

HOW TO BE BALANCED

**GOD'S WONDERFUL WAY OF LIFE
COMPILATION
BOOK 7**

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HOW TO LIVE A BALANCED LIFE

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HOW TO LIVE A BALANCED LIFE

INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you think of the word balance? For many of us it may conjure up an image of an acrobat walking a tightrope or a basketball player spinning a basketball on his index finger or maybe trying to balance a chequebook. Essentially balance is that quality where we are trying to position ourselves in the middle of two opposing ends so neither will outweigh the other. For the acrobat he needs to keep the middle of his body or centre of gravity directly over the tightrope so an equal amount of his body is on either side of the tightrope. The same applies for the basketball player. He needs to keep his finger directly under the basketball's centre of gravity so an equal amount of the ball is on either side of his finger. When it comes to trying to balance our chequebook we're trying to make sure our outgoings equal our income and savings without exceeding it.

Not everything in life is black and white. I'm sure you know about fire-and-brimstone preachers who make it sound like everything is black and white. Some things certainly are eg. breaking a specific law such as stealing, lying or adultery. They're black and white because you've either done it or you haven't. There is no middle ground. Other things, such as friendliness and love, as well as many other things in life, are a matter of degree. It's not always a matter of whether you love someone or not but how deep is your love to paraphrase the title of one of my favourite Bee Gees songs.

In his book "Between Two Truths", Klyne Snodgrass has this to say about the subject of balance:

Tension permeates our faith. Many truths that we know are balanced by another truth that seems to be going in the opposite direction. The gift of grace is not given without requirements. Freedom is not given without responsibility. Our faith is lived out between two or more competing truths, neither of which can be relinquished. We live between truths (p.14).

This tension where we strive and often struggle to find the right balance is like trying to get the right tension in a bow or the strings of a guitar so it is in tune and not too loose or too tight. This tension and need to find balance is an inevitable part of life. In the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus we read, "Look at all the works of the Most High: they go in pairs, one the opposite of the other".

The book of Ecclesiastes says much the same with its famous passage in chapter 3. The unhappy "preacher" of Ecclesiastes saw the complexity of life and warned against going to extremes. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 he points out that everything has its time and

place and the things that he lists are opposites (for instance, "a time to weep and a time to laugh"). What may be appropriate behaviour at one time may not be appropriate on another occasion which may call for a different or even opposite reaction.

In Joshua 1:4 Israel's new leader Joshua was encouraged to walk in God's ways and to "TURN NEITHER TO THE RIGHT NOR TO THE LEFT"(KJV).

The Bible emphasises the need to guide our lives between the left predispositions and the predispositions on our right. In other words, don't go to extremes!

Christ also mentioned this in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads unto life and few there be that find it"(Matt.7:13-14, KJV).

Steiner offers the following appendix in his book "The God Who is There" to illustrate that often the true godly traits fall in the centre of two not-so-godly traits.

LEFT	MIDDLE	RIGHT
pedantry	orderliness	disorderliness
cowardice	bravery	recklessness
apathy	concern	over-sensitivity
indifference	compassion	effusiveness
miserliness	thrift	wastefulness
rigidity	equanimity	vacillation
sloth	controlled activity	over-activity
hurtful criticism	needed confrontation	closing of one's eyes

God is neither right-winged nor left-winged politically. Some people are so conservative that they will never try new ideas or change things while others are so liberal that they will forsake tried and tested truth and patterns of living which God has ordained. God is neither. He has the perfect balance and is straight down the line as we would say about those who stick to tried and tested truths of living and doctrine.

The Bible often has seemingly contradictory concepts which have to be understood in the context that different situations often require different responses or as they say horses for courses. Proverbs 26:4-5 places two "contradictory" proverbs back-to-back: "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." There are different factors involved in each of these situations which is why they require different reactions.

Paul tells us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is...not from works, so that no one can boast" (Eph.2:8-9). James tells us that, "A person is justified from works and not from faith alone" (Jam.2:24). In Matthew 7:1 we are told not to

judge, but in Matthew 7:16 we are told, "by their fruits you will know them." The "Prince of Peace" said in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I come to bring peace, but a sword." In Matthew 11:29 we read, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls" yet in Luke 9:23 Christ said, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross(symbolic of trials) daily". We are also told to conquer by yielding; that we are exalted by being humble, and we are given the goal to reign in the World Tomorrow in order to serve.

We will look at the grace, faith and works subject a little later. In Matthew 7:1 we read that we are not to judge in the sense of condemning people but we do have to make assessments based on their fruits as to whether people's actions are in accord with God's laws. With that assessment we can then go to our brother in the right spirit (Matt.18:15) if there is such a need. If we are too far from the situation where it is not our place to confront then we need to be aware of what is right and wrong so we can avoid the same wrong things and make good decisions based on what we have observed.

Christ will bring peace to this world when He returns but in this age those who Christ calls will have relatives who will be offended and ostracize them because of their commitment to God's truth and His way of life. This lack of peace and division is inevitable in some cases if we put God first since those relatives are of the world and don't support God's truth and values.

Matthew 11:29 says we will find rest in our souls with Christ but at the same time we have to deny ourselves and take up our cross (or burden) daily in Luke 9:23. We do have to deny that part of our nature that wants to do things that are against God's law (eg. sexually desiring a woman we're not married to). This denial can be painful at times and is something we have to do daily but the pain of discipline is light in comparison to the pain of regret if we give in regularly to our selfish desires and reap bad consequences. By exercising discipline on a daily basis we save ourselves a lot of extra pain when we do things according to the way that Christ lived His life. In this way we find rest for our souls in Christ.

We conquer sin by yielding. This yielding is yielding to God. Instead of fighting God's will as we are naturally inclined to do at times we give in to God and do things His way. In this way we conquer sin and over the course of time we begin to naturally want to do things more and more God's way.

When we are humble by putting the needs of others ahead of our own and by being receptive of criticism and applying it then God appreciates that and looks after us and will exalt us in time. On the other hand, if we are proud and exalt ourself at the expense of others by ignoring their needs or mistreating them to get what we want then God will humble us (Luke 18:14).

In Luke 22:24-27 we read, "Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (NIV).

The world's idea of rulership is to use the authority that you have to benefit yourself firstly and have those under you do things for you. The needs of the people under you come after that. God's way of life is all about helping others first and you will derive your own fulfillment and enjoyment in life seeing others being happy from the good things that you do for them. God looks after those who put others' needs ahead of their own.

If we genuinely put other needs ahead of our own people do appreciate that and often will respond kindly to us and be generous to us in return. That doesn't always happen or sometimes it takes time but if it doesn't God will, in time, bless us because of His promise "Give and it will be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). The more authority we have the more power we have to serve and benefit other people. Rather than using that authority to get as much as we can God wants us to use authority to help and serve others even more than we can now.

A.W. Tozer highlighted some of these seemingly contradictory concepts in his famous quote about what a christian is. He wrote:

A real christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for someone he has never seen. He talks familiarly everyday with someone he has never seen. He expects to be in the Kingdom on the virtue of another. He empties himself in order to be full. He admits he is wrong in order so he can be declared right. He goes down in order to get up. He is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order that he can have, gives away so he can keep. He sees the invisible, hears the inaudible and knows that which passes knowledge. He is a christian.

Though we have not seen God we can prove His existence through observing the incredible complexity of design through the wonders nature and the universe. We can know that God is supremely loving in His concern for His people because of the way He has dealt with them as recorded in the Bible and through the circumstances of our own lives. From answered prayer, healings of sick people in His church, the miracle of conversion in our own lives and that of others and knowing the awesome future He has prepared for us we can know and know that we know that God is all loving. Even though we have never seen Him with our eyes we can love Him with all of our hearts because we can still know wholeheartedly He exists and wants the very best for us.

We empty ourselves of our human nature so we can be full with God's character and the joy of life that comes with obeying God. We admit that we are wrong and have sinned so God will count us right or justified by forgiving our past sins with the blood of Christ. We can be spiritually strong and rich when we are physically and financially

poor and weak and see our great need for God and living by His laws. We put to death the old carnal self in order to live by God's way and so that we can have eternal life.

SAINT AND SINNER

In a country and western song called "The Gemini Song" Waylon Jennings summed up succinctly what it means to be human when he sang, "When I'm bad, I'm bad and when I'm good, I'm the best you've ever seen...There's two sides to me, and we aint even friends." How often do we agonize over this struggle? There are plenty of times in our lives when we feel like the apostle Paul when he said, "For the good that I want to do, I don't do, but the evil I don't want to do, that I practise...O wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death?" Every one of us is a mixture of good and evil.

We christians are, as Martin Luther put it, at the same time saint and sinner. We are not part sinner and part saint, nor are we one then the other. At the same time we are both saint and sinner. We are not perfect and are in constant need of God's grace to cover our past sins with Christ's blood while at the same time we are saints. We may not be comfortable with the term but when the Bible uses the term saint it is describing our state of being set apart by God as trainee God beings, not about our moral behaviour. It refers to God's action, not ours.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:17 that "the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." As one person put it, "The old man has been drowned in baptism, but the rascal can swim!" Why do we desire both good and evil? Why do we have such a hard time vacillating between our desire to do things that are good and to do things which are bad? The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote, "People love their vices and hate them at the same time; they hate their sins and cannot leave them."

The reason we have this struggle is because, even though we are often at the academic level convinced that sin hurts, we often waver in our belief deep down in our hearts that sin is bad for us and is going to hurt us. Deep down we believe that the benefits of whatever sin we are enticed outweigh the hurt that it will produce.

Paul acknowledged that there is pleasure in sin when he wrote that Moses gave up "the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb.11:25). The passing pleasures, as Paul calls them, that are in sin inevitably lead to kickbacks which hurt more than the pleasure.

Satan's subtlety and deception is in regularly being able to convince us into looking at sin from a selective viewpoint - focusing on the pleasure more than the inevitable kickback that follows just around the corner.

Sin often has a short-term pleasure and long-term pain. God's way most of the time has short-term and long-term pleasure but sometimes it involves short-term pain with long-term pleasure - eg. a young man having to wait until marriage for sex.

God's way quite often involves self-discipline but we need to remember that the pain of regret is much more painful than the pain of discipline. That realization should make us want to put in the work that is involved in self-discipline to avoid the regret of giving in to the temptations of sin.

Because we are so often morally lazy we all too often take the path of least resistance. It takes work to do the right thing when we are tempted and we are often too lazy to put in that work.

When we are physically lethargic or mentally and emotionally exhausted we are vulnerable to the temptations of sin that come from Satan, the world and our own desires.

Another reason we vacillate between doing what is right and wrong is by taking a gambling perspective. Mr Ron Dart puts this very well in an excellent article called "True Conversion" where he writes:

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you," said God through Moses, "that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both you and your seed may live" (Deut.30:19). What this means is that God has left it within our power to choose death. But why would we do a thing like that? Who, knowing the choice he is making, would choose death?

I suspect it is because most of us think that we are only taking a chance with death. We would not deliberately choose death over life, but we will gamble with death in order to pursue what we want.

Everyone knows that, across the averages, smokers die much younger than non-smokers. But, we say to ourselves, there are exceptions. Perhaps there is something else at work. Maybe I can beat the odds.

Sinners always have a choice. At any moment in time, we can choose to sin or not. When we are converted, we start making different choices. But, in order to start to make different choices, we have to accept responsibility for the choices we have made and are making. It is no good saying before God, 'Yes, I was a thief, but I was poor and downtrodden.' Nor can we say, 'Yes, I have sinned, but it because I was abused as a child.'

The implication of all these excuses is that bad things that have happened to me in my life have taken away my choices. It may be true that they have changed your choices, but they have not taken them away. You still have a set of choices before you. One group of choices leads to death and destruction. The other group of choices leads to life" (Twentieth Century Watch, Sept.1994, p.11-12).

In the same article Mr Dart makes these excellent observations about true conversion:

It is curious that we should think that baptism changes everything. It only changes one thing. We go down in the waters of baptism guilty of every sin in the book. We come up out of the waters innocent. THAT IS ALL! Unfortunately, we are still the same person. We still have almost exactly the same character, the same weaknesses, the same lusts, the same failings. We are ready to receive the Holy Spirit and the power to begin to turn our life around...

Most people will agree that they notice little change in their appetites after conversion. Some have confessed to being more tempted after baptism than they were before. Instead of the spiritual process becoming easier, it becomes harder. The problem is this - it is our response to our appetites that has to change, not the appetites themselves.

Our desires may abate over time, but there is no overnight change - at least in most cases. Things that felt good before still feel good. Things that you craved before are still desirable to you.

People have occasionally written to ask us to pray that God would take away their desire for cigarettes. Now, it may be that God will perform a miracle and take away the craving for nicotine. But why should He take away your sense of smell and taste? If you really like the smell and taste of a cigarette, should God change all of that to where you hate it? Must all the laws of nature be changed to make it easy for us to overcome?

I hate to disillusion anyone, but if God had intended to make it easy for us to overcome sin, we would have been out of the woods long ago. Could it be that He is willing that it should be hard work to overcome sin? Could it be that the way God changes us into what He wants us to be is through the hard knocks of life? In our language, conversion mean change. When we convert something, we make it into something it was not before. If God were satisfied with what we are, He would no doubt smooth out the road. But if He wants to change us into something else, then our old man is going to have to suffer through the process of change. The primary agent of that change is choice(ibid., p.10)."

We have looked at why we vacillate between good and evil, right and wrong and how to respond to it and do what it is right. Let's now look at how to cope emotionally with the battle and the fact that we are all great sinners who regularly need God's forgiveness. I would like to focus now on the misunderstood topics of self-esteem and damaged emotions.

HOW TO HAVE A PROPER SELF ESTEEM

In a WCG reprint article entitled "This Universal Lack of Self-Confidence", Garner Ted Armstrong wrote the following:

Probably you are afflicted with a serious handicap. It's more nearly universal than you'd suppose! Most people call it "lack of self-confidence". Psychologists call it an

"inferiority complex". Millions suffer from it. It's a principal reason for countless failures. It brings worry, frustration!

Those plagued with it are somehow afraid to push on to success. They shun the acceptance of responsibility, limiting the success they should achieve in life. They shrink from making decisions, from acting on decisions, from leaping out where they realize they should. They constantly fear insecurity, often flee from reality. They bog down to mediocrity...

It's human nature to go from one wrong extreme to the other. Instead of finding the real cause of his troubles, man has tried to deal with the effect. Many popular modern writers and philosophers have written books and articles telling people how to overcome this timidity and inferior feeling.

The methods usually recommended for developing confidence include positive thinking, the desire to reach others and the expression of SELF. The doubts and fears will flee, they say, with faith in yourself. To cultivate this faith, you must free yourself from hesitancy and anxiety by kidding yourself you really have the assurance you lack. This means flattery of the self, careful coddling and pampering of the self...

The real objective behind this practice is what other people think of you!...What a letdown it is - what a disheartening shock it is, when this individual finds all the pseudo-confidence has fled, that he cannot meet a difficult situation, and all his ego and trust in SELF is shattered! Then, after being swept to the heights of self-confidence and trust in the self, he is dashed to the gutter of despair and hopelessness - feeling himself to be a complete failure...

Part of the heritage our father has bequeathed to my brother Dick and me is this very lesson he had to suffer so terribly to learn...God took away his business - his success - shattered his self-confidence - plummeted him all the way down to the deepest chasm of despair, disillusionment and feeling of utter failure. Then God was able to reveal to him the only REAL confidence, and start him toward real success!

What does God say about the way to confidence? Why, the exact opposite, of course! God said through the prophet Isaiah that the wicked man had to forsake his way! God tells us to THROW SELF AWAY - not to pamper and fondle it. God says to get rid of self - man says to flatter self. Man talks about positive thinking and God says to forsake even your own thoughts! (Isa.55:6-9)...

The very Son of God, for all His personality and energy, said He could do NOTHING by Himself! Christ had absolutely NO self-confidence! How much less, then, can you and I accomplish by trusting in ourselves? (John 5:19,30)."

There are a number of scriptures that deal with how God wants us to view ourselves. Let's take a look at a few of them.

In Jeremiah 10:23 we read, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man who walks to direct his steps."

A few chapters later he wrote about the nature of all of us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

King David cried to God as he repented of his adultery to Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17).

We read how there will come a great time ahead when Israel will repent before God and we are told that they will **LOATHE** themselves (Ezekiel 36:31).

After Job was humbled by God he said, "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye see you. Therefore **I ABHOR MYSELF** and repent in dust and ashes." (Job. 42:5-6).

We see here that God was pleased when David and Job abhorred or hated themselves. The Bible tells us that we must hate ourselves in order to please God.

"But wait a moment", says the person who suffers from an inferiority complex and wants to somehow feel good about himself but is often put down by others and hates this constant sense of feeling like dirt. "How do I feel good about myself? Do I have keep on hating myself and feel like a failure because I am and always will be desperately wicked?"

Hold that thought for a moment. Let's look at a few other scriptures and think about what they have to say.

When Christ was asked which was the greatest commandment He said to love God with all of our being and the second was to love our neighbour as we love ourself.

David Seamands in "Healing for Damaged Emotions" writes the following:

We do not have two commandments here, but three: to love God, to love yourself, and to love others. I put self second, because Jesus plainly made a proper self-love the basis of a proper love for neighbour. The term self-love has a wrong connotation for some people. Whether you call it self-esteem or self-worth, it is plainly the foundation of christian love for others. And this is the opposite of what many christians believe....

Paul also showed that it is the basis of a solid marriage when he wrote, "Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph.5:28-29).

Experience confirms Paul's psychological accuracy. Because some people love their partners the way they love themselves their marriages are in trouble. For self-belittling works it's way out through marriage. A proper self-nourishing and a realization of your own worth are essential if you are to be a good wife or husband(Healing for Damaged Emotions, p.77-79).

The Bible tells us to both hate or abhor ourselves and to love ourselves also. How can this be? Is this a contradiction? To understand we have to remember what Waylon Jennings sang in the Gemini song I quoted from earlier - there are two sides to us.

There is a side to us that is called our human nature. It is what we ARE. It is that carnal side to us that is an accumulation of all of our habits that have been developed through our wrong choices influenced by Satan's broadcasts since our birth and this world. Everything that is us without God's help is CARNAL AND SELFISH!

This side of us we have to utterly repent of. It is us! "There is no one who does good, not one" (Romans 3:12).

The longer we live the more we understand that and are humbled by our own carnal side when we compare ourselves with God. We should hate our carnal self. We are all in the same boat when we compare ourselves to God.

We don't have to feel inferior to anyone because EVERYONE is in the same boat when compared to God!

If everything about us without God's help is carnal and selfish is there anything left about us that is good? Well, the answer lies in the qualification I made in the last sentence.

I said without God's help spiritually we are NOTHING! "All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Christ said of His own He could do NOTHING without God (John 5:19). The same applies with us, so anything good that we have is what we have that comes from God.

Now there is a limited amount of good that we can have without God's spirit. This comes from the fact that the tree which God created that Adam and Eve weren't to take, but did anyway, was the tree of good and evil, not just the tree of evil. Now that good we have naturally is limited and in a sense is still from God because He created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

What can we feel good about ourselves that we have? We can rejoice in the character that God has developed in us over time as we have submitted to His will.

But, what if we have developed very little despite how much we have tried and are often being overtaken by our lusts and bad habits and we find ourselves often being corrected for them? Apart from striving to draw closer to God and just enduring our problems, how do we feel OK and good about ourselves and not feel worthless without losing our sanity?

If there is little of God's character in us there are other things that we have from God that we can rejoice in and have the proper love for ourselves and feel we are really worth something.

According to Dr Maurice Wagner, author of *The Sensation of Being Somebody*(p.32-37), there are three essential components of a healthy self-esteem.

The first is a sense of belonging, of being wanted, accepted, cared for and loved.

The second is a sense of worth and value. "I count. I am of value. I have something to offer."

The third is a sense of being competent. "I can do this task. I can cope with that situation. I am able to meet life."

Josh McDowall in his wonderful book "The Secret of Loving" also has this to say about how we should look at ourselves from God's perspective:

Have you ever said, "I really don't count. I could disappear and no one would notice or care?" Most people think those thoughts at one time or another. Yet the Bible reveals that God looks at us quite differently. In the Bible, God tells you that He sees you as very special because God created you in His image...

You are special also because you are of great value and worth to God. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul said that we have been purchased with a great price. The value or worth of an object is usually determined by the price one is willing to pay to purchase or redeem it.

WHEN SOMEONE ASKS WHAT I AM WORTH, I CAN FACTUALLY SAY THAT I AM WORTH THE PRICE GOD PAID FOR ME, WHICH WAS JESUS"!

[I would word this a little differently myself. Christ is certainly greater than all of us but the fact that the Father offered up His son and Christ willingly sacrificed His life for us in an agonizing death shows how much God values us. He WANTS US and loves us THAT MUCH that He gave His son for us! - RW]...

Another reason you are special is because you are unique. Of the 5.5 billion people alive right now on this planet, there is no one just like you...You must begin fixing your thoughts on the fact that God has made you unique and, as one person put it, "God don't make no junk."(p.35-37)

There is no one with your exact combination of likes and dislikes, talents and abilities. Also we all have the awesome potential of being one day in God's family just like God Himself with His perfection one day.

No matter how much people may hurt or humiliate you or how badly you've slipped up no one else can take away that awesome potential that you have. Never forget that! You are potentially perfect at the resurrection.

"But what about now?", someone might ask. God doesn't wait until you reached a certain standard before he accepts and loves you. We do have to grow in

character and obey Him but He loves and accepts us at our weakest times as well.

Josh McDowall also points this out:

In Romans 5, we learn that even when we were His enemies God loved us - even when we were still sinners(verse 8).

If He loved us in that condition, how much more does He love us now as His adopted children?"(The Secret of Loving, p.40).

HEALING FOR DAMAGED EMOTIONS AND MEMORIES

In researching these topics relating to self-esteem I have come across a couple of remarkable books by a man who been a pioneer in this field, David Seamands. He has authored two books called "The Healing of Damaged Emotions" and "The Healing of Memories".

The concepts he discusses are quite revolutionary and, I believe, quite scripturally sound, and I am amazed that I have never heard about much of these things in the church. I would wholeheartedly recommend these two books to any men in God's ministry who, I believe, would find them invaluable in helping the brethren in God's church with the common emotional and relationship problems that they face.

In the church when we talk about healing we talk about two types of healing - spiritual healing(forgiveness of our sins) and physical healing(the healing of our physical bodies from sickness and injury). We teach that Christ has paid the penalty for both our sins and the transgressions of health laws which lead to sickness. Since Christ has already paid the penalty we no longer have to bear the penalty of death for our sins and sickness for health transgressions which allows us to be healed.

God tells us in the Book of Isaiah:

"He (Christ) is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **Surely he hath borne OUR griefs, and carried OUR sorrows:** yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed....

"Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Isaiah 53:4-10 (KJV)

We are all familiar with the phrases in those verses that talk about our spiritual and physical healing like being "wounded for our transgressions" and by "his stripes we are

healed". But look at the phrase that I have in bold and underlined in that passage - Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.

Now I ask you, are griefs and sorrows sins? Are they physical afflictions such as sickness or disease? No, they are EMOTIONS! Christ has borne those emotional afflictions for us. Why? For what purpose?

I believe the church has, for the most part, overlooked a third type of healing - that of emotional healing!

David Seamands in his two books mentioned above discusses this type of healing in a way I believe is very much in accord with what the scriptures have to say. I'd like to now quote at length from what he has written on this important subject which I'm sure the reader will find quite fascinating:

Introduction to Healing for Damaged Emotions

Through fifteen years, as tapes have gone out all over the world, letters and testimonies have confirmed my belief that there is another realm of problems which requires a special kind of prayer and a deeper level of healing by the Spirit. Somewhere between our sins, on the one hand, and our sicknesses, on the other, lies an area the Scripture calls 'infirmities'.

We can explain this by an illustration from nature. If you visit the far West, you will see those beautiful giant sequoia and redwood trees. In most of the parks the naturalists can show you a cross section of a great tree they have cut, and point out that the rings of the tree reveal the developmental history, year by year. Here's a ring that represents a year when there was too much rain. Here's where the tree was struck by lightning. Here are some normal years of growth. This ring shows a forest fire that almost destroyed the tree. Here's another of savage blight and disease. All of this lies embedded in the heart of the tree, representing the autobiography of its growth.

And that's the way it is with us. Just a few minutes beneath the protective bark, the concealing, protective mask, are the recorded rings of our lives.

There are the scars of ancient, painful hurts...as when a little boy rushed downstairs one Christmas dawn and discovered in his Christmas stocking a dirty old rock, put there to punish him for some trivial boyhood naughtiness. This scar has eaten away in him, causing all kinds of interpersonal difficulties. Here is the discolouration of a tragic stain that muddied all of life...as years ago behind the barn, or in the haystack, or out in the woods, a big brother took a little sister and introduced her to the mysteries - no, the miseries of sex.

And here we see the pressure of a painful, repressed memory...of running after an alcoholic father who was about to kill the mother, and then of rushing for the butcher knife. Such scars have been buried in pain for so long that they are causing hurt and rage that are inexplicable. And these scars are not touched by conversion and sanctifying grace, or by the ordinary benefits of prayer.

In the rings of our thoughts and emotions, the record is there; the memories are recorded, and all are alive. And they directly and deeply affect our concepts, our feelings, our relationships. They affect the way we look at life and God, at others and ourselves.

We preachers have often given people the mistaken idea that the new (life in Christ) and being 'filled with the spirit' are going to automatically take care of these emotional hangups. But this just isn't true. A great crisis experience of Jesus Christ, as important and eternally valuable as this is, is not a shortcut to emotional health. It is not a quickie cure for personality problems(p.10-12)...

Understanding that salvation does not give instant emotional health offers us an important insight into the doctrine of sanctification. It is impossible to know how christian a person is, merely on the basis of his outward behaviour.

Isn't it true that by their fruits ye shall know them? (Matt.7:16) Yes, but it is also true that by their roots you shall understand, and not judge them...

What I am saying is that certain areas of our lives need special healing by the Holy Spirit. Because they are not subject to ordinary prayer, discipline, and willpower, they need a special kind of understanding, an unlearning of past wrong programming, and a relearning and reprogramming transformation by the renewal of our minds. And this is not done overnight by a crisis experience(p.12-13)....

What are some of these damaged emotions? One of the most common is a deep sense of unworthiness, a continuous feeling of anxiety, inadequacy, and inferiority, an inner nagging that says "I'm no good. I'll never amount to anything. No one could ever possibly love me. Everything I do is wrong."

What happens to this kind of person, when he becomes a christian? Part of his mind believes in God's love, accepts God's forgiveness, and feels at peace for a while? Then, all of a sudden everything within him rises up to cry out, 'It's a lie! Don't believe it! Don't pray! There's no one up there to hear you. No one really cares. There's no one to relieve your anxiety. How could God possibly love you and forgive someone like you? You're too bad!' What has happened? The good news of the gospel has not penetrated down into his damaged inner self, which also needs to be evangelized. His deep inner scars must be touched and healed by the balm of Gilead.

Then there's another kind, that for want of a better term, I call the perfectionist complex. This is the inner feeling that says, "I can never quite achieve. I never do anything well enough...I ought to be able to do this. I should be able to do that. I must be a little bit better." He's ever climbing, but never reaching.

What happens to this person when he becomes a christian? Tragically enough, he usually transfers his perfectionism onto his relationship with God, who is seen now as a figure on top of a tall ladder. He says to himself, 'I'm going to climb up to God now. I'm His child, and I want to please Him, more than I want anything else.' So he starts climbing, rung by rung, working so hard, until his knees are bleeding and his shins are bruised. Finally he reaches the top only to find out that his God has moved up three rungs, so he puts on his Avis button and determines to try a little harder. He climbs and struggles, but when he gets there his God has gone up another three rungs(p.14-15)...

Then there's another kind of damaged emotion that we can call supersensitivity. The supersensitive person has usually been hurt deeply. He reached out for love and approval and affection, but instead he got the opposite, and he has scars deep inside of him...

Then there are the people who are filled with fears. Perhaps the greatest of them all is the fear of failure. These damaged persons are so afraid of losing the game of life that they have a simple way out - never get into the game; just sit on the sidelines. They say, 'I don't like the rules', or 'I don't care for the referee'. 'The ball isn't quite round.' 'The goals are not right'"(p.16-17)....

The Broad Principles of Being Healed Emotionally

How do we solve these damaged emotions with the healing help of God's Holy Spirit?

At this point, let me suggest the general, biblical principles which must be followed throughout in order for you to find healing for damaged emotions.

1) Face your problem squarely.

With ruthless moral honesty and with God's grace, confront that awful, hidden childhood memory, however deep the feelings within you. Acknowledge it to yourself, and acknowledge it to another human being. Some problems can never be solved until you confess them to others. 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed'(Jam.5:16). Some people miss deep inner healing because they lack the courage to share deeply with another person.

2) Accept your responsibility in the matter.

'But,' you say, 'I was sinned against. I was a victim. You don't know what happened to me.' True enough. But what about your response? What about the fact that you learned to hate or resent, or to escape into an unreal world? You may say, 'My folks never told me anything about sex, and I grew up and I went out into this evil world, innocent and ignorant and got into trouble.' That's the way it happened the first time. But what about the second or the third time - whose fault was it then?

Life is like a complicated tapestry, woven with a loom and shuttle. Heredity, environment, all the things experienced in childhood, from parents, teachers, playmates, all of life's handicaps - all of these things are on one side of the loom, and they pass the shuttle to you.

But remember, you pass the shuttle back through the loom. And this action, together with your responses, weaves the design in the tapestry of your life. You are responsible for your actions. You will never receive healing for your damaged emotions until you stop blaming everyone else and accept your responsibility.

3) Ask yourself if you want to be healed.

This is what Jesus asked the sick man who had lain ill for 38 years(John 5:6). Do you really want to be healed, or do you just want to talk about your problem? Do you want to use your problem to get sympathy from others? Do you just want it for a crutch, so that you can walk with a limp?....

4) Forgive everyone who is involved in your problem.

Facing responsibility and forgiving people are really two sides of the same coin. The reason some people have never been able to forgive is that if they forgave, the last rug would be pulled out from under them and they would have no one to blame. Facing responsibility and forgiving are almost the same action; in some instances you need to do them simultaneously. Jesus made it very plain that no healing occurs until there is deep forgiveness.

5) Forgive yourself.

So many Christians say, 'Yes, I know that God has forgiven me, but I can never forgive myself.' This statement is a contradiction of terms. How can you really believe that God has forgiven you, and then not forgive yourself? When God forgives, He buries your sins in the sea of His forgiveness and forgetfulness. As Corrie Ten Boom says, 'He then puts a sign on the bank which says: "No Fishing Allowed"'. You have no right to dredge up anything that God has forgiven and forgotten. He has put it behind His back. Through an inscrutable mystery, divine omniscience has somehow forgotten your sins. You CAN forgive yourself.

6) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your real problem is, and how you need to pray.

Paul said that often we do not know how to pray as we ought (Rom.8:26). But the Holy Spirit prays in and through us, and makes intercession for us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit uses a temporary assistant in the form of human counsellor who can help us to perceive what the real problem is. Sometimes the Spirit is able to do this through God's Word or through some incident in life that suddenly makes us aware of our real problem. For it is important that we realize the true problem and know how we should pray. James reminded us that we sometimes do not receive because we pray for the wrong things (Jam.4:3). It may be essential for you to get help from a counsellor or a pastor or friend; then together with this person, you can ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your real need is (p20-22).

Oughts and Debts

A profound parable that Christ once gave was the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. He said:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he 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.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

"When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled 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?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart". (Matt 18:23-35, NIV).

With this parable, Jesus put into living colour and stereophonic sound His teachings about forgiveness. The parable is filled with profound insights about spiritual and emotional healing. We shouldn't be surprised at this. Jesus was the only normal and perfectly sane Person who has ever lived. We are told that He knew what was in man, and at the deepest levels. So we should expect His truths, His teachings, to contain the most penetrating psychological truths.

The servant fell on his knees and begged for mercy. He was asking for a special kind of mercy, "makrothumason". Every time this word is used in the New Testament, it means "an extension of time, a delay." "Lord, have patience with me. Please delay and I'll pay you back everything. Give me more time."

We see that the servant's idea of forgiveness was one thing, but the lord's idea was another. The lord in his mercy forgave him all his debt and released him. But that same servant as he went out saw a fellow servant a co-worker, who owed him a measly twenty bucks. He seized him by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe me."

When the co-worker couldn't do it, the servant showed no mercy on him but put him into the debtor's prison until he paid in full. Then the lord summoned the servant and said, "Look, I forgave you all your debts and now you treat your fellow servant this way." So in anger the lord delivered him to prison until he should pay all.

Now, that's bad enough, but Jesus' next statement is the real shocker. "So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your head."

Wait a minute, Jesus. What are you trying to tell us? What kind of picture of the heavenly Father is this? Is it a mistranslation? No, the inference is clear. To the unforgiven and the unforgiving, God will be like a harsh and stern debt-collector.

Is this an exaggeration, like the inflated sum of money? Or does it refer to the future life, to the punishment of the wicked? It may include those, but we don't have to wait until the next life to see Jesus' words come true. For here and now, the unforgiven and unforgiving person is plagued with guilt and resentment. He lives in a prison house where he finds himself tortured by all manner of inner emotional conflicts (p24-26)....

One of the biblical descriptions of sin is "violation of God's laws"[1 John 3:4]. When we break those laws we are, in a sense, in debt to them. The words ought and owe come from the same root. To say, "I ought to do this," or "I ought not to do this," is like saying, "I owe it to God," or "I owe it to this person" to do this or not to do this.

What is true about God's laws is also true in the realm of interpersonal relationships. We feel oughts and debts to one another.

When we sin against a person, we often say, "Somehow I feel as if I'm in debt to him," or "I feel as if she owes me an apology." When a person is released from prison, we say he has paid his debt to society.

Jesus put this concept at the very heart of the Lord's Prayer when He taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who owe us debts."

A pastor, counsellor, or anyone who works closely with human beings knows that this whole debt system has been built into the human personality in a most incredible fashion.

There is a sense of oughtness, of owing a debt, an automatic mechanism by which the built-in debt collectors go to work. We seek to atone for those wrongs, to pay the debt we owe, or to collect the debt that someone else owes us.

If we feel anger at ourselves, we say, "I must pay in full." Or if we feel anger at someone else, he or she must pay. In this way the whole inexorable process is set in motion as the personality is turned over to the inner tormentors. They are the jailers who work as debt-collectors in this awful prison (p.27)....

Causes for Emotional Problems

"Many years ago I was driven to the conclusion that the two major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people.

1. Failure to receive forgiveness.

So many of us are like that servant in the parable. Because he misunderstood the offer the lord gave him, he pled for an extension of time. And what happened? The lord in his mercy gave him far more than he asked for, more than he could dream about or pray for; he released him and forgave him all his debts.

But the servant never heard what the lord said to him. He thought that his master had given him what he asked for. And what did he ask for? Patience and extension of time. "Lord, please don't foreclose on my debt.

Extend my promissory note a little longer and I assure you I'll pay you everything I owe you." And in his pride and moral stupidity, he thought he could pay back \$10 million, if he was only given enough time.

But the master in his mercy wiped out the whole debt. He didn't extend the note. He tore it up. He cancelled it, and set the man free from his debts, free from the threat of imprisonment.

The poor servant really couldn't believe the wonderful news. He couldn't receive it. He couldn't live it. He couldn't enjoy it. He thought he was still under sentence as a debtor and he'd simply been given more time to work and skimp, and to save and then pay

what he owed. Because he didn't realize the debt had been cancelled, the hidden tormentors of resentment, guilt, striving, and anxiety went to work in him.

Because he thought he still owed, he thought he still had to pay, and also to collect debts from others. Many of us are like that. We read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that's not the way we live. We believe grace in our heads but not in our gut level feelings or in our relationships.

There's no other word we throw around more piously. We affirm grace in our creeds and sing about it in our hymns. We proclaim it as distinctive of the Christian faith—that we are saved by grace....But it's all on a head level. The good news of the Gospel of grace has not penetrated the level of our emotions. It hasn't worked its way into our interpersonal relationships. We rattle off the definition: "Grace is God's undeserved favour." But it's not in our feelings. It's not in our living. We don't go far enough.

Grace is not only God's undeserved mercy and favour. It is also unearned and can never be repaid. The failure to see and know and feel grace drives many Christians to the tragic treadmill of performing, achieving, and striving. They try to get rid of their guilt. They try to atone and pay the debt.

They read an extra chapter in the Bible and extend their prayertime for another ten minutes, and then go out and do some guilty witnessing. And what they have is salvation by promissory note.

Many Christians are like the young minister who once came to see me. He was having a lot of problems getting along with other people, especially his wife and family. I had already talked privately with his wife; she was a very fine person—attractive, warm, affectionate, loving—and totally supported him in his ministry. But he was continually criticising her, scapegoating her. Everything she did was wrong. He was sarcastic and demanding, and withdrew from her advances, rejecting her love and affection. Slowly but surely it began to dawn on him: he was destroying their marriage.

Then he realized that in his weekend pastorate he was hurting people through sermons which were excessively harsh and judgmental. You can do that, you know. He was working out all of his unhappiness on other people.

Finally, in his desperation, he came to see me. At the beginning of our interview, he met trouble like a real man: he blamed it on his wife! But after a while, when he became honest, the painful root of the matter came to light.

While he was in the armed forces in Korea, he had spent two weeks of R and R in Japan. During that leave, walking the streets of Tokyo, feeling empty, lonely, and terribly homesick, he fell into temptation and went three or four times to a prostitute.

He had never been able to forgive himself. He had sought God's forgiveness, and with his head, believed he had it. But the guilt still plagued him and he hated himself. Every time he looked in the mirror, he couldn't stand what he was seeing. He had never shared this with anyone and the burden was becoming intolerable.

When he returned home to marry his fiancée, who had faithfully waited for him all those years, his emotional conflicts increased because he still could not accept complete forgiveness. He couldn't forgive himself for what he had done to himself and

to her; so he couldn't accept her freely offered affection and love. He felt he had no right to be happy. He said to himself, "I have no right to enjoy my wife. I have no right to enjoy my life. I've got to pay back the debt."

The terrible tormentors were at work within him and he was trying to punish himself, to suffer, to atone for all of his guilt. All those years he lived in a prison house, with the debt-collectors doing their deadly work. As A.W. Tozer put it, the young minister was living in "the perpetual penance of regret."

How beautiful it was to see him receive full, free forgiveness from God, then from his wife, and perhaps best of all, from himself. Sure he was a Christian. He believed and even preached grace, but he had never completely accepted God's forgiveness. He was trying to repay by promissory note. He was doing a self-atonement job, with the guilt disposal unit going inside him.

There is no forgiveness from God unless you freely forgive your brother from your heart. And I wonder if we have been too narrow in thinking that brother only applies to someone else. What if you are the brother or sister who needs to be forgiven, and you need to forgive yourself? Does it not apply to you too?

The Lord says to forgive your enemies. What if you are the worst enemy? Does that exclude you? This serviceman-minister had to realize that to forgive the other meant to forgive himself also. Anger and resentment against yourself, a refusal to forgive yourself—these are just as damaging when directed at yourself as when they are directed against other people.

2. Failure to give forgiveness.

When we fail to accept and receive God's grace and forgiveness, we also fail to give unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people. And this results in a breakdown of our interpersonal relationships. It results in emotional conflicts between us and other people. The unforgiven are the unforgiving, and the unforgiving complete the vicious circle because they cannot be forgiven.

How tragic is this parable! The servant, not realizing he was completely forgiven, thought he still had to go around collecting money from the servants who owed him, so that he could pay the lord a debt—that had been cancelled.

He went home, checked his ledger, and said, "I've got to get all this money because I told the master I would pay him back." And what happened? He grabbed hold of the first fellow servant he found, seized him by the throat, and said, "Pay me what you owe me. Give me that twenty bucks."

Think of it. He thought he had at least been given an extension on his promissory note. He wouldn't even give this guy more time, but said, "Pay me right now or I'll throw you in prison." When the poor fellow didn't have the money, he was sent to jail. Not a very healthy way to maintain good interpersonal relations!

The vicious circle becomes more vicious. The unaccepted are the unaccepting. The unforgiven are the unforgiving. The ungraced are the ungracious. In fact, their behaviour is sometimes positively disgraceful. And emotional conflicts and broken relationships are the result.

Think of how you apply this to the Significant Others in your life: parents who hurt you when you were growing up; brothers and sisters who failed you when you needed help, who teased you, and put you down; a friend who betrayed you; a sweetheart who rejected you; your marriage partner, who promised to love, honour, comfort, and care for you, but instead has nagged or scapegoated or caused you pain. They all owe you a debt, don't they?

They owe you affection and love, security and affirmation, but since you feel indebted and guilty, resentful, insecure, and anxious, since you see yourself as unforgiven and unacceptable, you in turn become unforgiving and unaccepting. You have not received grace, so how can you give it to others? And as you feel tormented, you hurt others.

You've got to collect on the grievances, collect on your hurts. You must make all these people who have hurt you pay the debts they owe you. You are a grievance collector.

Marriage in Debt

Many married people fail to allow God to do for them what only God can do. Then they ask other human beings, their spouses, to do what they cannot possibly do. If they work at it, men make good husbands, and women make good wives. But they make lousy gods. They're not meant for that. And all those wonderful promises that people make on their wedding day—"I promise to love, care for you, cherish you, through all the circumstances and vicissitudes of life"—these are possible only when a heart is secure in God's love, grace, and care. Only a forgiven and graced soul can keep such promises.

What the person often really means when he says those beautiful words is, "I have a lot of terrific inner needs and inner emptiness and debts to pay and I'm going to give you a marvellous opportunity to fill my Grand Canyon and take care of me. Aren't I wonderful?"

Psychologist Larry Crabbe compares this behaviour to a tick on a dog. The tick isn't really interested in a good life for the dog, he's simply taking all the time. You see, the tragedy with some marriages is that both partners are takers, and the marriage is like two ticks and no dog! Two collectors and nothing to collect (p.28-32)....

After I preached about debt-collecting at a counselling conference, I was going up the aisle when a mother grabbed ahold of me. She said, "I never realized it. That's what I've been doing to my kids for the last eighteen years—collecting debts, asking them to pay me what they owed me, instead of giving them unconditional love." And what a lot of hangups it caused. Will you take three tests with me, to see if there is someone you need to forgive, including yourself?

1. First of all, there's the resentment test.

Is there someone you resent, you've never let off the hook? A parent, brother, sister, sweetheart, marriage partner, friend, co-worker, someone who wronged you in childhood, some teacher in grade school, or someone who misused you sexually as you grew up?

2. The responsibility test is a little trickier.

It goes something like this: "Oh, if only Mary, Joe, or Pete, my parents, my wife my children, life, God—if only they had given me what they owed me, I wouldn't be in this mess today. I wouldn't have all these personality problems. If they had paid me, then I could have paid off my debts to the master"....

3. The reminder and reaction test is really subtle.

Do you find yourself reacting against a person because he reminds you of someone else? Maybe you don't like the way your husband disciplines your children because he reminds you of your father who overdid it. So that causes a clash. You don't like your neighbour, or you respond to a co-worker with a bit of anger, a bit of resentment. Why? Because you have never really forgiven someone else. And your reaction to reminders of that unforgiven person from the past triggers resentment against this person....

Are you part of a debt-free community of Christians? Is your marriage free of debt-collecting? Your family? Every church should be a debt-free society, where we love each other because we are loved. Where we accept because we are accepted.

Where we grace one another and are gracious because we have been graced, because we know the joy of having seen the Master tear up the charge card that we have spent beyond paying. It's been cancelled. He's torn it up. He doesn't add something more to it and say, "Well, I'll give you a little more time to repay."

And so because He has set us free, we can set others free and thereby set in motion grace and love (p.33-35)....

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is the most disturbing emotional problem among evangelical Christians. It walks into my office more often than any other single Christian hangup. What is perfectionism? Since it is a lot easier to describe than to define, I want you to see some of its symptoms.

1. Tyranny of the oughts.

Its chief characteristic is a constant, overall feeling of never doing well enough or being good enough. This feeling permeates all of life, but especially affects our spiritual lives. Psychologist Karen Homey's classic phrase describes it perfectly, "The tyranny of the oughts." Here are its typical statements:

- "I ought to do better"
- "I ought to have done better"
- "I ought to be able to do better"

All the way from preparing a meal to praying or witnessing—"I didn't do it quite well enough."

The three favourite phrases of the perfectionist are: "could have," "should have," "would have." If you are living in this emotional state, the official state song is "If Only." Always standing on tiptoe, always reaching, stretching, trying, but never quite making it.

2. Self-depreciation.

The connection between perfectionism and low self-esteem is obvious. If you are never quite good enough, you feel a continuous sense of self-depreciation. If you are never quite satisfied with yourself and your achievements, then the next step is quite natural: God is never really pleased with you either. He's always saying, "Come on now, you can do better than that!" And if you are a perfectionist and never pleased with yourself anyway, you reply, "Of course."

Try as you will, you always remain in second, not first place. And since you and God always demand first place, that's not quite good enough. So, back to the spiritual salt mines you go, with increased efforts to please yourself and an increasingly demanding God who is never quite satisfied. But you always fall short, you are inadequate, you never arrive but you must never stop trying.

3. Anxiety.

The oughts and self-depreciation produce an oversensitive conscience under a giant umbrella of guilt, anxiety, and condemnation. Like a great cloud, the umbrella hangs over your head. Once in a while it lifts and the sun shines through, particularly during revivals, deeper life conferences, and retreats, when you go forward for prayer or "make a deeper surrender."

Unfortunately, the sunshine lasts about as long as it did the last time you made the same trip, went through the same process, and claimed the same blessing. Soon you fall off spiritual cloud nine with a sickening thud. Those same dreaded feelings settle in again. The general sense of divine disapproval, and comprehensive condemnation return, nagging and knocking at the back door of your soul.

4. Legalism.

The oversensitive conscience and comprehensive guilt of the perfectionist are usually accompanied by a great scrupulosity and legalism which rigidly overemphasise externals, do's and don'ts, rules and regulations. Let's see why this almost inevitably follows the first three symptoms.

The perfectionist with his fragile conscience, his low self-esteem, and his almost built-in sense of automatic guilt is very sensitive to what other people think about him. Since he cannot accept himself, and is quite unsure of God's approval, he desperately needs the approval of other people. Thus he is easy prey to the opinions and evaluations of other Christians. Every sermon gets to him. He introspects: Ah-h, maybe that's what's wrong with me. Maybe if I give this up . . . add that to my life . . . Maybe if I stop doing this or I start doing that, I will experience peace, joy, and power. Maybe then God will accept me, and I will please Him.

All the while, the do's and don'ts are piling up; they keep adding up because more and more people have to be pleased. The halo has to be adjusted for this person and

readjusted for that one. So the perfectionist keeps fitting it this way and that way and, before he realizes what is happening, the halo has turned into what Paul called “the yoke of bondage”(Gal. 5:1).

The yoke was a very familiar farm implement in those days, put upon an animal to pull the plough or to join two oxen together. But the word was used in another way, and this is the meaning Paul had in mind. In the Old Testament the yoke was a symbol of the despotic authority laid upon the necks of a conquered people as a symbol of their enslavement. It was something humiliating and destructive.

The Good News of grace had broken into the lives of the Galatians, freeing them from that kind of spiritual yoke. The Good News is that the way to God is not the path of perfect performance. No matter how much you try, you can never win God's favour.

Why? Because His favour, His being pleased with you, is a love-gift of His grace through Jesus Christ. After a while, grace seemed too good to be true, and the Galatians began to listen to other voices in the marketplace; “another gospel” as Paul termed it (Gal. 1:6). Maybe they listened to the Jerusalem legalists, who said you had to keep all the law, including the ceremonial law.

Maybe they listened to the Colossian ascetics who majored in giving up things in order to please God....They insisted on “self-abasement,” and deliberate low self-esteem (Col. 2:18, NASB). They stressed what Paul called regulations. “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.”

Paul said they had “the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement” which was “of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:21, 23, NASB). How accurate!

And so, the Jerusalem legalists and the Colossian ascetics produced the Galatian diluters, the Galatian revisionists. They reverted to a diluted mixture of faith and works, law and grace....

Immature and sensitive believers can become neurotic perfectionists who are guilt-ridden, tight-haloed, unhappy, and uncomfortable. They are rigid in their outlook, frigid in their lovelessness, conforming to the approval and disapproval of others. Yet, in a strange paradox, they critically judge, blame, and bind those same others.

5. Anger.

But the worst is yet to come. For you see, something terrible is beginning to happen to the perfectionist. He may not realize it but deep in his heart a kind of anger is developing. A resentment against the oughts, against the Christian faith, against other Christians, against himself, but saddest of all, against God.

Oh, not that it's really against the true God. That's the sadness of it, that's what breaks my heart. The perfectionist is not against the gracious, loving, self-giving God who has come to us, who in Jesus Christ went all the way to the Cross at such cost. No, his resentment is against a caricature of a god who is never satisfied. A god whom he can never please no matter how hard he tries, no matter what he gives up or holds on to. This cruel god always ups the ante a little, always demands a bit more and says, “Sorry, that wasn't quite good enough.”

Anger against this kind of god seethes up in the perfectionist. Sometimes his anger is recognized and the whole wretched ought-tyranny is seen for what it is: a desperate satanic substitute for true Christian perfection. And sometimes the perfectionist can work through all this, find grace, and marvelously be set free.

6. Denial.

But too often the anger is not faced but denied. Because anger is considered a terrible sin, it is pushed down. And the whole mixture of bad theology, legalism and salvation by performance becomes a frozen Niagara. This is when deep emotional problems set in. Mood changes are so great and so terrible that such a person seems to be two different people at the same time.

Under the stress and the strain of trying to live with a self he can't like, a God he can't love, and other people he can't get along with, the strain can become too much. And one of two things can happen: either there is a breakaway or a breakdown.

The breakaway is so sad. Much of my time is spent in counselling people who used to be active Christians but who have now broken away. The breakaway just throws the whole thing over. He doesn't become an unbeliever. He believes with his head but he can't believe with his heart. Perfectionism is impossible to live up to. He's tried so many times and it made him so miserable that he just left it behind.

Others suffer a breakdown. The load is too heavy to bear, and they break under the weight. That's exactly what happened to Dr. Joseph R. Cooke, professor of anthropology at the University of Washington in Seattle. A brilliant Ph.D. and well trained in biblical theology, he became a missionary teacher to Thailand. But after a few years he left the mission field a broken man. A nervous breakdown left him no longer able to preach or teach or even to read his Bible. And as he put it, 'I was a burden to my wife and useless to God and to others' (Free for the Taking, Fleming Revell)"(p.86-90)....

Perfectionism is a constant and all-pervading feeling of never quite measuring up, never quite being or doing enough to please. To please whom? Everyone—yourself, others, and God.

Naturally, a lot of self-belittling and self-contempt goes along with it, together with a supersensitivity to the opinions, to the approval, and the disapproval of others. And all of this is accompanied by a cloud of guilt. The perfectionist almost has to feel guilty, if for nothing else, not feeling guilty about something!

Perfectionism produces a distorted picture of God with feelings of doubt, rebellion, and anger against a God you can never please. There is a cure for perfectionism in the graciousness of God who comes to us in Jesus Christ. But to experience this cure you need to accept the prescription for the process of healing.

The first step is to abandon all ideas of a quick cure. Don't let anyone delude you with the idea that a crisis cure will instantaneously heal you. In fact, part of the disease itself is to be always looking for a solution just around the corner. For perfectionism specializes in if-onlys: "If only I could I would be OK." How did you fill in the blank?

With a positive? "If only I could . . . read, pray, give, witness, serve?" Or with a negative? "If only I could give up . . .", "If only I could stop . . .", "If only I could quit..." "If only I could follow the four laws, or the three steps, or receive the two blessings, or get the one gift; surely that would do it!"

Every such desperate grasp for quick solutions is a search for magic, not miracle. Healing is a process; you didn't get to be a perfectionist overnight, and you will not be healed overnight either. It will involve a process of growth in grace, of reprogramming, and of healing in every level of your life.

You will need healing of your mind with its distorted concepts, healing of your feelings with their damaged emotions, healing of your perception with its downgrading evaluations, and healing of your relationships with all of their disruptive contradictions. You also need a deep, inner healing of your memories to blot out the destructive, slow-motion video replays that interfere with the way you live.

You may think this sounds like a pretty thorough overhauling. It is, and your submission to this process is the beginning of healing for perfectionism.

Not only will God and His grace be with you in every step of the healing process, but God will be pleased with you at every step of the process.

In the Bible the word grace is always woven into the presence of the Giver of grace. We should never use the word grace as if we were describing some kind of commodity that God dispenses. Grace means a gracious God coming to you. "My grace is sufficient" (2 Cor. 12:9). Not grace but "My grace."

One of Paul's favourite phrases was "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thes. 5:28; 2 Thes. 3:18). Grace is not a commodity but our Lord Himself, coming to us in His graciousness. A loving, gracious God accepts us as we are, offers Himself lovingly to us right here and now, not when we shape up.

God is as pleased with you when you are in this healing process as loving parents are when their child starts learning to walk.

Those are exciting days in a home, especially with the first child— the child stumbles, knocks over the furniture, may even bend the lamp a bit. But do the parents scold him, tell him how displeased they are because he isn't doing a perfect job?

Does Dad shout "You ought to do better than that, kid?" Does Mother chime in with, "That sure was a stupid step you took. No wonder you fell and hurt yourself?" Do you see how we so often have made God into a neurotic parent?

If Jesus were preaching His Sermon on the Mount, He might paraphrase this idea: "If you being evil know how to do that well when teaching your child to walk, how much more will the heavenly Father (love you) every step in your healing process." (See Matt. 7:11.) God will (love) you, every step of the way.

Let me suggest a prayer to go along with this, a prescription, to take as often as needed. "Thank You, Lord, that You are healing me according to Your perfect schedule." In this way you turn the process not into another form of irritation for your

perfectionism, or anger at your slow progress, but into a prayer of thanksgiving for His graciousness every step of the way.

Emotional problems often result from the kind of a god, the kind of people, the kind of life we saw, as we looked through the relational windows of our childhood. Most of us developed our concept feelings about our heavenly Father from our earthly mothers and fathers, and these feelings become so intertwined and confused. But the guilty and contradictory feelings are not the voice of God. They are often the continuing voice of Mother or Dad or Brother or Sister, or something internalized that puts pressure on us. Remember, most of our basic patterns for relating to other people come from the patterns of the relationships of our family(p.99-101)....

One of the most common parental family situations which produces perfectionism and depression is unpleaseable parents. Such parents give only conditional love which demands that certain standards are lived up to, top grades achieved, or the highest kind of performance met in athletics or in spiritual life. There is little or no affirmation and plenty of criticism. Even approval is conditional. Encouragement is given but only to stress the fact that 'you should have and could have done better'.... Unpleaseable parents and conditional love produce unreachable goals and unattainable standards....

It's not hard to see how such home situations are the breeding grounds for emotional cripples and perfectionists. Unpleaseable parents, unacceptable selfhood, unrealistic, unattainable standards, unclear signals, unendurable conflicts—all program people to the wrong kind of responses.

"Do you understand why healing is a process that needs time, effort, oftentimes the help of a counsellor, and always the supportive, loving fellowship of the body of Christ? How we need the affirmation, the support, and the ministry from fellow members of the body of Christ! James implies that in many cases the reprogramming, renewing, and healing process comes about only as we share with and pray for one another (James 5:16)(p.102-103)....

The healing process must include the courage to unmask the anger, bring it out before God, and put it on the Cross where it belongs. There will be no healing until it is acknowledged, confronted, and resolved. Resolution means forgiving every person involved in that hurt and humiliation; it means surrendering every desire for a vindictive triumph over that person; it means allowing God's forgiving love to wash over your guilt-plagued soul.

I was surprised to get a phone call many years ago from a professor in a Christian college. He remembered a statement I had made, while preaching a revival at his school.

He said, "I remember you saying, 'Whenever you experience a response on your part that is way out of proportion to the stimulus, then look out. You have probably tapped into some deeply hidden emotional hurt'(p.105-106)"...

Such basic inner resentment is really an anger against injustice and it cries out, "I was a victim. I had no choice. I didn't choose to be born. I didn't choose my parents. I didn't choose my brothers and sisters. I didn't choose my handicaps and my illness. I was a victim, and my hurts and my humiliations and my scars are unjust."

And we often see this hidden anger coming out in perfectionists who want to correct every mistake they see and set right all the wrongs of the world.

The place of healing for this damaged person is the Cross—the very peak of all injustice. In P.T. Forsythe's profound book, he calls the Cross “the justification of God” (The Justification of God, London, Independent Press). In the Cross God demonstrated His total identification with us in our undeserved suffering, as well as in our deserved punishment. Never was there more injustice than in that Cross. No one ever received more rejection than our Lord. His accusations, His trial, His crucifixion were all vastly unjust.

Never say, “God doesn't know what it is like to suffer” and never think that God allows us to suffer things that He has not been willing to bear Himself. He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter; all His rights were taken from Him; all His powers were suspended. The support of His friends was removed as they forsook Him and fled, while He was humiliated, stripped, mocked, ridiculed. “So you're the Son of God, huh? Well, come down and prove it if You are so great.”

As we look at the Cross, we begin to see how deeply Christ is the truth, and not just the bright, shiny, beautiful truth of God for all of us. His Cross is the ghastly, revolting truth about all of us—the truth about the envy and the hate and the lust and the selfishness and the rage that permeate this fallen, sinful world of human beings. The truth of life in this world came out in the crucifixion of the Son of God. Now we know that God understands what it is like to live in this kind of a world. He is the Wounded Healer, He is our High Priest who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities....

There is nothing you can share out of the agonizing hurts and depths and hates and rages of your soul that God has not heard. There is nothing you take to Him that He will not understand. He will receive you with love and grace (p.107-108)....

Satan's Deadliest Weapon

The biblical picture of Satan is quite different from the popular one. In the Bible he is not the comical creature of the cartoons, with horns, tail, and pitchfork, and ludicrously dressed in long red underwear. Rather, Satan is an adversary, who is clever, wily, and dangerous (1 Peter 5:8).

Because he is of the spirit world, Satan knows your weaknesses; he understands your infirmities and uses them to great advantage against you. The Bible doesn't speak as much of the power of Satan as of his extreme subtlety, trickery, and deceptiveness. He uses clever wiles and devices, stratagems and designs.

He knows how to exploit your weaknesses in the direction of discouragement, disappointment, failure, and abdication of the Christian life. He is spoken of as a roaring lion, prowling about trying to find somebody to devour (1 Peter 5:8). Paul wrote of the evil powers of darkness against which we fight (Eph. 6:12). And it is in the dark that we are easily attacked or deceived.

Some of the most powerful weapons in Satan's arsenal are psychological. Fear is one of these. Doubt is another. Anger, hostility, worry, and of course, guilt. Long-standing guilt is hard to shake off; it seems to hang on even after a Christian claims forgiveness and accepts pardoning grace.

An uneasy sense of self-condemnation hangs over many Christians, like a Los Angeles smog. They find themselves defeated by the most powerful psychological weapon that Satan uses against Christians. This weapon has the effectiveness of a deadly missile. Its name? Low self-esteem.

Satan's greatest psychological weapon is a gut-level feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, and low self-worth.

This feeling shackles many Christians, in spite of wonderful spiritual experiences, in spite of their faith and knowledge of God's Word. Although they understand their position as sons and daughters of God, they are tied up in knots, bound by a terrible feeling of inferiority, and chained to a deep sense of worthlessness.

There are four ways that Satan uses this deadliest of all of his emotional and psychological weapons, to bring defeat and failure into your life.

1. Low self-esteem paralyses your potential....

Jesus told a parable about the talents. The man with the one talent was immobilised by fear and feelings of inadequacy. Because he was so afraid of failure he didn't invest his talent, but buried it in the ground and tried to play it safe. His life was a frozen asset—frozen by fear of rejection by the master, fear of failure, fear of comparison to the other two who were making their investments, fear of taking a risk.

He did what a lot of people with low self-esteem do—nothing. And that's exactly what Satan wants for you as a Christian—that you will be so tied up that you are tied down, frozen, paralyzed, settling into a job and a life far below your potential.

2. Low self-esteem destroys your dreams....

One of the characteristics of Pentecost as prophesied by Joel and fulfilled in the Book of Acts, was that when the Holy Spirit was poured out, the young would see visions and the old would dream dreams (Acts 2:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to dream bold dreams, to see visions of what God wants to do for us and in us, and especially through us.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18) Yes, and with the wrong kind of vision about yourself, with a low-esteeming picture of yourself as inferior and unable, you will surely self-destruct. Your dreams will be destroyed and God's great plan for your life will not be fulfilled....

What happened to your dream? Where is the vision God put before you? What wrecked it? Your sins and transgressions and bad habits? I doubt it. Probably your dream has been delayed or destroyed because Satan tricked you into thinking of yourself as a grasshopper or a worm. And as a result, you never have realized your full potential as a son or a daughter of God. You've filled up with fears and doubts, inferiority, and inadequacy....

William Carey...expressed it this way: "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God."

That's the kind of divine dream that is destroyed by low self-esteem. Lack of faith in God is often fed by underestimating what He wants to do through you.

3. Low self-esteem ruins your relationships....

Once you become critical of the design, it isn't long until you feel resentful toward the Designer. This is how your concept of God becomes contaminated and your perception of how He feels about you gets all mixed-up, finally ruining your relationship with Him.

Low self-esteem also spoils your relationships with other people. Satan uses your nagging sense of inferiority and inadequacy to isolate you.

For the commonest way to cope with feelings of inferiority is to pull within yourself, to have as little contact with other people as you possibly can, and just occasionally to peek out as the rest of the world goes by.

Christ commanded us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. This implies that it is basic to Christian ethics and to interpersonal relationships for a Christian to have a healthy self-image.

You are able to give to others only when you have a proper and healthy opinion of yourself. When you devalue yourself, you become overly absorbed in and with yourself, and you don't have anything left over to give to others.

Who are the hardest people to get along with? Those who don't like themselves. Because they don't like themselves, they don't like others and they're hard to get along with. Low self-esteem wrecks interpersonal relationships more than anything else I know....

4. Low self-esteem sabotages your Christian service....

Did you ever notice that God doesn't choose superstars to do His work? Check it out, all the way from Moses—who lost no time in telling God about his stuttering, to Mama's boy Mark—who ran out on Paul and Barnabas. Paul was right when he said that not many wise and noble and terrific are chosen.

It seems that God takes people with shortcomings and infirmities, gives them work to do, and then supplies them with sufficient grace to do it. Not many wise, not many noble, not many supermen, not many wonderwomen are on this team (I Cor. 1:26-31).

The trouble is that your low self-esteem robs God of marvellous opportunities to show off His power and ability through your weaknesses. Paul said, 'Therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities.' Why? Because they gave God such a wonderful chance to show off His perfection (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Nothing sabotages Christian service more than thinking so little of yourself that you never really give God a chance(p.51-58)....

A person's self-concept is a system of feelings and concepts he has constructed about himself. There are four sources from which we get our self-concepts.

The first is the outer world....

From this outer world we see pictures and feelings about ourselves reflected in the mirrors of family members. We decide who we are from our earliest system of relationships—by how we are treated and loved and cared for, and the language of relationships that we learn as we are growing up.

The second source is the world within us, the physical, emotional, and spiritual equipment that we bring into the world.

This includes our senses, our nerves, our capacity to learn, to register, to respond. For some of us, the world within includes handicaps, deformities, and defects....

Satan is a third source, and we have already considered him as a source of our low self-esteem.

Satan uses our feelings of self-despising as a terrible weapon in three roles that he plays. Satan is a liar (John 8:44), the accuser (Rev. 12:10), and the one who blinds our minds (2 Cor. 4:4). In all three roles he uses inferiority, inadequacy and self-belittling to defeat Christians and prevent them from realizing their full potential as God's own children.

The fourth source for our self-concept is God. We now move from the problem of low self-image to the power for a new Christian self-image. We now turn away from the disease to its cure, for there are practical steps you can take toward the healing of your low self-esteem(p.75-77)....

Develop the picture of your worth and value from God, not from the false reflections that come out from your past.

The healing of low self-esteem really hinges on a choice you must make: Will you listen to Satan as he employs all the lies, the distortions, the put-downs, and the hurts of your past to keep you bound by unhealthy, unchristian feelings and concepts about yourself? Or will you receive your self-esteem from God and His word?

Here are some very important questions to ask yourself.

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God loves so deeply?

Don't say, "Well, I know God loves me, but I just can't stand myself." That's a travesty of faith, an insult to God and His love. It is the expression of a subtly hidden resentment against your Creator. When you despise His creation, you are really saying that you don't like the design or care much for the designer. You are calling unclean what God calls clean. You are failing to realize how much God loves you and how much you mean to Him.

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God has honoured so highly?

Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called children of God'(1 John 3:1, Phillips version). And that's not just what we're called. It's

what we are. "Oh, dear children of mine...have you realized it? Here and now we are God's children"(v.2, Phillips version). Do you think that when you consider God's son or daughter worthless and inferior. IS He pleased by your so-called humility?

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God values so highly?

How much does God value you? "In human experience it is rare thing for one man to give his life for another, even if the latter be a good man...Yet the proof of God's amazing love is this: that while we were sinners that Christ died for us...We may hold our heads high in God's love" (Rom. 5:7-8,11, Ph.Ver.). God has declared your value. You are someone whom God values so highly as to give the life of His own dear Son to redeem you.

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone whom God has provided for so fully?

"How much more shall your Father which is heaven give good things?"(Matt. 7:11) "God shall supply all your need"(Phil. 4:19). This doesn't sound as if He wants you to be self-loathing or to feel inadequate...

- What right have you to belittle or despise someone in whom God delights?

The Apostle Paul said that we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Do you remember the Father's words at the baptism of Jesus? "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Paul gives us a daring thought: we are "in Christ". He used the phrase some ninety times. You are in Christ, therefore you are in the Beloved. God looks at you in Christ and says to you, "You are my beloved son, you are beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased."

From where will you get your idea of yourself? From distortions of your childhood? From past hurts and false ideas that have been programmed into you?

Or will you say, "No, I will not listen to those lies from the past any longer. I will not listen to those lies from the past any longer. I will not listen to Satan, the liar, the confuser, the blinder who twists and distorts. I am going to listen to God's opinion of me, and let Him reprogram me until His loving estimate of me becomes a part of my life, right down to my innermost feelings"(p.80-81).

The Healing Of Memories

In David Seamands book "Healing for Memories" he goes into the counselling techniques used in the healing of memories. Rather than quote at length from that book I would like to now quote a summary of that material that appears in another very fine book that he has written called "Putting Away Childish Things". In that book he writes:

I remember that Sunday evening service in 1966 when with great fear and hesitation I preached on theme, 'The Holy Spirit and the Healing of Our Damaged Emotions.' I doubt if I have preached another sermon God has seen fit to use as much as that one. The tapes have gone all over the world and have been the means of bringing release to people held captive by their emotions....

As far as I can discover, the phrase 'the healing of the memories' began with Agnes Sanford, an amazing Episcopalian lady whom God has used so miraculously in a healing ministry all around the world. The term is hers, but the basic idea is an old one which has long been used by Christian counsellors and psychologists....

The obvious place to begin with this troublesome inner child of the past is where he really makes himself felt—in our memories. It might be tempting to go off on a high-sounding tangent to discuss the unconscious mind, but personally, I think we have overdone this a bit. At most, I like to talk about the subconscious mind or perhaps a preconscious mind.

I think the reason for overemphasis on the unconscious is to find an excuse, an escape from responsibility for our own wrong behaviour....Although you may not be able to recall at will, anything that ever crossed your path lives in your memory. It is filed in the storeroom of your mind. This is both wonderful and terrible. It is both the misery and the grandeur of being a human....

Long ago I discovered the amazing power of the subconscious part of my mind in helping me prepare sermons. I have found that if weeks and months in advance, I feed certain basic ideas into my mind—a title, a brief outline, some thought of what I want to say—then the preacher doesn't simply work on the sermon. The sermon also works on the preacher! My subconscious mind is always occupied with that sermon, even when I'm busy with other duties....

But the subconscious mind can also be a tormentor, for it contains tremendous power for producing evil and misery. This especially relates to painful childhood memories. In trying to push them out of our minds, we actually bury them deeper and deeper, until they no longer can find a way out. As a result, the intense emotions we experienced but did not express at the time the hurt occurred, have no way of being expressed now. Burned alive within our hearts, they retain amazing persistence and explosive power.

While we may think we are free of those apparently forgotten torments, this is not the case, for submerged memories cannot be stored away in peace in the same way that the mind files pleasant memories. Instead, we have to keep closing the door again and again, refusing to let these painful memories into our conscious minds. Since they can't enter through the door of our minds; they disguise themselves and try to smuggle into our personalities through another door.

The great effort required to keep these memories below the surface of the conscious mind is a constant drag on our energy. Some of us are as tired when we get up in the morning as when we went to bed at night, even though we have had eight hours of sleep. Why? All night long the battle has been raging in the depths of our personalities, causing a constant drain on our energies.

Many people live with the unresolved tensions of painful memories for years, during which the load increases. If such a person comes to the end of his endurance and finds his energies depleted, he becomes a prime candidate for an emotional crisis. If he is further weakened by physical exhaustion, illness, or traumatic shock, and then if some experience takes place which associates itself with a painful event of the past, those hidden memories he has so long tried to bury are awakened and reactivated.

When the dormant inner child of the past is thus aroused, he can take over the person's attitudes, reactions, outlook, and behaviour. The submerged emotions rise up and express themselves in feelings of deep depression, rage, uncontrollable lust, inferiority, fear, loneliness and rejection.

These painful memories are not automatically evicted or transformed by an experience of conversion or even by the filling of the Holy Spirit. They are not necessarily changed by growth in grace. In fact, these memories are often great hindrances to spiritual growth. And until a person receives deliverance from them, he does not really mature. It is as if one part of his person is in a deep freeze, or in a time machine. His body matures and his mind develops but that one particular area is still frozen. He remains a little boy, she is still a little girl, locked into that childhood stage of life.

Unfortunately these memories do not seem to be reached by our ordinary levels of prayer. Sometimes prayer seems to make the pain even worse. You feel you are in quicksand: the more you fight and struggle, the deeper you sink. I believe this situation calls for a special kind of shared praying and healing. The confusing thing is that often there is nothing wrong with the person in his present life. Not understanding this, Christian friends have been known to berate such people by saying, "There is sin in your life" or, "You are guilty of some transgression."

Such people are made to feel guilty about disobedience to God, when just the opposite may be true. Sometimes they are the finest, most sincere Christians who are trying the hardest. They read and pray and struggle with their hangups. Their friends give them Scripture verses, books, and lots of advice. All this only adds to their agony, so they become disillusioned and sometimes despair of life.

Please don't berate a person like this! There is nothing wrong with his present adult mind. His commitment to Christ is clear, his surrender as complete as he knows how to make it. The trouble is in the child he used to be, who still lives within him, repressed and crushed down into the mind, and unexpressed until something causes it to rise up and take over.

What is to be done in this kind of situation? Often what is required is prayer for the healing of memories - the healing of that little child or teenager who underwent certain experiences which made him stop growing, experiences which imprisoned him, froze him at one stage in his growth.

All those memories need to be offered to God in a prayer for healing, so that the person can be freed from his pain and compulsion.

You may ask, 'What happens then? Will he no longer remember? Will the memories be erased?' Certainly not! But the power of the emotions which surround those memories - the sting, the pain, the fear, the hate, the hurt, the

lust—will be broken. As we kartegeo them, they will lose their propulsive significance. They will be devitalized, no longer effective and operative in the adult life.

Someone add, 'How is this possible? After all, those childhood experiences are gone. They took place many, many years ago. How can our prayers today possibly affect that inner child of the longest past? It doesn't make sense.' To which I reply in the words of Jesus, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scripture, or the power of God'(Matthew 22:29).

For you see, Scripture over and over again emphasizes that Jesus Christ transcends time. 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever,' (Hebrews 13:8). John the Baptist, talking about Jesus, said, 'Here is the One I was speaking about when I said that although He would come after me He would always be in front of me; for He existed before I was born'(John 1:15, PH). The Jews mockingly said to Jesus one day, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am'(John 8:57-58, ASV).

Jesus of Nazareth is the everlasting Christ who broke through the time barrier and entered history. He lived within our time for thirty-three earthly years. But time is a finite concept. It is the way you and I experience reality—in pieces, in parts. We divide time into past, present, and future. But Christ transcends all of time. 'Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God . . . for a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by' (Psalm 90:2, 4).

Thus our Lord is not restricted by time. He is our eternal contemporary who can walk back through time to minister to that hurting little child. Jesus can gather him into His loving arms, comforting and loving that child who so desperately wanted to be loved but never was. He can understand that little child who so intensely sought to be understood, but never was. He can reassure that child with the unconditional, accepting love he so acutely needed but never experienced. He can forgive that guilt, shame-filled little child the way he so deeply wanted to be forgiven back then, encouraging him and replacing the feelings of condemnation and dirtiness with virtue and cleanness. Yes, Jesus, the tender and everlasting Shepherd, can gather the lambs into His arms and heal their tormented, thorn-filled memories.

My experience is that the inner child of the past which most needs healing is usually one of four kinds: he is the hurting child, the hating child, the humiliated child, or the horrified child.

The memories that seem to grip and grind us, that have an almost hypnotic sway and power over us, are memories of deep emotional pain, resentment, hate, fear, or embarrassment. Sometimes it is a terrible mixture of all these.

With increasing frequency, some form of sexual abuse is mingled with the memories - violation, homosexuality, betrayal, or incest. And so some people, who in their present lives are very sincere Christians, experience a near hypnotic, propulsive and compulsive lust in their lives. Their imaginations paint terrible pictures on the walls of their minds, driving them into guilt and depression, and almost to self-destructive actions. Or, they have deep-seated distrust and revulsion toward sex which prevents them from having meaningful relationships with their spouses.

I want to share some experiences I have had with people, in prayers for the healing of the memories. Mike was a committed christian, a leader among youth, a dedicated Sunday School teacher who was much loved by all his students. Yet he had a deep inner struggle in his spiritual life, for he could never quite believe that God loved him. Every once in a while feelings of rage, bitterness, and lust would get hold of Mike. These would be followed by guilt, depression, and a feeling that God had forsaken him and was far away.

We counselled together several times and tried all the ordinary ways of praying, but there was no real deliverance. So one day I explained to Mike the concept of the healing of memories. I loaned him some books and tapes and asked him to write down the most troublesome and hurtful memories which came to mind as he read and listened.

Finally, when I thought he was ready for this special time of prayer, we met for an undisturbed and unhurried time of openness to the Holy Spirit. We entered into an open, conversational kind of prayer in which we just talked to each other and to God, remembering that He was right there in the room.

As we did this, several pictures arose in Mike's mind, one of which was a very binding, grinding, and searing scene. This memory was central to his childhood, so dominant that he still had repeated nightmares about the event. Mike's father was well-meaning and sincere, but a very harsh disciplinarian. To punish Mike whenever he did any childish wrong his father would shut him up inside a little room in the barn. There he would strap him severely until Mike was screaming for mercy, crying for his mother and his brothers and sisters to come and let him out. He'd run for the door of the team, but his father would get there first and stand at the door barring the way. He would then order Mike, 'Say you're sorry.' He would repeat this over and over again, until the hysterical little boy would finally say he was sorry. Then his father would force Mike to embrace and kiss him.

As we prayed together and as Mike began to bring this memory to the Lord in prayer, he started to relive the emotion of it. All the resentment, hurt, and terrifying fear came into his voice. I didn't know what to say or how to pray, so I waited on the Spirit for guidance, asking Him to pray in me and through me.

All of sudden it came to me. As I was praying, I saw little Mike. We were confined together in that horrible barn. And I realized that emotionally Mike was still in the barn, that he had never gotten outside the door. He had lived in that team for fifteen years without getting around his father and out of the door. Inside himself he was still screaming, still hysterical with fear, still burning with rage. When I began to pray, I believe it was in the spirit of Romans 8:26-27, where we are told the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us.

"Lord Jesus, we are in the barn together. Take this little boy in your arms, dry his tears, quiet his fears, cleanse away his hate. But, O Lord, above all, open the door and let him out."

When I said that, he began to sob uncontrollably. I continued, "Lord, Mike has never seen the blue sky. He has never lived in Your love and freedom. He is still locked in the barn. Open the door now, and let him out - set him free."

While we were praying, it happened. It seemed Jesus rolled back the carpet of time and walked right into that barn. He took frightened little Mike in His arms and comforted him, loved him, and healed him. All the scars and the wounds were washed with the Balm of Gilead. Then we saw the door opening and Jesus talking that frightened, hurt, hate-filled lad out of the barn and into the clear blue sky and clean air of God's love.

I used to wonder along with Nicodemus who asked, "Can a man really be born again when he gets old?" New birth for young people we can understand - it seems much simpler for them. But let me tell you about Anne, a married woman in her middle forties, who came to see me after one of my meetings. She had several teenage children. Her marriage was about to break up because of her terrible inner conflicts and the way she was taking them out on her family.

As we counselled together, I saw that she was a deeply sincere woman who had spent many hours praying about her problem. We talked several times and I loaned her some books to read. Those helped her to open up and share with me many things she had never before talked about.

When I thought Anne was ready, we had our time of healing prayer together. She lifted up to God her awful childhood and teenage memories. She had an abusive alcoholic father who made several advances toward her, broke up the home, and then committed suicide.

We prayed for the deepest possible healing of those childhood memories and the cleansing of all her twisted emotions. Nothing seemed to happen when we prayed together. I didn't see her for about two weeks. Then she told me this most amazing story, and we knew God had answered our prayers.

It happened this way: about a week after we had prayed, she awoke very early one morning. She couldn't get back to sleep, so she lay in bed and began to pray. She said it was as if Christ Himself came into the bedroom, called her and said, "Come, Anne, take My hand. I want us to walk back through your life."

"'Lord, I couldn't stand it again. It was so hard when I told the pastor.'

"'Anne, this time is going to be different. I am going to be with you each step of the way.'

Anne then described that walk with Jesus in a most unusual fashion. The two of them were in a great art gallery where each painful incident was a picture on the wall. As Jesus led her they would stand before each vivid memory, like looking at a painting. And as she looked at them one by one, all the original emotions she had experienced swept over her.

Once more she relived the fear, the pain, the shame, and the rage connected with those ghastly memories. Each time she would weep bitter tears and each time an inner voice would say, "My child, just turn it over to Me; forgive everyone involved and receive forgiveness for your own hate and rage." As she surrendered each memory to the Lord it was as if Jesus reached up and took down that particular picture.

This went on for several hours until finally, when she looked around, all the pictures had been taken down and the walls of her mind were clean and whole. The scalding bitterness and poisonous fangs had been removed from those destructive memories.

That dramatic experience was many years ago and, although there was a lot of reprogramming which had to be done as a follow-up, it was clearly the beginning of her healing. A subsequent medical and psychiatric report confirmed this. Her deliverance and transformation has been a source of joy to her husband and family and to those who work with her.

Both Mike and Anne needed healing for childhood and teenage memories. However, many times the painful memory is more recent, a part of an adult life. This is especially true of some of the traumas surrounding our modern tragedies involving sex, violence, and the sense of betrayal in a divorce. The same principles apply and bring about release and healing when often the ordinary means of prayer do not. The best biblical example of this is the way Jesus handled Peter's denial and restoration.

These are the only two places in the New Testament where the word for 'a charcoal fire' is used. Surely this is more than a coincidence. It is obvious that Jesus deliberately set the stage for His conversation with Peter on the beach that post-Resurrection morning. Peter had denied Him three times while standing near a charcoal fire in the high priest's courtyard. Now he would be asked to affirm his love and loyalty three times.

Everyone knows this part, but the fact that Jesus staged the conversation by asking Peter to relive the very setting of his denial seems to be overlooked. Surely the memory of those courtyard coals had been burning like fire in the conscience and memory of Peter.

The Master Psychiatrist led Peter to his most traumatic memory, and used a charcoal fire to cauterize and heal Peter's pain and shame. With the sting removed, Peter would be able to use that burning memory not as a curse which crippled, but as a spark to ignite him to an even deeper devotion, even unto death.

I know this may all sound much too simple - like a shortcut. It is not meant to be a cure-all, for this type of healing prayer doesn't apply to everybody. However, it does apply to some. The difference is perhaps a difference of degree in our lives. I am trusting the Holy Spirit will apply it to those who need this deeper kind of healing experience.

While this experience can take place when you are by yourself, it doesn't usually happen that way. I believe it is the kind of healing spoken about by James in his epistle. "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (5:16).

Healing of the memories usually requires a very deep openness and sharing with another person, and then the prayer of faith by that other person for you on your behalf. You see, you are so intricately involved in the whole matter that you may be unable to reach the inner layers of the child of your past.

You should spend time preparing yourself and in reaching an openness to the Holy Spirit for new insights and the courage to surrender your defenses. This kind of praying should take place with someone you trust and respect, and whom you believe can pray the prayer of faith on your behalf.

It is often helpful to write out a list of the areas in your life that need to be cleansed and healed - anything that raises to bother you, memories that have powerful emotional overtones. Omit nothing, however insignificant petty, or even foolish it may seem, as you open your heart to the probing scalpel of the Holy Spirit. Don't be surprised at what comes to your mind.

Paul Tournier says this inward examination is like entering a dark room. At first your eyes see only the most evident and the prominent objects, and you say, "Oh, there's only a table and a chair." But as your eyes become more accustomed to the dark, you begin to realize the whole room is filled with an amazing clutter of objects. Don't be afraid. Relax in the Spirit. Thank Him for every new insight, however painful.

Pray with someone in whom you have confidence, one who knows how to really pray the prayer of faith. Conversational prayer together with that person and with the Lord is easiest and best. Confess to God every feeling, every emotion you experience as you relate these memories. If you remember anything new, interrupt and share it at once, for it is the Spirit taking you to a deeper level of your mind that may need healing.

Remember that Christ is alive. He is here now. And because He transcends time, He is also back at that painful experience. Confess to Him, turn over to Him each experience, each emotion, each attitude. Let Him love and comfort and forgive you. Let Him cleanse your hates and comfort your hurts and disinfect your lusts and remove your fears. Then specifically forgive others their trespasses as He also forgives you. Let Christ's love take the place of hate. Let Christ's strength take the place of hurt feelings and self-pity. Don't be in a hurry. Allow plenty of time for undisturbed, unhurried prayer.

If you are the one who is praying the prayer of faith for others, let the Holy Spirit melt your spirit with theirs. It is not easy work. Baron van Hugel talked about the "neural cost of intercessory prayer." Such prayer is demanding and exhausting. Let the Lord fill you with understanding and empathy so you can feel the same sorrow, anger, hurt, and fear. In this way the Spirit can pray through you, putting the very words in your mouth. If the Spirit leads you in the spirit of James 5, lay hands on them, even anoint them with oil. Prayerfully and carefully obey the Spirit without embarrassment or fear. Your feelings at this time are not as important as your trusting faith.

Your friend may not have much faith so you may need to have enough faith for both of you. It was when the four disciples let the paralyzed man down through the roof before Jesus that He saw their faith and healed the man (Luke 5:19-20). Jesus said to Jairus about his sick daughter, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed" (Luke 8:50, NIV). In these and other instances, faith on behalf of another brought healing.

Finally, don't dictate to the Holy Spirit as to how He is accomplish His work. It may take several such prayers, as the Spirit away one layer at a time. It may happen on the spot in a great rush of victory and release. It may come about several days or even

weeks later. It may happen by leading that person to another healing experience - never mind, God will answer the prayer of faith for that person (p.20-31)."

The healing of emotions and memories is all about squaring the ledger - balancing the ledger in our mind through forgiving others, genuinely receiving and accepting forgiveness from God and, as a result of that, forgiving oneself.

By forgiving others we write off the debt they owe us in our minds for sins and hurts to us that may have been horrific and excruciating. We no longer stew over wanting our pound of flesh.

If we have been the instrument of such horrific sins and painfully embarrassing moments we accept the forgiveness that God plainly offers in His word for our sins and this makes it possible to forgive ourselves.

The healing of memories technique is where we seek the miraculous intervention of God's spirit to help us to forgive others and forgive ourselves when such forgiveness either way is almost impossible for us to do of ourselves because of the extreme pain associated with those incidents and memories.

It releases you of the COMPULSION to have to make up for whatever you have done wrong - to pay a debt you may never be able to pay back.

You still have to deal with the consequences and with your actions make up the best you can to those you have wronged, but, though you are giving back to others through your actions, you are not crushed emotionally by the weight of guilt and the compulsion to make up for the wrong.

You do make up the best you can to those you may have wronged but it is not a compulsion and if you fall short in your actions it doesn't trouble you or feel like a debt if you've done the best that you can. The healing of emotions and memories is an ongoing process but it does work!

In summary let's again look at those broad principles for the healing of emotions:

1) Face your problem squarely.

With ruthless moral honesty and with God's grace, confront that awful, hidden childhood memory, however deep the feelings within you. Acknowledge it to yourself, and acknowledge it to another human being, if need be.

Some problems can never be solved until you confess them to others. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (Jam. 5:16). Some people miss deep inner healing because they lack the courage to share deeply with another person.

2) Accept your responsibility in the matter.

Heredity, environment, all the things experienced in childhood, from parents, teachers, playmates, all of life's handicaps - all of these things are on one side of the loom, and they pass the shuttle to you. But remember, you pass the shuttle back through the loom. And this action, together with your responses, weaves the design in the tapestry of your life. You are responsible for your actions. You will never receive healing for your damaged emotions until you stop blaming everyone else and accept your responsibility.

3) Ask yourself if you want to be healed.

Do you really want to be healed, or do you just want to talk about your problem? Do you want to use your problem to get sympathy from others? Do you just want it for a crutch, so that you can walk with a limp?

4) Forgive everyone who is involved in your problem.

Facing responsibility and forgiving people are really two sides of the same coin. The reason some people have never been able to forgive is that if they forgave, the last rug would be pulled out from under them and they would have no one to blame. Facing responsibility and forgiving are almost the same action; in some instances you need to do them simultaneously. Jesus made it very plain that no healing occurs until there is deep forgiveness.

5) Forgive yourself.

So many Christians say, "Yes, I know that God has forgiven me, but I can never forgive myself". This statement is a contradiction of terms. How can you really believe that God has forgiven you, and then not forgive yourself? You have no right to dredge up anything that God has forgiven and forgotten. He has put it behind His back. Through an inscrutable mystery, divine omniscience has somehow forgotten your sins. You CAN forgive yourself.

6) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what your real problem is, and how you need to pray.

Paul said that often we do not know how to pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26). But the Holy Spirit prays in and through us, and makes intercession for us. Sometimes the Holy Spirit uses a temporary assistant in the form of human counsellor who can help us to perceive what the real problem is. Sometimes the Spirit is able to do this through God's Word or through some incident in life that suddenly makes us aware of our real problem.

When we do know what is at the heart of the matter we may need the miraculous intervention of God's spirit to help us to forgive others and forgive ourselves when such forgiveness either way is almost impossible for us to do of ourselves because of the

extreme pain associated with those incidents and memories. Through the prayer of faith James spoke about you can be healed emotionally!

One of the finest books that I have found that discuss the subject of balance is "Between Two Truths" by Kline Snodgrass. He covers a number of topics relating to the subject of balance such as pride and humility, strength and weakness, authority and submission, whether God is passive or active, being in the world but not of it and unity and diversity. I'd like to quote at length from his book regarding some of these topics. He writes:

PRIDE AND HUMILITY

Few areas of tension are more obvious than that of pride and humility. Both words have positive and negative connotations. We know that pride is the essence of sin, and yet we also know that we should take pride in our achievements and in ourselves. Humility is considered a laudable virtue worthy of saints, but the word conjures up unappealing images of a self-effacing person grovelling in the dust....

What is the origin of pride. Pride emerges from the legitimate and necessary desire to show that our lives have value. That is why we use the word positively, for example, in saying we take 'pride' in our work.

We mean that we have shown we can do something of value. Pride becomes twisted, however, because we think that a personal asset or accomplishment gives us more value.

Pride is the result of our thinking that our concerns, desires, and accomplishments are more important than those of other people.

Like the disciples of Jesus who kept asking "Who is the greatest?" (Luke 22:24), we are not content with value, but desire superiority. Pride is no longer a feeling of accomplishment, but an estimation of ourselves as more valuable than someone else. Life then becomes dominated by the attempt to prop up that estimation (p.56-57)....

Despite Paul's concern to prevent boasting about Christian leaders, elsewhere he speaks of legitimate boasting. Quoting Jeremiah 9:24, Paul writes, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:31). God's salvation precluded human boasting. You cannot boast about anything human, but you can "boast in the Lord."

Much of Paul's "boasting" theology is lost because translations often use a word like 'rejoice' for those places where Paul uses the word boastings positively (see Rom. 5:2-3, 11). He rejected any attempt to boast "in the flesh," meaning in anything that is merely human.

But he eagerly boasted about a variety of things the Lord has done. For example, he boasted in the cross (Gal. 6:14), the future glory of God and his present working in afflictions (Rom. 5:2-3), and the willingness of the Corinthians to assist monetarily (2 Cor. 9:2). Christians are even referred to as those who boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3).

Similarly, Paul rejected a negative idea of commending himself (2 Cor. 3:1; 5:12; 10:12, 18), but he had a positive view of self-commendation in view of what God accomplished in or through him (2 Cor. 4:2; 6:4; 7:11).

So what can we conclude about pride? There is a legitimate drive for us to do acts of value, but neither those acts nor any assets we possess give us value. We must reject the whole process of trying to find true value in ourselves. Only God has abiding significance and value. Therefore, the only legitimate foundation for boasting is God and His activity in Christ. We overestimate what we are to our own peril. In doing so, we turn from that which has real value to an illusion.

On the other hand, there is also a danger in underestimating what we are in Christ. Self-depreciation is just as much a problem as pride. On hearing that our righteous acts are like “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6), people too often conclude that they are of no value. Knowing that pride is sin, we have driven ourselves into the arms of a false humility that is really self-effacement (p.60-61)....

In our attempts to be humble we have ended up telling lies about ourselves, saying we cannot do things that we certainly can do well. Why would a corporate executive feel that he cannot pray in public?....Our efforts at humility have led to self-effacement to the extent that we are unable to receive compliments. Our most common reaction to a compliment is to deny its validity....We are insignificant when viewed apart from God, but when viewed in relation to God we possess extreme value (p.61-62)....

Having a proper self-understanding did not stop Paul from having a very robust view of the importance of his ministry. He took a back seat to no one. (Read, for example, Gal. 1-2, Rom. 15, or 1 Cor. 3-4.) On the other hand, Paul referred to himself as the least of the saints (Eph. 3:8) and as the least of the apostles because he had persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:9). But even his persecution of the church did not lead to self-depreciation, for he went on to make one of the most freeing statements ever made: “By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been without effect” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Our defects and failures are not causes for self-depreciation, and our strengths and accomplishments are not the basis for pride. All we are, we are by God's grace.

This is the basis of our freedom, service, and unity. Grace should never be used as an excuse for us to do nothing; it is an excuse for just the opposite! We are responsible to see that grace has its effect in our lives (p.66-67)....

Our self-understanding must be derived from our relation to God. We should not overestimate our own importance as if we were the centre of the universe and all things revolved around us. By ourselves, we are nothing, a soon-to-be-wilted flower. On the other hand, we should not underestimate ourselves, for we have been given ‘all things’ by our relationship to God. To borrow Paul's words, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Blaise Pascal expressed our tension this way:

“The knowledge of God without that of man's misery causes pride. The knowledge of man's misery without that of God causes despair. The knowledge of Jesus Christ

constitutes the middle course, because in him we find both God and our misery. Jesus Christ is a God whom we may approach without pride, and before whom we humble ourselves without despair”(Pensees, 526-27).

Give up trying to be superior and be faithful instead. Reject messages of inferiority, even internal ones; grace says that it does not matter. By the grace of God, we are what we are! That is a proper self-understanding and a foundation for meaningful life (p67-68)....

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

We are driven to prove ourselves strong and competent, and we should, for God has created us to be capable. At the same time, our capabilities are limited, and life sometimes appears to be too big a challenge. We need to prove ourselves, but we are also afraid of failure.

We are always vulnerable to failure, and as we age, vulnerability increases. We know we have limitations, but God seems to call us past our limitations. Jeremiah complained that he was too young to be a prophet and could not speak, but God called him anyway. We are caught between the fear of failure and the need to prove, between awareness of our weakness and God's call to serve with strength....

The Bible ultimately is about competent living. Like Joshua, we are called to be strong and courageous (1:6). Whether through laws, proverbs, parables, or promises, the Bible in effect says, “This is the way; walk in it and please God.” But what the Bible has to say about competent living is sometimes disconcerting. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 12:10 we read, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” Once again we are confronted with the fact that scripture's point of view is dramatically opposed to human common sense. Misunderstanding of the dynamics of strength and weakness is rampant even among Christians (p.70-71)....

Misunderstanding prevents competent living. Either we overestimate or undervalue our capabilities. Some people reduce the words of Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things in the one empowering me,” to, “I can do all things.” Their attitude is that they can handle life—with or without God.

We tend to be aware of God only when we need him. Then having used all the right language about God, we presumptuously expect him to do our bidding. But God does not work that way.

The truth is that none of us is competent for all of life. We deceive ourselves by ignoring our frailty and limitations. We have forgotten the words of Jesus: “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We can live a life that looks competent, but competent living does not come from our attempts to prove competence and hide incompetence. In the final analysis, we have only avoided the areas of weakness and difficulty.

Without God any competence we have—even though it is itself a gift from God—is limited and temporary.

Other people make the opposite error. They take Jesus' words, "Apart from me you can do nothing," and abbreviate them to, "I can do nothing." Too many people view themselves as weak and incompetent. Jesus' words do not imply that those without Christ cannot accomplish anything. It is quite obvious that those who do not know Christ can be creative, productive, wise, helpful, loving, and capable in many areas.

Bearing fruit is the subject under discussion in John 15. What the text means is that no person can accomplish anything in connection with the purposes of Christ apart from Christ.

The text does not mean that we are inherently incapable and weak, but amazingly that is exactly what a good number of people, especially Christians, say about themselves. Nothing is more devastating to competent living—to authentic relations, to love, to learning, and to productivity—than a negative self-image. The truth is that we are both weak and strong. We live with both realities (p.71-73)....

Paul placed no value on his accomplishments or standing in his community. Rather, he considered all things as loss to gain Christ (Phil. 3:4-8). However, it is one thing to refuse to place value on accomplishments or standing, and it is quite another to have no accomplishments or standing.

Three factors render people incompetent. First, they fight the wrong battles.

They put all their energy and time in figuring out more and more elaborate ways for not facing the very area they need to confront. This is merely a 'defence mechanism' to avoid the truth. It is like worrying whether your paper clips are in order instead of dealing with the tough issues of your job. Churches worry about their organizational structure and programs and never get around to expressing and living the gospel. Life must be focused on issues and problems that really count. To live competently requires the wisdom to determine what needs to be done and the honesty to deal with it directly.

Second, some people are incompetent because they are not willing to expend the energy required to succeed.

They are too passive and lazy. Pascal commented that pride and laziness are the twin sources of all vices (Pensees, 435). He added that the gospel drives both out. It is impossible to serve God and be lazy.

Third, some people are rendered incompetent because others have convinced them that they are incompetent.

People were not born with self-doubts. They were taught along the way. These people were given a negative self-image by abuse (whether sexual, physical, or emotional) or neglect. They were not given the grace and help needed to learn to be what God had called them to be (p.74-75)....

The only way out of such a quagmire of self-doubt is to begin to take seriously one of the first things we learn from reading scripture: that it was God who created us, that he declared his creation good, and that he created us in his image.

God does not create incompetence. We are competent enough. We have the value and abilities God created us to have. That does not mean we can do anything we wish, nor does it mean that we all are equally capable. People do have varying levels of ability.

But we can focus on the tasks appropriate to God's leading, and we can work to prepare ourselves to perform those tasks. And so, by God's grace, we show ourselves to be competent (p.75)...

AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

When we speak of authority, we are referring to the communication of power to achieve a particular belief or action by others. This power might be expressed by example and reasoned argument, as with Jesus, or it might be expressed by coercive force, as with Pilate. It might be something as simple as a mother explaining how the toothpaste ought to be squeezed or as complex as the president running a nation. But in each case someone is exercising some type of power, whether rightly or wrongly, to affect the behaviour of others.

There are various kinds of authority: authority based on knowledge, on physical force, on charismatic attraction, on position, or on financial clout. Authority may be shared so that it is exercised by various people at different times, or it may be limited to a select few. But wherever people are together, power is being communicated, and therefore authority is being exercised.

In addition to power, legitimate authority contains a second component: the idea of right. When authority is valid, it has the right to exercise power. We need both aspects of authority: right and power. The problem is that too often we find those who have the right but not the power, and those who have the power but not the right. The first results in inept leadership; the latter results in abusive leadership.

However we express it, we all exercise some form of authority. We may not be someone else's boss, but we have responsibility for other people, which requires the communication of authority. Parents have authority— for good or ill. Teachers have authority—whether the teaching is formal or informal, and all of us teach much more frequently than we are aware. When we drive a car or run some type of machine we are expressing a kind of authority. We cannot escape authority—our own or that of others, and there is nothing inherently evil in it. Without authority there is anarchy.

But authority does get abused. In this world, authority mixes with our sin and pride and gets expressed as, “I get to be boss. I am up; you are down. You have to submit to me and do what I say.”

The real dangers and abuses of authority come when it is viewed as a personal possession. “I have the authority; therefore I will do what I want. I am the one in control here. I don't have to listen to anyone.” Such attitudes inevitably lead to disaster.

Even so, people often submit to such authority out of self-interest—if they are paid enough or if they feel they must submit to maintain order or preserve their own

safety. Too often, authority and submission are both ways of seeking the best for ourselves in view of the circumstances.

Contrary to what some people think, authority is not obliterated in Christianity. Jesus appointed twelve persons with special functions. The early church appointed elders, deacons, and a variety of other leaders. Where people lead and coordinate or take responsibility and accomplish tasks, authority is being expressed (p.83-84)....

We find that in Christ we are moved to a different spectrum—this time to one where authority and submission function differently from how they function in the world.

The authority of Christians is an authority for others and not an authority over others.

Any authority that we have—whether within the family, the church, in our occupations, or in society—is not ours but God's, and has been given to us for ministry. This perspective puts many 'checks' on our expression of authority:

First, Christians should not claim authority in areas where they have neither the right nor the ability, since these are ways God leads us.

Second, there is no place within the body of Christ for being authoritarian, since our authority is not our own and because its expression should conform to Jesus' life and teaching.

Third, in Christ, authority does not lead to the denigration of people. If anything, it leads to a 'denigration' of the one in authority, for that person is made the servant of others (see 1 Cor. 4:9-13). Authority does not push one person up and other people down, since we are all one in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Fourth, our authority does not allow any room for pride or self-congratulation. Authority does not make us one bit better than we were without it.

Finally, and most important of all, authority is not a prize to be clutched or even sought after. The self-giving love of the Christ who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (Phil. 2:6) will not allow his followers to be so enamoured with status and position. They, too, must practice the same self-giving love.

The practice of authority that is really for others is far different from the authority we usually see. Such authority has no need to be defensive, and if wrongly attacked, defends itself by the character of the gospel. Such authority is quick to listen and recognize both the temporary character of its leadership and that the leadership is itself a gift of God's grace.

A person is not appointed chair of a church to enhance his or her ego....The chairperson is to provide leadership and coordination to the congregation but can do that only by listening and enabling people to do their jobs. If that does not happen, the chairperson fails.

This is not true merely for church leaders. As Max De Pree argues in his book *Leadership Is an Art*, these Christian principles are good business practices in the secular world (p.85-87)....

To speak of authority, however, is to speak of only half of the issue. There can be no authority without a corresponding submission....

Submission is not the same as obedience or doing someone else's will, and it certainly is not weakness. Submission by Christians means the voluntary surrender of one's rights or will in response to the purposes and actions of God. Closely related are the ideas of humility and agape love, by which Christians are willingly to give themselves in love to others.

Submission to each other is another way of identifying with the death of Christ. Thus, just as authority does not elevate, submission does not lower(p.87)....

Jesus' teaching raises some questions: How can a person lead if he or she always has to be submitting to everyone's requests? How can any of us submit when the actions or requests of the other person are wrong?

Submission does not mean that every request has to be honoured. Nor should wrong be ignored or tolerated. Jesus certainly did not tolerate wrong or become a doormat acquiescing to every request. Yet at the same time, he was willing to submit to the point that he died on a cross.

The gospel directs that we submit to others as an act of love and service. Any act of submission that is not in accordance with the gospel's understanding of love and service is invalid. The same is true for the use of authority. The gospel views authority as an act of service for others. In fact, submission and authority both function as self-giving love for others (p.88)....

The Bible's judgments on freedom do violence to many of our commonly held assumptions. Among other things, scripture reveals that those who strive to exercise their own freedom are actually slaves, that the church's 'rules'—when understood correctly—are actually expressions of freedom, and that we will never find freedom until we are enslaved to our proper Lord [The reason that this is so is because freedom in the above sentence is viewed in regard to freedom from bad consequences of hurt and disharmony in an organization – RW](p.128)....

Paul pointed out that people are slaves to whatever they give themselves to obey (Rom. 6:16; see also 2 Peter 2:19)....The issue is not whether we will be free, but which Lord we will serve. To think that we are free is only to be blind to the forces that manipulate us. Even as Christians who experience new birth in Christ, we are limited by the old age in which we live. Particularly, sin impinges on our freedom.

As Jesus said, "Everyone who does sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). If the sin is egotism, we will do service to needs for recognition. If the sin is sexual titillation, we will find ourselves pulled toward people, magazines, or movies that meet our need, and we will be hampered in relating freely to people of the opposite sex (p129)....

While other New Testament writers also speak of freedom, this message is most obvious in the writings of Paul, who is often called the "apostle of liberty." It was Paul's teaching on the freedom of Gentiles not to observe Jewish laws that led to his arrest. "For freedom Christ freed us" (Gal. 5:1) is Paul's summary of the gospel.

A glance at the theological words used for salvation shows how fitting such a summary is. All the salvation terms are freedom words. Justification means acquittal. Redemption refers to freedom or release that is obtained by the payment of a price (such as purchasing the freedom of a slave). Reconciliation expresses the end of hostilities. Salvation itself implies a rescue from danger.

Christian faith grants freedom because it involves a transfer of lordships. To live in Christ is to live in the sphere of his lordship. Only there may we have freedom. Only there are the various tyrannies broken. The ancient Greeks said that the key to freedom was “not caring.” If Jesus is Lord, we will be free because we will not care for the wrong things. We will not care about propping up our egos or fulfilling wrongful desires. When we care for his concerns, we are free to be what we were created to be.

So what does freedom in Christ look like? The biblical texts dealing with freedom sound paradoxical. They all contain words that seem to describe the opposite of freedom. “You were called to freedom, brothers, only not the freedom that leads to an occasion for the flesh; but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13; see also 1 Cor. 7:22).

In 1 Peter 2:16 Christians are directed to live “as free, but not using freedom as a cloak of evil, but rather to live as slaves of God.” James even wrote of the perfect law of liberty (1:25) which is fulfilled in loving one's neighbour as oneself (2:8). The fulfillment of freedom is love. The obedience that the law seeks is found in freedom, not in legalism (p.132-133)....

Mutual submission and legitimate authority expressed in the context of love and service are the goals....There will be the tendency for us to choose either authority or submission: to seek to be in control or to avoid responsibility. Neither option is acceptable. All of us are to exercise the authority of the gospel (p94).

Mutual submission should be the goal. If we are in authority we will seek to do God's best for the situation seeking the wise input of others as much as we can within reason. We should seek mutual agreement as much as we can within God's will. The right to exercise power comes into play only when there is a deadlock and a decision has to be made.

IS GOD PASSIVE OR ACTIVE?

How much is God responsible for what happens? Does he act directly or only indirectly?

People usually hold one of two positions on this subject: Either they believe that God is in control and manipulates events to punish or bless people, or they believe that God created the world, wound it up like a clock, and has gone off somewhere to let it run on its own. The latter view was made popular in the nineteenth century and was called deism. Although not many Christians consciously hold to deism, many live their lives as if God is not really involved in our world. Clearly, deism cannot be squared with the Bible at all. But as it turns out the first view is equally deficient.

As long as life is going reasonably well, we can maintain our simplistic views of the universe. But when an event shatters our naivete, we are left with nothing (p.142)....

People like certainty. But the Christian life is a life of faith—not sight. Humility and caution are required as we analyse what happens in our world. We cannot avoid interpreting events, but we must remember that our conclusions are based on partial understanding. If a tornado skips a church and destroys a bar, should we conclude that the tornado was sent as a judgment of God? What do we say if the tornado hits the church and misses the bar? That God wanted us to build a larger church?

The tensions in the Bible keep us from drawing what seem to be the “obvious” conclusions.

At most, scripture provides “guidelines” for understanding God's actions. Hopefully, by following the five guidelines listed below we will be prevented from falling prey to a sometimes dangerous naivete and become more discerning and caring about how God involves himself in our world.

First, humans cannot fully understand God and his actions.

The biblical writers repeatedly describe the gulf between human understanding and God's actions. The prophet Isaiah bluntly states that God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts; in fact, God's ways are higher than ours as much as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa. 55:8-9). The impossibility of explaining God's actions is shown in Job 38-42 when Yahweh ridicules the attempts of Job and his friends to explain Job's suffering. After wrestling with Israel's failure to believe in Christ, Paul concludes with words of praise marvelling at how unsearchable are God's judgments and how his ways are beyond our comprehension (Rom. 11:33-36).

Second, God is present and active among His people....

The whole Old Testament testifies that God is active, that he calls, leads, and empowers his people. God is presented as Lord over the history of all peoples. Nations are presented as instruments by which God accomplishes his purpose, as when Assyria is used to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5-11) or when the Persian king, Cyrus, is raised to deliver them (Isa. 44:28-45:13).

In the New Testament the risen Christ promised, “I am with you always, even to the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20). The book of Acts emphasizes the activity of God's Spirit in the spreading of the gospel. Acts 17:27-28 also affirms that God is not far from any person, for in him we all live, move, and have our being....

Third, the God of the Bible is a hidden God.

If God exists, why doesn't he go ahead and prove it to everybody? Yet Isaiah describes God as hidden: “Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Saviour of Israel” (45:15 NIV). In Exodus 33:20 God tells Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (NIV). In John 6:46, Jesus explains that other than himself no one has seen the Father. These texts say more than that God is beyond our understanding. The point is that we do not have direct, physical access to God....

Why does God remain hidden, No doubt, one reason is that God's holiness is too great for humans to endure. Another reason may be that for God to have authentic relations with people, there must be freedom; if God forces himself on us by overwhelming acts, then we are compelled into a relationship with him. Dostoyevski said, "Thou wouldst not enslave man by a miracle and didst crave faith given freely, not based on miracle."

God does not coerce; he invites. To preserve human freedom he will even let people do the opposite of His desires and even let them abuse others. Because of human free will, God has chosen to veil his presence. He does not want automatons.

Fourth, God is not directly responsible for every event that occurs.

Genesis 6:5-6 reports that because of human sin God was sorry that he had created humankind. God's grief shows us that much of what happens is not of God's doing. Job's friends attribute his suffering to God's punishment of sin, but Job, and later God, will have none of it. In Luke 13:1-5 Jesus likewise argues against a "straight line" interpretation of events, arguing that certain tragedies cannot be viewed as God's personal judgment on sin. **[Time and chance happens to all it says in Ecclesiastes 9:11 – RW].**

Saying that God is not directly responsible for every event does not remove the problem of evil. Even if God is not directly responsible, he at least allows suffering and evil to take place. But there is a big difference between God's permitting events and his causing them. If God causes evil, he must be held accountable for it. If he permits evil, the responsibility for it is placed on the free will of the persons doing it. We may question why God values free will so much, but there is no doubt that he does.

Being human means being responsible for our actions and being subject to the actions of others. Our neighbour has the free will to commit murder, and we could well be the victim of his free will. To be human means to be a resident of the old age where sin (ours and others), suffering, tragedy, and death are all commonplace. God created the world, willing to chance what free human beings would do. God may be responsible for allowing such a world to exist, but he is not directly responsible for all the events that take place.

Finally, rather than doing things to people, God usually works in and through them and through the created order.

In the Bible most of the activity of God is not performed directly by God, but through some agent. When He dried the sea at the exodus, He did so by a strong east wind (Ex. 14:21). In fact, many scholars interpret the first nine plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7-12) as a result of natural forces caused by extreme flooding of the Nile.

In most all of the miracle narratives in the Bible God acts through nature, nations, and people. Even the healing miracles of Jesus usually engage the faith of the person. This is not an attempt to say how God must act, for he is free to act as he sees fit at any time. Nor is it an attempt to de-emphasize or explain away the miraculous. Certainly there are many events in scripture that do not take place through the created order, most notably, the resurrection of Jesus.

We cannot put God in a box to control his activity, but we do need to recognize that he usually acts through creation rather than contrary to it. Acts within the created order are no less acts of God (p.143-147)....

Questions about God's role in our lives come into focus as we face issues of prosperity and tragedy.

Every religion attempts to help people escape the plight of the human condition: sin, fear, poverty, degradation, meaninglessness, future judgment. Some offer ways to bargain with God: "Do these sacrifices and you will be forgiven." "Wear this charm and you will be protected." "Keep these rules and all will be well." Or in a more modern framework, "Send ten dollars to support my TV program and God will bless you." It would be difficult to imagine a religion that did not offer the prospect of a better life for its adherents.

Christians are motivated by the same concerns as everyone else. People frequently turn to Christ because of fear and guilt and expect God to make their lives better and more meaningful. And there is nothing wrong with these motives or desires. The only difficulty in approaching God to make life better is the way we define "better," and how we expect it to be achieved. Do we expect God to change things so that we do not have to deal with the problems other people encounter? Do we expect some type of insurance policy that prevents tragedy? Are there things we can do or doctrines we can believe that insure prosperity?

The Bible sometimes seems to imply that prosperity is the reward of believers and that tragedy is the judgment of God.

Old Testament history tells how Israel prospers or languishes politically and economically directly in relation to whether she is obedient or disobedient to God. The writers of Deuteronomy and Proverbs repeatedly teach that obedience results in prosperity and that disobedience leads to poverty and judgment (see Deut. 28).

Examples abound of persons blessed by God because of their faith: Abraham, Joseph, Daniel, and even Job both before and after his suffering. Examples of judgment on the disobedient are just as plentiful: the sons of Korah, Achan, Absalom, and Ahab and Jezebel.

Yet other parts of the Bible prevent our drawing any conclusions about prosperity necessarily being God's blessing or tragedy being God's judgment.

The Bible is full of people who were prosperous though ungodly or cheats: Jacob, Laban, Zacchaeus, the rich fool, and the nations of Assyria and Babylon. While the Bible views wealth as a blessing in some contexts, wealth is seen in others as a burden making it difficult to enter the kingdom (Matt. 19:23-24). Still other texts denounce the rich (Amos 6; Luke 6:24; James 5:1-6).

There are also numerous people who are righteous but poor, or the victims of tragedy: Job, Naboth, Lazarus, Mary, Paul, and even Jesus himself. The psalmists and the prophet Habakkuk often lament that the unrighteous are the ones getting ahead (Ps. 10, 74, 94), and the psalms frequently are prayers for rescue from distress.

Therefore, the Bible does not allow us to view prosperity simply as either a right of Christians or a reward from God. Neither does it allow us to view tragedy as simply something from which Christians are promised deliverance, or as a judgment of God.

When tragedy occurs, careful evaluation possibly will lead to some answers as to why the event happened, but we must also be prepared to live with unresolved questions....

At the same time, some tragedy may legitimately be seen as judgment. In fact, sin often brings its own judgment. A person who lives a violent life ought not be surprised to encounter a violent death. Selfishness and deceitfulness lead to very poor relationships. Sin is to be avoided, therefore, not only because it is wrong, but also because the punishment of sin is often sin itself.

Deuteronomy and Proverbs are right to connect obedience and prosperity. Wise and right living are necessary for a happy life, but they do not guarantee a happy life....

When tragedy occurs, there may be numerous factors that are the cause.

We may be the victim of someone else's sin, like a recent Chicago Christian who was murdered as she walked home, or like a child born with AIDS because of a mother's drug habits.

Tragedy may result from ignorance as when a child climbs on high-voltage wires. It may result from negligence and malice as when a Korean pilot allowed an airliner to stray over Soviet airspace and was shot down.

It may result from a whole society gone awry as with the Holocaust of the Jews. We live in a world where tragedy occurs for numerous reasons, and one where it some times is within our power—both as individuals and as a society—to prevent some tragedies.

In our fallen world, tragedy sometimes just happens—whether the victim is Christian or non-Christian, whether the person is living a holy life or a life of sin.

The important thing for Christians in the midst of tragedy is not so much to be able to explain why it happened, but to determine what it means to live and hope in Christ in the presence of tragedy.

We should not forget that Paul and other New Testament writers viewed some suffering as positive.

Suffering can be a means of identifying with Christ. It can also be a means of solidarity with the suffering of other people. The New Testament teaches that we cannot be followers of Christ without identifying with his suffering....

The cross that Christians bear is the suffering they willingly endure in service to Christ. In Jesus' "farewell discourse" given just before his arrest and death on the cross, he promised his disciples peace in the midst of pain (John 14:27; 16:33). Christians can know peace in the midst of pain because they experience the presence of Christ in their lives and because they have a hope for the future. For this reason

among others, the early christians even rejoiced about their sufferings (Col. 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13).

In both our prosperity and our tragedy God is present with us, for in him we live and move and have our being (p.148-152)....

Does God assist us and guide our lives? Without question, the teaching of the Bible is that he does.

But problems emerge when we look for God's activity in naive ways. A boxer, after having just beaten his opponent senseless, exclaimed, "God helped me beat him up." A ball player trying to break a record said, "If the Man upstairs wants me to get the record, I'll get it." Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland pray that God will help them kill their enemies.

The problem is that we want God to provide for us what we think we need. We want him to bless what we are doing and to lead us where we want to go. But God is not our lackey. He does not do for us what he expects us to do for ourselves. He is not going to stop the universe for one of our whims.

When we speak about God's assistance or guidance, it ought to be in the context of giving our lives over to God's service (p.154)....

We all need to become a lot wiser and more mature in the way we think of God. God is both active and passive.

God is passive when he allows our free will to be exercised, when he allows nature to run its course, or when he gives people over to their own choices (see Rom. 1:24-32).

We can see that God is an active God when we view creation and other climactic events in the history of salvation, such as the exodus, incarnation, resurrection, and Pentecost. But God is active in other ways as he works in and through us and in and through the created order. God is active and often surprises us and moves in ways that we did not expect (p.156)....

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

What will it mean then for us to be separate from the world? There are no easy answers here either. Individual decisions will have to be made in accordance with the purposes God has for each person.

We need to remember that being separate is first of all an act of God, rather than a human choice. Christians are people whom God has separated to himself. That is more important than being separated from the world. In being separated to God, we are called to live in relation to him. All of our lives are determined by this act of grace. Any choices that we make about the world must derive from our being separated to God.

The discussion of separation goes hand in hand with the discussion of the practice of freedom. Four principles are to guide our decisions on separation:

- (1) Christians separate themselves from sinful activity, not people;
- (2) Separation may be required to avoid misleading less mature persons;
- (3) Separation has to do with the focus of our lives;
- (4) We do not need to fear the world.

First, Christians separate themselves from sinful activity, not from people.

Our first concern must always be to show the love and grace of Christ. We cannot do that if we are never with people. This is no excuse for engaging in sinful activity. We do not have to sacrifice principle in order to show grace....

Second, separation may be required to avoid misleading less mature persons.

When Paul discussed whether Christians could eat meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8-10), he emphasized both Christian freedom and discretion. Where a practice may mislead a less mature person (even if it is allowable such as with eating meat offered to an idol), it should be avoided. The well-being of people is more important than any action we choose.

Third, separation has to do with the focus of our lives.

Typically, discussions about separation have been a debate about what acts or associations are permitted. Instead, more attention needs to be given to the focus of our lives. How do we spend our time? What nourishes our being? What are our true interests? What determines our lifestyles? To what extent do we live our lives as if God did not exist? By living in the awareness that we are separated to God, we will have taken healthier steps toward separation from the world than we would if all we did was simply follow a list of prohibited acts....

Fourth, we do not need to fear the world.

Christians are often paranoid, as if the world were a monster that is going to strip us of our faith. The New Testament shows that the early church was very much concerned about the world, but at the same time they were not afraid of the world. Paul knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God....The world may bring danger, but the person (begotten of) God conquers the world through faith (1 John 5:4-5)(p170-173)....

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Unity is not uniformity...and diversity is just as important to the life of the church as unity. God seems to relish variety both in his creation and in his people. Grace is given to each person so that he or she may minister, and people are given to the church as gifts. People are equipped in a variety of ways for the ministries of the church. To focus on diversity recognizes the unique and necessary contribution of each person. Division is wrong, but diversity is essential.

The discussion of unity and diversity implies a parallel discussion of the tension between the individual and the community. Both are valued, and always there is a movement back and forth between the responsibility of the individual and his or her involvement in the community....

In true communities the identity of both individual and community is kept in focus. Each person has the responsibility to address and support others. If a person concludes that truth does not apply in his or her case, others in the community must bring the individual back to reality. If a person loses a job or struggles with doubt, the community must become a basis of support. The tensions in the Christian faith are an expression of both unity and diversity and of the importance of both the individual and the community....

We must accept the limits of our humanity; when we do so, we discover that tension is inherent in our nature. Humans are made only a little lower than God (Ps. 8:5), but they are also like the beasts that perish (Ps. 49:12). Humans are temporal, but capable of unending relation to God.

We are weak, but strong; have limited knowledge, but powerful and creative minds; are subjected to suffering, death, sin, and the actions of others, but are also capable of healing, and are free and responsible. Humans are victims of sin and temptation, but recipients of redemption and can live godly lives.

Being human means that we have a variety of physical needs and drives: space, food, shelter, sex, and pleasure. It also means that we have less tangible, but no less real needs and drives as well: recognition, meaning, productivity, relationships with other humans and a relationship with God....

May God assist us to be as fully human as he intended us to be. To do so we will have to accept our impending death and anticipate the possibility of unending life with God. We will have to accept our limitations without denying our capabilities (p.187-189).

GRACE AND LAW

Theologically people in the world are very mixed up over the relationship between grace and law and that between faith and works.

The Pharisees and certain of the Jews in New Testament times thought that keeping the law of itself could make them forgiven or righteous in God's eyes and consequently rejected that only accepting Christ's sacrificial blood could forgive sin and justify one in God's eyes.

The Catholics and Protestants seeing Paul's statement that, we are saved by grace, which is the gift of God, and not of works, have gone to the other extreme saying that no works are required to be saved. You only have to believe and accept Jesus and the gift of salvation is yours they say.

Commentaries talk about a tension or conflict between Paul's and James' theology or writings. Paul says that it is by grace and no longer by works while James in chapter 2 of his epistle plainly says faith without works is dead. Is this really a conflict?

What you need to understand is the context of what the two apostles were dealing with.

Paul was dealing with Jews who were so strict in their law-keeping that they thought law-keeping of itself, without Christ's sacrifice, would save them while

James clearly shows that those who go to the other extreme are wrong also, who say that you only have to just believe. James shows that faith without works is dead.

By the "Just believe" teaching, James points out that, if the just believe in Christ teaching were true (which it's not), then the demons would be saved - "Even the demons believe and tremble!"

Let's notice the very plain words of Christ Himself in the Sermon on the Mount, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"

In other words, profession is simply that - profession! Christ then went on, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matt.7:21-23).

If you deliberately sin and persist in it, despite accepting Christ as your Saviour, aren't you treading on the relationship that has to be there with God and Jesus Christ?

Yes, works, **though they don't of and by themselves save us**, are important and are **REQUIRED!**

The blood of Christ's sacrifice is what saves us, justifies us and makes us innocent but without works God will not apply that pronouncement of innocence to you and save you from your sins and that is an ongoing process.

It is a process and some who start off right with God can lose out if they get caught up in the cares and snares of this world and drift away from God (Matt. 13:22).

We overcome evil with good. Overcoming also means working to bring bad sinful habits under control even though we may never completely extinguish them in the flesh and have to wait until the resurrection.

It is God's to give but He's not going to give it to those who aren't committed to His way of life or showing it by how they live. If we persist with our calling by striving to overcome we will not lose the salvation we have, which is by having God's spirit, thus if we are doing our part and God's way is in our hearts we should not be overly fearful of losing it but on the other hand we should never be complacent because we can lose that which we have by sheer neglect and complacency.

We must be balanced - have a right and proper fear of God and failing to do our part but not an exaggerated worry that many have that will stifle our love for God and our spiritual growth. Let's strive for that balance!

Our full obedience to God from here on in our lives to the best of our ability with His help does not earn us the gift.

Here is a simple explanation to illustrate the meaning of qualifying to receive a gift. If I say I will give every child under 10 a beautiful toy that is worth hundreds of dollars does the fact that the child is under 10 earn him this expensive gift? Of course not! I have the gift and I can choose the criteria of who gets the gift. The same goes for God.

Whatever conditional criteria God chooses, none of those criteria earn us the gift, though God has every right to set them!

Neither is salvation a reward for having those criteria because keeping God's law is merely what is expected of us - our duty (Ecc.12:13). The Bible talks about being rewarded for our works (Matt. 16:27) but this is referring to the different positions of rulership we will receive in God's kingdom (Luke 19), not salvation.

When it says in Revelation 2 that we are to be overcomers that does not mean that we have to be literally or eventually TOTALLY PERFECT in this life.

The majority of the time (maybe 80/90/95%) of the time we can live just, good lives. It's the other 5/10/20% that is 100 times more difficult, yea, near impossible the closer we get to 100%, so from that perspective there is a lot in this life that we can accomplish in terms of developing character as Christ lives His life in us.

What does it mean to overcome?

1) Overcome the world - the society's pulls - to go back to its vile ways

"For whatever is born of God overcomes(present tense) the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith."(1 John 5:4)

2) Overcome Satan's pulls

"I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one.(1 John 2:13)

3) Overcome evil / sin

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome (present tense) evil with good."
(Rom.12:21)

Does this mean perfection? Yes and no! We are to respond / strive to fully obey God and when we sin we are to confess our sins to God (1 John 1:9) and seek God's forgiveness and then we are cleansed. Our record is gone, buried!

We have a **perfect record** in God's eyes even if we have a hard time forgiving and forgetting ourselves. It shows how awesome, how caring, how loving God is. Notice how many "ifs" there are in 1 John 1:6-9. The use of the word "if" means something such as forgiveness is conditional upon the confessing and turning from sins.

If we fail to confess our sins, if we persist with our sins (Heb.10:26) that death penalty stays with us until such a time that we repent.

"For if we sin (not just not accept Christ) wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" (Heb.10:26-27).

If we persist in sinning, refusing to confess them and turn from then and keep the law, then we won't be forgiven and surely if we are not forgiven we won't be saved?

Does this verse sound like we are no longer required to keep the law (which defines what sin is) in order to receive the gift of salvation? Is the idea of saved by grace and kept by law **and forgiveness** really so unbiblical in the light of this scripture and so many like it?

Some people say that keeping that law can't be done. If that be the case then why did God say the following about John the Baptist's parents who had God's spirit, "They were both righteous before God, walking blameless in ALL the commandments and ordinances of the Lord"? They still made lots of mistakes just as we do but they kept ALL the law.

The reason God made that pronouncement was through the forgiveness He offers they can be counted as righteous and have a perfect record but as we've seen from 1 John 1:9 and other verses if we don't confess and turn from our sins that forgiveness won't be offered.

We don't have to be so perfect we never ever break the law again. NO, a thousand times - we just have to be going in the right direction and whenever we fall down we immediately seek God's forgiveness.

As long as we keep that wonderful relationship with God going and we don't deliberately reject it or neglect it (Heb. 2:1-4) drifting away from what God

wants of us, then we will never have to fear losing the gift God has given us in salvation.

Salvation is a process. We are saved from past sins (Eph. 2:8), we are being saved and we shall be saved if we endure to the end (Matt. 24:14). He guarantees to give us that gift as long as we stay with Him.

LIVING BY WORKS AND LIVING BY FAITH

Are we trying to overcome sins and other difficulties which are impossible or near to it by our own strength or on the other hand do we have faith in God but don't use our own initiative enough and find ourself falling flat on our face just as much? I'd like to quote, first of all, from an article on the subject of overcoming seemingly impossible problems. The article by Karl Karlov is called "Religion: Just a Hobby?" which appeared in the Nov-Dec 1988 Good News. Karlov writes:

There indeed is a way out of the seemingly impossible difficulties of personal overcoming. Truly understanding this way out is the key that unlocks God's power and makes that power available to you for your personal use. So vital is this key that information about it is scattered throughout almost every part of the Bible. But in few places is it seen in such startling clarity as in Deuteronomy 9.

Israel was near the end of its arduous 40-year Exodus. The Israelites had weathered many problems and trials since departing from Egypt. But all these seemed to pale before the one colossal problem that remained—that of actually occupying and making their own the strongly fortified land of Canaan.

God didn't hide from them the scope of the difficulties ahead: "Hear, O Israel: You are to cross over the Jordan today, and go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourself, cities great and fortified up to heaven, a people great and tall, the descendants of the Anakim, whom you know, and of whom you heard it said, 'Who can stand before the descendants of Anak?'" (Deuteronomy 9:1-2).

God is no "pop" psychologist. He didn't advise Israel to somehow imagine their troubles away, nor did He say the problem wasn't as big as they thought. He advised them it was even worse than they thought!

God is realistic. And He is every bit as realistic about your difficulties as He was about Israel's. God won't waste His time—or yours—by pretending your hard problems are really easy, or by claiming that, through mental gymnastics, you can somehow overcome your difficulties without really trying.

But what He does say is even more amazing. Read it in verse 3: "Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you."

God promised to go into battle ahead of Israel. But only just ahead. If they lacked courage to face the enemy and weren't prepared to march directly into battle—if they instead chose to sit on their hands and look at the enemy from afar—so

would God. In that case, nothing at all would be accomplished. But if Israel took the initiative to actually confront the difficulty, and willingly marched into action, then God would proceed ahead of them. Only just ahead.

Israel had to demonstrate that they were absolutely serious about overcoming their obstacle. They had to go to war against it. Then, like a withering, consuming fire before them, God would intervene and give them victory.

Undoubtedly Israel would have found it much more comfortable had God chosen to step in while the enemy was still way off in the distance. But that would have required little faith or commitment on Israel's part. So God didn't do it like that—and still doesn't.

Overcoming is really a joint venture: God supplies the power, but only after you first supply the initiative. The resulting success is a joint achievement.

That's why Deuteronomy 9:3 concludes: “**He...**goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so **you** shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you.’

Overcoming does not depends on your strength. But it does depend on your initiative. Without it, God won't make His strength available to you.

This explains why all of us sometimes fail to overcome. The failure is not the result of the problem being too strong, or us being too weak.

Often, it is the result of us lacking the faith in God to even get started. We aren't sure God will wipe out the enemy from in front of our faces, so we do not take ourselves anywhere near the action!

Or perhaps we aren't convinced that the problem to be overcome is an enemy in the first place. In our heart we don't really want to overcome, so we aren't serious in going out to battle. So God doesn't involve Himself on our behalf.

Now it should be clear what the Bible means when it advises us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that there is a way out of our difficulties. That way is directly ahead, straight through the problem!

Yes, the obstacle may well be too hard for you. But not for God. He'll provide the strength if you're serious enough to provide the initiative.”

Now I'd like to quote from Charles Swindoll's marvellous book “Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back” and from his chapter entitled “Impossibilities: Uncrossable Rivers of Life.” He writes:

When you face an impossibility, leave it in the hands of the Specialist. Refuse to calculate. Refuse to doubt. Refuse to work it out by yourself. Refuse to worry or encourage others to worry. Stand against that.

Instead, say, "Lord, I'm carrying around something I cannot handle. Because You are not only able but also willing and anxious, take this off my hands. It's impossible to me, but it is as nothing with You." Persevering through the pressures of impossibilities calls for that kind of confidence.

Now, our problem is that we hold onto our problems. If your Swiss watch stops working, you don't sit down at home with a screwdriver and start working on it yourself. You take it to a specialist.

What if you do work on that watch and then you take it to a specialist? "Sir, my watch stopped working."

"Oh, really. Let me take a look at it . . . What in the world have you done to this lovely watch?"

The problem is that the Lord gets all the leftovers. We make all the mistakes and get things tied into nineteen granny knots, then dump it in His lap and say, "Here, Lord."

No! Right at first, say, "It's impossible: I can't handle it. Lord, before I foul it up, it's Yours." He is able to handle it.

I've just finished reading an exciting book called Say It With Love, by my good friend Dr. Howard Hendricks. You need to read it. In the book he tells the most marvellous true story. I quote:

"We had a lovely couple in Dallas a number of years ago. He sold his business at a loss, went into vocational Christian work, and things got rather rough. There were four kids in the family. One night at family worship, Timmy, the youngest boy, said, 'Daddy, do you think Jesus would mind if I asked Him for a shirt?'

"Well, no, of course not. Let's write that down in our prayer request book, Mother.'

"So she wrote down 'shirt for Timmy' and she added 'size seven.' You can be sure that every day Timmy saw to it that they prayed for the shirt.

"After several weeks, one Saturday the mother received a telephone call from a clothier in downtown Dallas, a christian businessman. 'I've finished my July clearance sale and knowing that you have four boys it occurred to me that you might use something we have left. Could you use some boy's shirts?'

"She said, 'What size?'

"Size seven.'

"How many do you have?' she asked hesitantly.

"He said, 'Twelve.'

"Many of us might have taken the shirts, stuffed them in the bureau drawer, and made some casual comment to the children. Not this wise set of parents. That night, as expected, Timmy said, 'Don't forget, Mommy, let's pray for the shirt.'

"Mommy said, 'We don't have to pray for the shirt, Timmy.'

"How come?"

“‘He Lord has answered your prayer.’

“‘He has?’

“‘Right.’

“So, as previously arranged, brother Tommy goes out and gets one shirt, brings it in, and puts it down on the table. Little Timmy’s eye’s are like saucers. Tommy goes out and gets another shirt and brings it in. Out back, out—back, until he piles 12 shirts on the table, and Timmy thinks God is going into the shirt business. But you know, there is a little kid in Dallas today by the name of Timothy who believes there is a God in heaven interested enough in his needs to provide boys with shirts.”

But we don’t usually give God those kinds of chances. We are so totally (and sinfully) confident in ourselves that we don’t give God the chance to do what He is a real Specialist at doing. If something is humanly impossible, then what in the world are we doing trying to pull it off?

There’s a conclusion to this subject I don’t want us to miss. It has to do with “personalizing” what we have been reading about. Because it revolves around a father and his son, it won’t be difficult for most of us to identify with it. The man (like many of you) had reached the end of the rope.

“And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth. And He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘If You can! All things are possible to him who believes’ (Mark 9.20-23).

The only place I know of in the Scriptures where Jesus made that kind of statement is in this passage.

The father looked at his son, then turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, if You can help....” And Jesus said, “If You can! Why, I’m a Specialist in that kind of thing. It’s impossible with you, but with Me that’s nothing.”

The father’s response is commendable. When he realized his need to trust completely and not fret any longer, he cried out, “I do believe; help me in my unbelief” (v. 24).

Sure enough, some of you who read these words are facing some of the most unbelievable problems anyone could imagine. You’ve come to the absolute end. There is nothing you can do—zero.

What’s God saying to you now? “All things are possible to him who worries?” No. “All things are possible to him who attempts to work it out?” No. “All things are possible to him who believes.” The story in Mark 9, of course, is that He saves the boy’s life, freeing him from this unclean spirit and providing healing.

The work God wants to accomplish is not going to take place while you sit here reading. It’s going to take place when the pressure of impossibility nests upon your shoulders. Child of God, learn a family secret.

God specializes in things we think are totally impossible. But being a Gentleman, He won't grab them out of your hands if you insist on holding on to them. "The Lord longs to be gracious to you," says Isaiah. "And....He waits on high to have compassion on you" (Is. 30:18).

Your impossible situation may be a marriage that is almost or altogether on the rocks. It may be a destroyed romance that's left you disillusioned. It may be a terrible habit that you just cannot conquer. It may have to do with your work or your career, or perhaps your schooling. You may be at rock bottom financially. It may be a relationship that is now so strained and pressured that you cannot handle it. If it seems impossible to You, **TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF!** Ask God, in absolute faith, to take over (p.70-73)."

THERE IS A TIME FOR...

The quintessential passage of scripture on the subject of balance is Ecclesiastes chapter 3. I'd like to quote that passage here and then quote from a prominent commentary (Matthew Henry's Unabridged Commentary) for it's comments which will help us get a better handle on the subject of balance from what we can garner from the wise words of King Solomon.

- 1** There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
 - 2** a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
 - 3** a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
 - 4** a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
 - 5** a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
 - 6** a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
 - 7** a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
 - 8** a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace."
- Eccl 3:1-8 (NIV)

THE MUTABILITY OF ALL HUMAN AFFAIRS (3:1-10)

The scope of these verses is to show,

1. That we live in a world of changes, that the several events of time, and conditions of human life, are vastly different from one another, and yet occur promiscuously, and we are continually passing and repassing between them, as in the revolutions of every day and every year. In the wheel of nature (Jam. 3:6) sometimes one spoke is uppermost and by and by the contrary; there is a constant ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning; from one extreme to the other does the fashion of this world change, ever did, and ever will.

2. That every change concerning us, with the time and season of it, is unalterably fixed and determined by a supreme power; and we must take things as they come, for it is not in our power to change what is appointed for us. And this comes in here as a reason why, when we are in prosperity, we should be easy, and yet not secure-not to be secure because we live in a world of changes and therefore have no reason to say, To-morrow shall be as this day (the lowest valleys join to the highest mountains), and yet to be easy, and, as he had advised (ch. 2:24), to enjoy the good of our labour, in a humble dependence upon God and his providence, neither lifted up with hopes, nor cast down with fears, but with evenness of mind expecting every event....

II. The proof and illustration of it by the induction of particulars, twenty-eight in number, according to the days of the moon's revolution, which is always increasing or decreasing between its full and change. Some of these changes are purely the act of God, others depend more upon the will of man, but all are determined by the divine counsel. Every thing under heaven is thus changeable, but in heaven there is an unchangeable state, and an unchangeable counsel concerning these things.

1. There is a time to be born and a time to die. These are determined by the divine counsel; and, as we were born, so we must die, at the time appointed, Acts 17:26. Some observe that here is a time to be born and a time to die, but no time to live; that is so short that it is not worth mentioning; as soon as we are born we begin to die. But, as there is a time to be born and a time to die, so there will be a time to rise again, a set time when those that lie in the grave shall be remembered, Job 14:13.

2. A time for God to plant a nation, as that of Israel in Canaan, and, in order to that, to pluck up the seven nations that were planted there, to make room for them; and at length there was a time when God spoke concerning Israel too, to pluck up and to destroy, when the measure of their iniquity was full, Jer. 18:7, 9. There is a time for men to plant, a time of the year, a time of their lives; but, when that which was planted has grown fruitless and useless, it is time to pluck it up.

3. A time to kill, when the judgments of God are abroad in a land and lay all waste; but, when he returns in ways of mercy, then is a time to heal what he has torn (Hos. 6:1, 2), to comfort a people after the time that he has afflicted them, Psa. 90:15. There is a time when it is the wisdom of rulers to use severe methods, but there is a time when it is as much their wisdom to take a more gentle course, and to apply themselves to lenitives, not corrosives.

4. A time to break down a family, an estate, a kingdom, when it has ripened itself for destruction; but God will find a time, if they return and repent, to rebuild what he has broken down; there is a time, a set time, for the Lord to build up Zion, Psa. 102:13, 16. There is a time for men to break up house, and break off trade, and so to break down, which those that are busy in building up both must expect and prepare for.

5. A time when God's providence calls to weep and mourn, and when man's wisdom and grace will comply with the call, and will weep and mourn, as in times of common calamity and danger, and there it is very absurd to laugh, and dance, and make merry (Isa. 22:12, 13; Eze. 21:10); but then, on the other hand, there is a time when God calls to cheerfulness, a time to laugh and dance, and then he expects we should serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart. Observe, The time of mourning and weeping is put first, before that of laughter and dancing, for we must first sow in tears and then reap in joy.

6. A time to cast away stones, by breaking down and demolishing fortifications, when God gives peace in the borders, and there is no more occasion for them; but there is a time to gather stones together, for the making of strong-holds, v. 5. A time for old towers to fall, as that in Siloam (Lu. 12:4), and for the temple itself to be so ruined as that not one stone should be left upon another; but also a time for towers and trophies too to be erected, when national affairs prosper.

7. A time to embrace a friend when we find him faithful, but a time to refrain from embracing when we find he is unfair or unfaithful, and that we have cause to suspect him; it is then our prudence to be shy and keep at a distance. It is commonly applied to conjugal embraces, and explained by 1Co. 7:3-5; Joel 2:16.

8. A time to get, get money, get preferment, get good bargains and a good interest, when opportunity smiles, a time when a wise man will seek (so the word is); when he is setting out in the world and has a growing family, when he is in his prime, when he prospers and has a run of business, then it is time for him to be busy and make hay when the sun shines. There is a time to get wisdom, and knowledge, and grace, when a man has a price put into his hand; but then let him expect there will come a time to spend, when all he has will be little enough to serve his turn. Nay, there will come a time to lose, when what has been soon got will be soon scattered and cannot be held fast.

9. A time to keep, when we have use for what we have got, and can keep it without running the hazard of a good conscience; but there may come a time to cast away, when love to God may oblige us to cast away what we have, because we must deny Christ and wrong our consciences if we keep it (Mt. 10:37, 38), and rather to make shipwreck of all than of the faith; nay, when love to ourselves may oblige us to cast it away, when it is for the saving of our lives, as it was when Jonah's mariners heaved their cargo into the sea.

10. A time to rend the garments, as upon occasion of some great grief, and a time to sew, them again, in token that the grief is over. A time to undo what we have done and a time to do again what we have undone. Jerome applies this to the rending of the Jewish church and the sewing and making up of the gospel church thereupon.

11. A time when it becomes us, and is our wisdom and duty, to keep silence, when it is an evil time (Amos 5:13), when our speaking would be the casting of pearl before swine, or when we are in danger of speaking amiss (Psa. 39:2); but there is also a time to speak for the glory of God and the edification of others, when silence would be the betraying of a righteous cause, and when with the mouth confession is to be made to salvation; and it is a great part of Christian prudence to know when to speak and when to hold our peace.

12. A time to love, and to show ourselves friendly, to be free and cheerful, and it is a pleasant time; but there may come a time to hate, when we shall see cause to break off all familiarity with some that we have been fond of, and to be upon the reserve, as having found reason for a suspicion, which love is loth to admit.

13. A time of war, when God draws the sword for judgment and gives it commission to devour, when men draw the sword for justice and the maintaining of their rights, when there is in the nations a disposition to war; but we may hope for a time of peace, when the sword of the Lord shall be sheathed and he shall make wars to cease (Psa.

46:9), when the end of the war is obtained, and when there is on all sides a disposition to peace. War shall not last always, nor is there any peace to be called lasting on this side the everlasting peace. Thus in all these changes God has set the one over-against the other, that we may rejoice as though we rejoiced not and weep as though we wept not."

MENTAL BALANCE

We need to be balanced mentally. Our knowledge, perspectives and understanding should be balanced. Take for instance our spiritual knowledge. Since the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) changed their doctrines to conform with Protestantism we have seen all sorts of unbalanced individuals and thinking.

Some are hooked on prophecy, others are hooked on pet doctrines such as their personal understanding of Pentecost and Passover, others are hooked on their personal understanding of the Sacred Calendar, others conspiracy theories or pet ideas about good health and so on. Now I'm not saying those things are wrong. **The major problem is with the level of importance that are placed on such ideas.**

The question we need to ask ourselves is what things does Christ place most emphasis on. In Matthew 22:36-40 Christ places most emphasis on the two great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbour.

On these two He said hang all the law and prophets. The law directs us to know how to care for others while prophecy is what God uses, first of all, to get our attention as we have a fascination with what the future holds, and then to motivate us to mend our ways and live the way of love for others.

Christian living is what Christ places most emphasis on. One only has to read the Sermon on the Mount to realize that. But that's not all. After the WCG started to make doctrinal changes they started to focus more on their idea of "love" and completely did away with prophecy. Ezekiel 33 talks about the watchman who has a job to warn the people of impending danger.

As well as the preaching of the gospel at this time we are very close to the greatest time of danger in world history.

Since we have the foreknowledge of what will happen we have a duty out of love to warn our peoples of that danger so they can mend their ways and be spared of the horrors of the Great Tribulation. It is something we must do because we love them.

So prophecy does have its place but it is lesser in importance than Christian living - our relationships with others.

Alan Ruth writes the following relating to this:

We sometimes give the impression that we are cultic or not Christian by our attitude and demeanour toward others. On a personal level, we in the splits may treat others (especially our brethren) coolly or distantly, lacking the warmth of love and concern that is to be our hallmark as Christians. There are members in the splits who have a great deal of understanding and knowledge about many Bible subjects.

They are able to show others why they believe what they believe and are strong in explaining doctrines. Yet some of them can be the most distant, aloof, unpersonable brethren in the church. They have a mind for doctrines, but they lack some very important relationship skills.

One of the biggest problems in the splits is our struggles with relationships between brethren and especially between lay members and church leaders. Our actions speak louder than our words. What we need is some balance--an adjusting of our mental scales to place more weight on relationship skills and the mercy and love of God.

In a confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus chided them for meticulously tithing while neglecting the weightier matters of the law, such as justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23). They were straining out a doctrinal gnat, but swallowing a camel (v. 24).

Could this be what our critics see - that we weigh heavily on some laws and not on other doctrines such as love, forgiveness and compassion? (The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles, p.29-31)

I couldn't agree more with Alan that we need to focus a lot more focus on relationship skills in the church of God today. One thing that I still find in the church today is the lack of good, detailed material in sermons, in particular, and church literature on relationship skills. Christian living is the particular area that I am most interested when it comes to God's truth, though I also have a great love for doctrine, prophecy and Bible history.

There is so much christian living material out there which is fantastic that could be used in helping brethren relate to others better and develop stronger marriages and families that the church hardly touches on that I have purchased from christian bookstores.

To illustrate what I mean, out of the average 60 odd sermons you would hear in your church organization in a year how many of those were devoted to marriage, how many to childrearing, how many to relationship skills?

Now compare that to the number of sermons on doctrinal subjects and those on prophecy and those which are more head-knowledge sermons rather than those which have material on relationship skills which you can practically apply in your life. I find that there are lots of general, overview sermons that encourage us to keep the standards but few that go into genuine detail on what those standards are.

When you look through the material on christian living in any good christian bookstore discussing subjects like how to build and maintain friendships, communication skills, marriage and how to raise children in great detail, counselling skills and helping those

who need help in life you begin to comprehend some of the superficiality that is there in what the church provides on christian living that I hope can be reversed in time. There's only so much that can be covered at a time in sermons and church literature coupled with other subjects that the church has to address but I hope in time the church can provide more material in this vital area of life.

I believe the ministry in all branches of God's church should devote more of their sermons to detailed material on relationship skills. The gospels and the epistles of Paul, in particular, and the many books written on relationship skills that one can pick up in christian bookstores have so much to offer us on God's way of life that we can and should learn from.

On the other hand we should not ignore minor points of doctrine and spiritual understanding either. Remember Christ told the Pharisees these things you ought to have done, referring to the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith, without leaving the other things undone. I am an explorer by nature and I love learning about new things based on the Bible and that includes these sort of minor things also as well as a deeper understanding of the major things we discussed before. I try to be fairly open-minded about things.

Some people are very close-minded and won't open up their mind to new things or ideas which may well be based on the Bible. Other people are so open-minded that their brains have fallen out. Have a broad range of interests also and don't be narrow-minded.

BALANCE IN OUR PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY

In his book "Two Steps Forward, Three Steps Back" Charles Swindoll writes:

Before we get into the meat of our discussion about a truly attainable spirituality, let us make clear what the christian life is not. There are four common misconceptions about spirituality and christian maturity that simply do not hold water. Warning: They might come as a surprise, maybe even a shock. So hang on.

Flaw 1: Because you are a Christian, all your problems are solved.

We do a great disservice to an unbeliever when we bait him by saying, 'Come to Christ and all your problems will be over.' The Bible never says that. It promises that we will be new creatures; it assures us that we will have a destiny that is secure; but it does not guarantee a downhill slide once Christ comes into a person's life. In fact, in some instances problems increase and the road gets rougher!

Flaw 2: All the problems you will ever have are addressed in the Bible.

They're not. It is very unwise for us to make broad, sweeping statements in areas where the Scriptures do not speak. There are many times when we don't find an explicit answer in Scripture for our particular problem. At such times we are forced to

walk by faith, trusting the Lord to show us the next step as it is needed. The Bible simply does not offer a specific answer to every problem in life.

Flaw 3: If you are having problems, you are unspiritual.

Isn't it a shame that this idea is conveyed in so many places today? Having a problem simply proves you are human! We all have problems, and you're not unspiritual because you are wrestling with a dilemma. As a matter of fact, some of the most spiritual men and women I have ever known have wrestled with some of the deepest problems life offers.

Think of Job and his suffering. He did not have an answer. He did not understand why. His counsellors, with their severe and heady statements, were grossly deceptive; they didn't know the answers either. Although Job was spiritual, he had enormous problems.

Flaw 4: Being exposed to sound Bible teaching automatically solves problems.

Bible instruction alone will not result in instant solutions to problems. No matter how reliable the teaching or how gifted the teacher, the declaration of truth does not provide the removal of difficulties.

Think of the Scriptures as an absolutely accurate map. A map tells you how to get to a certain destination. But just looking at a map won't automatically transport you to Arizona or England or Peru. Getting to those places means you have to make the effort . . . pay the cost . . . take the time for travel . . . stay at it until you arrive.

So it is in the Christian life. God's map is reliable and available. It is also clear and direct. But there is no hocus-pocus in its pages that automatically sends its reader by way of a magic carpet.

Anyone with a family of children has a built-in illustration of maturity. In the Swindoll family there are four kids—a boy on each end and two girls in the middle. Each one has a distinct personality, a unique set of characteristics that makes that person an individual.

But there is one thing equally true of all four—they are growing up, fast. They are maturing. They are becoming increasingly more responsible and they are learning how to handle themselves correctly in everyday situations. As my wife, Cynthia, and I observe their growing maturity, we are delighted. Maturity is a joy to behold.

So it is in God's family. We are born into it by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At first, as spiritual babies, we are fragile, irresponsible, milk-drinking infants who lack discernment and strength. But as time passes, we should begin to grow up spiritually. As our Father observes our maturity, it pleases Him. He sees our resiliency, our responsibility, our enlarged diet, our increased discernment, our sensitivity to Him, and our strength and it delights Him.

The theme of Hebrews 5:11-14 is maturity—and the lack of it. In verse 11, which speaks of an ancient past, we read: "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing."

It was not that the Hebrews hadn't heard: it was that they had not obeyed. They had heard sounds in their ears, but they had become hard of listening, dull of hearing. We read further:

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

What is a sign of maturity? Practicing what you hear. Through practice you become mature.

YOU SEE, IT IS ONE THING TO GROW OLD IN THE LORD, BUT IT IS ANOTHER THING TO GROW UP IN THE LORD.

There are many people cruising from church to church, from Bible conference to Bible conference, filling notebook after notebook, wearing out Bible after Bible, who are still some of the crankiest, fussiest, most irresponsible people you meet. Why? Because they do not practice the things they hear.

This is the whole thrust of the Book of James. I call James the New Testament's 'man from Missouri.' He wants you to put to the test what you claim to believe—by doing it! A mature person is one who is involved in practicing on a regular, consistent basis what he hears and what he takes in. Just being exposed to Bible instruction won't solve problems.

Maturity is a process I like to call 'spiritual osmosis.' We hear and absorb biblical truth and then allow that truth to pervade our inner lives—down deep where attitudes are formed and decisions are made. Then, as circumstances arise that call for a supernatural response, the indwelling Holy Spirit has sufficient ammunition to give us stability and power to cope. This works in all sorts of difficult experiences.

When irritations come, obey God and carry out His Word in dealing with them. When temptations come, apply principles of Scripture that help you face them victoriously. When the sins of the flesh arise, apply the truths you have been taught. It is in the experience of all this application that you become wise and more mature.

A person would be insane to hear his physician diagnose his ailment as a rapidly growing tumour, and then think that just because he had talked with his doctor, the growth would suddenly disappear. No, he's going to have to be operated on. Likewise, just being exposed to the truth won't make us mature. Nor will it alone—without application—solve one problem.

Please don't misunderstand. I love God's Word! I am more convinced than ever in my life that its trustworthy truths are of inestimable value. But although the Bible may be a trustworthy Book, it is certainly no magic potion that you rub on yourself three times a day to chase the devil away. Nor is it something you take internally with a pious promise to God, hoping that the next morning you will suddenly know and experience all its truths.

There is no such “instant maturity” available on this earth. God does not offer a formula that produces fully mature Christians overnight. Christian growth comes through hardcore, gutsy perseverance (a forgotten word!) of applying what you hear and obeying it . . . and thereby learning how to handle those inevitable problems (p.18-22).

LESSONS OF BALANCE FOR THE MINISTRY AND GOD’S CHURCH TODAY

One of the greatest lessons needed to be learned by God’s people, especially the ministry, is that of bringing vanity under control. This vanity has badly affected the way we look at brethren in fellow church of God groups and made us quite unbalanced.

Alan Ruth writes:

Some of us have made ourselves vain over doctrine and the issue of government. To be sure, we have our differences in Biblical understanding.

Unfortunately, part of our problem with vanity is that we focus on the 10% we disagree on instead of the 90% we agree on. This is part of the reason why there is sometimes little cooperation and love among brethren and leaders in the splits.

Doctrine is important. Yet we need the wisdom of God to know what are the foundational beliefs of our faith and what is of less importance. Our knowledge must be mixed with humility and love....

We...in the splits have at times not been generous in our assessments of other brethren outside our organization or other organizations beside our own. We don't give credit where credit is due.

We sometimes use doctrine, leadership, differences of administration, talents of brethren, etc., as reasons to justify putting down those in other splits.

The terms “Laodicean” and “unconverted” have been used too often by some brethren and leaders to describe others in the churches of God. We do this in part out of our vanity and desire to be Special and Unique (with capital “s” and “u”). This kind of labelling has helped keep the splits and the brethren apart in fellowship and has hindered cooperation in preaching the gospel.

One of the important principles I have learned is that nearly all of the splits have something to contribute to the growth and work of the body of Christ. Though we may differ in a few areas, though we may administer differently, though our gifts may not be the same, we can all contribute what we have to witness to this world. We need not bite and devour one another in the process. We need to spend more time on preaching the gospel and building up the church rather than putting others down. With God's help we can do this. With God's help we can overcome this vanity (The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles, p.13-14).

On the subject of government we see that church groups are going to extremes. We have people who dogmatically maintain that ministers have no authority at all. We have others who acknowledge that ministers have authority but that the Bible is against church hierarchy or top-down government.

Then we have other groups who believe in top-down government but they take the teaching to extremes and say that there is absolutely no place whatsoever for voting or committees and lean strongly to one-man rulership at their headquarters and in their local areas. Let's have a look at what the Bible says about church government.

Let's first of all look at whether God's ministers have rule or authority in the church and, if so, for what reason. In our anti-authoritarian society and as a result of the great abuse of authority many would like to deny that God has put authority in the church yet that is what we find in many verses of the New Testament. Let's notice a few of them.

The first is 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 where God says, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you and are **OVER YOU** in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly for their work's sake." Paul commanded Titus to "Rebuke with **ALL AUTHORITY**" those who were creating turmoil in the church (Tit. 2:15).

To the Thessalonians he wrote, "Now we **COMMAND YOU**, brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly"(2 Thess.3:6).

Now why is this authority given? We read, "Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, **ACCORDING TO THE POWER WHICH THE LORD HAS GIVEN ME TO EDIFICATION**, and not to destruction"(2 Cor.13:10).

In the same letter Paul also says, "For though I should boast somewhat more of our **AUTHORITY**, which the Lord has given us **FOR EDIFICATION**, and not for your destruction"(2 Cor.10:8). Government in God's church is given to help edify the brethren and to help them grow.

Garner Ted Armstrong makes these fine comments:

True church government emphasises service more than command; gentle encouragement more than rebuke; being 'helpers of your joy' (2 Cor.1:24) more than policeman over their faith; visiting, counselling, anointing, encouraging more than criticising; seeking those who are straying rather than threatening the weak with excommunication; building up faith, not instilling fear (Where is the True Church?, p.33-34).

Authority is a two-edged sword. It is something that is needed to keep order in the church yet carries the potential for abuse which sadly has happened quite a bit in

recent years in the church. The membership of God's church are saying enough of this abuse and truly desire more accountability in the ministry yet power is given by God and is required to both co-ordinate things and keep order in the church. Garner Ted Armstrong makes the following comments:

Today the preaching of the gospel must be done by means of the mass media; through radio, television, and evangelistic campaigns, through booklets and magazines plus on a local level church services and activities must be co-ordinated. All of this takes organisation. And, as in any organisation, **someone has to take charge** (Where is the True Church?, p.42).

Without authority chaos will be the result with many people who have conflicting opinions from time to time. The ministry have the power to make decisions on church policy and decide on disputes that are brought voluntarily to them by the membership so long as they are based on the revealed will of God. This is the power of binding and loosing that Christ gave to the apostles (Matt.16:15-20).

We have answered the question of whether ministers have authority in the church for collective decisions involving the church, as opposed to personal decisions that should be left to members. Now does the Bible teach that church government should be from the top-down?

Let's look at a few scriptures that show there was a chain of authority in the New Testament church. What has to be kept in mind for those who are dogmatic about top-down church government is the following:

By the time anyone wrote anything that is now New Testament, what there was of church government was already in existence. The New Testament writers took it for granted, and went on to more important subjects.

The result is that we are left to gather what we know about church government from fragments and inferences" (In Transition, August 25,1995, Ron Dart article on church govt.)

The Bible has barely anything to say about the "correct form" of church government! And what can be used to support such a viewpoint must come solely from the New Testament as the church is a New Testament.

There was a hierarchy in Israel in Old Testament times but Israel was a civil, military nation NOT a spiritual body such as a church.

We will see in the New Testament that Paul had the authority when necessary to **COMMAND** Silas and Timothy to go wherever he designated.

Dr Hoeh tells us:

In Acts 17:15 we read, 'So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens, and receiving a **COMMAND** for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.' In other instances when duties were not imperative, Paul sometimes left it to the convenience of the evangelists(1 Cor.16:12). Paul was not a dictator.

The evangelists, under the direction of the apostle Paul and the other apostles, preached to the unconverted. Evangelist means an announcer of good news. They made converts, established local churches and appointed elders and deacons (Titus 1:5), and visited established churches (Phil.2:19-20) with authority over local officers. The apostle Paul commanded Timothy to reprove and rebuke publicly any elder that sinned so the congregation would learn to fear God(article 'Government in our Church, Plain Truth, Aug.1953, p. 4, 7).

We read of that in 1 Timothy 5:19-21 where Paul tells Timothy, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus and the elect angels that you observe these without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality."

All recorded appointments in the New Testament to church offices are made by others in greater authority. To appoint church officials to a certain office by those in lesser authority differs from the pattern that was used by the New Testament church.

Though there is only JUST enough evidence to support the principle of top-down appointment in the Bible that doesn't justify everything else associated with many church groups' hierarchal church structure or sub-points used to defend top-down church government.

Some have implied that there is no place whatsoever or allowance in the Bible for voting or committees of any kind in the church. If a church's Council of Elders requires a certain majority to change any church doctrine as is the case in both Global and United then such decisions require finding out who agrees and who doesn't or in our modern vernacular - a vote! A group that makes a collective decision like this is a committee, board, a council and other such synonyms.

Along with that there appears to be an allowance for voting in a limited sense in the Bible. There are many, many Greek words for our synonyms appoint, ordain and chosen with different shades of meaning. One which is used twice in the New Testament is "cheirotoneo". It is a composite of two Greek words that mean hand-stretch. According to Strong's (5500) the word means voter, hand reacher and selection by a show of hands.

In Acts 14:23 it's used for how the leaders chose elders. "And when they had ordained (selected by a show of hands - cheirotoneo) elders in every church...they commended them to the Lord." Here we have **an appointment by a vote**. For those of who believe

in the top-down style of government this occasional way that they did it was still within the top down principle and that's what makes this so different between this and worldly politics and voting!

We should have faith that Christ guides and leads and inspires His faithful ministry in a right way and that He will work everything out in His church for the best. Having said that, I don't believe the idea that having faith in the leadership in God's church and that God "sees to it" that unfit men are removed from office justifies having as little checks and balances as the leadership wants. We had that lack of them back in the WCG and we can see what has happened. False teachers came in and hundreds, maybe thousands, were hurt by ministers' harshness and actions.

In the right of shepherd-like leadership from the top is it not wise stewardship to have the right kind of checks to prevent some of this occasional spiritual abuse at both the top and the local level? Is this not a case of the leaders showing love for the flock of God that they will do what they can to prevent that kind of thing? God Himself put in checks and balances into the Sinai government realizing that humans would be running the government. Norm Edwards tells us:

For example, the priests and Levites were not given a land inheritance and were prevented from acquiring one - the Eternal knew there would be too much temptation for these leaders to use their power to amass empires for themselves (How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?, p. 7).

In the upper management of the church a council of elders must be used regularly so there is much input on major decisions before they are made. Along with the church's leader running and making the day-to-day decisions of the church, certain types of decisions and matters of doctrine should be decided upon collectively by the whole council of elders with a multitude of counsel, not by one man alone. As the Book of Proverbs says there is safety in a multitude of counsel. Power is therefore not just concentrated in the hands of one or two who wield it dictatorially.

At the local level there has to be a commitment to preventing any lording it over the flock by pastors. The senior ministry must keep a keen eye on the local affairs of the church so this is minimised. All disciplinary actions, such as disfellowshipment, should meet with the approval of **several** elders and if possible with the approval of a senior minister as well. Local elders should be encouraged to keep the local pastor accountable for his actions and if he mistreats any members they should be encouraged to first bring it to the pastor's attention and then brought to the attention of the senior ministry if it falls on deaf ears.

A friend of mine through his Bible reading and a couple of books that he had read pointed out the fact that the New Testament never talks about appointing pastors in each church area but says a few times that they appointed elders (plural) in each city. The focus is always on the elders and not the pastors who we find no specific greetings to in any of the epistles. In the New Testament it would appear as if the

pastor, though he had the highest authority at the local level, was more like the first amongst equals, though not quite, in a shared leadership or as Dr Hoeh put it in his 1953 article on church government - the presiding elder. Acts 20:17-38 says that the elders(plural) of the one city, Ephesus, all had oversight over that church.

In the book Biblical Eldership the following comments are made:

Joint leadership permits a greater number of capable, dedicated men to share fully in the leadership of the church community to which they belong and love...The single pastorate, on the other hand, permits only one to teach and pastor, although others in the church may be equally talented. Often men of equal spiritual maturity and ability are a threat to the pastor's position rather than the blessing they should be.

Since the single pastorate allows only one man to be the pastor, it is a poor utilization of manpower and spiritual gifts...

Thus, of the 18 passages which speak of church leadership, 15 of them are plural. Of these 15, seven of them definitely speak of a single congregation. Only 3 of them talk about church leadership in singular terms, and in each passage the singular may be seen as fully compatible with plurality.

Should local congregations be run by one man or by an team of elders working with co-operation and consensus? The weight of evidence in the New Testament indicates the latter. This was how Jewish synagogues were run and how the New Testament continued to be run.

This pattern seen in the New Testament is quite different from the one-man rulership we see in our local churches today. The Church adopted a system of basically having one man over a congregation, which unfortunately, has in too many cases resulted in autocratic rule.

Why was the latter form chosen? I believe that the church was influenced, unwittingly, by the hierarchal structure that was prevalent in the world at the time. As the bureaucratic structure flourished during this period it may have tipped the scales for its implementation in the Church.

Another major factor was the sheer demand for ministers brought on by spreading the gospel too wide too quickly in the geographical sense. Had Mr Armstrong stuck with the West Coast until he had sufficient ministerial manpower before going nationwide, and had he stuck with the biblical principle of not ordaining a novice (1 Tim.3:6), such as what happened constantly by sending out college graduates in their 20's who had never worked before in the real world, the church would have fared a lot better than it did.

Alan Ruth writes:

Ministers are to be helpers of their brethren's joy, not rulers over their faith or their gifts. The brethren need to be inspired to follow God, not beaten to obey. God's true government is that of consent, not constraint. It is of choice, not coercion. It is by inspiration, not intimidation. God's way is that of obedience from the inside out, from a heart of willingness and love.

We are to rule ourselves with God's help. It is not the way of rulership whereby obedience is to be enforced from the outside. This is a lesson some of us in the splits still need to learn" (The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles, p.13-14).

When a church group heavily emphasizes church government or the right form of church government in most cases it is trying to force people to obey rather than persuade people to obey because they want to and support the group they are attending.

Rather than taking subtle digs at other groups or overemphasizing church government church leaders need to persuade people to support them by selling them on the positive points and when people point out legitimate problems the leaders need to address those problems and show they are working at them, not sweep the issues under the carpet and overemphasize church government.

Alan Ruth in the following quotes explains another lesson needed to be learned in the church today:

One of the main attitudes which various leaders and ministers have carried over or copied from the WCG...is the belief that the brethren of God's church are primarily 'dumb sheep.' By 'dumb sheep' I mean the view that the brethren are basically unlearned in the Bible, gullible, naive, spiritually immature, incapable of contributing something meaningful to the work of God, and lacking the character to fulfill their responsibilities as Christians.

In short, the purpose of membership in some groups is to 'pay, pray, obey (do what headquarters/ministers say in spite of the Bible) and stay (do not leave the organization - we 'need' you).' Few if any openly espouse this belief, yet it is an attitude which still finds its expression in the splits. How does this attitude manifest itself in the churches? Here are some practices which subtly support and enforce the 'dumb sheep' attitude:

1) When administrative and other local church issues need to be decided, the minister or leader will decide unilaterally what is best for the church, or he may consult a few leaders. If the brethren are asked for input, it is done in a patronizing way.

2) When there is discussion on issues that will affect the whole church (many congregations) or when doctrinal issues are being examined, only the ministry or headquarters is consulted. The brethren are to be seen, not heard or taken seriously on such matters.

3) The minister tries to shield the brethren from the realities of life in and outside the church. If problems arise between brethren in the church, the minister may step in and try to solve the problems himself (negating Matthew 18:15-17). The lay members are subtly led to become spiritual 'hot house flowers' who are unable to effectively cope with the difficulties, trials and tests which come their way(The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles, p.14).

Some ministers have little respect for the principles of dealing with problems in Matthew 18. When members don't bother going straight to their brother who might be doing something wrong but go straight to the minister the minister doesn't tell the member to go to the offending person themselves. The minister then is the first and only person to go to the offending person.

When ministers encourage or do nothing to correct the problem and a number of people are "spying" for the minister you have a spy network in a church area which creates fear and is wrong. The first step must be done and not bypassed by going straight to the minister. It is dead wrong for a minister to allow this practice to go on and he should ask whether the member has done the first step before he intervenes.

Continuing on with what Alan Ruth has to say:

4) It is stated that the primary or only important spreading of the gospel to the world is through church headquarters or the ordained ministry. Members are consistently encouraged to 'get behind the work of God' done through these leaders. What is termed 'local evangelism' or a more active role of the members in promulgating the gospel, is down played and discredited.

5) Brethren are sometimes talked down to, belittled and overly criticized by the leaders. Lay members are considered the cause of most of the church's problems. The leaders or ministers do not admit their own responsibilities for the problems in their churches. Because it is believed that the lay members cause churches the most problems, the minister's responsibility is to make sure the brethren 'play nice' (treating them like children), and that they play 'by the rules' and do what they are told.

6) The spiritual gifts which the brethren have are not as important or as encouraged as those the ordained ministry may have. Brethren may use their God-given gifts as long as they have ministerial approval, they do not conflict with headquarters or a leader's goals, and they do not overlap or exceed any of the minister's talents or in any way jeopardize a leader's domination or control of the church. The leadership thus exercises nearly complete control over the service of the brethren in the church.

I believe that many leaders or ministers are unaware that they have the 'dumb sheep' attitude with its resultant actions toward the brethren. There are few indeed who 'plot' or consciously set out to act this way. This trait is part of the manifestation of the human nature in everyone which wants to have power and control and to think of oneself as more valuable or better than someone else"(The Worldwide Church of God Splits: Their Triumphs and Troubles, p.15).

We all need more of a balance of the subject of government and realize that God is far more concerned with the attitude of church government than the structure of church government.

Our focus needs to be on building one another up and not on comparing ourselves with others. Our focus should be on reaching out to a dying world because we love it and want to see people spared from the tribulation ahead.

Our focus should be on sharing the fantastic gospel or good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God and what it will be like to a world that desperately needs such a hope.

And finally, our focus should be on helping one another in the church live God's way and helping them with our love and friendship to stick with it and make it into God's Kingdom.

HARD LOVE AND SOFT LOVE

I'd like to quote a few passages from a wonderful book by Gary Smalley and John Trent called "The Two Sides of Love" which does a wonderful job explaining what the two sides of love are how we need to balance both of them in our lives. They write:

It's essential that we learn to balance love's two sides if we want to communicate the deepest, most meaningful kind of love. What do we mean by "hardside" and "softside" love, and why is it so important to understand and communicate both of them to others? While it may seem an unlikely place to look, nature provides a classic illustration of the answers to those questions.

One of the most beautiful things in all God's creation is a rose. In our culture, roses signify love, hearty congratulations or other deep emotions. Roses have been bred to capture and show off the colors of the rainbow. There's great softness in them as well. Like the tenderness of a baby's skin, velvety rose petals beg to be touched.

But God knew when He designed the rose that the very softness that makes it a thing of splendor also leaves it easy prey to those creatures that would destroy its beauty. That's why, along with the softness, He also provided the hardness of thorns. They don't detract from its beauty but protect, preserve and enhance it. What's true in the realm of nature is also true in the world of relationships.

Hardside love is doing what's best for another person, regardless of the cost. Held in balance, it's the ability to be consistent, to discipline, to protect, to challenge and to correct.

It's the strength a mother needs to stand up to a defiant two-year-old instead of caving in to his immature demands. It's the courage of a father who risks his relationship with his daughter to point out how far she's wandered from the Lord. It's the power an elderly husband demonstrates every day he stays and cares for the wife of his youth who is smitten with Alzheimer's disease instead of giving up and walking away.

Like the thorns on a rose, hardside love is protective. But if left to grow unchecked and never cut back to allow for healthy softside growth, it can become a thornbush instead of a rosebush. Instead of drawing people to its beauty, it can be hurtful and even cause them to move and stay away.

Hardside love is essential. But it's also incomplete by itself.

Softside love is a tenderness that grows to be the same color as unconditional love. When held in balance, it manifests characteristics like compassion, sensitivity, patience and understanding.

It's the sympathy of a father who sits with his arm around his daughter as she cries over a lost boyfriend, and the dad doesn't even hint at a lecture or an 'I told you so.' It's the encouragement of a mother whose cheerful card arrives at the college post office the day before her son's medical school entrance exams. And it's the kindness of a man who still calls his best friend's parents each year on the day their son died in Vietnam—just to let them know he remembers and that their son is more than a name on a wall.

Softside love takes time to understand another's feelings and listens instead of lecturing. It shows itself in the willingness to reach out and warmly touch and hug someone. It's also the wisdom to ask "Will you forgive me?" or to say "I was wrong" especially to our children.

Like hardside love, softside love can be pushed out of balance. Without a protective hard side, it can become so emotional and unstable that all.

The soft petals end up withered on the ground. Is such a view of love novel? In trying to understand and balance these two sides of love an invitation to confusion? Hardly. It's actually the very way we were always meant to love others. For it's the way the greatest lover of all time loves us—God Himself.

Have you ever wondered what God is like? Isaiah the prophet gave two closely connected word pictures to the people of Judah in anticipation of their being conquered by Babylon and taken into captivity for seventy years.

At the end of that time, the weary refugees would experience God's presence again and finally return to the promised land. Get up on the rooftops and mountains, Isaiah told them in the first picture, because "the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him" (Isa. 40:10). In Old Testament times, this signified a conquering warrior in all his strength. It was a clear picture of His hardside love.

But then we see the second picture in verse 11: "He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those who have young." God is a caring, loving shepherd who "gently" tends to those with special needs. That was a clear picture of His softside love.

The people weren't being told that two Gods were in view—just one. But our God does have two sides to His love: a hard side that's consistent, purposeful, protective and mighty with judgment; and a soft side that's compassionate, tender, forgiving and merciful.

If we're serious about what it means to love others with our whole heart, the place to begin is by looking to the greatest lover of all time, Jesus Christ. He loved a sinful world enough to take off the mantle of heavenly power and be born in a stable. What's more, He demonstrated that love to us in that while we were still His enemies, He died for us on the cross.

Jesus had the ability to give softside love to Peter, warmly saying to him after his great confession of faith, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.' Yet just a short time later, He could draw on the healthy, protective, hard side of love to say to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.'

Christ wasn't being inconsistent in His love. Neither was He on an emotional roller-coaster ride, alternately critical and caring. Rather, He was demonstrating the same two characteristics Isaiah spoke about when he described God as both sovereign Lord and a tender shepherd.

As the visible expression of the invisible God, Jesus showed us that His love was soft enough to cry at the death of a friend, to hug children and have them sit in His lap. Yet it was hard enough to confront those opposed to God's way and to 'resolutely set out for Jerusalem' and the cross no matter what the personal cost.

If we want to love in a Christlike way, our love must have both hard and soft sides. **Specifically, we need to remember that He was always soft with people, yet hard on their problems.**

Jesus was soft with people like Peter, the rich young ruler and Paul. But He was consistency hard on their problems of pride, greed and hatred. He blasted the Pharisees who challenged Him, calling them white-washed graves and blind guides. Yet whenever one of these religious leaders turned to Him with a sincere faith—like Nicodemus, the rich young ruler or Joseph of Arimathea—His softside love was always there, ready to forgive, comfort, show mercy and point to the truth.

Christ used the hard side of love to confront wrong, but He also knew there are times when a person most needs softness. Under pressure from the Pharisees not to heal on the Sabbath, He rebuked their hardness of heart. He would always do what was loving, and at times that meant touching, healing and forgiving even when the Pharisees' rules forbade it....

Until we learn to love others the way God loves us - with both of love's sides - we'll never have the kind of relationships that reflect the nature of God (p.6-10).

BALANCE IN FRIENDSHIP

How does the quality of balance affect our friendships? Let's look at the ways we need to apply the principle of balance in our relationships with others.

When we talk about the subject of friendship or the friendliness of people or a group of people what many people don't realize is that there are two components of friendliness to others. One is how deeply we relate to others and the other is how widely we associate with others.

Friendliness is not a black or white issue. There are degrees of friendliness and there are the two components of friendliness - how widely you mix with others (breadth) and how involved you get in other people's lives (depth).

There have been people I know who mix very widely and are friendly to lots of people but who make little effort to get to know others in a deeper way or allow you to get to know them better. I have met a lot more people who are at the other extreme, who just stick with their own close bunch of friends and make little time or effort to get to know others when such a thing would require little effort on their part.

Do you fall in any of these categories? Are you balanced in this area of your life?

Do you just hang around a few people or do you go out of your way to meet and get to know others also? On the other hand, do you know lots of people but make little effort to deepen those friendships and get to know those people on a more personal or deeper basis?

Let's ask a few other questions regarding how we dispense our friendship. Is virtually all of our contact with others restricted to those your own age or financial status in life or race or sex? Do you get to know people of different age groups, race, the opposite sex or of different positions or status in life? Does the level of interest you show in others vary from person to person depending on any of those factors. Given that different people are easier or harder to talk to depending on their manner or interests do you give the best that you can in interest and friendship to all types of people or is there variance based on some of those factors I mentioned before?

We all need a cause in our life that is bigger than ourself whether it's serving the church, God's work or serving our families. We spoke about the tension between the individual and community before. On this point people can go to one extreme or another. Some people can devote themselves to their families, the church or God's work at the expense of their own needs or their families' needs - giving so much that it hurts and hurts bad, whether the consequences are bad health and lack of sleep for themselves or giving so much to a cause that they neglect their families' physical and emotional needs.

The other extreme is the more common one where people have no loyalty to anyone but themselves. They are selfish and irresponsible and don't give their families the physical and emotional support that they need, no loyalty to their employer and the goals of the organization they work for and have little or no interest in the church or God's work. There's little or no desire to support any cause or people or group of people other than themself.

When we speak of loyalty to an organization such as a company we work for or a church group that we attend we also can be unbalanced in that type of loyalty. I've seen that kind of corporate loyalty taken to many ridiculous extremes in my time.

In many cases it's a product of the empirical self. One's sons or daughters or one's sporting clubs that they support are more than just an extension of the self. This is why many parents push their kids against their own will to succeed at certain things. Their love and concern is not a love for their children but for themselves. They want to succeed and their child's success gives them that success because their child is an extension of themselves. We have to be careful of this that we don't try and mould people into our image. We want them to develop the character traits we have that are good but we have to make sure when it comes to personality traits that we try and help develop our personality traits only to the degree that they wish to take on board our personality traits. Let them develop their own unique personalities.

Many people's loyalty to an organization, often rooted in empirical selfishness, can lead them to turn a blind eye to people's faults or the organization's faults or if they do see the fault it will cause them to try and sweep the problem under the carpet and not have to deal with it when it really needs to be resolved.

We do need to have loyalty to people and organizations that we are a part of but that loyalty does not supersede our loyalty to God and the truth.

In Proverbs 15:23 tells us that "a word in due season, how good it is!" This proverb tells us of the wisdom of saying what we want to say at the right time. For example, greeting a husband at the door with a whole bunch of problems when he's tired and a little irritable from a hard day on the job will get less sympathy and be less effective at motivating him to help with those problems than compared to the wife telling him those things after he's sat down for a little while and is more refreshed.

The key to the right timing of when to say things is being aware of the feelings and moods of the people you wish to talk to about it, taking note of the verbal and non-verbal signals and speaking when that person is going to be most receptive to what you have to say.

Another aspect of when to speak and when not to speak being aware of when someone just wants to get a problem off his or her chest and blow some off some steam. Often in such cases the person is not looking for answers from you but simply wants an open ear and some understanding. Often it's better to say nothing at all. Sometimes the person is looking for encouragement and maybe options to deal with what's on their mind. Be careful not to be too opinionated where you're always dishing out advice to people.

In our conversation with others we also need to be balanced with how much we talk about our own interests and how much we talk about and show interest in the other person's interests. It's good to open about ourselves and what we're interested in but don't overdo it.

Some people go overboard and tell people their life's story without so much as a break in the conversation to allow the other person to speak. Be aware of when the other person wants to offer something when you are talking to them and give them a chance to speak.

There should be a balance in our conversation between light conversation, be it humour or small talk and more deeper conversation. Some people are quite shallow and have little to offer beyond small talk while there are other people who are too heavy and serious in their conversation with others and need to lighten up a bit. We should develop depth in our personality and our conversation skills and be sensitive to other people's feedback to have the right balance between lighter conversation and deeper, more meaningful conversation.

Most people give less encouragement and praise to others than they could or would like to. We need to be generous with our praise and encouragement but not overdo it where it becomes insincere flattery or unrealistic praise of what others do.

We saw before in Ecclesiastes 3:4 that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance". It's good to have a sense of humour and fun but we also need to have a serious and responsible side to us also. We should not be flippant - that is being humorous and carry on light-heartedly when the situation calls for sobriety and/or seriousness eg. laughing at a funeral or carrying on and partying when you might need to get work done on an important project or you have imminent exams.

Those of us in the church can easily live our lives with little contact with people outside the church. We need to be careful we don't give too little time for our unconverted relatives or friends outside the church.

We are to be a light to the world but if we don't give quality time to those closest to us, such as unconverted relatives, who are not in the church we can be perceived as being exclusivist.

On the other hand we know from 1 Corinthians 15 that bad company corrupts good morals. We need to pull away from unconverted friends if their company is too negatively influencing our character and behaviour.

Being sensitive to the feedback of others (their body language and the things they say) is the key to showing the right balance in our relationships with others. It's the key to knowing how fast or slow to build friendships with others as well as romance with the opposite sex.

When it comes to romance is safer to be a little too slow than too fast with building a relationship with someone you like. Be careful not to force your friendships but on the other hand if you sense someone wants to spend more time with you don't withhold your time and friendship without good cause.

Another aspect of being balanced is being able to change our perspective when necessary. It's amazing how differently things can be when we try and put ourself in other's shoes and look at things from their perspective.

We need to be willing to accept other's perspective and not take our own perspectives too seriously. Are you too fixed or inflexible? On the other hand do you lack principles where you have little that you would stand up for? Are you so passive you have next to no opinions at all about anything?

We should realize that people can have different views where neither side is necessarily wrong eg. two people may argue about whether to see a certain movie that has an excellent plot and action with a light amount of bad language. Is it wrong to go and see such a movie? It would be a grey area where neither side is necessarily wrong. The main point is to avoid and not be influenced to do the same thing yourself.

When understanding what people are like be aware that we're all a makeup of a great many character traits. Generally, if someone is morally strong in a number of character traits they are usually fairly good across the board. That doesn't apply in every case or even most cases. Our character can be very compartmentalized.

I know in my own life I can be going very well in certain areas of character growth and be an absolute disaster in other areas. Some people can be great in some areas and yet rationalize some terrible sins in their life. I've known a few cases where I've seen some great dichotomies like this and hypocrisy on a grand scale.

We have to have a balance between trusting everybody which sets us up for being hurt by others who would abuse that trust and trusting no one, a phrase made popular by X-Files character, Fox Mulder. We need friends who we can trust and it's by seeing the choices that people make that they make that we can determine the level of trust we can give to people. Do they swear to their own hurt (Psalm 15:4) where they will keep their word even at their own inconvenience?

Character and trustworthiness are best seen when tough choices are made by people and they are selfless enough to defer to the will and good of others when it would be difficult on them to make those choices.

It's easy when we are very angry at people for hurts that they have done to us or others to allow that anger to turn into hatred towards them personally. We must remember that God loves and forgives each and every one of us sinners but hates our sins greatly. We must keep that distinction. Hate the sin but love the sinner.

When we say love the sinner we are not necessarily talking about a feeling but an action - that of wanting God's best for them despite the fact we don't like certain character and personality traits that person has.

Another point of balance when it comes to dealing with people is decide when to confront and when not to confront. Some people love fault-finding and pointing out other's real or perceived errors. Some people get a feeling of well-being and superiority from criticising their friends.

Alice Miller's rule of thumb is a good one: "If it is very painful to criticise your friends, you are safe in doing it. But if you take the slightest pleasure in it, that is the time to hold your tongue."

We need to be very accepting in the sense that we tolerate and even enjoy the many differences in perspective they have as well as tolerating their not-so-pleasant personality traits. When it comes to sin that is a different story. If our silence is construed as condoning such a sin then we need to confront. If they are going to get into serious trouble if we don't speak up then we also need to confront.

There comes a time when a confrontation or some criticism is necessary but keep it to a minimum. Sometimes it's very hard to gauge.

After many painful mistakes in this area my rule of thumb is, if in doubt don't, or put another way, err on the side of too little criticism rather than too much.

Before you do, find out what you can to determine if it is the right time to confront them. Are they going through enough problems as it is without being loaded with more? Is their self-esteem low that they need encouragement rather than criticism? Are they aware of the problem and are they trying their best to work on it already?

BALANCE IN CONNECTION TO GOD'S LAWS AND WAY OF LIFE

Love is the first of the fruits of God's spirit. We saw before that there are two sides of love - hard love and soft love and how we need to have both in balance. We need to care enough to confront and discipline when necessary but we have to show warmth and affection also to all people.

Joy and happiness are similar but not the same. Joy is a calmness and thankfulness that God is in control whether you're circumstances are good or bad while happiness is feeling good and excited about the way your life is. As we saw before there is a time to mourn and a time to feel happy. There comes a time when we should mourn over our sins and the hurts of others and the world around us.

Peace is not the absence of problems. It also includes the ability to resolve conflict. Patience is the ability to stay calm and collected for a long time especially when things go wrong. We can, on one hand, be impatient and stir up conflict or on the other hand we can allow problems to continue to build up and sweep them under the carpet as so many people do ignoring dealing with problems that need to be dealt with.

I'm constantly amazed at how people, even in the church, continue along ignoring problems and make out as if there's nothing to talk about regarding

issues that need resolutions. We need to be responsive to people when issues need to be resolved especially if we are the offending party.

Faithfulness is being loyal to people and being loyal to and trusting of God. We looked at the balance of keeping our commitments and being fully committed to serving others as opposed to either showing little or no commitment or going overboard with loyalty to people or organizations when they aren't acting in accord to God's law.

Meekness or humility is lacking selfishness, pride or vanity. We need to have the right kind of pride in our talents and achievements but not an overestimation where we look down on what others do.

Gentleness is that quality of soft love we described before, of being tender, of showing kindness and compassion. We looked at earlier how this quality needs to be balanced by the willingness to confront and show discipline when needed to others.

When it comes to God's law we have to not only focus on not doing the don't's but we also have to focus on the positive aspects of God's commands.

We can't just focus on rooting out bad habits in our life alone. We have to replace those bad habits with good habits. You can't leave a vacuum. If you leave a vacuum the problem will probably come back and often be worse than before.

This point is highlighted in the second of God's feast days - the Days of Unleavened Bread. You'll notice God didn't call it the Feast of Not Eating Leavened Bread. God put the main emphasis on what the Unleavened Bread pictures - His holy, righteous character.

We may not have any other gods except for God, in the sense that we don't worship pagan gods but we must also put Him first in our life. Not only should we not take God's name in vain but we should also hallow and praise God's name (Matt. 6:6). Faithfulness and cleaving to your spouse is just as much a part of the seventh commandment as not having sex with someone else. The don't aspect of this command is all about preserving something bigger.

Not working on the Sabbath is not all there is to Sabbath-keeping. We have to remember it and use that time in a holy way by using it to draw closer to God. Remember how the Pharisees went overboard with the law regarding the Sabbath. They were so strict about not profaning it with anything unholy that they missed the whole purpose of the Sabbath.

Are we self-righteous like them using rules and regulations that are external to measure other people's righteousness, looking down on them when they don't match up when we should be focusing on what we need to get right in our own life?

BALANCE IN CONNECTION WITH THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

We talk about pride as one of the seven deadly sins but we have to realize that there is a right and a wrong kind of pride. We spoke about that a little bit earlier on in this chapter. Pride emerges from the legitimate and necessary desire to show that our lives have value. That is why we use the word positively, for example, in saying we take "pride" in our work, our abilities or our appearance. We mean that we have something of value.

The wrong kind of pride is an excessive estimation of our abilities and accomplishments to a degree that they are much more important than those of other people. Dr Dobson tells us that:

Sinful pride occurs when our arrogant self-sufficiency leads us to violate the two most basic commandments of Jesus: first, to love God with all our heart, mind and strength; and second, to love our neighbour as ourselves. A proud person is too pompous and haughty to bow humbly before his Maker, confessing his sins and submitting himself to a life of service; or he is hateful to his fellowman, disregarding the feelings and needs of others (Dr Dobson Answers Your Questions, p306).

As we saw before a too low estimation of our worth in the hands of God, otherwise known as low self-esteem, can be just as crippling to our relationships with others and our service to God. We do need a right pride in our appearance, talents and accomplishments acknowledging God as the source of our strengths for God to use us effectively.

Pride can feed ambition for power and authority but the desire for that power and authority or greater status in life should be to serve others, not feed one's ego. At the other end of the spectrum some can be too contented and complacent that they have no ambition to better themselves when they should strive to better their circumstances or their career so they have more resources or authority to serve others and their family.

Paul tells us "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given you" (Romans 12:3). You should think of yourself highly as being of value to God but not too highly or as more highly than others.

The second of the seven deadly sins is envy. Envy is a close cousin of jealousy and is often used interchangeably by many for envy but there is a difference between the two. There isn't a right kind of envy but there is a right and wrong kind of jealousy. It's by understanding the right and wrong kind of jealousy that we understand the difference between envy and jealousy.

Certain jealousy may be sinful, and yet other times it may be the appropriate desire to keep what is yours to yourself. It may be appropriate for a person to be jealous for his

spouse. Notice we don't use the word 'suspicious.' 'Jealous' and 'suspicious' should not be used interchangeably. Godly jealousy in marriage refers to a desire to keep united that which God has sacredly united. [It is an intolerance to unfaithfulness – RW].

There are times when jealousy is not appropriate—namely, when a thing is not rightfully ours. Jealousy, then, to be a godly emotion, must be motivated by the desire to guard what is rightfully ours.

Envy is a different matter. Envy has nothing to do with what we already have. The envious person is worried about what somebody else has. The envious person cannot tolerate somebody's having something he or she wants and cannot have" (Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?, W. Backus & M. Chappian, p.64).

The third deadly sin, anger, is not always wrong. Again there is a right and wrong kind of anger. The Bible talks about the anger of God in hundreds of places. The Macquarie Dictionary defines anger as "a strongly felt displeasure aroused by real or supposed wrongs, often accompanied by an impulse to retaliate."

When anger causes you to want to hurt someone unnecessarily, instead of forgive, or cause inappropriate destruction then it crosses over into sinful anger. Righteous anger is always controlled and is a hatred against sinful actions. It is controlled so as to lovingly bring the offending person back to the correct path.

Anger can be overexpressed and it can be repressed. Many of us have struggled with having a bad temper. A good example of this is the former tennis player John McEnroe. His outbursts became legendary. Why was there so much anger that came out whenever he felt wronged?

He took those real or supposed wrongs far too seriously. Such anger is very closely connected to selfishness - a desire to always have things go your way. He lacked tolerance when he was "wronged". We need a graciousness to accept things when circumstances go against us.

Anger should not be repressed either. When people hurt us over and over that anger can build up to the point that we end up exploding to either the person who wronged us or some innocent bystander. If we just hold it all in it can eat away at us emotionally and physically through any number of stress-related illnesses. Paul tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger. When the timing is right we need to go to the person who has offended us and express our displeasure at their actions and if they repent we should forgive them. The principles in Matthew 18 about going to your brother should be followed to deal with the anger we feel when we are wronged.

Another point of balance related to anger is the speed at which we express our anger. Some people are impulsive and just react angrily too quickly often misreading someone else's actions and motives without giving the other person a chance to explain what they did. We are told that God is slow to anger. That slowness to anger is a good trait but it too can go an extreme. God eventually expresses His anger when

the timing is right. Some people don't hate sin enough to show the appropriate anger when people they know break God's law flagrantly.

Moving on to deadly sin number four we come to greed. There is a right and wrong desire to have more possessions and other things in life. The wrong desire to have more is what we call greed. Greed refuses to be denied anything it wants to possess.

Greed is where we want too much, where we want to have more at the expense of others, where we want more than we can reasonably afford and where we are obsessed with possessions much more than character growth and building good relationships with people.

On the other hand we should have a desire to improve our financial position for ourselves and our family for the right reasons - to provide well for those we love and to have more to give to the church and those people who are in need.

Moving on to sloth we are dealing with having the right balance between work, rest and play. There is certainly amongst those who love their careers every bit as much as their family, if not more, a proclivity to be workaholics and this is wrong when our family relationships suffer. At the other end of the spectrum is the slothful, lazy one. We have many, many people in my country who are what we call "dole bludgers" - people who do as little as possible for the unemployment benefits that they receive and who just don't really want to work for a living and give some contribution to society.

We often get lazy to do what we should do whether it's household chores or prayer and Bible study. We need to fight this desire to procrastinate and as the Nike ad tells us "Just do it!"

The sixth deadly sin is lust. We dealt before with the balance we should have with not letting admiration become lust or cross over to an inappropriate level of physical intimacy before marriage.

The last of the seven deadly sins is gluttony. We should glorify God in our bodies. That means we shouldn't be anorexic and unhealthy like some fashion models appear to be. Neither should we eat to excess. We should do our best to keep ourselves in shape without taking that to an extreme. We can be gluttonous for food but we can also be gluttonous for drink as well and that includes not drinking alcohol to excess but drinking it in moderation.

BALANCE FOR SINGLES

How does this quality of balance affect the lives of those of us who are single? Let's look at few areas.

Amongst our singles the desire for marriage can go from one extreme to another. There are those who want to be married so much that they will virtually take anyone

who shows them some interest. These are the type of people likely to be branded “desperate” by others.

When looking for someone to spend the rest of your life with such anxiety can override common sense blinding you to flaws in the other person and leading to regret should you make such a rushed commitment.

The other extreme are those people who seek the intimacy of a romantic relationship but just don't want to get married and commit to someone. Some are too scared to make such a commitment and that's something that has to be worked through in time. There are others who are just too selfish to be willing to provide emotionally and physically for a wife and kids but still chase the romantic company of the opposite sex.

There is a vanity that is very much a part of youth, especially young men. Young men will often show off and brag to be seen as tough and strong. There is a natural desire to be seen positively in the eyes of others.

That desire can easily be pushed to an extreme in teenagers, in particular, and this desire is what makes teenagers so vulnerable to the wrong kind of peer pressure. You need to be secure in yourself and have a realistic view of yourself as we saw earlier - not having an inflated ego or having an inferiority complex.

It's very hard to get that balance to get that kind of balance when you're young but having good family and good friends who accept you the way you are a big help.

When it comes to fitness and exercise we run across another area where it's easy for young people to go to one extreme or the other. Some people, often out of the vanity we just spoke about, are gym junkies and are obsessed with exercise, working out or sports while others never get any exercise and are very unfit. We should keep ourselves in shape but not overdo it like some.

Men should be able to endure hardship, both physical and emotional. That kind of toughness, physical and emotional, in particular, takes time to develop. Emotionally some guys are oversensitive to hurt and criticism and that's something they need to work through. On the other hand we should be expressive of our feelings and occasionally not be afraid to cry when it's appropriate such as for repentance or times of great stress or great joy and emotion. Girls yearn to have a guy who is willing to share his life with her. Though girls may be initially attracted to the strong and silent type, after a while his lack of expressiveness about his life will frustrate just about any lady.

When it comes to how we control our emotions we have people of two extremes. The first are highly emotional over trivial things. Their feelings are worn on their shirtsleeves. They are upset over trifles. Their tempers fly uncontrolled. They vacillate and compromise too easily when pressured by others to do the wrong thing. They flatter, they gush and they exaggerate their praise of others. People of both sexes and

all age groups can be like this. They gossip, continually feel jealousy, they slander, they speak evil of others behind their backs.

Then there are those of the opposite extreme. They have controlled their emotions with their minds to the extent that their emotions have been stifled and put to death or they exert no energy generating them. They no longer or never feel deeply about anything. They are utterly devoid of any sincerity, depth of gratitude, compassion or empathy for others. They are just listless, apathetic or indifferent. They feel no real purpose in life nor have any ambition or spark.

We need to feel deeply about our calling and life in general. Our emotions and the choices that we make have to be balanced though by the proper degree of logic and reason. Emotions must be ruled by reason but reason must be warmed by emotion.

Emotional maturity is where we don't just react purely on how we feel. It's where we control our reactions and only react where it's for the good of others and ourselves, not at others' expense irregardless of how we feel - whether we want to do it or not!

How are you emotionally? Do you go to pieces regularly? Are you up and down often? Strive to be settled and emotionally stable. Are you a stable person? How do you handle stress, disappointment, problems or discouragement? Do you give up(Prov. 24:10) or fly off the handle? Do you retreat from reality? Do you sweep problems under the carpet?

The fruit of instability is doublemindedness(Jam.1:8). Are you constantly changing jobs, relationships or places of residence? Are your moods erratic? Do people have to walk on eggshells around you? Try and develop a sense of calmness, consistency and peace of mind. Have a stability of what you plan on doing with your life jobwise and develop stability in your relationships and stability of residence.

The emotions of romance if we are not careful can lead us to make choices with devastating consequences - such actions as pre-marital sex and marrying the wrong person. When we are in love it is easy to be love-blind. Dr Dobson warns us in his book "Love Must Be Tough":

Beware of blindness to obvious warnings that tell you that your potential husband or wife is basically disloyal, hateful, spiritually uncommitted, hooked on drugs or alcohol, given to selfishness, etc. Believe me, a bad marriage is far worse than the most lonely instance of singleness (p.192).

Remember the following about romantic feelings -:

- they contain only a piece of reality
- they constantly fluctuate

- they're difficult to control and powerful
- they add spice to life
- know them for what they are - temporary and constantly going up and down
- don't trust them too much and don't let them blind you to the real facts and lastly
- enjoy them.

Those feelings from being fond of someone produce an aromatic high which we call infatuation (whether there is love also is another story). Those feelings should stimulate our self-confidence, especially if the feelings are mutual. They should give us the extra confidence to approach people easier and be able to serve them more.

On the other hand a lot of people let those feelings work against them. Couples should spend a lot of time with each other but certainly not at the exclusion of others as happens a lot when people do get together. Other people base their whole life's plans around a particular person and leave themselves high and dry when things don't work out. Other people do crazy and impulsive things which they later regret while others become so pre-occupied with their object of desire they neglect friends, family, schoolwork, their college studies, saving for the important things of life and other important things.

It's important to maintain friends after romance blossoms or a couple gets married as one person can satisfy all your needs of friendship and companionship. Remember the choices are in your hands. You can let those feelings work for you or against you depending on how you work them. Are they going to help or hurt others? Are they going to be a help or a hindrance if things don't work out? Be careful to make wise choices the next time those aromatic feelings next come into your life.

Amongst singles there should be a good balance between group dating and single dating. Dating in groups has several pluses. You build relationships with many people, not just one. Second, if you have trouble making conversation with a date, group dating takes the pressure off. You can listen while others in the group talk. Third, dating in groups keeps you out of situations where you might be tempted to give in to physical temptation.

The one main drawback of group dating along with its pluses is that there is a universal tendency for the triviality of conversation to be directly proportional to the number of people in a group. Often conversation can get very trivial in a group and there's not as much chance to get to know people that much on a more personal level. That's why I feel there should be a good balance between both group dating and one-on-one dating.

When it comes to choosing a partner for life we need a right balance in those qualities we think of as important.

The most important quality of all in choosing someone is character. Character is everything a person is on the inside - especially their attitudes and maturity.

It is often a result of the person's spiritual life and convictions. And that's what really counts! On the outside, a person can be the best you have ever seen, but if he or she does not have positive character qualities the relationship will be a real loser.

Obviously character is not the only thing to look for. You need to find other qualities that are important to you also - the ability to talk freely, looks that you would be happy to wake up to for the rest of your life and common interests. Be careful you don't set the bar too high that no-one is able to reach those standards. Some girls may want too high a financial standard of living from a guy. Many guys have too high a standard of looks - seeking a gorgeous blonde with a 36-24-36 figure or whatever.

Don't pass up beautiful lady for a pretty girl and on the other hand don't just grab the first person who comes along. Make sure they have good character, that you get along like best of friends and that you find that person quite attractive.

We should have the right balance with how we look. Some people are obsessed with how they look and what they wear while others don't have a right sense of pride in their appearance.

Are you careful to be well-groomed? Do you use deodorant, soap, a comb and toothbrush often enough? Do you take care of yourself? Mr Armstrong had a certain sense of pride in himself. One example he mentions is where he would wake up before his wife did and comb his hair because he didn't want his wife to see him with his hair all messed up. Are you neat and careful to look good in the clothes you have? Is your appearance appropriate for a christian? Are you careful to dress suitably for the occasion?

On the other hand do you focus far too much on what you or other people look like and little about the character and personality underneath? Are you vain in always trying to look good seeking the compliments and favours of others to boost your ego?

We should have a balanced view of love and not mistake it for pure infatuation which is the stage of highly charged emotion you feel in the presence of someone highly attractive.

Infatuation is only about how YOU feel. Love is about how much you care about the other person.

You may think that you care for someone but are those acts motivated out of genuine concern for the other person or so the other person will reciprocate and give you what you want?

Here's a little comparison of love and infatuation to help you consider whether what you feel is truly love or an imitation of love for another.

INFATUATION...**REAL LOVE**

Deepens little with time

Always deepening

Wants sex now

Willing to wait for sex...

In love with love

In love with a person

Fickle

Faithful...

Emphasizes beauty

Emphasizes character

Gets

Gives

Based on my feelings

Based on other's needs

Self-centred

Self-controlled...

Asks 'How am I doing?'

Asks 'How are you doing?'...

Possessive

Allows the other person to relate to others...

Has an idealized image of the other person

Has a realistic view of the other person's strengths and weaknesses"

(From Love - Making It Last, B.St Clair & B. Jones, p.18-19)

We need to be balanced with the speed with which we seek romance with someone we find attractive. There is a time to chase and a time not to chase someone. There is a time when a girl wants the attention and interest from a guy and other times when a girl is not ready for it depending upon circumstances in her life. The key to knowing when is to pay attention to the feedback a girl is giving which hopefully will indicate when a girl wants the attention of being romantically pursued and when a girl needs space in the friendship you have with her.

There is another piece of advice a close friend of mine once gave me that I've found quite helpful despite the difficulty of putting it into practice. He said, "You have to plant seeds. Don't try and plant a forest!" In our eagerness to shower the object of our desire with attention and other good things we can certainly overdo it and that can be disastrous if the object of our desire is not ready for the attention and good things we desire to shower upon them. Build it slowly and don't plant more seeds of romance than the person you like can handle. Be patient. Good things come to those who wait!

It can be easily for our attraction for those of the opposite sex to be pushed to an extreme. It's all too easy for the feelings of admiration and attraction to become sexual lust. This is a constant battle most single people have to face. God blessed you with your sexual desires. He has special plans for you to use those desires within marriage.

That is normal. So when you look at person and say, "Now there's an attractive person", that's cool. But sexual desires that come from lust are not from God. When you start to think, "I wonder what he (or she) looks like undressed" and your thoughts start imagining anything from messing around to sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex you're into lust and that's wrong.

With God's help you need to guard the door of your mind. It's not the one big forest fire of passion that gets you, it's the little brush fires. The little compromises get the fire hotter and hotter. To illustrate this to his son, one student's dad had him drive a nail in a tree every time his son had a lustful thought. After a month they went out and looked at the tree. It was full of nails and dying. Don't compromise with the desire that motivates you in the direction of this most difficult sin. Don't take sin too lightly, especially this one but on the other hand don't take it too seriously and never give up how often you fall. Don't take it so seriously that you get so discouraged you end up giving up. That's exactly what Satan wants. Don't give him that pleasure!

"If you can't go all the way before marriage, how far can you go?" is a question often asked by couples preparing for marriage.

Joyce Huggett in her book "Growing Into Love" answers the question this way:

Two broad opinions are voiced by the world. One is summed up in two words, "Don't touch". If you follow this prohibitionist approach you will not hold hands, embrace or indulge in any form of physical expression of love until you are married....

Is this the healthiest preparation for marriage? I personally do not believe it is. Is it reasonable to encourage people to demonstrate affection to a cat, a dog or a pet rabbit and to refuse that person permission to touch the person they love? This unhealthy view of touch generates anxiety, fear and embarrassment. Too many people go into marriage afraid of touch, even frightened of sex.

The other extreme opinion is "Do anything". Any kind of sexual expression is permissible as long as the motive is genuine love. After all, kissing, fondling another's genitals and sexual intercourse are external acts – "doing what comes naturally." Why then curtail these demonstrations of affection?....

Is there a middle course? I believe there is. It is the use of responsible touch. Touch is a language which can be learned....It should be learned because when two people marry they promise to give their bodies to one another for a lifetime of sexual fulfillment. They therefore owe it to one another to venture into marriage unafraid of touch. But touch is not a language that can be learned overnight, not even on the wedding night.

But I do not want to suggest that learning the language of touch is without risk. It is as dangerous as lighting a match on a parched land in summer. Awakened sexual desire is a hungry flame. It can sweep through the hidden recesses of our being, consuming the whole of us. This greedy flame must be guarded"(p.80-83).

Concentrate only on the touch which is an end in itself eg. hugs, a light facial or hair caress rather than the touch which is the love-play designed to end in intercourse. Avoid being alone together too much and reduce the opportunities for necking and petting and also be aware of allowing physical contact to replace other means of communication.

When it comes to our finances balance does play a big part in our success in handling money.

It's vital to live within your means. Spend only what you earn. Watch out for credit as it's awfully addictive. I know as I've been there myself. Many, many people could tell you the same thing. Avoid personal credit like the plague.

There are times when we can't avoid credit such as emergencies and buying a home but in buying a home you are investing which generally goes up in value. It's so easy for a small manageable debt to balloon out to huge, difficult to manage debt. Do your best to get in the situation where a mortgage, if you have one, is the only debt you have.

Credit buying is the most common way we spend more than we earn. Learn patience when it comes to what you would like to buy with your money. Buy things only when you can afford it without credit.

Have a balanced budget. The key to a good budget is to have the right priorities with what you allocate your money to. After mortgage or rent payments and tithes allocate money for your food and bills(include a portion for your monthly and yearly bills). Once you've done that the rest is yours to spend and save.

Don't spend more than what you have left and restrain your spending so that you don't have too much week left at the end of money.

Be generous with what you have but not to the point where you have too little for yourself and your family.

If you want to help people who are not so financial you need to be strong financially yourself.

Save for marriage and the right kind of big ticket items like a house but not on wasteful things. Buy quality within your means and not cheaply if those products won't last long. Having "suffered" from the travel bug for many years I know how easy it is to overdo spending on travel. Err on the side of spending too little on yourself than on too much.

We need to be careful not to burn the candle at both ends. It's so easy when you're young to party hard and stay up to the wee hours of the morning. Be careful not to punish your body with too little sleep and be careful not too overdo your socializing where you get to the point other more important things in life are suffering like college and schoolwork and your finances if you're spending too much going out and socializing.

Balancing our time is probably one of the toughest things all of us have to balance. It's a precious resource that there never seems enough of when we are busy. Often we just take on too many things in our life or acquire so many things that require us to maintain them. We all need to simplify our life if we want to be able to balance the way we use our time.

We need to prioritize our tasks. In other words place them in order of the ones that are most important and do them first.

God must be number one in our life so don't avoid prayer, Bible study and giving to others!

Do what's urgent without neglecting the more important less urgent tasks. Work towards that balance.

Strive for efficiency - doing most with least effort. Just because you are busy doesn't mean you are efficient. Also don't spread yourself too thin. Concentrate on what's really important. That includes putting seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness first as we find in Matthew 6:33.

At times we need to say no, especially if we're spreading ourselves too thin. That may include saying no to going to too many social activities or other things we like doing to get more important things done. Selectively neglect all but the essentials if you are pushed for time.

We have so many distractions in life that it is vital to simplify our life and not take on too much.

We have to be balanced with our decision-making. To do that we need to make sure we get enough good(not bad) advice and thoroughly go over all the benefits and pitfalls of what we are trying to decide upon without rushing in. Sometimes what looks the right thing to do early on turns out to be the wrong decision when we've later on got a lot more advice.

Proverbs 18:17 tells us, "The first to present his case seems right till another comes forward and questions him." Be careful to not let your emotions overpower your decision-making. Take them into account but follow what is logical and in God's eyes the best thing to do.

We should have the right balance with keeping our place clean. Some people are pedantic like the tidy one out of the TV series "The Odd Couple" while other people are very slovenly. Be neat and tidy but don't get pedantic about it.

It can be frustrating when asking some people out that you have to book something with them two months in advance. It's good to have plans but also leave room for change and spontaneity.

BALANCE IN MARRIAGE

How does the quality of balance affect our marriage relationship? Let's have a look at a few points.

As the husband is the head of the household the final decisions on all sorts of matters are made by him.

The husband has to be balanced by standing up to a woman's wants when they are unreasonable and wise enough to let her have her own way when they are within reason.

Mutual agreement is always the goal but when the husband and wife differ in their opinion on what decision needs to be made he has to take on board his wife's input and prayerfully make the wisest choice on what he feels how God would want him to decide.

Women want security and the husband being successful in his work plays a big part in that. A man should strive to be good at his job without letting it be more important than his wife. This becomes especially difficult when husbands are self-employed and running their own businesses which demand so much of their time. There must be time enough to show a wife that she still is number one in your life after God and not your job or business.

In "The Art of Understanding Your Mate" Cecil Osborne writes:

In short she (the wife) desires a father, lover, handyman, and playmate—a kind of composite of John the Beloved, a movie star lover, a businessman with a brief case in one hand and a box of tools in the other, and an all-wise father. This paragon of male virtue must share his life with her but without boring her with too many details or personal worries which would create insecurity in her. He should be able to meet these needs without neglecting his work....

As she is seeking a mature, understanding, strong, gentle husband, he is also seeking the impossible: an all-forgiving, ever-loving, understanding, wife-mother- mistress; a combination of a mother giving unconditional love, a movie star who is a good housekeeper, a sounding board, an ego builder, an obedient, adoring daughter who thinks his utterances are either profound or quite witty (p.12,14).

This quote highlights the point that we should have balanced expectations of our romance partner. Our marriage partner is every bit as fallible and human as we are and we need to not set our expectations of what our partner should be too high.

God created woman to be a helper for man. Women can take this point to either extreme from not caring about him growing as a person at all to on the other hand trying to make him over too much into the perfect man. Many women think they'll change him once they get married. This is a bad mistake. If a man is not willing to

improve himself under the hormonal influence of being in love then there is very little chance of him improving once the chase is over and the hormonal influence begins to wane.

Many women are very passive and shy on the one hand to overly aggressive and dominating on the other hand. Men are looking for gentleness and warmth in a woman and will avoid either of the above types of women in an effort to find it.

Many men, and this can be seen in leaders in business and in churches, suffer from inferiority and/or have an excessive need for control in what they are over, be they family members, employees or church members.

Cecil Osborne has this to say about the explosive, argumentative, domineering husband:

This type of man has some deep-seated feelings of inferiority. He may have begun early in life to try to control his environment by shouting or by being overly argumentative. Because of immaturity he fears to let anyone become an equal, lest he feel overwhelmed and thus controlled. He must at all costs maintain his fictional superiority. He must always be right. He cannot endure the idea of having been wrong about anything.

Such a man tyrannizes and dominates through fear and sheer volume, or if somewhat quieter, through an intensive argumentativeness that seems never to end until he is confident that he has squelched all his adversaries. Emotional immaturity and insecurity are the basic root of this problem. If you are leaning in this direction you need to get at the heart of the inferiority complex that is feeding that kind of behaviour" (The Art of Understanding Your Mate, p185).

There is a balance that needs to be struck between expecting too much from your spouse and expecting too little and allowing your spouse to walk all over you by giving so little in the marriage. Cecil Osborne writes:

If there are obvious things which you have a right to expect of others, the approach is all-important. A half-hostile, half-demanding manner is much less likely to get results than a gentle approach. A man is much more likely to yield to a gentle, seductive tone than to the 'I'm fed up to here with these kids. You take over!' type of approach....

"Speaking the truth in love" is generally a better solution than blurting out the honest and hurtful truth. To be loving is more important than to be honest, yet to be loving involves facing, at times, the fact that one must speak honestly.

There are times when true feelings must be shared, provided that the marriage partner is able to face and accept the truth. We have no moral right to unload all of our hostile feelings on another who may be emotionally unequipped to deal with that much anger. Speak truth but in love"(The Art of Understanding Your Mate, p141, 154)

Speaking the truth in love is part of showing strength in a balanced way with the right kind of gentleness. Examples of strength such as decisiveness, physical strength like in protecting one's spouse and correction need to be balanced out with soft, gentle love such as love, affection, praise and encouragement.

Men need to be balanced when it comes to being a handyman. Some men love working on cars and doing jobs around the house. Some men can be obsessed with their cars that they don't give enough of their time to their spouse while other men won't do anything around the house such as household chores or fixing up things around the house. Since the home is a wife's nest, a husband's neglect is often taken as a rejection of her as a person.

Cecil Osborne tells us that:

Men after a few years of marriage often will tend to talk a lot less to their spouse than they did in their first years together. One reason for the uncommunicative male is that after two persons have lived together for some years, they are "all talked out." This is much more true of the husband than of the wife.

Men tend to deal largely in terms of ideas, concepts, facts, and opinions. After they have talked these out, there is, for some men, little to share. Women, on the other hand, are much more in touch with their feelings, more interested in persons and their surroundings. Consequently, they have more to talk about" (The Art of Understanding Your Mate, p73).

Men need to learn to share their feelings a lot more with their spouse so they don't find themselves talking too little to their spouses. Women need to be patient with this failing in many men and not talk too much especially when the man may not be in the mood for it such as when he walks in the door from work and just simply wants to relax for a few minutes. Maintain friendships with other friends who share the same interests that you have which your spouse may not share or be as interested in.

BALANCE WITH CHILDREARING

The most important areas parents need to show balance with their children is with love and discipline. Many parents may show love and affection to their children but are too permissive and allow children to virtually do anything that they want to do. This kind of permissiveness is becoming a more and more common phenomena in this ever-increasing selfish world as parents pursue their own goals and careers and pay little attention to their children's real needs.

At the other end of the spectrum are those parents who discipline their children too harshly and show no or very little love and affection towards their kids. We have an epidemic of child abuse spreading all over our countries. Many of the stories are absolutely horrific.

There has to be a balanced amount of both love and affection and discipline.

One important study on childrearing practices showed that parents can be classified as either permissive or restrictive. They can also be described as warm or cold.

The combination of these characteristics gives us four possible types of parents:

- 1) warm-restrictive;
- 2) warm-permissive;
- 3) cold-restrictive; and
- 4) cold-permissive.

What this study also showed were the results of such parental approaches.

The warm-restrictive parents produced rule-conscious, law-abiding children who valued adult approval.

The warm-permissive parents produced children who were self-confident and very sociable, but would twist the rules. They were friendly, but spoiled.

The third group of parents described as cold and restrictive had children who were willing to obey, but were anxious and tended to be angry with themselves.

Finally, the fourth group, cold and permissive parents—raised hostile children who more often than not became delinquents.

Notice the preferred children were raised by warm yet rule-conscious parents—parents who set some bounds and rules for behaviour, and combined that with love and affection.

Significantly, this finding from the social sciences completely supports what the Bible has always taught—that parents must teach the standards given in God's revealed Word with love, and then maintain them by correction when necessary"(There's a Hidden Enemy in Your Home, article 'Positive Parenting In Five Steps', p.22).

When it comes to setting down rules for children parents need to show balance with the rules set down. As we just saw some parents give little or no rules to their children. Other parents are too restrictive or strict. This can frustrate children very much. We should be careful to give our children the right amount of freedom to do what they want and not be unrealistic with our demands on them.

Some parents are quite indifferent towards their children showing very little love or affection at all. At the other end of the spectrum is the over-protective parent. The parent who tries to protect its children from every hurt and difficulty in the world will end up creating a dependent child who won't know how to handle the difficulties the

world will throw at them when they have to leave home. Character and responsibility isn't built without going through some pain and difficulty in life. The over-protective parent is not helping develop independence in its child.

Children gradually have to learn to do more and more things on their own and make more decisions on their own learning from their own mistakes as they go along to develop the right kind of character and independence that they will need to function as a well-adjusted adult come time to leave home.

We know that we should encourage and develop our children with positive reinforcement and praise but even this can be pushed to the other extreme. Our praise must be realistic, not untruthful. We can lavish our child with so much praise that they can get a shock when they find out society doesn't give them the praise they think is due to them.

We have to be careful with young girls who are attractive that we don't over-praise them for their beauty. This helps create what's called the "Princess Syndrome" where a girl thinks that the world revolves around her because she's so special and beautiful. This feeds her vanity to where she looks down on those who are not so attractive.

SOME OTHER WAYS BALANCE PLAYS A PART IN OUR LIVES

Charles Swindoll in his wonderful book "Active Spirituality" writes the following:

The longer I live the more I realise the ease with which we can slip into extremes and the harm that can do to our spiritual lives. I see it all around me and sometimes, to my own embarrassment, I find it in myself.

A major prayer of mine as I grow older is, 'Lord, keep me balanced!'

- We need a balance between work and play (too much of either is unhealthy and distasteful).

- We need a balance between time alone and time with others (too much of either takes a toll on us).

- We need a balance between independence and dependence (either one, all alone, leads to problems).

- We need a balance:

between kindness and firmness,
between waiting and praying,
between resisting and co-operating,
between saving and spending,
between taking in and giving out,
between wanting too much and expecting too little,

between warm acceptance and keen discernment,
between grace and truth.

For many folks, the struggle to keep things in balance is not an annual conflict, but more like a daily struggle. Solomon mentions one such struggle: adversity. 'If you are slack in the day of distress, your strength is limited' (Prov. 24:10).

When things are adverse, life gets simple; survival becomes our primary goal. Adversity is a test on our resiliency, our creativity. Up against it, we reach down deep into our inner character and we 'gut it out'. We hold up through the crisis by tapping into our reservoir of inner strength.

But another far more subtle struggle is the opposite extreme: prosperity—when success smiles and things begin to come easily, when there's plenty of money, when everybody applauds, when we get all our ducks in a row and the gravy starts pouring in, watch out! That's the time to hang tough. Why? Because, in times of prosperity, things get complicated. Spiritual goals get cloudy. Integrity is on the block. Humility is put to the test. Consistency is under the gun. Of the two struggles, I'm convinced that prosperity is a much greater test than adversity. It is far more deceptive.

The one who wrote the following sayings understood all this much better than we do. Listen to his wise counsel actually a prayer: 'Two things I asked of Thee, Do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God' (30:7-9).

The man had lived enough years and had seen enough scenes to boil his petition down to two specifics:

- Keep me from deceiving and lying.
- Give me neither too little nor too much.

It is that second request that intrigues us, isn't it? That is the one he amplifies. Why does he resist having too little? There would be the temptation to steal. Whoever doubts that has never looked into the faces of his own starving children. At that moment, feeding them could easily overrule upholding some high-and-mighty principle. Adversity can tempt us to profane the name of our God.

And why does he fear possessing too much? Ah, there's the sneaky one! It's then—when we're fat-'n'-sassy—that we are tempted to yawn at spiritual things, take credit for our success, and think heretical thoughts like, 'God? Aw, who really needs Him?' Prosperity can tempt us to presume on the grace of our God.

So we need balance. The adversary of our souls is the expert of extremes. He never runs out of ways to push us to the limit—to get us so far out on one end, we start looking freaky and sounding fanatical as we cast perspective to the winds.

The longer I live, the more I must fight the tendency to go to extremes—and the more I value balance”(p.140-143)

One quality that will help us be balanced in our perceptions of others and what they are like or are going through is the quality of tolerance. Charles Swindoll in the same book makes these wonderful comments about the quality of tolerance.

Tolerance provides 'wobble room' for those who can't seem to measure up. It also allows needed growing room for the young and the restless. It smiles rather than frowns on the struggling. Instead of rigidly pointing to the rules and rehearsing the failures of the fallen, it stoops and reaches out, offering fresh hope and humble understanding.

Intolerance is the antithesis of all that I have just described. Unwilling to "overlook a transgression" (Prov. 19:11), it tightens the strings on guilt and verbalises a lot of shoulds and musts. It frowns as it piles more shame on an already shame-satiated soul. Unwilling to overlook differences, it sets up one's self as the standard. The heart of the intolerant has not been broken, not really. For many, it has become unbreakable, judgmental, without compassion and very shallow.

Don't misunderstand; most of this lack of tolerance is not overt, but subtle. You can detect it in a look; it is not usually spoken. To draw upon Solomon's saying, instead of delivering those who are going under, those "staggering to slaughter", the intolerant excuse their lack of assistance by saying, 'We did not know this' (Prov. 24:11-12). But the Lord knows better. The Lord is well aware of how much active spirituality needs to exhibit impartiality in its dealings with others.

Is more tolerance something you would like to gain? Be honest; do you have difficulty leaving room for differing opinions? Are you impatient with others who can't measure up? Could it be that you have tasted for so long the ecstasies of conquest that you've forgotten the agonies of defeat? I can think of any number of ways, however, where tolerance can demonstrate an active spiritual life.

- The healthy can be patient with the sickly.
- The strong have no trouble adapting to the weak.
- The fleet do well with the slow.
- The thin and physically fit refuse to judge those who struggle with their weight.
- The productive have understanding of the drudge.
- The wealthy can really imagine the pain of being poor.
- The quick minds know quite a lot of the embarrassment of being a slow learner.
- The coordinated accept the awkward.
- The pragmatic listens to the philosophical.
- The engineer respects and tries to learn from the artist.
- The stable and secure work on understanding the fragile and fearful....

It may be hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one, but it isn't completely impossible. Our Lord knew no sin, did no sin, had no sin. Although He was never 'hooked', His heart went out to those who were ashamed of their sin. On one occasion He had the audacity to stand in defence of a woman caught in the very act of adultery.

Remember His words of tolerance bathed so beautifully in grace? After shaming those self-appointed judges who were ready to stone her, He looked deeply into the fallen

woman's eyes and gently reassured her, "Neither do I condemn you; go your way; from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Not a hint of intolerance.

If more tolerance is what you need, it is imperative that you go for it. I'm thinking not only of you, but of others who might suffer if you don't. Those around you will be relieved by your humility and will be encouraged to know that you are striving for greater tolerance in your life. It's a virtuous pursuit: becoming easy to live with" (p.172-174, 176)

One thing that you will often notice about people is that their weaknesses are basically their strengths pushed to an extreme.

Take a look at King David. What set him apart and made him a man after God's own heart? No doubt his tremendous zeal and passion to do what's right. Being Jewish he had a great emotional zeal but what happens though when zeal and passion are pushed to an extreme?

When passion is pushed to an extreme with the opposite sex, lust is the inevitable result. How much of that led to his multiplying wives and concubines (8 & 10 respectively) we don't know but we are all very familiar with the adulterous affair that he had with Bathsheba. His passion for fighting and violence resulted in God not allowing him to build the Temple. This point is highlighted by Gary Smalley and John Trent in "The Two Sides of Love". They write:

Almost without exception, our weaknesses are simply a reflection of our strengths being pushed to an extreme. For example, a softside bent often includes the ability to listen closely and carefully to others. But pushed to an extreme, this positive trait can become a weakness. At times, our focus on listening can keep us from asking the hard questions we should. We can also listen so much to others' problems that we become overburdened or never take the time to verbalize our own hurts and concerns.

Another person may possess the natural hardside bent of being a critical thinker. Held in balance, that talent can make him great at dissecting things or projects. But push that strength out of balance and the ability to take issues apart can be used to take people apart as well (p.30)".

People who have a very intense, zealous personality can be prone to vanity and stubbornness as they are so passionate for their own point of view. Such passion can make one also prone to fits of anger and a bad temper. Those who are very intelligent are also very prone to being vain and letting their intelligence go to their head and thinking of themselves as superior to others.

We have to be careful of taking things either too seriously or too casually in life. What happens when we take things too seriously? All sorts of things happen. We worry too much, we can lose our temper at people and be stubborn refusing to yield to the will of others, including God, when we should

co-operate and give in. We can become obsessed with whatever we are doing whether it's a sporting endeavour, trying to make money, take vengeance on someone or become obsessed with a hobby or pursuit our family and spiritual lives suffer.

Being a single, one thing I commonly see amongst single men, and something I did in my younger days, is taking the hopes of romance with a particular girl too seriously. This leads to a number of bad consequences like doing crazy and impulsive things which you'll later regret, becoming so pre-occupied with the object of your desire you neglect friends, family, schoolwork, college studies, saving for the important things of life and other important things. You can end up pushing a girl too much into liking you forgetting real love is based on that person freely loving you, not being with you because she feels obligated. Ask yourself, "Are there things in my life that I take too seriously?"

On the other hand we can take things too casually. What about our need for God in our lives? Do we take our spiritual life so casually that we give God the scraps of our time and let down in prayer and study of His word? Do we take our relationships too casually?

I am always amazed at how little people in the church reciprocate the time and friendship that you give them. Few people value their friendships that they really devote plenty of time and effort into building their friendships with others. Are you a giver or a taker? Do you initiate or do you just let other people give of their time and friendship to you?

We can take anything of importance in life too casually at times whether it be our work where we cut corners or improving our lot for our family or whatever.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, balance is a quality that we all need in our lives. It takes a lifetime of learning and regular adjustment to reach an ideal level of balance in most aspects of our lives. By being balanced individuals in all these kinds of areas we have covered here our lives will be far more richer and fuller than they would be otherwise.

God's way of life and the laws and statutes that He has given us are profound. They reach into almost every corner of our life and give us guidance to a joyful and healthy life. They enrich our lives physically, emotionally, financially, mentally and, most of all, spiritually.

God's law is one of the greatest gifts God has given to mankind yet we struggle because of human nature and the influence of Satan and the society we live in to live by that most wonderful way of life. May God give each and every one of you the strength and wisdom to live up to its most noble principles and laws and may your lives be more richer and meaningful by living by God's wonderful way of life!