping us see the truthfulness of God’s written word. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can also focus on the presence of Christ today and see His work in our lives.

The Spirit will help us grow as God’s “new creation” and enable us to know God more through worship, prayer, reading and studying Scripture.

If you’re stuck on this step:

If you find that you’re having difficulty in this area, the following prayer might reflect your thoughts and hopes.

Prayer

Lord, because I have trusted you to be my Lord and Savior, I know from Scripture that I am now a new creation. I ask that You would help me discover new life in You. Help me as I grow to know You as a friend. Help work in me the outward “fruit of the Spirit”, and help me to grow in my relationship with others in Your church. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What about new life in Christ is encouraging to you?

2. Read the following words that describe some of God’s characteristics:
 - love
 - good
 - generous
 - kind
 - forgiving
 - trustworthy
 - compassionate
 - just
 - holy
 - all knowing
 - faithful
 - our creator

- our sustainer
- in control
- unchanging
- Jesus
- the Holy Spirit

In what ways would you like to grow in your understanding of God?

3. Read these Christian character traits. Which one or two would you like to grow in?

Accountable	Hospitable	Persevering
Authentic	Humble	Prayerful
Caring	Identifies with Jesus	Pursues Excellence
Compassionate	In fellowship	Puts God first
Consistent	Integrity	Reliable
Content	Impartial	Repentant
Courageous	Joyful	Respectful
Dependable	Keeps Commitments	Sacrificial
Depends on God	Kind	Studies Scripture
Does not love money or possessions	Lacks bitterness	Self-controlled
Fair	Lacks envy	Selfless
Faithful	Lacks self-righteousness	Straightforward
Follower of God	Listens to God's word	Supportive
Full of Faith	Loving	Teachable
Generous	Loyal	Thankful
Gentle	Mature	Transparent
Helpful	Obedient	Trustworthy
Holy	Open to being changed by God's Word	Willing to Serve
Honest	Patient	Wise
Hopeful	Peaceful	Work ethic

Chapter 3

Notes:

1. Mark Virkler, "*Dialogue with God*", (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1986), p. 25.
2. J.I. Packer, "*God Has Spoken*", (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979), p. 50.
3. *ibid.* p. 50.
4. Thomas a' Kempis, "*Imitation of Christ*" (1530), (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pg. 84.
5. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 1 (1647).
6. Joseph Scriven, "*What a Friend We have in Jesus*" (1855).
7. James D.G. Dunn, "*Jesus' Call to Discipleship*", (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), p. 85.
8. G.K. Chesterton, "*Orthodoxy*" (1908), (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959), p. 132.
9. Richard Lovelace, "*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*", (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 114.
10. *ibid.* p. 115.

Chapter Four

The Broken Places

Step 4: Identify the Broken Places

Over the years, I have put off fixing a number of things that were broken around our house.

- Our wooden storage shed has needed to be replaced for several years now
- The remote control on our television has been broken for close to a year
- Our garage door is in need of repair
- The brass knockers on the front door still contain the name of the previous owners
- I've even had five strings on my six string guitar for a very long time

For me, I tend to make excuses for putting off these inevitable fixes, and try not to think about what is broken.

Spiritually speaking, we may do the same thing. We may realize that after becoming a Christian, we still have *problems* and are not living an abundant, joy-filled, Christ-centered life (as we discussed in Chapter Three)

It is important, therefore, for us to *identify* those areas in our lives that are broken and in need of healing.

The Holy Spirit will help us through this process. He will bring what is called "*conviction*" to help us see these

broken places. This is part of a process known as “*sanctification*” as we grow to become more like Christ.

As we seek to grow spiritually, however, there is a myth, or lie that many people struggle with as they refuse to explore these broken places and say instead, “I’m fine.”

Lie #4
“I’m fine.”

You may have heard others say,

- “I’m fine, no worries here.”
- “I better keep that to myself.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I don’t want to look at the broken places in my life because _____.”

Why do we avoid looking at the broken places?

There are a number of reasons why we avoid looking at the broken places in our lives. However, the main reason seems to be around the area of *fear*.

We may be fearful of *God's judgment*. In the Bible, in the book of Genesis, we can read about Cain who denied that he had murdered his brother named Abel.

- Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9)

Clearly Cain knew where his brother Abel was, because he had just killed him. Yet, he denied any knowledge out of fear of God's judgment.

If God is all-knowing, however, how can we hide things from Him?

Another reason that we may avoid looking at broken places is the *fear of what others might think*. This fear has been humorously portrayed many times recently in movies and television shows that show powerful people attending therapy sessions and yet are concerned about what their friends or co-workers will think. Some programs even portray mobsters secretly meeting with their therapists, fearful that their mafia rivals will find out.

Still another reason that we avoid looking at the broken places is the *fear of change*. Most people find comfort in familiar patterns and actions. The fear, then, is that, "If I identify broken places, I might have to do something different, I might have to change, and I'm not sure I can do that."

Finally, we may fear identifying broken places because the *pain* feels too great.

It can be difficult facing issues of rejection, abuse, abandonment and other painful memories.

If you feel like things are too painful, you might prayerfully ask God for wisdom and strength as you proceed slowly in identifying broken places and revisiting painful events.

So, here is another question for you,

- Why is it difficult for you to look at the broken places in your life?

The Truth

The truth is that we are broken people, sinners, with broken places in our lives. We have all sinned and have been sinned against by others.

The truth also is that Jesus is interested in us and the Holy Spirit will work with us, in us and through us on areas to positively affect our spiritual growth.

There are many positive Biblical examples of people identifying their brokenness and seeking Jesus:

- As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (Matthew 9:27)

- A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."(Matthew 15:22)
- "Lord, have mercy on my son," a man said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. (Matthew 17:15)
- "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' (Luke 18:13)

In each of the examples, we can see a common thread...people identifying their brokenness and then asking God to help and heal them.

What if I Don't Think I Have any Broken Places?

Some people may feel as if they have no broken places in their lives.

Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend have pointed out, however, that our conscience, our inner compass for knowing what is right and wrong, “fell with the Fall.”

So, it is possible that someone might *think* that they have no broken places in their lives. According to the Apostle John, though, those who do not recognize their needs are mistaken,

- “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.”(Rev. 3:17)
- “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:8-9)

As C.S. Lewis has noted,

- “The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of others lives, to exploit the whole universe.” [1]

God's Standards

God has said,

- “If you love me keep my commandments.” (John 14:15)
- “be perfect even as my Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)

However, as we read a moment ago from the Apostle John, we don't always keep His commandments, nor do we always seek Him.

Again to quote C.S. Lewis,

“...what God cares about is not exactly our actions. What he cares about is that we should be creatures of a certain kind of quality – the kind of creatures He intended us to be – creatures related to Himself in a certain way.” [2]

As we have seen, all people have broken places that need God's healing touch to help with their relationship with God and with others.

What If I Feel Like I Do Everything Wrong?

Some, on the opposite side of the continuum may feel like they do *everything* wrong.

Again, as Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend have pointed out: our conscience, our inner compass for knowing what is right and wrong, “fell with the Fall.”

So, it is possible that some might think that they are constantly doing *everything* wrong, perhaps even wondering how God could love them because they are so

bad, and experiencing feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and depression.

As J.B. Phillips has written,

“There are many...who are made miserable by a morbidly developed (or overactive) conscience, which they quite wrongly consider to be the voice of God.” [3]

As you identify the broken places and bring light to past mistakes, it is important to identify if you are thinking of a specific thought or action, or something more general.

For example,

Specific Event

-“I lost my temper with my son this afternoon.”

-“I shouldn’t have lied yesterday.”

-“I’m fearful that I’m going to lose my job, so I’ve been working a lot lately. I need to spend more time with my family.”

-“I drank too much last night.”

General Accusation

-“I’m a bad person.”

- “God could never love me for my mistakes.”

- “Everyone thinks I’m a failure.”

- “God doesn’t care about me.”

A general accusation that demoralizes and brings discouragement is not from God.

If you are sensing those general accusations, of “I’m a bad person” or “God could never love me” or “Everyone thinks I’m a failure”, it is important to *identify* those lies that you are telling yourself and bring them to God.

It will also be important to consider why you might be thinking those thoughts, as they may be symptoms of deeper assumptions about God or yourself.

The Apostle Paul said in Romans, “let each man be convinced” of our sins and areas of healing. (Romans 14:5)

It will be the Holy Spirit’s job to show us the broken areas that need God’s healing touch.

The goal of this process then, is not to make you feel like “a worm”, “worthless” or “bad”. The goal is to bring into the light areas of brokenness for God’s healing touch.

Identify

The fourth step then in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Identify the Broken Places”.

Step #4:
Identify the broken places.

To begin, simply ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an area of brokenness in your life.

Our Feelings

As you ask God for insight and wisdom, perhaps you identify brokenness in a feeling, such as when you feel:

- angry
- anxious
- bored
- cynical
- depressed
- “empty inside”
- guilty
- insecure
- pressured
- like saying things that you don’t really mean
- shameful
- that you need to rescue others
- that you never measure up
- that you’re different
- unappreciated
- worthless

Or you may *not feel*:

- accepted
- loved

Our fears

Perhaps as you pray for insight in this step, you are reminded of your fears, perhaps you are fearful of:

- looking at your past
- rejection
- the unknown
- trusting God

Our history

Perhaps as you pray, you identify some broken places in your personal or family history:

- family patterns
- disappointment

Our actions

Perhaps you have identified the brokenness in your actions when you:

- had a bad attitude
- blamed others
- blamed yourself for everything
- controlled others
- denied reality
- didn't trust God
- didn't trust others
- were greedy
- hurt ourselves
- hurt others
- were jealous
- lashed out in anger
- lied to help others
- lied to help ourselves
- manipulated others
- were people pleasing
- were prideful
- sought a replacement for God in:
 - alcohol
 - drugs
 - escape
 - money
 - power
 - relationships
 - sex

- work
- other (really any noun or verb): _____
- were selfish
- unforgiving
- filled with vanity
- filled with worry

If you're stuck on this step:

Reflect upon, or ask someone these questions,

- “How has my behavior hurt others?”
- “What negative results have occurred because of my feelings, thoughts or actions?”

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in this area:

Prayer

Lord, trusting that You are merciful and kind, I ask that You would reveal areas in my life that are broken and in need of Your touch. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What feelings, fears, beliefs or actions have kept you from God?
2. After spending some time in prayer, what area of brokenness in your life do you feel that God is “bringing to light”?
3. What have been the consequences of that brokenness? How has it affected you, your relationship with God, and your relationship with others?

Chapter 4

Notes:

1. C.S. Lewis, "*Mere Christianity*", (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 154.
2. *ibid.* pg. 127.
3. J.B. Phillips, "*Your God is Too Small*", (New York: Macmillan Books, 1961), p. 18.

Chapter Five

Turning it Over

Step 5: Turn it Over to God

In recent months, eBay, an online person-to-person auction house, has been running some interesting commercials on TV.

In the ads, different objects such as an alarm clock, a diamond ring, a fish dinner, bathroom lights, a guitar and other items are displayed in the shape of two letters, “I” and “T”.

At the end of the commercial, the announcer says, “Whatever *it is*, you can find it on eBay.” (Basically saying that you can get anything at their online auction site.)

Spiritually speaking, as we discovered in the previous chapter, we need to identify the areas of brokenness in our lives. As we will learn in this chapter, after we have identified those areas of brokenness we need to turn *it*, whatever *it is*, over to God.

I Can't Tell God

Even after identifying the brokenness in our lives, however, we sometimes fail to seek the One who can help us with our problems and say instead, “God won't help me.”

Lie #5

“God won't help me.”

You may have heard others say,

- “I’ve dealt with this for so long, I’ll take care of it on my own.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I find it hard to trust God to help me because _____.”

The Truth

The truth, according to Scripture, is that we are *dependent* upon God and that God desires to help us.

According to the Bible, the Lord is good, unchanging, our protector and our provider who *wants to help us*:

- “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)
- “For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” (Isaiah 41:13)
- “For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jer. 29:11)

So, we see in Scripture that God wants to help us.

Specific Needs

God wants to help us, not just in a general sense, but with each of our specific needs.

In our need for *knowledge* and *wisdom* we are encouraged to “call out for insight” and “cry aloud for understanding” (Prov. 2:3) and the Lord will let us “know the word that sustains the weary.” (Isaiah 50:4)

In our need for spiritual *sustenance*, Jesus said that, “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.” (Matthew 4:4)

In our *brokenness*, Jesus said that he did not come for those who had it all together, saying:

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32)

Scripture teaches that when we seek God we will find him. Jeremiah writes:

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

As Jerry Bridges has written,

“...we must learn that however difficult and frustrating our circumstances might be, God’s divine assistance through

the Holy Spirit is available to help us....” [1]

So, here is another question for you,

What do you find encouraging about God’s faithfulness and offers to help?

Step Five

The fifth step in our journey of spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Turn it over to God”.

Step #5:
Turn it over to God.

What is “*it*” you might ask?

“It” is whatever your area of brokenness is that:

- the Holy Spirit is revealing to you and that He wants to address
- others are telling you is causing them pain
- an area of failure or difficulty that you are experiencing
- an area of your life that needs healing and forgiveness

The “it” for you may be:

- anger

- bitterness
- pain
- resentment
- shame
- unforgiveness

“Turning it over to God” is in many ways a combination of the first three steps in the Twelve Step Alcoholics Anonymous process:

- “We admit we are powerless over _____.”
- “We believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.”
- “We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.”

Surrender

An important part of “turning it over to God” is *surrender*.

As we identify these broken areas and give it to God, we might use terms such like “surrender”, “trust” and “follow.”

Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)

Surrender, therefore, is an important component of this step. We must “deny” ourselves and trust Christ with our brokenness and healing.

Many have written about the need to *surrender* to God.

Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen, wrote about St. Anthony, saying that he was able to endure terrible trials, “not because of his own willpower or ascetic exploits, but because of his unconditional *surrender* to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” [2]

E. Stanley Jones, a Methodist missionary to India, answered someone who “wanted to know about the secret of victorious living” by telling them that “it was in *self-surrender*. The difference was in giving up the innermost self to Jesus.” [3]

Saint Therese of Lisieux, a Catholic nun, wrote about an experience she had by saying, “Oh, how sweet the first kiss of Jesus was! It was a kiss of love. I knew that I was loved and declared: ‘I love You and *I give myself to You* for ever!’” [4]

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor in Germany during World War II wrote,

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him *come and die*. It may be a death like that of the first disciples who had to leave home and work to follow him, or it may be a death like Luther’s, who had to leave the monastery and go out into the world. But it is the same death every time – death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old man at his call.” [5]

And,

“Who is pure in heart? Only those who have *surrendered* their hearts completely to Jesus that he may reign in them alone.” [6]

In his writing on the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer wrote that many could claim different ways of interpreting the text, but “Jesus knows only one possibility: simple *surrender* and obedience, not interpreting and applying it, but doing and obeying it.” [7]

James Houston, Chancellor of Regent College in Vancouver has written,

“Jesus cannot simply become an occasional guest in the human heart. To allow him into our hearts means to *surrender* to his rule over our lives.” [8]

We Can't Manipulate

As we give God ourselves and our brokenness, it is important to remember that God is *sovereign*. He will do what He wants, when He wants.

What do we mean by the sovereignty of God?

Sovereignty, as writer A.W. Pink describes it, means, “the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God.” [9]

He continues,

“The Sovereignty of the God is absolute, irresistible, infinite. When we say that God is Sovereign we affirm His right to govern the universe which He has made for His own glory, just as He pleases. We affirm that *His right* is the right of the Potter over the clay, i. e., that He may mold that clay into whatsoever form He chooses, fashioning out of *the same lump* one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor. We affirm that He is under no rule or law outside of His own will and nature, *that God is a law* unto Himself, and that He is under no obligation to give an account of His matters to any.” [10]

That means that God is God and we are not.

That also means that we cannot:

- Manipulate God
- Cajole
- Control
- Barter with Him
- Bargain to get our way

We can simply surrender and trust.

As we surrender and “Turn it over to God” we are acknowledging two things:

- our needs
- God’s faithfulness

John Calvin wrote about this very thing in 1559,

- “True prayer is born first from our own sense of need, then from faith in God’s promises.” [11]

My Story

I sometimes doubt and feel like God may not want to help me.

When I find myself thinking those thoughts, I find it helpful to remember times when God was very evident and answered my prayers in the past.

One time period in particular was in my early twenties. In the course of a year I saw several amazing answers to prayer. During this time I prayed:

- For a friend who had twisted her ankle. It was swollen, black and blue and she was expected to be on crutches for two weeks. Several hours after we prayed, the swelling went down and she was able to walk without difficulty.
- For a woman who had fallen from a horse and had been suffering from severe migraines. After we prayed the migraines stopped.
- For a man who had been in a motorcycle accident and had severe pain in his jaw. After we prayed the pain went away.

As I think about God's faithfulness in the past, it has helped me "turn things over to God" in the present.

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in this Step:

Prayer

Lord, thank You for wanting to change me and help me.

Lord, please give me faith to turn my brokenness over to you. Help me learn to surrender my life to You. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "God won't help me." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

 Not what I'm thinking
 Somewhat what I'm thinking
 Very much what I'm thinking
2. What is difficult about turning things over to God? Why?
3. What steps might you take in light of this chapter?

Chapter 5

Notes:

1. Jerry Bridges, *“The Practice of Godliness”*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), p. 121.
2. Henri Nowen, *“The Way of the Heart”*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1981) p. 19.
3. E. Stanley Jones, *“The Divine Yes”*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), p. 61.
4. Saint Therese of Lisieux, *“The Autobiography of Saint Therese of Lisieux, The Story of a Soul”* (1895), (Doubleday: New York, 1957), p. 52.
5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *“The Cost of Discipleship”* (1937), (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 99.
6. *ibid*, p. 125.
7. *ibid*, p. 219.
8. James Houston, *“The Transforming Friendship”*, (Oxford: Lion Books, 1989), p. 34.
9. A.W. Pink, *“The Sovereignty of God”* (1918), Chapter 1. (A free online copy of this volume can be found at: www.reformed.org/books).
10. *ibid*.
11. John Calvin, as quoted in: James Houston, *“The Transforming Friendship”*, (Oxford: Lion Books, 1989), p. 93.

Chapter Six

Responding Again

Step 6: Respond to God's Direction

In 2001, I did some software consulting for a hospital on the east side of Louisville, Kentucky.

On my first day at the hospital, after the end of a long day of meetings, my clients let me continue working in a room after they left for the day.

“There’s no phone service or network connections here in the room but at least you can work on your laptop,” I was told.

Based on our day of meetings, I soon realized that I needed to talk to some colleagues out of state. So, I pulled out my cell phone from my briefcase, but quickly discovered that it was not charged.

I had planned on leaving that evening for home, but I was concerned that if I waited another three hours until I arrived home, it would be too late to get the information to my co-workers.

So, I felt stuck, I had no way of communicating with my colleagues out of state.

Soon I had a running dialogue with myself.

“Maybe the connections really do work in this room,” I thought.

“No. They told me they didn’t.”

“But, I really need to communicate to my co-workers.” I thought to myself.

So, in desperation, I tried the computer network connection.

Guess what...it worked and I was able to send some emails to my co-workers.

Then I thought, “If they were mistaken about the network connections, maybe they were mistaken about the phone.”

I tried the phone in the room...it worked too. So I was able to talk to my co-workers about the project.

On my drive home that evening from Louisville, I was struck by how my difficulties in the room seemed similar to my relationship with God.

“How many times do I feel like there is a barrier?” I wondered to myself. “And all I need to do is try the connection.”

God Wants Us to Follow

We discussed in the last chapter the importance of turning our brokenness and our lives over to God. We called it, “turning it over to God”.

After this step, then, it is important to check the connection; to hear what God wants us to do and then respond to Him.

In Scripture we can see that God wants to give us direction on what to do to help us grow spiritually and receive healing.

The myth, or “lie”, that many of us believe is that “I can’t do that.”

Lie #6
“I can’t do that.”

You may have heard others say,

- “Not that Lord.”
- “I just got discouraged and stopped trying.”

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,

“I can’t do that because _____.”

The Seed

Jesus told his disciples a parable about a farmer who was sowing seeds in the ancient tradition of scattering them across the ground. Some seeds fell on “the path” and birds ate them. Some fell on “rocky places” where the plants grew initially, but soon died because there was not enough

soil for them to fully take root, and they were scorched by the sun. Other seeds fell “among thorns” which choked the life out of the plants. And still other seed fell on “good soil” that produced a harvest of “a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 7:3-9)

Jesus’ disciples asked Him about the meaning of this parable and He explained to them that the parable was similar to what happens when people hear the truth about the Kingdom of God. Jesus told them:

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” (Matthew 7:19-23)

So we see in the parable that there could be a number of things that could hinder us from understanding God’s word, such as:

- the evil one snatching what is sown in the heart
- trouble or persecution
- worries of life
- deceitfulness of wealth

But, according to the parable, there will be many positive outcomes for the one who receives, hears and understands God's word.

The Truth

So the truth, then, is that God wants us to understand His ways and then respond accordingly.

James, says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

The Bible has a number of passages describing the Lord's desire for *followers*. Tragically, many of these descriptions in the Old Testament describe people who did not respond with the obedience that the Lord desired.

"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice..." (Ezekiel 33:31)

The writer Jerry Bridges encourages us to "take whatever specific steps are necessary in order to obey God's direction." [1]

The truth also, according to Scripture, is that God will not give us tasks to do that He is unwilling to help us with.

Step Six

The sixth step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, "Respond to God's direction."

Step #6:
Respond to God's direction.

No Formulas

The difficulty with this step is that there are no easy formulas. The specific steps that you must take to respond to God's direction will vary based on the issues that you are facing.

Therefore, it will be important to pray for wisdom and direction and rely on God for help.

Some common responses that God may be calling you to do in response to His direction might be:

- Confession/Repentance
- Forgiveness
- Waiting
- Trusting
- Letting Go
- Renewing Your Mind
- Taking Authority
- Taking Specific Steps toward Health

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Confession and Repentance

We all sin and "miss the mark." Some of our mistakes are willful, self-centered decisions while others are unintentional.

The response that God expects when we sin is to simply confess and repent.

Confession simply means to tell the truth, admit, or take ownership for something that you did.

Confession, therefore, means to simply say, "I did it."

Linked with confession, in Scripture, is repentance.

As James Dunn, points out, there are really three definitions of the word “repent”. To repent means:

- to change one’s mind
- to regret, to feel remorse
- to turn around and head in a new direction [2]

So, if the simple definition of confession is, “I did it.” The simple definition of repentance is, “I’m sorry, Lord. Help me do something different.”

When we sin, and “miss the mark”, we should confess and repent as the Holy Spirit convicts us.

Gordon MacDonald, tells a story about clearing rocks from the fields of his farm in New Hampshire.

MacDonald explains,

“My sinfulness is exactly the same. It consists of stones, pebbles, and boulders that come to the surface one by one. And the man or the woman who ignores the daily experience of confession in spiritual discipline will be overwhelmed by them.” [3]

In the Bible, James encourages Christians to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

Henri Nowen writes,

“In our heart we come to see ourselves as sinners embraced by the mercy of God. It is this vision that

makes us cry out, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ [4]

According to professor Richard Lovelace, this process of identifying sin is a lifelong process that,

“...involves a gradual detection process by which the particular forms in which sin expresses itself in our lives, our characteristic flesh, are uncovered to our view.” [5]

So a question for you,

What do you need to confess and repent to God about?

After some reflection, here is a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer that you might find helpful to confess and repent of your sins:

“Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
In thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen. [6]

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the act of forgiving (or canceling the debt of) someone who you believe has hurt or wronged you.

Without forgiveness life can be filled with resentment, bitterness and retaliation.

Forgiveness is an important element in the process of spiritual growth and healing.

As we learned earlier, as Christians, Christ has forgiven us of all our sins.

Paul described it this way,

- "...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3)
- "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Cor. 5:21)
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us..." (Gal. 3:13)

Jesus taught that just as He has forgiven us, so we should forgive others.

In Matthew 18, we can read a parable that Jesus told about this need to forgive others.

Jesus started the parable saying, “the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”

A servant was brought to the king who owed him millions of dollars (10,000 talents in the language of the New Testament).

Jesus explained, “Since the servant was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”

But the servant began pleading with the king, saying “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.”

Jesus then explained that “The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”

So, like our status before God as Christians, the servant had no debts, his debts were completely forgiven by the king.

Interestingly, however, the parable does not end there.

Jesus explained that after the servant left the king, he found a second servant who owed him a few dollars (a hundred denarii in the language of the New Testament).

The first servant from the parable, then grabbed the second servant who owed him money and began to choke him saying, “Pay back what you owe me!”

So, instead of forgiving the debts that were owed to him, the first servant, even though he had no debts to pay to the king, wanted to extract everything he could out of this second servant who owed him money.

Jesus then said that the second servant who owed the few dollars “fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'”

But the first servant refused and instead had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the King heard about this he called the first servant to him.

“You wicked servant,” the King said, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (Matthew 18:23-32)

So, through the use of the parable, Jesus taught his disciples the need to forgive others because they had been forgiven.

On another occasion, Jesus said:

- “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25)

Even the famous “Lord’s Prayer” contains the phrase, “forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)

A number of churches use the more modern language version of this prayer:

- “forgive us our *sins* as we have forgiven those who have *sinned* against us.”

What is not being said here is that if we have some unknown or unconfessed unforgiveness in our hearts that God’s hands would be tied and He would be unable to forgive us. We learned earlier that once we become Christians, we are new creations, free from condemnation.

Rather, what Jesus is saying is that we will be unable to experientially understand the complete forgiveness and depth of God of our lives if we are unwilling to give the forgiveness that we have received to others.

Another way to look at it is that others will still have some level of control over us until we forgive them. And, as we learned previously, we can be free from the bonds of sin that control us.

Paul encouraged Christians to:

- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
(Eph. 4:32)

Paul later wrote,

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Col. 3:12-14)

The results of forgiveness can be powerful.

- In the Old Testament we can read the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers. After enduring much difficulty, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers which ultimately led to saving his entire family from starvation.
- In the New Testament we can read about an early Christian named Stephen who asked God to forgive those who were killing him because he was a Christian. “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” He prayed. (Acts 7:60)
- In modern times, we have the example of Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned by South Africa’s apartheid government for 27 years. The moment he was released from jail, however, he spoke about the importance of forgiveness. Later, when he was elected as South Africa’s first black President, he chose Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, focusing on restoration and forgiveness instead of retribution.

Jesus, we need to remember, is our ultimate model. As he was being crucified by his persecutors, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

So, here's an exercise for you (it may be difficult, but God can help)...

Make a list of those past hurts and the people that you've been unable to forgive. Ask God to help you in extending forgiveness.

Waiting

Christians are also frequently called to wait.

Waiting on the Lord especially before, during and after God imparts plans for the future can be seen throughout Scripture.

Jesus had his disciples wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) and Paul waited in Tarsus before starting his public ministry.

Numerous passages in the Bible encourage waiting:

- "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)
- "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry." (Psalm 40:1)
- "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)
- "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope" (Psalm 130:5)
- "...we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Romans 8:25)

We can have confidence in the Lord that He will be with us as we wait.

You may need to wait to receive an:

- answer to prayer
- insight
- wisdom

So, another question for you,

What is it that you need to wait on God for?

Trusting

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to *trust* Him.

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” (Prov. 3:5)
- “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2)
- Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me.” (John 14:1)

Trusting God means having *faith* that God will provide help for your needs.

Jesus said,

“Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

(Mark 11:22-24)

In a similar passage, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not heal a boy, and Jesus replied,

“Because you have so little faith. I tell the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move.

Nothing will be impossible for you.”

(Matthew 17:20-21)

My Story

One of the pastors from my youth was a man named Rev. Woody Faulkner. Woody, who is now deceased, served as a pastor for over forty years.

In addition to being a pretty good banjo player, Woody reminded me of the passage above (from Matthew 17) several times in my youth and as a young adult.

In a letter to me he wrote, “Matthew 17:20, ‘move the mountain’ is the key to victory.” Then he added, “Keep looking to God and He will give the power to move the mountain.”

For me, I sometimes find it hard to trust God, especially when it feels like there is a “mountain” to move in my life and uncertainty about the future. I’m comforted by the

words of Cardinal John Henry Newman who as a young priest in 1833, found himself far away from home, longing to return. As he sought the Lord, he wrote these words saying that he did not need to see “the distant scene” (that is, the big picture), he just needed to see the next step.

His words became the hymn called “*Lead, Kindly Light*”.

“Lead, kindly Light, amid th’encircling gloom,
lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.” [7]

Perhaps, like Cardinal Newman, we can pray, “I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step is enough for me.”

So, another question for you,

What seems like a “mountain” in your life that is in need of moving with God’s help?

Letting Go

As we trust God, we will find the need to “let go” of anything that we are trying to control, fix or manipulate.

Controlling situations in our own lives or the lives of others falls short of what God intends for us. God desires that we let go in order to trust Him.

Perhaps you have seen the limits to controlling ourselves and others. As Henri Nowen has written,

“Even when we are trying to be in control and to determine our own course in life, we have to admit that life remains a great unknown to us.” [8]

For counselors and psychologists, this process of “letting go” is known as “detachment”.

When should we detach?

According to Melodie Beattie, we should detach,

“When we can’t stop thinking, talking about, or worrying about someone or something; when our emotions are churning and boiling; when we feel like we have to do something about someone.” [9]

So, as we trust God, we will need to “let go” and ask God to control the situation.

Renewing the Mind

Another response to God’s direction is called “renewing your mind.”

As Paul wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what

God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)

Our minds can be filled with many misconceptions, but by reading and meditating on Scripture we can bring truth to the lies that we believe.

For example, if we are prone to trust in our possessions, or anxious about not having enough, we may need reminding that, according to Jesus,

"Watch out! Be on your guard for all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

And the writer of Hebrews,

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 12:5)

If we are anxious about our circumstances, we might be reminded in Scripture to,

"Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

If we are mourning or sad and in need of comfort, we might read from the Apostle John,

- "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will

wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”
(Revelation 21:3-4)

God’s Word will give us the truth that we need for living and for combating our negative and misconceived thoughts.

Here is what Isaac Watts wrote about God’s Word in 1707,

“His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies;
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises [10]

So, another question for you,

What areas of your thinking would you like to be changed by more of God’s truth?

Taking Authority

Another response to God’s direction may be to take spiritual authority over a situation or a broken area of your life.

You may not be aware of it, but if you are a Christian, you are involved at some level in spiritual warfare.

According to the Bible, as Christians, we have an enemy that seeks to accuse and destroy.

Paul wrote that, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Peter said that, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”
(I Peter 5:8b)

The enemy, also referred to as Satan in the Bible, then, is one who will try to accuse and torment us.

Because of God, however, we should not fear Satan.

- Jesus said, “...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (that is, Hell) will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:18)
- According to Paul, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your foot.” (Romans 16:20)

What do we need to do to use our “spiritual authority”?

According to Scripture, we need to simply rely on God and be dependent on Him.

- “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

In Acts, we can learn how the early Christians encountered spirits sent by Satan. When Paul encountered an evil spirit in a fortuneteller, he simply used his spiritual authority and said to the spirit,

- “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her.” (Acts 16:18)

So, another question,

What areas of your life do you feel that the enemy is harassing, bringing temptation, doubt or pain?

Perhaps you could pray simply as the Apostle Paul did, saying, “Stop that, in the name of Jesus.”

Taking Specific Steps toward Health

In addition to the responses that we have identified, there may be additional specific steps towards spiritual growth and health that God may be asking you to take.

After you have turned your brokenness over to God and have admitted your own ownership in a situation, God may provide you with specific steps to start, stop or continue.

Actions to Start

Perhaps as a response to God’s leading, you may identify healthy actions to *start*:

- attending church
- attending a small group for growth
- helping/serving others
- asking for forgiveness with others - if you have hurt them
- praying for others
- reading God’s Word
- saying “No” – if you feel pressured by others
- setting limits - if others are hurting you

- spending time with God in worship
- telling others about your feelings
- thanking God for what He has provided

Actions to Stop

Perhaps you may identify actions to *stop*:

- being a victim
- blaming others
- controlling others
- destructive habits
- doubting
- nagging
- saying hurtful things

Actions to continue

Perhaps you may identify actions to *continue* doing that lead to greater spiritual growth and health.

The Result

The result of responding to God's direction can be powerful.

As Smith Wigglesworth has written, "Christ takes us where we are and transforms us by His power." [11]

As God's new creations, we should expect that God will pour out his Spirit upon us and transform our lives, giving us even more than what we have even requested.

C.S. Lewis notes that one request "may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment." [12]

According to Lewis,

“Those who put themselves in His hands will become perfect, as He is perfect – perfect in love, wisdom, joy, beauty, and immortality. The change will not be completed in this life, for death is an important part of the treatment.” [13]

Lewis adds, “Christ says give me All...I want you.”[14]

As we surrender to God, giving him our brokenness and our lives, and as we respond to God’s direction, we will see our lives transformed.

Not, it should be noted, according to our plans, but according to His.

If you’re stuck on this step:

If you find that you’re having difficulty in this area, think and reflect for a moment upon the pain of not changing or not responding to God.

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in the Step:

Prayer

Lord, as Your new creation I know that You are calling me to some difficult things. Please give me the strength to respond to your loving direction and care. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Think for a moment about some of the responses mentioned in this chapter as a response to God's direction:
 - Confession/Repentance
 - Forgiveness
 - Waiting
 - Trusting
 - Letting Go
 - Renewing Your Mind
 - Taking Authority
 - Taking Specific Steps toward Health

Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "I can't do that." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

- Not what I'm thinking
- Somewhat what I'm thinking
- Very much what I'm thinking

2. What is difficult about responding to God's direction in these ways? Why?

3. What action steps might you take in light of this chapter?

Chapter 6

Notes:

1. Jerry Bridges, "*The Practice of Godliness*", (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), p. 102.
2. James D.G. Dunn, "*Jesus' Call to Discipleship*", (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), p. 19 and 20.
3. Gordon MacDonald, "*Ordering Your Private World*", (Nashville, Tennessee: Oliver-Nelson Press, Year), p. 153.
4. Henri Nowen "*The Way of the Heart*", (New York: Harper Collins, 1981), p. 79.
5. Richard Lovelace, "*Dynamics of Spiritual Life*", (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 110.
6. "Prayer of Confession - Holy Eucharist II, "*Book of Common Prayer - According to the use of the Episcopal Church*" (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 360.
7. John Henry Newman. "*Lead, Kindly Light*" (1833).
8. Henri Nowen, "*A Letter of Consolation*", San Francisco: Harper, 1982), p. 48.
9. Melodie Beattie, "*Codependent No More*", (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), p. 65.

10. Isaac Watts. Originally titled "*The Faithfulness of God and His Promises*"; now known as "*Begin, My Tongue, Some Heavenly Theme*", 1707.
11. Smith Wigglesworth, "*Faith that Prevails*" (1938), (Springfield, Missouri: Radiant Books, 1966), p. 61.
12. C.S. Lewis, "*Mere Christianity*", (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 171.
13. *ibid.* p. 175.
14. *ibid.* p. 167.

Chapter Seven

Giving Away

Step 7: Give Away What You've Learned

When I was younger, I had several good friends. For them, family vacations usually involved a visit to a grandparent's house or sometimes a visit to a lake or to the beach.

For me, our family made an annual cross country trip to see my grandparents, but we stopped many times along the way.

The reason? My Dad's love of history.

Over the years my Dad would lead our family to many historical sites - some very famous, and others not so well known. In Pennsylvania, for instance we toured:

- Gettysburg
- Valley Forge
- Constitution Hall in Philadelphia

And we also visited Titusville, the site of the first oil well in America.

Out west, we stopped several times at:

- Mt. Rushmore
- Devil's Tower
- Yellowstone Park

And we also visited "The Stage Coach Museum" in Lusk, Wyoming (Population 1,341).

When we were young, my sister and I would tease my Dad about his desire to stop at seemingly every historical marker along the road or each sign at the museums we stopped at, but he was undeterred.

For my Dad, sharing history with us was natural. It was who he was. He found it interesting and couldn't help talking about it with our family.

And over the years, my sister and I benefited from his interest.

I'll never forget a moment in fourth grade when my teacher gave our class a homework assignment.

"Now, your assignment is to do some research and discover who invented the cotton gin." She told us. "You will need to look it up in a reference book after school to get the answer."

I raised my hand and said, "I know the answer already."

She took me into the hallway and asked skeptically, "So, you know the answer of who invented the cotton gin?"

"Yes. It was Eli Whitney."

"You are right." My teacher said. "Just don't tell the other students."

You might ask, "How did you know who invented the cotton gin as a ten year old in fourth grade?"

I knew the answer, not because I was a brilliant fourth grader, I didn't even know what a cotton gin looked like, or really even what it did...nor do I still.

I knew the answer simply because I had been around my Dad and I had heard him talking about it with my Grandfather, who also was a history buff.

God will help us

Spiritually speaking, as we are around our Heavenly Father, in prayer and worship, we will gain incredible things. We will gain spiritual growth, healing, insight, wisdom, and skills from being connected with our Heavenly Father.

God will help us because He loves us. But as we receive healing and help, however, He does not want us to just keep what we've learned to ourselves, He wants us to give it away to help others.

The myth, or "lie", that many of us believe, however, is that "Nobody's interested."

Lie #7

"Nobody's interested."

You may have heard others say,

- "I'm the only one who experienced that.
- Nobody's interested in what I have to offer.

Have you ever had those thoughts?

How would you complete the sentence,
“I don’t want to tell others about this because
_____.”

The Truth

The truth is that God will use us to help others.

Think about Jesus’ disciples for a moment. They were certainly a motley crew, among them were: uneducated fishermen, a tax collector, a member of a violent separatist group and a betrayer.

However, God used them to help others.

In Matthew 14:13-21, we learn that after a long day of teaching, the disciples came to Jesus concerned that the crowds had no food, and recommended that Jesus stop his teaching and send the people home.

“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” Jesus told his disciples.

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.”
They answered him.

So Jesus told his disciples to bring him the food. And (we learn in Luke’s account) then He had the disciples organize the crowd in “groups of about fifty each.”

After taking the five loaves and two fish he gave thanks for it and then gave it to the disciples to give to the people.

So, the disciples gave away what they had. As they were distributing the small amounts of food to the crowds, however, God multiplied it so that everyone had enough.

The Bible says, that “they all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over”.

The passage concludes with this astounding piece of information, “The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

In this passage we see that even though the disciples had only a little to offer, God used that little amount to help others in need.

On another occasion, Jesus explained it this way, “Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)

Step Seven

The seventh step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Give Away What You’ve Learned”.

Step #7:
Give away what you’ve learned.

Why is this difficult?

It can be difficult giving away what we've learned, due to many reasons: doubt, fear of what others might think, or even because it is not part of our expectations (of God or of ourselves).

Let's consider Jesus' disciples again. You would think that after the amazing miracle of multiplying the fish and the loaves among "five thousand men, besides the women and children", it would have been ingrained into their thinking of what Jesus could do.

However, in just the next chapter in the Bible (Matthew 15:29-38), we see the same type of situation occurring again.

We learn that a great crowd had gathered as Jesus was healing. Jesus called his disciples to him and said,

- "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

His disciples answered, "Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?"

So, here again we see the disciples asking Jesus how the crowd could be fed, even though they had been part of an earlier miracle that fed thousands.

Instead of condemning his disciples, or shaming them for their forgetfulness or their doubt with their question, we learn that Jesus simply said, "How many loaves do you have?"

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

Once again Jesus had the crowds sit down, then He took the seven loaves and “when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples” and again the disciples distributed the food to the people.

Again, as they distributed the food, God multiplied it so that everyone had enough.

We learn that, “They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.” And that “the number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children.”

So, an amazing miracle was performed by God, to help people.

There are many, many encouraging things about this passage. Again, we should note that Jesus did not condemn or shame the disciples for their doubt, their forgetfulness of the earlier miracle or for their unwillingness to step up immediately to help.

Instead, Jesus simply asked a question, “How many loaves do you have?”

We might not have loaves in our hands, but the question that Jesus is likely asking us is similar,

- “What do you have?”

Once we answer that, Jesus will likely ask us to help others by giving away what we have.

- “You give them something to eat.” (as He told the disciples in Matthew 14).
- “Feed my sheep.” (as He told Peter in John 21:18)

Writer Thomas Merton compared this process of giving away to others what we have received to a flame going from one candle to another into a darkened world.

“See how the One is multiplied,
Among us, hundreds!
And goes among the humble,
and consoles our sinful kindred.”

“It is for this we come,
And, kneeling, each receive one flame.
Our lives, like candles, spell
This simple symbol [1]

My Story

I’ve been privileged to work with a number of Christians who have helped others with what they had received.

Frequently, because they had seen such a transformation in an area of their lives that they wanted others to have the same opportunity for growth.

For example,

- Some friends who wrestled with the paperwork and difficulty of adopting three children, started two support groups: one group for parents of adopted children and another group for parents considering adoption.
- A friend who suffered from years of living with her husband's bi-polar mental illness, started a group to support family members who are struggling with their loved ones bi-polar condition.
- Friends who went through a very rocky time in their marriage and found healing and strength in Christ, are now helping others who are married and engaged to be married with a training seminar and group.

The list can go on and on, of people who are giving away what they have received.

I can't do that

You may think (as you might have with the six other steps in the booklet),

- "I can't do that. There's no way I can try that and help others."

And, if you have said that, there is some validity to that statement.

On your own, in your own strength, you cannot help others grow spiritually. However, with God's help you can.

The Apostle Paul said that we need to acknowledge our weakness, quoting Jesus as saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Paul then continued by explaining, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (2 Cor. 12:5)

Even though we are weak, God will still use us.

Jesus said, “With God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26)

Transforming and Redeeming

Helping others, we learn in Scripture, is one reason why God is interested in our brokenness.

God is a God of redemption.

God will take (or redeem) what has been lost and broken -- things that the enemy intended for evil and destruction -- and use it, somehow, to help others.

We are promised in Romans 8:28:

- “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him...”

As Joseph in the Old Testament told his brothers after seeing how God transformed their betrayal into the salvation of his family,

- “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”
(Genesis 50:20)

So, we see in Scripture that God will transform our brokenness. And even though others may have intended to harm us, God will use our brokenness for the benefit of others.

Indispensable Parts of Christ's Body

We learned earlier that all Christians are part of the Body of Christ.

The author Jerry Bridges has written that, "...each part of the body is indispensable." [2]

And according to pastor Greg Ogden, "Everyone has a part in this play." [3]

Rev. Ogden explains that, "The church is to be a therapeutic community. It is a place where broken, struggling people can become well and whole." [4]

Priesthood of all believers

Some reading this may think,

- "I am not a qualified therapist to help others."
- Or, "I am not a pastor."

While it is true that helping others overcome certain issues may require the help of trained pastoral counselors or therapists, every Christian can still share what they have learned with others.

In the sixteenth century, Christian scholars used the phrase "*priesthood of all believers*" to explain our status with Christ and with others.

They said that we are all qualified to have a relationship with God and to help others.

Martin Luther wrote in 1520,

“Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, and apply it to himself – that we are all priests, and there is no difference between us.”

[5]

Our transformation and status as Christ’s representatives as we have noted, is not just for ourselves, as Greg Ogden explains,

“People are put back together again so that they can be useful channels of God’s service. We are not trying simply to create *happy* people who feel better about themselves, but whole people who build up the body of Christ and bring the message of salvation and the witness of compassion to a broken world.” [6]

Serving Others

Serving others is at the heart of Christianity.

In Scripture we can read,

- That the Apostle John wrote, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)
- Paul wrote, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)

- Similarly, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained it like this,

"The bearers of Jesus' word receive a final word of promise for their work. They are now Christ's fellow workers, and will be like him in all things. Thus they are to meet those to whom they are sent as if they were Christ himself. They are bearers of his presence. They bring with them the most precious gift in the world, the gift of Jesus Christ." [7]

So what's your story?

So the question now is, "What do you have to share?"

Jesus' disciples, we learned earlier, had loaves of bread and fishes. And Jesus asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" then He had them use what they had to feed the hungry crowds.

Whatever you have been given, Jesus will ask you to give that away to help others.

Perhaps you had a problem with anger. You know the kind, similar to the boxer Mohammed Ali, who once said, "I'm so mean I make medicine sick." And you've found that God is transforming you into a person who has more kindness. Couldn't others benefit by hearing from your experience?

Perhaps you were an addict, and found healing through the love of Christ. Couldn't others benefit from hearing about what has happened?

The answer is yes.

As we saw with Jesus' disciples, we can easily forget it.

Smith Wigglesworth once wrote, "The child of God must catch the vision anew every day. Every day the child of God must be moved more and more by the Holy Spirit."
[8]

If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, the following prayer might reflect your thoughts and hopes.

Prayer

Lord, help me see You as You are in the process of transforming my life. Lord, help me to share with others the things that I have learned. Amen.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What about helping others do you find inspiring?
2. Who would you like to share your story with?
3. When will you talk to them?
4. What things stop you from sharing what you've learned spiritually with others?
5. How could God help you overcome those obstacles?

Chapter 7

Notes:

1. Thomas Merton, *The Candlemas Procession* (1943) in "*The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*", (New York: New Directions, 1977), p. 92.
2. Jerry Bridges, "*The Practice of Godliness*", (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), p. 115.
3. Greg Ogden, "*The New Reformation*", (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990) p. 19.
4. *ibid.* p. 104.
5. Martin Luther, "*An Appeal to the Ruling Class*" (1520) as quoted in "*The New Reformation*" by Greg Ogden, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990) p. 11.
6. Greg Ogden, "*The New Reformation*", (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990), p. 107.
7. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "*The Cost of Discipleship*" (1937), (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 107.
8. Smith Wigglesworth, "*Faith that Prevails*" (1938), (Springfield, Missouri: Radiant Books, 1966), p. 52.

Conclusion

Conclusion

I have had a very blessed life.

For the past ten years, in addition to helping churches with leadership development issues, I have worked as a software consultant, helping large companies and non-profits implement computer applications and websites. My work has taken me across the United States, Europe and South America.

On every software project I've worked on, however, I've always noticed the same pattern:

The first software release is never perfect.

In fact, many times the first software release is far from perfect.

In our business, we'll say that software development is *iterative*, meaning that there will be different iterations or versions of it.

So, first we'll have Release 1.0.

And after some testing, we'll identify "bugs" or glitches with the software, and let our developers know about it.

They'll make some changes and fixes and provide us with another version.

So, then we'll have Release 2.0.

We'll do some more testing and identify any problems or "bugs" with that release, and let the developers know about that.

Then, they'll make the fixes and give us the next version.

Then we'll have Release 3.0 and so on.

Spiritual growth and personal healing is similar. It is a process of God "testing us" and showing us "bugs" or "problems" that need to be fixed.

Once those are addressed, other "bugs" are identified that need to be fixed.

Like software, our spiritual growth is iterative. After God works on us in one area, there will be another area to examine.

"Spiritual growth is like peeling an onion" a friend of mine said to me once. "Once you get through one layer, there is another one underneath of it."

So, let's review the Seven Steps for Growth and Healing again...

The Seven Steps for Growth and Healing

1. Look for God's presence in your life.
2. Respond to God's offer of salvation with faith.
3. Discover new life in Christ.
4. Identify the broken places.
5. Turn it over to God.
6. Respond to God's direction.
7. Give away what you've learned.

As we have learned, after we have acknowledged that God is working in our lives and wants to help us (Step #1) and we have placed our faith in Christ (Step #2) we become God's new creations.

These first two steps need only occur once (but they can be very helpful to review many times - to remember the work that God has done in your life).

The remaining steps, Steps #3 through #7, can be worked and re-worked for the rest of our lives.

Our lives as Christians will be marked by discovering more and more the new life we are called to in Christ (Step #3).

Our Christian lives will also be marked by God helping us identify areas that are broken and need healing (Steps #4-6) and sharing what we have learned with others (Step #7).

Over time, God will continue to show us deeper areas of new life with Christ (Step #3) and identify other broken places for us to work on and we will start the process (Steps #4-6) all over again.

This may seem like an overwhelming task, but God will help us. As the Apostle Paul said,

- "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

Enjoy the Journey...

Finally, it will be important for us to try to enjoy this journey of spiritual growth.

We cannot control it, though, because God is in control.

Sometimes it will be difficult. However, James explained that we need to “consider it joy when we face trials” (James 1:2). Similarly, the Apostle Paul wrote that we should “rejoice in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3) and “be content in all circumstances” (Phil. 4:11)

“We must endure patiently,” As John Calvin encouraged us, “because God will not have us come to his kingdom, so to speak, in one leap.” [1]

Our spiritual growth is a journey, as G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “To the Christian, existence is a story...”[2]

The story, or journey, for each of us will look different. However, the destination that God desires for all of us is the same...

- that our lives be transformed by God’s love and mercy
- that we grow spiritually
- that we receive spiritual healing
- that we have an attitude of thanksgiving and gratitude for all of the things that He has done.

In conclusion, I would like to thank those people that have played a role in my spiritual growth and healing...thank you.

Conclusion

Notes:

1. John Calvin, “*Sermons on Ephesians – Ephesians 5*” (1558).
2. G.K. Chesterton, “*Orthodoxy*”, (New York: Image Books, 1959), p. 136.