

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

**A Spiritual Survival Guide for
the Victims of Divorce**

By

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Introduction

Psychologists tell us that the death of a spouse is a more stressful, traumatic experience than divorce. However, those who have experienced an unwanted divorce would find this conclusion highly suspect.

When a spouse dies, they have gone, generally speaking, through no fault of their own and therefore the surviving mate should feel no sense of rejection which is so common in divorce. Death, though terribly sad for the one left behind, is final. The survivor will not have to call his/her mate next weekend to discuss some problem with the children.

Divorce, on the other hand, produces a deep spiritual wound constantly infected by little reminders. God has placed a special burden on my heart for the victims of divorce.

It is my sincere prayer that this book will in some small way make your difficult journey a bit more tolerable. I understand the pain you are dealing with along the way for I walked this path before you.

PART ONE

DIVORCE HURTS!

I

NOTHING CAN POSTPONE THE DAWN!

Twenty years of marriage down the drain! That thought kept driving the nail of bitterness deeper into my heart as I pulled out of the driveway at the little blue house on Keystone Avenue. My marriage was over. The snow was falling in huge flakes and the road was already covered and frozen. The February wind made it one of the coldest days I can remember. Certainly not the best of days to look for a new dwelling but there I was driving down New Allen Road toward downtown Memphis, Tennessee in search of a cheap rooming house.

Right there in the middle of that deserted road I stopped the car and sat silently, feeling the crushing grip of depression squeeze my soul. I felt like my life was over and a hot tear fell from my eye and burned my cheek, and then another and another until I was sobbing with broken heaving breaths. The thing that kept hurting me the most was my children. I love them more than anything in the world. I remembered just a few nights earlier, after another pointless fight with my wife, I had gone into their bedroom and looked down upon them and struggled with the guilt because I could not make their lives better. I felt like a complete failure. It was the lowest period in my life and death would have been such a sweet and welcome friend. I had fought horrible thoughts of suicide for weeks, even having gone so far as writing suicide notes.

And now it was finally over and I sat totally alone in the middle of the street sobbing. When all the tears were gone and my eyes were red and swollen, I looked up toward heaven to the God I had tried to faithfully serve since I had been thirteen years old...to the God I had begged repeatedly and pitifully to save my marriage...to the God I had served as a minister for the past fourteen years...and I shook my fist in a rage at him and cursed him. I plainly remember telling God, "This is the last time in my life...as long as I live and have a breath of life in my soul...that I will ever call out your name, so leave me alone!"

I drove into Memphis and got a room in a depressing old house in midtown where the houses are generally old and poorly lit with tall, cracked ceilings and peeling plaster walls. I shut myself into that room and fell into the deepest blackest depression of my life. I wished for, hoped for, longed for and patiently waited for death. Only those who have shared this experience can possibly know what I mean. I forgot to eat. I lost weight. I could not concentrate or think. I lost all track of time. Sometimes I did not know what day it was. I plodded through the routine of life with no joy and no hope.

One day I got out of bed and sat down in a chair to put my shoes on. I picked up a sock but before putting it on my foot I felt an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. I just sat there with that sock hanging limply from my hand. The next thing I recall, I was watching the sun go down over the treetops, that same sock still in my hand. I don't know how long I had sat there or how much time had passed.

Then one day that spring I found the depression being pushed aside by feelings of bitterness and anger. Once again I foolishly lashed out at God. I demanded an explanation! How could he let my life sink to this depth? What did I have to live for? Why had he not answered my prayers? What was so wrong with me that I couldn't have a home and family like other men? Why? Why? Why? My voice rose louder and louder in my childish rage until I fell across the bed in sobs, pounding my fists into the quilt. Then God spoke to my heart as surely as I have ever felt his voice. I will never forget what he said. There in that dark silent room punctuated by my sobs. There in that blackest moment of my life. There in my anger, frustration and hatred. There at my point of desperate need. There among that emotional garbage that had once been a man is where God was present and that is where he spoke to me. "Child, when you are done screaming, when you are done cursing me, when you are all finished hating me and shaking your fists at me, when

you are completely empty, I am right here and I love you. I have always loved you just like you are and I will always love you. I know that your life is a mess and you don't understand. Even though you cannot understand, I know what is best and I am taking care of you."

Those words from God poured a healing warmth and new hope into my soul and started me back on the journey toward the God who simply will not leave us nor forsake us, and who never gives up on us! I opened my Bible and found an old familiar passage in Psalms 30:5, "Weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning." There is a scriptural order here - hardship, then happiness...night, then dawn...weeping, then joy. The glory of the resurrection morning was of necessity preceded by the night in Gethsemane and the horror of Calvary.

To everyone in their darkest hour, to everyone in their loneliest moment, to everyone in their hardest trial, to everyone crushed with heartache, to everyone wracked with pain, to everyone gripped in bondage, there stands this great and mighty promise from the Father, "Weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning.!" You will see joy at the end of your painful night! As surely as the darkness of this crisis you now face is real, so is the absolute guarantee of joy in the morning. Nothing - no angel in heaven - no demon in hell- neither man nor beast - no trial or unexpected circumstance - nothing - absolutely positively nothing can postpone God's glorious dawn nor his hour of deliverance one single second! We are children of the light and we are destined for the dawn! Now let's occupy some time together while we wait for the morning.

II

IF ONLY.

Suddenly you are alone. You probably did not choose it; it was chosen for you. Maybe you saw it coming for quite some time or maybe you thought everything was fine until the day he/she informed you that they wanted out. Suddenly you felt helpless. You felt like your life was out of your control. Someone else was making all the decisions and you felt like a puppet on a string. Now you are at the bottom...rock bottom. You don't see how you can go on any longer.

Everyday is filled with horrible reminders. You hear a song on the radio or see an old tv movie and suddenly that gaping wound in your heart is bleeding fresh again. You have sunk into a world where your mind constantly questions, "what if?". What if I changed my looks? Would he take me back? What if I changed my job? Would she take me back? What if I worked on my personality? "What if" I made more money? "What if" I begged? What if I made a new start? "What if", "what if?", "what if?" When every hope is lost in the "what if" world and every question has been answered negatively and you realize there is no chance of reconciliation, you sink one notch lower into the world of "if only..." - a world without hope, only remorse, regret, and self-blame. "If only" I had paid more attention to him/her. "If only" I hadn't been such a nag. "If only" I'd told her I love her more often. "If only", "if only", "if only".

You have struggled with feelings of rejection, low self-esteem, anger, depression, hatred, loneliness and isolation. People who were once your friends now avoid you and when you have sought comfort in the church you have found misunderstanding. It is so hard for you to believe that things will ever get any better.

But it is at this very barren place of hopelessness and depression that God is able to take the broken pieces of your life and put them back together again. It is from this broken heap of emotional wreckage that God is able to begin a work of beauty. Hundreds of years ago the prophet Isaiah had a burden for people with a broken heart. He told them that God had sent him to "patch up the brokenhearted". Look at Isaiah 61:1, "*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted...*" Isaiah went on to tell them in Isaiah 61:3 about a Messiah who was to come who would be a builder. He would take broken lives and build whole lives. He would be a planter and take lives blown hopelessly about by the circumstances of life and make them to become "*trees of righteousness*" with roots deep and solid. But most of, all, he would be a trader of a very odd sort indeed. Isaiah said that you could bring to this Messiah all your horrible ashes, your defeat, and all your sense of utter failure and lay them at his feet and he would give you beauty in their place. He told the brokenhearted to take their "*spirit of heaviness*" (their deep dark depression) and this Messiah would dress them in "the garment of praise". You are asking how this is possible. How does Jesus take a life at the point of absolute despair and sorrow and build a thing of beauty from those sad ashes?

III

THE BROKEN VESSEL.

For the child of God, there are inevitable steps from unrest and confusion to rest and peace. These are principles of recovery that every child of God deals with, either consciously or unconsciously, in the process of restoration.

Without giving it a label, we have been discussing the first of these principles - *the principle of the broken vessel*. Something cannot be fixed if it is not broken. When we come to that place where we simply don't know what to do, where we are out of resources and ideas, then, and only then, does God step into our lives to build and mold us.

Daniel could not find deliverance from the lion's den until he was *in* the lion's den. Years ago the Lord told Jeremiah (Jeremiah 18) that he wanted to teach him a lesson. He sent him down to the potter's shop where the ancient potter was turning the potter's wheel with his bare feet and shaping a piece of raw clay into a vessel of beauty. Jeremiah watched as the potter fashioned the yielding clay. When a flaw appeared that was unacceptable to the potter, he did a curious thing. Rather than work on that single flaw, the potter mashed the clay back into its original shapeless form and patiently started over. This procedure was done over and over until the potter could stand back and look at a beautiful pot that brought a smile to his lips and pleasure and satisfaction to his heart. Then God asked Jeremiah, "Can I not do this same thing to my children? You are in my hands just like this clay is in the hands of the potter." From the place of brokenness and uselessness, the master potter is able to fashion a vessel of beauty and honor.

On the night Jesus was arrested, he told his disciples that they would all forsake him. Peter, always the impetuous one, quickly declared that he would remain faithful even if the rest deserted. This broke Jesus' heart for he knew Peter would soon be warming his hands at the fire of the very men who sought his death. He told Peter that before the rooster crowed twice the next morning, Peter would have denied him not once but three times. And on that cool Jerusalem night Peter cursed and swore he was no disciple of Jesus. In fact, he said he did not even know the man. When he had angrily denied Jesus the third time he heard the rooster crowing and he remembered the words of Jesus. At that precise moment (Luke 22:61) Jesus turned and looked straight into the eyes of Peter. No words were spoken between the two old friends yet volumes could be written about the love, compassion, and understanding that Jesus shared in that brief moment! Jesus earlier had told Peter (Luke 22:32) that he had prayed for him that his faith not fail and "*when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren.*" (NIV). Now Peter knew what Jesus had meant. He quickly left the room and went outside and wept bitterly - he was at long last the broken vessel and not the proud braggart. And from this place of brokenness and humility, what a grand vessel did our God build!

There would be no more denials from Peter. This weak vessel who could not find the courage to tell one simple little housemaid that he did indeed know Jesus, would, in less than two months, stand in that same city and boldly proclaim that this crucified man was risen from the dead and was his eternal Lord and Savior. I don't know how big the crowd was but about 3,000 people (Acts 2:41) accepted his message and were converted and baptized.

From the broken vessel of shame and dishonor to the vessel of honor! You are experiencing that principle of the broken vessel. Yield yourself to the gentle potter's hands and watch him tenderly build your life into a thing of beauty. He is in the business of trading beauty for ashes!

IV

HOW DO I LOOK?

Have you ever walked into a large unfamiliar shopping mall in search of an advertised sale in the morning newspaper? What a nightmare! Where is the store? Upstairs? Downstairs? North wing? South wing? You are totally lost until you find one of those neat little directory boards which has a clear picture of the mall and a tiny “x” with a notation beside it: “*you are here*”. Suddenly everything makes sense, everything is clear. The store is in the same place it has always been, however; you can find your destination now because you have found out where you are.

In our spiritual lives we have to examine ourselves from time to time, especially when we are faced with a major crisis like divorce, in order to find out where we are spiritually so that we can reach our desired destination, which is recovery and restoration. We have to re-examine our thinking, our attitudes (or feelings), and our actions. Honesty is of the utmost importance with God. Spiritual deception and dishonesty toward God only delays our restoration. When we find sin and failure in our walk with God, we must mark a giant “x” mentally and label it “*you are here*”.

In the old testament book of II Samuel, we are told of the great Israelite king, David. His life teaches us an ageless lesson about self-examination. God had blessed David abundantly and made him the greatest of all kings of Israel, but David, while walking on his roof late one evening noticed another man’s wife, Bathsheba, naked in her bath. The sin of lust was born in his heart that evening and he wanted this woman for himself. There was only one obstacle - Bathsheba’s husband, Uriah. He was not only a faithful servant of David’s but also a great soldier in a time when Israel was in a difficult war. David’s lust continued to push him until he finally used his royal authority and had Bathsheba brought into his bedchambers where he committed adultery with her. Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word to king David about her condition. David was in a delicate situation. The wife of one of his best and most loyal soldiers was pregnant and David was the father. Furthermore, Uriah had been away in battle for some time and would surely perceive that the child could not possibly be his.

So from the horrible sin of lust David moved on to the abhorrent sin of deception. He ordered his general, Joab, to send Uriah home on leave for a few days rest. In this way, he reasoned, Uriah would most certainly have sexual relations with Bathsheba and therefore assume himself the father of the forthcoming child. But Uriah was an honorable man with a fierce dedication to his fellow soldiers. When he came home, he refused to have relations with his wife because he felt it unfair for him to be granted leave to enjoy his wife’s amorous favors while his men stayed in the field and fought. Plan “a” did not work for the devious king David moved on to plan “b”. He went from the sin of deception to the egregious sin of murder! He arranged for Joab to put Uriah in the “hottest” place of the most fierce battle thereby insuring that Uriah would be killed. Finally then, at great cost, David would have the beautiful Bathsheba for himself.

But God is not blind to injustice and sin and his prophet, Nathan, came calling on the sinful king (II Samuel 12) with the following story from God. “There was a certain rich man,” he began, “who had a very poor neighbor. The rich man had large numbers of cattle and sheep but the poor man had absolutely nothing except one little ewe lamb. The little lamb was like a daughter to him and even slept in his arms. Well, one day the rich man had company and wanted to prepare a feast for his guest but rather than kill one of his many cows or lambs, he stole the poor neighbor’s only lamb and killed it to feed his guests.”

When David heard this allegation he was furious. He declared the man who was guilty of such a low sin to be worthy of death. Nathan the preacher looked David right in the eye and

boldly declared, “You are the man! You took Uriah’s wife, his only wife, and his life and yet God had blessed you abundantly and given you everything your heart could have desired!” For the very first time since his eyes had been blinded by lust on the roof of his palace, David was forced to deal with the principle of self-examination. He had already declared any man guilty of such a sin as his to be worthy of death, and he knew very well that he stood guilty before God. Bathsheba was pregnant. Uriah was dead. Sin had planted its dirty seed and wrought its devastating crop. Lives were ruined. The damage was done. David fell upon his face in the secret privacy of his quiet room and from this place of brokenness he examined himself honestly before God and cried out from the depths of his soul the prayer found in psalm 51. He asked God to have mercy on him because he is a God of great compassion. David knew he must cry for mercy because justice would render death. He knew he had been filled with lust so he pleaded with God to “create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.” Psalm 51:10.

He examined himself honestly before God. He was sincere with God. He didn’t go through the memorized ritual of prayer...no - he cried out with a hunger that displayed his deep desperation for God. He brought his broken and contrite heart and placed it at the feet of the lord. David found restored fellowship with God after an honest self-examination revealed to him where his sin lay.

Why have I included this story about an ancient king in a book directed toward the victims of divorce? Well, David let a lot of sinful ugly things creep into his life when his mind was preoccupied. The trauma of divorce bombards our minds with horrible feelings of rejection, failure, depression, anger, hate, hostility, loneliness and pain. While we are struggling to survive emotionally, we sometimes overlook some very negative obstacles in our path to recovery. Looking back at the breakup of any marriage, we wish we could say, “It was all his/her fault.” That would make it so easy - so cut and dried. We try to draw two imaginary completely separate circles in relationship problems. The first circle contains those who need to forgive and the second circle contains those who need to be forgiven. We sometimes try to do everything within our power to put ourselves completely and safely inside circle number one. That circle relieves us of guilt and responsibility. “I didn’t do anything! He/she did it all to me! It’s not my fault that the marriage didn’t work. God knows I tried.” But after careful, sometimes painful, spiritual self-examination, we find that there is another way to look at these circles. The circles can overlap one another and sadly, our “x” falls within both circles. We need to forgive but we also need to be forgiven. If we could have carefully and completely placed ourselves in circle one, we would only have one problem to deal with: learn how to forgive. But since we must, after careful examination, place ourselves in both circles, we have doubled our problems: 1. Learn how to forgive. 2. Learn how to be forgiven.

Examining how we think is critical in our recovery. How do we perceive God? Is he filled with love, mercy and compassion or is he a tyrant waiting to throw us out of his care on some minute technicality? Are we able to talk to God? Are we filled with anger toward God? Do we blame him for the failure of our marriage? The answer to these questions will greatly affect our recovery and dishonesty in the slightest, subtle form will multiply our heartache and delay restoration for us. How about our attitude toward others? Is our heart filled with anger and hatred toward our ex-spouse? Toward others?

During the breakup of my marriage, I remember sitting in a pastor’s office for counseling. As he spoke, I felt deep resentment and bitterness toward him. He had a good marriage. How could he possibly understand my situation? Why did he deserve a successful marriage and I did not? These are the kinds of feelings that creep slowly into our hurting spirits and poison us. Do you have resentment in your heart toward others whose marriages are working out fine? All of these negative feelings toward God and others are normal milestones along the journey toward recovery after a divorce.

The victims of heartbreak should not feel condemnation for harboring these feelings but they must be acknowledged. God completely understands these feelings. My point is this: self-examination is necessary to bring these feelings to the surface of our consciousness where we can honestly face them and deal with them. Within our own strength, we cannot conquer any of these negative things. Spiritually speaking, we must fall on our face as did David and cry out to God, "Create in me a clean heart..." If you are angry at God, tell him, and tell him why. If you carry resentment in your heart, tell God about it. Confess all these negative thoughts and ask God to help you put them away. There is nothing more therapeutic for the hurting soul than honest prayer.

V

MIND GAMES.

All spiritual battles are fought in the mind and here is where the principle of self-examination must first be applied. Dealing with the onslaught of negative forces during and after an unwanted divorce is very likely the most difficult spiritual battle you will ever face. One thing must be remembered; character is forged in chaotic circumstance and never drawn from the serenity of routine. Muddled thinking and reasoning based on half-truths and misconceptions leads to spiritual stagnation. Growth comes by clearing things up.

I remember attending the fellowship meals on Wednesday evening before the mid-week service in a church I belonged to. It was always a delight to eat there on the nights they served fried chicken. They made, the best, most crunchy, well seasoned southern fried chicken I had ever eaten and I often said as much to my wife and children on the way home. At that time, I would never have thought that my five year old daughter was even listening to my favorable critique of the evening meal. However, about a year later we moved to another city and joined another church. This church also had a fellowship meal on Wednesday evening and one Wednesday evening they served southern fried chicken. It was absolutely scrumptious! On the way home I made the offhand comment, "You know, I never would have thought it possible but I believe this church makes better fried chicken than the last." Nothing else was said. A month or so later I was sitting in the dining room reading and I overheard my daughter Patricia playing with a friend on the patio. The discussion turned to religious matters. My daughter's friend asked, "Are you a Catholic? We're Catholics. We always go to the Catholic church." My daughter paused for a moment in thought before answering, "No, we're not Catholics." There was another long silence before her friend impatiently spoke again, "Well then, what are you?" I proudly sat there in the dining room assuming my daughter was collecting her thoughts to mount an admirable defense of the theological position of her family when she ended the religious conversation with her new friend with these profound words, "Well, my daddy always goes to whichever church makes the best fried chicken!" Muddled thinking...

Why is a self-examination so critical to our recovery? Because our thinking shapes our feelings. Our thinking is like a giant artery feeding the way we feel and in turn our feelings will produce our actions. The way I respond to God and react toward other people is a product of how I feel toward them and all these feelings are born from what's going on inside my mind. Every attack of Satan begins in the mind. Proverbs 23:7 tells us, "*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*" In other words, the things that are going on in a person's thinking, shape the kind of person they are or will become.

Jesus explained to his disciples in Matthew 15:18 that it was not the little "do's" and "do not's" and the technicalities of the law that caused the great sin problem with mankind but rather from his thinking all manner of evil was born. In verse 19 he said, "*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies...*" All these horrible sins are born in thought! As long as our minds are held captive by self-deception and self-righteousness, restoration will elude us. We need to honestly know where we have been, where we are now, and where we want to go. We must want to recover from the pain of divorce. We must stop finding solace in self-pity. We must face the principle of choice.

VI

PUTTING SOMEONE ELSE IN CHARGE.

When Nathan confronted King David about his sin of killing Uriah and stealing his wife, David was immediately forced to deal with the principle of self-examination. He looked deep within himself and he did not like what he saw. He knew he was guilty of murder and adultery, but what would he do about it? He did, after all, have a choice. He could have looked at Nathan and said, "Now listen, preacher, I am the king - the sovereign king - the law of the land. Regardless of what I have done to Uriah, that is none of your business - you preach - I'll govern!" He could have made that choice and he would have never found restoration and fellowship with God again and our book of Psalms would have been very abbreviated indeed! He chose however, the more noble path of honesty and repentance toward God. David could have made excuses for his sin. The 6th chapter of II Samuel alludes to the fact that David had some real problems in his marriage. His wife most certainly did not understand him. It would have been so easy for David to excuse his illicit relationship with Bathsheba on these grounds as many modern husbands do. But David made the conscious choice for restoration and recovery. He was honest.

There is another king who sinned before the Lord. The story of King Saul's sin is told in I Samuel, chapter 15. God told King Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites so that this evil people would not lead any more innocent souls into sin. After failing to follow God's commands in his battle with this perpetual enemy of the Lord's people, Saul came proudly back into his own country and built a monument to honor himself instead of God. Samuel, the prophet, came to meet him and was told that Saul had gone to Gilgal to make sacrifices to God - a task reserved by God's command only for the priest. When Samuel finally caught up with him near Gilgal, rather than confess and repent, Saul proudly boasted, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord!" (I Samuel 15:13). When Samuel pointed out his obvious lie, still there was no repentance or sorrow. How unlike King David! Instead, Saul blamed his lack of obedience on the soldiers who served him. He was trying to put himself safely in that circle of people who need to forgive instead of those who have sinned and need to be forgiven. As we have pointed out, David could have made excuses but he chose the path to recovery and restoration. Saul finally half-heartedly conceded and said, "OK, I've sinned, but come on up Gilgal with me. " He didn't want to be embarrassed about his sin.

We must never forget that the restoration comes from God, "*He* restoreth my soul..." Psalm 23:3. In the Old Testament there was a prophet named Hosea. He was a family man you might say. He was a minister who married a woman whom he loved dearly and he had three children with her. However, her past was a bit shady and eventually his wife grew bored with the routine of raising kids and keeping a home for Hosea. She began a quest for new excitement by drinking alcohol and then she fell into immorality. Not just a slip here and there but she fell into deep sin and wound up a prostitute. Imagine the pain this caused Hosea. Hosea had always been the faithful husband. Why was his wife unfaithful to him? How it must have hurt his feelings. What pain he must have felt as he put his children to bed at night and fielded their searching questions, "Where's mommy?". How often he must have cried into his pillow at night in the solitude of his bedroom wondering where the woman he loved was and who she was sleeping with. But Hosea, chapter three, recounts the day Hosea went into the seedy district of his town and looked up his wife as she practiced the vile trade of prostitution with any man who had enough money to pay her pimp. Hosea went to this pimp and bought his wife back. He literally paid for her with all he had.

Here is a marvelous, touching story about forgiveness. He took six ounces of silver and ten bushels of barley and he bought her back. He took her home and allowed her to grow old with

him...and he loved her. Forgiving his adulterous wife was good for her; it salvaged her from a life of sin and degradation but forgiving her was also good for Hosea - it restored his spirit and his family. Did he forget that she had been a prostitute? Of course not! Did he deny that she had been unfaithful to him? No. Did he pretend that what she had done was not really so bad or that it did not really hurt him too badly? No, he did not. But he did forgive her in the scriptural sense of the word and their lives were restored.

When Samuel charged Saul with sin in the strongest possible terms and placed the king - and the king alone - responsible for the sin, Saul finally half-heartedly conceded and said, "OK, I've sinned, but come on up to Gilgal and worship with me or I'm going to be embarrassed in front of the elders of my people." (Paraphrase mine.) In other words, "let's keep up appearances." With Saul, there was no trip to the inner, secret chamber of privacy to fall on his face in sorrow toward God. With Saul there was no crying out, "against thee, and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight..." psalm 51:4. With Saul there was no broken and contrite heart. Psalm 51:17. With Saul there was no desperate pleading from the guilty soul, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me." Psalm 51:11. With Saul there was no repentance, no sorrow, no humbling. And sadly, there was never recovery or restoration. A few years later, this proud man filled with resentment, pride, and bitterness committed suicide. His failure at honest self-examination and complete openness toward God rendered his life worthless even in his own eyes. Two kings - two sins - and two different choices - with two completely different outcomes. It was the men themselves who determined the outcome.

Self-examination always places us squarely at the crossroads between two different paths where we must exercise the principle of choice. David faced who he had become and reasoned with God, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom." Psalm 51:6. Saul never came to such a realization. David chose to put someone else (God) in charge of his broken life, but Saul at his greatest point of need chose to continue his failed path of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. You may not be guilty of some great sin but these biblical stories of two kings are still of great importance to you. You have gone through a divorce which has left you reeling in pain and heartache. Your self-esteem can sink no lower. You struggle with feelings of worthlessness and failure. And at night when you are all alone and the tears drip onto your pillow, you wonder why you failed so badly and whether anyone will ever have you or love you again. You see, emotionally you are at the identical same place that David was after he was confronted with his sin. These feelings most certainly may not be justifiable on your part, nevertheless, you do have them, and in that respect you share the same feelings David felt several thousand years ago. Find some place of quiet solitude and read Psalm 51. You will understand what this ancient humble king felt. I urge you, from a careful study of the scriptures and from the heartache of personal experience, take those feelings to God and share them with him. Thousands of people before you have traveled this path. Many chose a road of bitterness and resentment but others took their broken spirits to God and like David discovered, "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Psalm 51:16,

Whenever I am confronted with the message of God, I am forced to choose. There seem to be two more circles - each begins and ends with the word of God. As I read the scriptures or even if the word comes from one of God's children, I must inevitably enter the circle of acceptance or the circle of rejection. There is no neutral ground. I must choose. David followed the circle of acceptance, but Saul chose to follow the circle of rejection. He rejected God's word and God's counsel. When I enter the circle of acceptance, which begins with the word of God, I repent and in sorrow empty my heart before God. Then I accept the lord and whatever he has for me and I surrender my heart, my soul, my thoughts and all my efforts to him. I put someone else in charge. God then fills my empty heart with his peace, love, and blessings and I return full circle again to the word of God where I find spiritual food for spiritual growth. The very same word of

God that started this circle as something that made me feel uncomfortable by convicting me of my sin now comforts and sustains me.

But there is another circular pathway that I may choose which also begins and ends with the word of God; the circle of rejection. When confronted with the conviction of God about something in my life that displeases him, I may freely exercise a decision to reject God's conviction and close my heart to his love. When I close my heart to God, I have opened it to Satan and the world's great lie, "I don't need God." And when I have bought that lie, I, like Saul, will face God's displeasure and God will judge me from the very word of God I initially rejected. This is not to say that when a Christian sins, he loses his salvation but everytime we reject God, we also reject his offer of peace and contentment.

God and I have a strange relationship. It is completely one sided. I keep failing him and he keeps forgiving me. I keep traveling that same circle of acceptance over and over again because I deliberately choose to take that path. I came to know the Lord when I was thirteen years old. My experience with God occurred in a small church revival but it was the single most influential day in my life. It was the first day that I admitted, "I *do* need God. I cannot do it by myself." And since that day so many years ago, I have on many occasions found myself on my face in sorrow and repentance crying one more time, "I need you Lord. I cannot do it by myself."

I have two children, Joan Marie and Patricia Ann, and there is nine years difference in their ages. When Marie was twelve years old, Patricia was only three. They are both my daughters and I love them very much and equally. Yet I expected much more out of my oldest daughter because of her age. Let me explain what I mean. When we had spaghetti and meat sauce, it was perfectly acceptable for the three year old to get sauce and spaghetti all over her face but I expected better table manners from my twelve year old. The three year old turned her glass over very often at meal time but I expected the twelve year old to exercise a bit more caution. My purpose in this illustration is this: God is infinitely more patient than any earthly father. So many times spiritually speaking, after all these years of experiencing God's salvation, I still feel like a clumsy toddler. As a child of God, I am forever getting spaghetti and sauce all over my face. I am forever turning my glass over at the table. I am endlessly making a complete mess of things. Yet in spite of all my clumsiness and foolishness, God tenderly cleans up the mess and gives me a new start - a fresh opportunity.

I suppose my problem always goes back to this same thing. It's this matter of the principle of choice. So many times in my life I have chosen to let myself be in charge. Why do we continually want to wrestle the affairs of our life out of God's hands? It is a mystery but the greater mystery is why God continues to bring us back to himself. He loves us in a way that cannot be fully understood.

During one of my lowest points of depression I recall a lesson God taught me. Some sparrows built a nest nearby and each day I was able to observe the baby birds. Looking in that nest I found three bald, ugly baby birds with heads held high, necks stretched, and mouths open in anticipation of a nourishing morsel of food. The content of their day was spent in that posture, chirping with their high pitched peeps. The only time they weren't squawking was when they became aware of my presence, in other words, when they sensed trouble. The Lord spoke to my heart one day as I observed those little birds. "You see those baby birds there, all they do all day long is sit with their heads held high in the air, their mouths wide open, crying to their parents for nourishment. They don't actually do anything. They certainly haven't done anything to deserve the food their parents bring to them faithfully every day. They only have one responsibility in life; they look up, open up, and speak up. That is all that is expected of them. Yet their parents spend their entire day and every ounce of their strength to get food into the mouths of those tiny birds. That's how it is with your heavenly Father. All that I expect out of you is to look up, open up, and speak up. And there are times, just like those little birds, that you may be too discouraged or frightened in the presence of trouble to even speak up. Their parents feed them just the same. Are you not more valuable to me than a sparrow? If you will look up to me at this horrible time

in your life and open up, I will spend the last ounce of my resources to nourish your soul and heal your pain.”

It takes a number of years to recover from the devastation of divorce. The journey begins with these principles; the principle of the broken vessel, the principle of self-examination, and the principle of choice. May the Lord, whose eye is on the sparrow, watch over you as you continue your journey.

There are many approaches to divorce recovery today. As I have said, our nation has had a recent mass influx of Christian counselors. Their theories and ideas differ widely and every Christian counselor does not necessarily give Christian counsel. I am convinced that recovery from this personal tragedy is a spiritual matter. If the spiritual need is addressed, practical matters like dealing with loneliness, the ex-spouse, the children, and financial matters will all fall into proper perspective. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God...and all these things shall be added...” Matthew 6:33. He also said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life...” John 14:6. Today, right now, before you continue another minute in your painful journey, give your heart new and fresh to Jesus. Through the principle of choice, put someone else in charge. “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden...I will give you rest.”

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

PART TWO

WHEN GOD SAYS NO!

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

VII

THE MAKING OF A MARTYR.

The records are lost to us. They are buried deep in the dust of Roman antiquity. The greatest churchman of the Christian church went unheralded to his ignominious death. And yet other records are left and have been carefully studied by biblical scholars. We know how the Roman government treated Christians during the latter part of Nero's heinous reign and we know that the apostle Paul was a Roman citizen (acts 22:25). Furthermore, we know how Roman citizens who were condemned to death were executed, so we can safely surmise that the apostle Paul's last day on earth went something like this: just about the time the sun sliced through the cell window, four guards of caesar's elite Praetorian Guard unit would have arrived with the executioner. The apostle Paul would have been kneeling in morning prayers. He would have been forewarned of their arrival by the sound of their shields clanging and their high-laced Roman sandals clip-clopping onto the cold stone floor. The overwhelming volume of theology held by the early church came from the pen of Paul. Of the twenty-seven New Testament books, the apostle Paul wrote thirteen (fourteen if he was the author of Hebrews.) Yet, other than what we can glean from his own epistles, we are left with Luke's account of Paul's life found in acts as our only source of information about this remarkable man.

There is a bulk of information that has come to us through legend and a few bits and pieces that can be deduced from a careful study of the history of his time. For instance, we know the apostle Paul had three names because all Roman citizens were given three names from the Latin language. The first two names would identify the family from which he came and his last name (Paulus, in Latin) would have been his personal identifying name. However, we have no idea what Paul's complete name was because Luke, who provides most of the recorded history of Paul, was a Greek convert to Christianity and would not have used the Roman names. Furthermore, Paul was most likely to have been from a wealthy family, because fifteen years prior to his birth, Rome had stripped the citizenship from all but the most wealthy of the foreign citizens of the empire. The fact that he trained under the prestigious and scholarly Gamaliel is another indication of the wealth and influence of his family. Also, when Paul spent some time in the custody of Felix, the governor of the Palestinian region, we are told in scripture that Felix left him in prison hoping to get a bribe from him. (Acts 24:26) Paul would have been about 65 if he was born in 1 A.D. as tradition dictates. The pictures drawn on the catacombs indicate that he was a short man, bald, with a large, odd shaped nose.

The guards would have opened the door that fateful morning and stood the older apostle on his feet. Then they would have placed heavy chains on his hands and legs. Thus shackled, the four guards would have walked with him out of the Roman prison with the executioner following. He would have marched through the streets of Rome just as the city was coming to life, out through the tall stone gate past the pyramid of Cestius and onto a highway known then as the Ostian way. At that time of the day, the road would have been crowded with people making their way into the great metropolis to conduct business. They would have known that an execution was going to take place because these guards carried tall spear-like rods with ax heads attached to the top and the executioner carried a large sword (Nero had exchanged the ax for the sword as the favored instrument for beheading a condemned Roman citizen.) Everyone would have stopped to stare at the prisoner. Small children would have tugged on their mother's dress and asked questions about the old man, hustling along bowlegged because of the weight of the heavy chains dragging in the dust between his bare feet. He would have been breathing with great effort as he tried to keep up with the virile young Roman guards.

The party would have arrived at a certain place about three miles outside Rome known then as Aquae Salviae. A chapel stands on that very spot today, dedicated to the apostle who gave his life there. After their arrival, Paul's clothes would have been removed and he would have been roughly forced to his knees in front of a rock where his head would have been placed awaiting the execution.

The executioner, almost always a large man, would have removed his own clothes and stood totally nude over Paul. The guards would have moved back in four directions about ten or twelve paces to avoid the splattering blood and the sword would have been drawn in one practiced move high into the air above the apostle's head resting on the stone. There would be a pregnant moment of tension as each guard held his breath waiting for the sword's killing flight.

I have often wondered what thoughts went through Paul's mind in those last seconds. What scenes played through his tired mind in those brief seconds? I wonder if his mind took him back to the warm spring days of his youth as he played in the grape vineyards on the hills around Tarsus, or did he reminisce about the great spiritual victories he had experienced as a warrior for the new Christian faith? I like to think that perhaps he remembered something he had said to his beloved brothers in Philippi two years earlier, "...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish..."

With a loud "thud", the sword would have fallen hard and sure. "...that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:8)

The war was over for this old soldier. From the eyes of the world, he would have been considered a fool and a failure or worse. He had given up wealth, and a prominent, respectful position of leadership in the Jewish upper class. Since no one came to rescue him or provide for his defense while he was under criminal charges in the Roman legal system, it is a safe assumption that his family had disowned him. This would have been the normal reaction of a devout Jewish family if one of its members converted to Christianity. Even by the apostle's own words, he had lost everything and suffered much. When he sat and reflected upon the battles fought in his spiritual warfare, the wounds he received were abundant. He had been beaten with thirty-nine stripes on five different occasions, and on three separate occasions he had been beaten severely with rods. He was stoned once. He had survived three different shipwrecks, once having spent a full twenty-four hours tossed about alone on the waves of the sea. During the course of his personal war with the spiritual enemy, he admitted that he had been hungry and without food and drink, that he had been cold and without adequate clothing to protect himself from the elements. (See II Corinthians 11:23-27)

In II Timothy, probably the last letter he wrote before his death, he instructs his young friend Timothy to bring him his coat that he had forgotten at Troas. Then, just before closing the letter, he urges the young pastor to do his best to bring it before winter. (II Timothy 4:13,21) The Apostle Paul obviously had no other coat and no means of obtaining one before the harsh Roman winter set in.

The central question to Paul's warfare is not how many battles were fought, nor even how many were won or lost, but rather, did he win the war and if so what constitutes victory in spiritual warfare? As to whether or not he was a victor, there can be no question. He summed up the outcome of his life in II Timothy 4:7 and 8: "I have *fought* a good fight, I have *finished* the course, I have kept the *faith*: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown..." The true measure of success, then, in spiritual warfare can be summed up with these three "f's": fighting, finishing, and faithfulness. The number of battles you lose in your personal spiritual warfare is absolutely of no consequence in determining final victory. If you fight, if you finish, and if you remain faithful, you are a victor.

Divorce is a horrible disaster and part of the sadness is that it leaves people broken and spiritually defeated. They feel that they have failed and that they have been forsaken by God. They feel as though they have no value as human beings and if they did surely God would not

have allowed the tragedy of divorce to come into their lives. Victims of divorce are usually filled with regret and remorse. They can think of a million things that they wish they had done or left undone. But it is too late to change the outcome of life.

I have been involved in Christian ministry in one form or another for twenty-seven years and I have come to believe that every Christian still living in the flesh has things in their past that they are ashamed of...spiritual battles horribly lost. I am no longer surprised at the depth of human depravity in anyone. A born-again television evangelist is fighting in the same spiritual arena that you fight in. Any sin that you have done or can imagine yourself doing, he can do, from greed to lust to outright adultery. He has no more resources to fight his fight than you have to fight yours. I am not saying that sin should be overlooked and whitewashed: I am merely saying that lost spiritual battles, no matter how severely the battle is lost nor how long the wounds take to heal, are not necessarily indicative of the final outcome of the war. You may be down but "it ain't over until the fat lady sings!"

We love to talk about the great spiritual victories others have experienced and when we find ourselves in deep defeat, that is about all we *can* think of. Paul had probably preached many times about the miraculous way that he and Silas had been delivered from the jail at Philippi as they sang hymns of praise at midnight. In our time of extreme darkness we look at his (and others') great victories with jealousy and resentment. In the bitterness of our heart we cry out with spiritually clenched fists, "why not me!" But as we have seen, Paul also knew his share of unanswered prayer, heartache, and pain.

VIII

FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE.

It is the first baseball game of the world series. The game is going into the final inning and your favorite team is eight runs ahead. You are elated and filled with confidence and pride. You are certain that your team is going to win. After their victory, you celebrate with jubilant joy.

The very next night, both teams take the field again but this time the tables are turned and as you enter the last inning this evening, your team is behind by eight runs. Suddenly you are no longer elated; you are no longer filled with pride and confidence. You are no longer so sure that your team will win, in fact you seriously doubt it. Why the drastic change in feelings? Your team has just as much ability as it ever did. It is playing on the same field as the night before against the same competitor. Why do you feel differently? Of course, the answer to that question is simple: the circumstances have drastically changed.

Faith, in the lives of many Christians, works the same way. Faith is something they have when things are going great in life. They trust God when things are working out - when their team is safely ahead, when their marriage is working wonderfully and the kids are not in trouble. They thank him for the good things in life he has given them. They praise him for taking such good care of them. But when life's circumstances create a different, more unpleasant and hostile set of circumstances, their attitude and comportment toward God experiences a negative change. They wonder if God cares and what he is doing and they sometimes wonder if he is doing anything at all. This fairly describes the way I react sometimes and I am sure you can identify with it.

However, like the World Series analogy, God is the same as he always was, playing on the same field he always played on, and facing the same enemy he always faced. Our doubts arise from the circumstances. We are now filled with doubt about God's ability to win.

There is an all new subtle, theology pervading the modern church, a "give me" theology of faith. I want to make it clear that my concern with those who hold these views about faith is not for their salvation but rather for a balanced view of a great Bible doctrine. I realize they are saved and I heartily commend them for their emphasis on faith. It can certainly be argued that it is better to err in the direction of "faith for more than God has promised" than to err in the direction of those who believe that God can do nothing. This radical view of faith had never been heard of until the late evangelist A. A. Allen made the announcement in 1962 that God had given him a new spiritual gift. In his own words it was a "...new anointing and a new power to lay hands on the believers who give \$100 toward the support of our missionary outreach and bestow on each of them power to get wealth." And thus was born this new theology that became known by various aka's: prosperity theology, the gospel of health and wealth, the success gospel, confession theology, deliverance theology, and the "name it and claim it" theology. I realize some of these names are rather harsh and simplistic and I only mention them to give the reader the layman's terms for this theology.

In its most elementary form, this "faith theology" has been described along these lines: "If you want a new car, just confess it in the name of Jesus and it shall be done, and while you're at it don't settle for a Ford when you can just as easily have a new Cadillac. If you want a bigger house, just confess and receive. Need more jewelry and a bigger screen tv? Once again just ask in Jesus' name."

When taken to extremes (as it often is) it is a theology whose foundation seems to be bedded in selfishness and greed. When all the religious rhetoric is removed, you are left with a naked belief system that would have you serve God, not for who he is, but for what he can do for you. It would have us believe that Jesus never expects us to be inconvenienced with the normal

sufferings and disappointments of life. It does not teach us that Jesus will stay with us and sustain us during any suffering we endure, but rather, it teaches us that we will not endure any suffering if our faith is as it should be. That is to say we should always be totally happy - never sad and if we are, our faith is lacking and we are not in the perfect center of god's will. It goes without saying that the bitterness of divorce does not fit this new theology. The obvious conclusion then, would be your marriage failed because YOU are defective in some way. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Christianity today quotes Dave Dravecky, "In America, Christians pray for the burden of suffering to be lifted off their backs. In the rest of the world, Christians pray for stronger backs so they can bear their suffering." This new theology emphasizes what *I* want instead of what *God* wants. When radically accepted without balance, it is self-centered and is humanistic at its core. When taken to the extreme, this view of God pictures a God who serves me as some sort of vending machine of blessings instead of my serving God as a humble servant. I stick in a proper prayer in the coin slot of God's ear and God delivers my favorite pre-selected blessing. It's all so easy. I play the fiddle; I select the tune and the tempo; and Almighty God dances the slow waltz or the Texas two-step...all at my desired choreography or whimsical notion. ***But what if God does not dance when I play the fiddle?***

In mark 10:35, James and John came to Jesus with a special request. They wanted places of prominence when he established his kingdom on the earth. They thought he was going to set up an earthly kingdom immediately and they wanted choice jobs in the new administration. They wanted to sit on his right hand and on his left hand when he took his throne. Jesus was appalled. They wanted such a high honor but could they or *would* they travel the same road he was bound for? He asked them, "Can you drink of the same cup that I drink of?" (Matthew 20:22) What did he mean? Which cup was he talking about? Not long after this confrontation, Jesus faced Calvary and the agony of torture on the cross. The night before, he went out to a garden and fell on his face before God and in mark 14:36 he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this *cup* from me: nevertheless not what I will but what thou wilt." Jesus was talking about this "cup of suffering" he would soon be drinking and he asked God to deliver him from this cup, but then he placed his faith in the right place, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt."

There would be no deliverance for Jesus - he would drink that horrible cup of suffering to the last bitter dregs. God does not always choose to deliver but he always chooses to be faithful and present with the suffering...even the horror of divorce.

Anyone who has struggled with the pain of an unwanted divorce, the death of a precious child, or any other disaster that life may offer, has experienced first-hand the failure of this new theology. Whether you are going through a horrible divorce or the ravages of cancer or heart disease, your condition and your circumstances in no way truly reflect your position in God. You are loved by the Lord as much as any other child of his. We cannot understand the ways of God but we, like Paul, must sometimes face sadness and disappointment and God seems a million miles away.

IX

THE BITTER CUP.

Sometimes it is hard to believe that God is with us in our times of deep-felt sorrow and heartache. Consider Joseph. This innocent young man whose story is told in Genesis 37 - 50 was hated by his brothers who were jealous of their father's fondness for Joseph. When young Joseph went to see his brothers out in the fields tending the flock, they conspired to kill him, but Reuben, the eldest son, talked them out of their murderous plans. While Reuben was away from the campsite, Judah and the other brothers sold Joseph to a band of Midianite merchants headed for Egypt, where they would take Joseph and sell him into slavery. Later as a slave, Joseph was falsely accused for an act of immorality with his master's wife which resulted in his unjust incarceration for several years of his life. Eventually Joseph was returned to a place of honor but it is interesting to note that the Bible is careful to tell us in Genesis 39:2 that when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, the Lord was with him and again in verse 21 when he was unjustly imprisoned, the Lord was with him. It was not in God's plan to deliver Joseph from these painful events in his life but God did not forsake him.

Do you suppose Joseph *felt* like God was with him when his own brothers sold him into slavery? Do you suppose, day after day, in a lonely prison cell in Egypt, that Joseph might have doubted the plan and care of God? I do. And yet he did not grow bitter. He placed his faith in God and had to believe that God was taking care of the ugly circumstances of his life. Romans 8:28 states, "and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God..." Could Joseph see good working in the drudgery of slavery or the pain of false imprisonment? Of course not! But God could see good working and that is where our hope must lie.

Years later in the middle of a devastating famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in search of food. They stood before Joseph without recognizing him because of his Egyptian appearance and begged for food. Eventually Joseph made his real identity known and his brothers were rightfully afraid because, by this time in his life, God had elevated Joseph out of prison to the second most powerful position in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh himself. Now at long last Joseph could see good working through all the pain and heartache he had gone through as his kinsmen stood before him in need of food. They had sold him into slavery because of their hatred for him but now he saw God's sovereign dealings and he comforted his frightened brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve you..." Genesis 45:7. It was his brothers who had perpetrated the deed but Joseph saw it as God's plan for the preservation of his family in time of famine. We often can only see God's working and plans after the events become history but it is very difficult to see any good while we are in the middle of our sorrow. When Joseph's father died, his brothers once again thought Joseph would take his revenge on them. However, Joseph had only words of comfort about their past deed, "...you thought evil against me, *but God meant it unto good...*" (Genesis 50:20)

Whatever the child of God faces, no matter how horrible it may seem and even though he may not understand how, God means it for our good and it will somehow work to that end. There have always been two cups the child of God has had to drink from, in spite of the new "give me" theology. There is the cup of joy and blessing that leads to the crown and there is the cup of sorrow and suffering which leads to the cross. We are not often given a choice in the matter. Hebrews 11 is often called the faith chapter in the Bible and no place illustrates these two cups better. Verses 32 - 35a give us an impressive list of godly men and women of faith who were drinking heartily from the cup of joy and blessing. These great warriors of faith did great and impressive feats. They "...subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of

weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens, women received their dead raised to life again...” What a tremendous list of victories! Nevertheless there is that other list...that other cup in verses 35b - 38. They suffered...“tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings...yea moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned...sawn asunder...tempted...slain with the sword: they wandered about...being destitute, afflicted, tormented...they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth...” These were the saints of God who were drinking from the cup of suffering. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:39 that these all received a good report because of their faith. The circumstances of life are not an indication of the amount of faith a person has nor of any lack of faith. Bad situations and circumstances do not necessarily mean a person is being punished because of some sin in their life and it is unjust to approach them in an accusatory manner. The circumstances that surround our life, whether good or evil, have absolutely no bearing on whether or not we are pleasing to God. The reasons that things happen as they do has never been fully understood or revealed to us. It is all in God’s sovereign plan and kept in his heart but we can be sure he loves us and is working all things for our good.

This new theology has often caused discouragement to the sick. These folk who already suffer from physical sickness have additional suffering placed on them by the obvious conclusion they must draw if they embrace this new theology in its extreme form: I am not healed because I am lacking in faith. Somewhere in the back of their mind there lurks that haunting verse, Hebrews 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please him...” The damage to their spiritual self-esteem from following this false course of reasoning is inestimable. At the very time of physical sickness and weakness when they need all the encouragement they can muster, they are driven by false theology to a place of defeat and depression. It *is* the will of God to heal in some instances but he does it in his time and way. The condition of the body and the condition of the faith do not seem to be the major factors in such events. Time and time again, people who have been healed of life-threatening diseases have expressed as much delight and surprise as those who observe the healing. But God does not heal everyone. Some people of godly character and deep faith bear physical ills in their bodies. The Apostle Paul left his friend Trophimus sick at Miletus (II Timothy 4:20) and you know very well that Paul prayed fervently for his friend’s healing before he left him. Trophimus most certainly would have prayed for his own healing. Nevertheless, he remained too sick to travel. Did Paul lack faith? Did Trophimus? It seems far more plausible that it was simply not God’s will to heal him at this time. The reasons are hidden in God’s mind and we will not understand them until we reach heaven.

Many Bible scholars think that II Corinthians 12:7, where Paul mentions a thorn in the flesh that he had been given to bear, was a reference to a sickness or disease that he was not healed of, even though he prayed earnestly for deliverance. He actually refers to it as an “infirmity” in verse 9. And in Galatians 4:13 he mentions an “infirmity of the flesh”. The New International Version, The New American Standard Bible, the Goodspeed translation, The New Testament in Modern English, and others refer to this infirmity as a physical illness. Many biblical researchers believe that Paul’s thorn was chronic ophthalmia, an eye disease, prevalent in that part of the world which caused bodily weakness and a repulsive physical appearance. This certainly seems compatible with the Galatian narration where Paul says in 4:15 “...ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” Paul gave a further indication of his physical eye problem in Galatians 6:11 where Edgar Goodspeed’s New Testament translation states, “See what large letters I make, when I write to you with my own hand!” And the New English Bible says, “you see these big letters? I am writing to you in my own hand.” A final indication that Paul suffered from an eye disease lies in the fact that he dictated nearly all his letters to someone else.

Whatever this thorn was, eventually Paul accepted it as God’s sovereign will to keep him dependent on his grace and the lord told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...” (II Corinthians 12:9)

Even Jesus apparently did not heal every sick person he came in contact with. It simply was not God's time. It was God's will to heal certain sick people at the same instant they were in the presence of Jesus and Jesus often sought those people out. John 5: 1- 9 is a perfect example of this. Here we have the pool of Bethesda where the Bible says a great multitude of sick people lay waiting for the moving of the healing waters of this spring. On the occasion of this story, Jesus was in Jerusalem for a Jewish feast and went down to this pool. He was the Son of God and certainly had all power vested in him, and yet he did not heal all the sick people at this sight and the Bible says there were all sort of impotent folk, blind, halt, and withered. None of these maladies were insurmountable to the faith of Christ yet he deliberately made his way to one man. The multitude of sick people no doubt could not understand why this man was selected and they were not. The sick man himself who had suffered his infirmity for thirty-eight years could not fathom the reasons of God's choice. Nevertheless, his time had come and he, much to his own surprise, was healed. Others, however, were not. Were they out of the love and will of God? Preposterous!

We are fishing in waters where the fish swim very deep when we try to second-guess God. We can make every effort to put God in our own little theological box but he will still be God and move only as he sees fit. God, and he alone, knows the answer to some of the difficult questions of life. But we can be sure from the above scriptural examples that God does not heal everyone. Whether you receive your healing or not does not determine where you stand in God's grace and his grace is sufficient. Whether your marriage works out or not does not determine whether or not you have faith or whether or not God love you. He does love you, circumstances not withstanding. Trust him and as difficult as it seems now, drink from whichever cup is placed to your lips.

X

WHO IS IN CHARGE?

Who is in charge? God is sovereign and in charge of all the universe. There are no surprises to God and everything happens within the boundaries of his permissive will. This is true whether we are able to believe and understand it or not. Scriptural faith when fully developed in the Christian, not only believes this is true, it accepts it and rests on the fact that God has a perfect plan for every single one of his servants.

Job is probably the oldest book in the Bible and it tells the story of an ancient servant of God who held this kind of scriptural faith in the sovereignty of God. He not only believed God controlled the circumstances of his life, he accepted it. Job had seven sons and three daughters whom he loved very much and prayed for continually (Job 1:5). Through hard work he had managed to become a very wealthy man. Everything was working well in job's life. However, due to a war and a terrible storm, Job lost all his children and all his wealth. If ever there was a man who could have been bitter, Job was that man. Nevertheless, the Bible says, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." (Job 1:22)

He had prayed for his children constantly, and being a father myself, I am sure two things were always sought in his prayers for his children; their safety and their salvation. And yet a storm had collapsed a roof on them while they were at a drunken party and killed every last one of them. It must have appeared to Job that God did not hear his prayers or love him. As if the loss of property and family were not enough, Job became deathly ill himself. His wife did not share his faith and she advised her husband to "...curse God and die." (Job 2:9) But deep down in his heart, Job believed that God was the master of the circumstances. There are two statements that Job made that give us great insight into his faith in God's sovereignty. In Job 1:21 he said, "...Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Job further solidified his position when he stated, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job 13:15) Job served God because he loved him and knew that everything in his life was in the hands of God and he intended to trust God regardless of the outcome. If God chose to heal him then, "Blessed be the name of the lord!" If God chose not to heal him then, "Blessed be the name of the lord." Either way, Job's faith was set to accept the sovereignty of God. The circumstances of life would not dictate his degree of trust.

The problem with those of us who live on this side of eternity is that we are bound up in time. We are possessed of a mentality that demands order and explanation for everything. We feel we must understand before we can accept. But how can we effectively reason things out when we don't have all the facts because of this physical limitation of time. Furthermore, as the apostle Paul observed, we have muddled spiritual vision. "...we see through a glass darkly..." I Corinthians 13:12. Our vision into matters of eternity are limited at best.

We have our physical eyes, our eyes of the body, which believe only what we physically see. All things are taken into these eyes by the physical dimensions of height, width, and depth and our physical eyes are limited to the present. They cannot physically see the past nor the future. And yet we know that optical illusions are possible whereby we think we see what we really don't, thus deceiving our sense of reason in this limited way of seeing things.

We also have the "eyes" of the soul. These eyes only believe what they mentally comprehend. When we have worked tirelessly on a math problem and finally understand it, we delightfully mutter, "Oh, I see!" Of course we don't physically see anything at all. We have only mentally comprehended it. These eyes see the past (our history) and the present (what we are experiencing today).

However, the scriptures teach that man is a triune being made in the image of God. This is clearly taught in Hebrews 4:12 and I Thessalonians 5:23 where the scriptures make a distinction between the body, soul, and spirit. So man also has spiritual “eyes”. If the physical eyes are the eyes of the body and the soul’s eyes are the eyes of the mind, then the spirit’s eyes are the eyes of the heart. The physical eyes see only the present, the soul’s eyes see only the past and the present, but the eyes of the spirit of man are capable, by faith, of seeing the past, the present, and the *future*. I am not talking about fortune-telling or some other metaphysical nonsense. I mean the eyes of the spirit see *potential*. They see with hope what can be and with faith what will be.

The scriptures are filled with examples. The Old Testament prophet Elisha once spent the night in a house close to the Syrian encampment during a time when Israel was at war with Syria (893 B.C., see II Kings 6:8-23). During the night the Syrian army surrounded the house. They intended to kill Elisha because God had been sharing the Syrian war plans with his prophet, who in turn told the Israelite king.

Early the next morning, Elisha’s servant got up and went outside. The sight that met his physical eyes that morning was awesome. There were Syrian soldiers and chariots on every hill. The situation looked hopeless. With his physical eyes this servant saw only soldiers; with the eyes of the soul, he mentally comprehended only fear and hopelessness. No one in the history he kept catalogued in his mind had ever escaped alive from a situation like this. Then Elisha got up and came outside where he comforted the servant with these extraordinary words, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” Had the circumstances been different, I am sure that this servant would have found humor in that remark. The hills were literally covered with chariots and horsemen and foot soldiers brandishing spears and swords and Elisha and his servant stood there in front of that shelter completely unarmed! Elisha made that remarkable statement because he was seeing through the eyes of the spirit. He was comprehending the sovereignty of God who works in all dimensions. Elisha prayed to God and asked him to “Open his (servant’s) eyes, that he may see.” (Verse 17) Which eyes and sight was Elisha talking about? The eyes of the spirit, of course. What did he want the young servant to see? He wanted him to see the sovereignty of God as it unfolded and God’s providential care for his children, for when God answered Elisha’s prayer and opened the servant’s spiritual eyes, he saw that the mountains were filled with the horses and chariots of God’s army! God fought Elisha’s battle and delivered him to safety. This story of one man resting on God’s sovereignty is but one of many to be found in the Bible.

If we could grasp the key to opening these eyes of the spirit, we would have no problem in comprehending the sovereignty of God. We would see the larger picture of things in the arena of life from the vantage point of eternity. We would fully realize that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and in complete control of every situation. For the child of God, there are no accidents or surprises, not on God’s part. God told David in Psalm 91:11,12 “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” While this is prophetic scripture concerning Christ, it also pertained to David, and for that matter, every child of God. God is even aware when we stub our toe! God is aware when a sparrow falls in death to the ground. (Matthew 10:29) Nothing is hidden from him. He is absolutely and totally in control of all Things.

After a long bout with mental illness, brought on by spiritual pride, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, ruler of a world empire, caught a clear glimpse of the sovereignty of God and left this testimony for the world, “I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most high, and I praised and honored him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou?” (Daniel 4:34,35)

It took Nebuchadnezzar a long time and the lesson was hard but he finally got it straight - God is sovereign. He is in control of all things and he does not make any mistakes in the execution of his will. Only after we comprehend this truth as it relates to spiritual warfare and the tiring battles we find ourselves engaged in, can we truly claim God as our Shepherd who leads us to green pastures...and rest.

XI

THE GREAT CIVIL WAR.

There is a great civil war that rages within each of us. The Christian is first and forever a *soldier* engaged in war. We are front line troops caught up in endless battles that rage among angelic beings and demonic forces that strain the mind to comprehend...and yet they are as real as this page you are reading. The armies engaged in these great battles go unseen to the physical eyes but the results are very often felt in society. Where do we fit into this great war? There can be no doubt that divorce and the destruction of homes and families is a casualty of this colossal spiritual war.

High above us is the commander of the forces that seek our good - God: and far below us is the commander of the forces that seek our destruction - Satan. So here you have the chief positive being in the cosmos pitted against the chief negative being in the cosmos. Just below the supreme commander on either side are high ranking spiritual beings. God's army is made up of legions of angels and Satan's army is made up of legions of demons. Below these high ranking commanders there is a chain of command that descends to the lowest ranking spiritual being on either side. Then we enter the physical realm where each side has recruited men and women for their respective army. There are godly men who daily serve in God's army and do valiant battle for the cause of God. Likewise, there are evil men who fight with equal vigor for the cause of evil.

Both of these armies have formidable forces and neither is to be trifled with lightly. We make a serious tactical error in our battle plans when we take lightly the forces of Satan. Daniel, who was one of the most godly men in recorded Old Testament history, prayed for God's presence in his life during a time of special personal need (Daniel 10). He did not pray lightly, but rather he fasted and sought the lord diligently. It is interesting to note, and provides wonderful insight into spiritual warfare, that the angel dispatched from heaven to answer his prayer left the first day Daniel began to pray (verse 12) and yet this angelic being did not arrive for *twenty-one days!* What could have detained him? The answer is found in verse 13: he had been engaged in a catastrophic spiritual battle and he would not have emerged to reach Daniel in twenty-one days if he had not received reinforcements from Michael, one of God's highest ranking commanders. When this spiritual being reached Daniel to provide help, he addressed him with this salutation, "O Daniel, a man greatly beloved..." (Verse 11, 19) But I doubt that Daniel felt loved during those 21 days of praying to a seemingly empty heaven. Regardless, Daniel's answer was on its way the first instant he uttered his need for help because God loved him but there are forces at work in the universe where we live that boggle the mind and stagger the soul. Tenacity is essential to success in this struggle. Daniel did not quit praying after one day or one week. He prayed until his help arrived.

This whole scenario may seem like a fantasy born in some fanatic's mind but let me assure you this warfare and these battles have as much foundation in scripture as any other orthodox doctrine. You and I, who live this side of the spiritual realm and are hindered because of our poor spiritual eyesight, are caught right in the middle of this warfare. To make matters worse, we have our own personal spiritual battle fought on a far less grandiose scale raging in our own breast. High above are all these positive spiritual forces and far below are all these negative forces and we are in the middle. This causes us particular difficulty because we are a trinity of being. We have a body, which is selfish and self-centered and tends to lean toward the negative forces. The Apostle Paul described this part of our trinity as "the flesh". We also have a spirit within us - a place hidden in our heart that was created to contain God. For the Christian, this part of our being longs to be like Jesus and so it forever tends to lean toward the spiritual positive forces. These

two parts of our being struggle endlessly with one another. There is a constant conversation going on inside us. Our flesh and our spirit are engaged in a verbal battle to direct the third part of our being - our soul - to action. Sometimes the spirit within us wins the argument and sometimes the flesh within us wins the argument but whatever contract these two arrive at, the *soul* will act upon it.

No matter how horrible the sin or crime, it was committed because of a *compromise* between a man's flesh and his spirit. This battlefield is located in the mind. The Apostle Paul described this battle brilliantly in Romans 7:15-25 and summed it up as follows, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man (spirit): but I see another law in my members (flesh), warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

Every child of God is engaged in this warfare, and every child of God wins some battles and loses others. These unseen forces engage in relentless warfare to occupy territory in the mind. Sometimes the forces of good occupy a larger portion of the battlefield and we shore up the walls of the fortress with prayer and the word of God and then there appears some tiny break in the wall, some unnoticed crack and in rushes the enemy - the forces of evil occupying new territory until they can be rooted out with prayer and the word of God. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, "...We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The battle would be much simpler if we *did* wrestle against "flesh and blood" - something we could see and touch. But the principle of spiritual warfare must be fought with unseen weapons on unseen battlefields with an unseen enemy. When Paul faced this dilemma two thousand years ago, he cried out in tortured desperation, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me???" (Romans 7:24) Spiritual soldiers engaged in tiring, endless battle throughout the ages have made this same heart-felt plea. Divorce is a terrible time of defeat and we sometimes feel like the entire war has been hopelessly lost. But the answer remains the same today as it did for Paul two thousand years ago; "I thank God through Jesus Christ our lord..." (Romans 7:25)

PART THREE

WHAT HAPPENS TO A BROKEN HEART?

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

XII

WOUNDED SPIRITS.

Mankind has been created in the image of God. This statement is unacceptable to the atheist, the humanist, or the reprobate sinner, because it assumes the existence of God and therefore a moral responsibility and accountability to a supreme being. However, for those who take a high view of scripture, it is inevitable. The very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) states in 1:26, “And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”. This fact is repeated again in Genesis 1:27, 5:3, and 9:6. But what is the image of God?

God is a trinity. I John 5:7 states, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” If the likeness of God is a trinity of being then it follows that the likeness of man is a trinity of being. In the early 1900’s, a radical Jewish physician from Vienna named Sigmund Freud came to the conclusion that the psyche of man is made up of three parts which he termed, the *id* (innate basic drives) and the *superego* (the socially acquired conscience) and the *ego* (the negotiator between these two components). For many years of my life, I wondered how this anti-religious man who rejected both Christianity and Judaism, the religion of his birth, could have possibly stumbled onto the idea of man’s triune nature. (Although his understanding of the subject is far from scriptural and has been largely rejected by modern psychologists, both Christian and non-Christian). In his book, *The Future of an Illusion*, (1927) Freud vents outright hostility at all religion and compares it to a neurosis (mental illness). How then could a man with this attitude toward God stumble onto such a profound theological concept, even if his understanding of the issue was faulty. I believe the answer lies in an obscure Christian physician who lived a full one hundred years before Freud. Johann August Heinroth wrote much in the early 1800’s about the tripartite nature of man. This German Christian studied Romans 7 and deduced that the human personality could be divided into three parts that were often engaged in a tremendous struggle. Johann Heinroth declared that this inner crisis could be overcome only by the power of the Holy Spirit in a born-again believer. Since his solution to the problems were considered ridiculous by most of his contemporaries, his name and work have been largely lost to most students and Freud’s atheistic approach gained wide acceptance and his place in history assured as “the father of psychiatry”. I believe Freud was influenced by this earlier Christian writer. I have included this little historical jaunt to give credence to the idea that not only theologians but a large part of the psychological branch of science has for sometime realized that there is more to mankind than can be anatomically identified. In the book “Closer to The Light”, considerable space is given to descriptions of modern scientific investigation into this area of study. But what does the trinity of our being have to do with a broken heart?

We carry our soul and our spirit within the temple of our physical body and that physical body has certain “gates” or entrance ways; the mouth, nose, ears, eyes, and touch. This physical body is subject to physical pain and when that pain is severe enough it manifests itself out one of these gates, “ouch!” through the mouth, tears through the eyes, etc.. This physical part of our personhood is not hard to understand but what about the soul and the spirit? Can they be wounded? People are born with this trinity of being inside them. The word of God refers to this triune nature in Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow (the body), and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

If someone slaps you across the cheek, they have inflicted a minor physical wound to the outer shell that houses your soul and your spirit. If someone hurls repeated insults at you, it may never cause you actual physical harm and yet it eventually penetrates the soul and your feelings

change. You are hurt and sad and the pain in your soul, while not physical, often manifests itself through the physical gates - harsh words spoken or tears shed. But if someone inflicts upon you an even deeper hurt, for instance, if someone you love dearly betrays you, it cuts to the deepest part of your being - your spirit. The offense to the body changes your appearance, the offense to the soul changes your feelings but this deepest of all wounds - the offense to the spirit, changes your very thinking. Your entire thinking changes from trust to mistrust, from peace to confusion, from security to insecurity, from love to hate and on and on.

A wounded spirit is a broken heart. As we travel through life, we develop vulnerable spots in our spirits. Some would say we are “real sensitive” about certain things. Some of these vulnerable spots are developed by past experiences. For instance victims of child abuse, both sexual and physical as well as emotional abuse, develop lifelong vulnerable spots in the spirit...places where they can be easily wounded. Other people are born with physical deficiencies or deformities and in some people, these create vulnerable or sensitive places in their spirit. Maybe in childhood, classmates taunted them and it has left a scar. The past sins of a spouse, perhaps unfaithfulness, may have created a sensitive area where we are easily hurt in our spirits. For whatever reasons, and there are a multitude, we all seem to have developed these little areas where we are easily offended. And very often when an offense comes, it hits one of these spots where our spirit is very close to the surface and very sensitive.

Every honest individual can remember incidents from life that caused an especially deep pain to their heart. We may have even hidden them deep in our hearts and kept them secret. We may have forgotten them and pushed them deep into our subconsciousness only to have these old hurts flare up unexpectedly when we are under stress as adults.

Wounds to the spirit, like wounds to the body range from scratches to serious lacerations. When the spirit is deeply wounded we experience heartbreak. For some reason we expect spiritual wounds to experience immediate healing. We are perfectly willing to tolerate discomfort and hardship to allow the proper healing of a broken leg but expect a broken heart to heal right away. God is certainly able to heal a broken heart instantly just as he is able to heal a broken leg instantly, however, as a general rule of thumb in both cases things take their natural course which requires time and attention.

These offenses that come into our spirit and wound us are a lot like seeds. They must be removed or they will grow. The more the offense grows within me, the less room there is for good, healthy spirit to exist in peace. The longer this seed is allowed to grow, the more it pushes its way out until it manifests itself through one of the gates of the physical body. I'll say something I should not say. I will give someone that “look that kills”. The joy of life will leave my eyes. Medical science now broadly admits this deeply spiritual truth: an untreated spiritual wound will turn inward to the physical body and manifest itself in a host of physical maladies that range from headaches to stomach ulcers and some research doctors have even suggested a link to cancer. The only remedy is to deal with the seed. So often psychologists will deal with the symptoms and try to change the manifestation which escapes through one of the body gates. The symptoms may change by learned discipline but until that seed of offense is dealt with properly there will be no true healing.

There is only one reason why spiritual healing does not take place in some people; they have not taken their case to the right physician. Jesus said, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4.

In I Samuel, chapter 1 and 2 there is the precious story of Hannah. She was the wife of Elkanah but he also had another wife named Peninah who was blessed with many sons and daughters. Hannah was barren and had no children. This was her vulnerable spot in her spirit. Every year Elkanah took his family to Shiloh to make sacrifices to the lord. On this yearly journey, Peninah took delight in attacking this sensitive spot in Hannah's spirit until she would break down in tears and would be so heartbroken that she could not eat. How did hannah deal with her broken heart? First, she chose to put someone else in charge of her life - the Lord.

People cannot fix broken hearts, only God can. It is a spiritual problem that requires a spiritual answer. Hannah knew she could not heal the brokenness of her heart anymore than she could heal a broken leg. In I Samuel 2:9 she declared, "...for by strength shall no man prevail."

Second, she did not lash out at her tormentor. In chapter 1:10 the Bible tells us, "...and she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord and wept sore." Instead she called upon the Lord. It wasn't that she felt no bitterness, the scriptures plainly state that she did, she just turned that bitterness over to the Lord. We are all naturally tempted to strike back at those who hurt us, but more often than not, such retaliation only deepens our own painful wound.

Thirdly, Hannah did not blame God. All of us come to hard places in our life when we wonder why God allows certain things to happen and if we're not careful we will slowly allow our hearts to turn doubt into anger toward God. And that, of course, is counterproductive to spiritual healing.

Finally, Hannah was patient. This painful spiritual wound festered for years inside Hannah until God finally blessed her with the child, Samuel, who would grow up to be one of the greatest judges in Israel's history. Can you imagine the pride in this Jewish mother's heart when she looked upon her grown son who now presided as Israel's most pre-eminent jurist? God truly turned her heartache into happiness when she dealt with the seed of her wounded spirit.

God understands the broken heart and loves the brokenhearted. The principles of spiritual healing deal more with the matter of surrender than any exercise you may perform. God, and he alone, is the healer. The very most you can do is to go to him and tell him what the symptoms are. Jesus had this concept in mind when he cried, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. Years after Christ issued this universal invitation to spiritual healing, his faithful servant Peter encouraged the persecuted Christians scattered about the Roman Empire with these words, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." I Peter 5:7. God is the healer of broken hearts to all who yield.

There was a Korean orphanage I once read about, where the children could not sleep at night. They would become fearful and restless. This was just following the Korean war and these children had seen a lot of the horrible carnage of war and had suffered much hunger because of the war's disruption of their lives. One of the orphanage officials finally discerned that the children were afraid to go to sleep for fear they would wake up and have nothing to eat, so he came up with a novel idea. Every night at bedtime he would give each child a piece of bread. This was not a piece of bread to be eaten, no, this was a piece of bread to be held until morning. With this security - this assurance that there would be something to eat in the morning, the children were able to sleep soundly.

At one point in my life, when I was going through a very difficult time in the break-up of my marriage, I wrote a personal psalm from my own heart and I attached it to the sun visor of my car. Everyday before I left for work, I lowered that sun visor and read that psalm to God. It was my little piece of bread to get me through the night of spiritual heartbreak. This is an excellent exercise in times of crisis. If you find that particular exercise hard today, then find some psalm in the Bible or some other passage that speaks to your heart and claim it for your own. It should be taken daily, like any other medicine prescribed by a physician for a physical illness. Chew it...swallow it...digest it...believe it...quote it...learn it...and live it. Saturate yourself with the word of God and you are placing yourself in the great healer's care.

When Jesus was on the mount of temptation before he began his earthly ministry, Satan came to that mountain top to tempt him. Three different times Satan approached Jesus with a new and difficult temptation. Jesus was the Son of God and had all power and authority but the weapon he used against Satan's attacks was the word of God. Again and again Jesus reprimanded Satan with, "It is written!". The best salve for spiritual wounds is the word of God gently applied by the Lord's love. The psalms are full of deep and meaningful truths uttered from broken hearts

and broken lives by men whose experiences are ageless as they learned this beautiful truth, “The lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalms 34:18 NIV.

XIII

PULLING THE KNIFE OUT.

The telephone rang in the middle of the night and I instinctively knew something was wrong. It was my mother informing me that my father was in the intensive care unit of the hospital with a failing heart and the attending physician did not expect him to live. Almost one year to the day earlier, my father and I had a horrible quarrel. Our relationship had never been ideal but that argument was the worst confrontation we had ever had. Cruel, vicious words born in deep-seated resentment were spoken that drove a wedge deep between us...and now he was dying. As I dressed and ran for the car I began to pray, "Lord, let him live long enough for me to apologize." It is amazing how fast foolish pride and sinful arrogance melt away in the sobering shadow of impending death. As soon as I arrived at the hospital, which was one hundred miles from my home, I ran into the intensive care unit. My father was unconscious and it was obvious that he was breathing his last breaths. While I helplessly wept over his failing body, he stirred a little and opened his eyes. For about two minutes my father regained consciousness and I made my apologies to him. I wanted so much for my father to apologize to me for the things he had said and done but that did not happen. Nevertheless, I had done all within my power to make my personal peace with him before he died. To my knowledge, I was the last person to ever speak to my father before he died. I asked him to forgive me for every wrong in word or deed that I had done. His last words to me were, "You were forgiven long ago."

Restitution - setting things straight - putting things in order, is a beautiful act of spiritual reparation and is a soul freeing, life giving principle of God. Many Christians carry an awful unnecessary weight around their spiritual necks because of wrongs done to others and never made right. There is an ethical responsibility that rests on the shoulders of every honest soul to restore broken relationships as far as those wronged will allow us.

If restoration is the process of my forgiving the offender, then restitution is the process of learning *how to be forgiven* (or how to seek forgiveness) when I am the offender. It may seem odd to talk about learning how to be forgiven, but restitution, like restoration, is a process and not a single instantaneous event. So many times, when we wound another spirit at some vulnerable spot, we think a single apology ought to patch things up nicely and everything ought to be rosy and right again. This kind of mentality is born in the selfish heart. We want things to be back to normal so that our little world is sound and in good order with a minimum amount of work on our part. A single little, "I'm sorry." and we hope to have fulfilled the requirements of restitution. The picture looks something like this: we rip a gaping, ugly hole in someone's innocent heart and then we expect a neat, well worded apology to fill that hole. That is comparable to cutting off your hand and putting a single band-aid on the gushing wound.

The obligation of scriptural restitution does not end with an apology. Exodus 22:1 states, "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep." If God required this kind of restitution - this over compensation - for material property, how much more does he require when the spirit of a fellow child of God is robbed of their spiritual peace and sense of well being?

Jesus said in Matthew 5:23,24, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." When there is an unhealed wound in a brother or sister that exists because of my insensitivity, my relationship with God is severely affected. "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." Matthew 18:6. That is incredibly strong language regarding people guilty of

offending God's little ones. God places great weight on our personal relationships as his children and when there is a tear in a human relationship or bond, the perfect will of God has been breached. The answer is restitution.

When you accidentally hurt someone physically, (perhaps you accidentally bump them with something), your first reaction is to quickly apologize and very often you will offer physical comfort by rubbing the hurting area. If you hurt someone emotionally, you might offer restitution with a loving deed; sending flowers or a nice card. But when you wound the spirit and cut deep into another person's heart and self-esteem, the proper response is deep Godly repentance, the kind of repentance that produces ongoing works of love and support along with a sincere apology. If you make attempts at restitution and your efforts seem to be fruitless, there are several possibilities. First, did you truly repent? Sometimes in our attempt at restitution, our apology begins like this, "I'm sorry, but..." followed by any number of excuses for our behavior. Any apology, whether to man or to God, that includes the word "but" is not true repentance because the instant that word (*but*) is spoken, we are making an attempt to shift responsibility. We have done wrong but in our eyes there is a perfectly good reason for it.

Secondly, in most cases, it took more than a few words to rip that horrible hole in their heart and it will take more than a few words to repair it. Doesn't it make sense that if you spend six months or a year doing things that create a wounded spirit (or even one single thing) that the act of repentance to bring about restitution and healing should include doing acts of love for a like period of time rather than a trite apology quickly offered?

Thirdly, perhaps restitution has not been accomplished because God is still trying to teach you something. Every principle of God, including the principle of restitution, is for our good and growth. God is always teaching us something that will make us stronger and more able to help others.

Finally there is a law written into the heart of all people, a law of justice, that makes us feel that the punishment or consequence must equal the offense. When we hear about someone who has abused a small child and then gets a simple slap on the wrist by our justice system it makes our blood boil. Why? Because the punishment does not fit the crime in our mind. It is a build-in characteristic of human nature. We call it justice. It is truly a gift of God to be able to forgive our offender the same way God forgives us - with complete mercy and grace.

Motive is important in every spiritual act we perform and restitution is no different. How many times has a spouse confessed to unfaithfulness and thought to himself, "Whew, that's a load off my chest."? Now stop and consider this: did the individual confess and repent because of a Godly sense of responsibility that made them want their spouse bettered spiritually or did they do it to get a load of guilt off their own dirty conscience? The age old "I just had to tell someone" situation.

You see, the seed of wrongdoing grows into the tree of heartache and the fruit of that tree is deceit, anger, mistrust, and broken fellowship. Many people fail to make restitution until their tree is full grown and laden with foul fruit. They are then amazed that the foul stench of that rotted fruit lingers in the air for so long after they feel they have adequately dealt with the issue. Somehow, they have been led to believe that an apology in some magical way is like an ax that cuts that tree to the ground. In reality, an apology only says, "I am not going to plant this seed again and I will never again water the seed already planted." The hurt, the pain, the heartache, and all the other fruit our wrong doing has wrought take quite a long time to die and wither away.

Time is a great healer and we must realize that our sin against our fellow man places us in a peculiar place of obligation to him. We are ethically and scripturally bound to help in his restoration process because this is the foundation for our restitution process. Both are essential to a healthy spirit.

In short, restoration, (which is taken from the Hebrew word "shuwb" meaning "to pull in again" or "fetch back home") is an act of God reaching down to man and filling him with the grace to forgive others so that he may be forgiven. The forgiveness is instantaneous but the

restoration process, more often than not, takes more time. There was a journey for the prodigal son to make before he reached home although he repented of his sin while still living in the hog lot. There are lessons to be learned. The prodigal son was allowed to go all the way to that stinking hog pen and wallow in the mire before the restoration process began in his heart.

Restitution, on the other hand, is man reaching out to his fellow man to make amends for his offenses. This process is often time consuming and requires ongoing acts of love and kindness to the wronged party. We must not be impatient. The minute we utter in anger those familiar words, “Why don’t you forgive me? I said I was sorry, what more can I do?”, we have once again tried to shift the responsibility for restitution from our shoulders onto the offended person’s shoulders and that is not where it belongs.

The truth of the matter is that restitution and forgiveness may be taking place without our fully realizing it. Let me explain. When the event occurs that causes the deep wound to the spirit, the offended party sinks into a deep pit of pain. As the offended and the offender try to work out restitution and restoration, a certain level is reached and things are better, although not like they once were. But then, just when it looked like things were going to be OK, he/she recalled that horrible offense and they felt that same pain all over again although not quite as badly as before. Once again restitution/restoration is begun and the fellowship is restored, or so it seems, when the cycle repeats itself yet again. But if you will carefully observe what is going on, you will probably see that the time between the recalling of the event and the subsequent pain to the next cycle is growing further and further apart. The pain is not as deep during each successive time and the effort at forgiveness comes faster. Don’t blame the offended party. They are probably doing their best and if you will be patient, the pain and the remembering will be almost nonexistent as the restitution procedure continues.

If we are to be all God would have us be, we must treat restitution with the same respect that God does. It is not a selective, optional obligation. It is at the foundation of a way of life that teaches, “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Mark 12:31.

Thousands of years ago a rebellious, angry young man named Cain cried out sarcastically to God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Sixty-six books of the Bible exclaim the answer to be an unconditional “YES!”

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

PART FOUR

**A SECOND CHANCE
AT LOVE?**

What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?

XIV

WHEN WILL I BE LOVED?

Social science research has determined through long term study that the dissolution of the two-parent family is harmful to children and also detrimental to our society. In a recent article in Atlantic Magazine, Barbara Whitehead cites the following evidence: "Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor...two to three times as likely to have emotional and behavioral problems. They are also more likely to drop out of school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs, and to be in trouble with the law. "Contrary to popular belief, many children do not 'bounce back' after divorce or remarriage..." In 1960, 9.2 women per 1000 got divorced but by 1990 the figure had climbed to 20.9 per 1000. That same year (1990) 28% of all births were to unwed mothers...that's over 1 in 4! It is obvious that divorce should be avoided if at all possible and yet, with the new no-fault divorce laws which allow one partner to unilaterally file, divorce is sometimes inevitable.

A large number of people who get divorced each year are so wounded and hurt by the event that they make well-meant mental oaths that they will never marry again. In spite of tempestuous promises, the reality is that about 75% of the people who experience a first divorce *will* marry again. And sadly, a much higher than normal percentage of those second marriages will end in yet another divorce. Therefore, no honest book addressed to the victims of divorce would be complete without facing this issue. In the united states we have lost sight of the true meaning of love and given ourselves to a self-centered mentality that constantly poses the question, "What's in it for me?"

What has happened to us as a society to bring us to our present place of selfish decadence and moral decay? When did we misplace the true scriptural meaning of love? The average household in America spends over six hours every day mesmerized in front of a television set that delivers an unhealthy dose of ungodly philosophy to a new generation. Men and women who were taught sound scriptural values from the word of God failed to pass them on to their children, falsely assuming that they would adopt the philosophy and lifestyle of their parents. Our moral oversight has produced one of the most violent societies in recorded history, with strong forces actively engaged in the destruction of the traditional family. Those who have accepted the world's definition of love are doomed to repeated failure in marriage. When did the meaning of words like "love" begin to blur?

It only makes sense that a people would lose sight of scriptural values if they cease to value scripture. Our nation has charted a course that does not acknowledge God. We have slowly abandoned our historical God-centered point of view for a man-centered point of view. Where once "family" was all important, now "self" is all important. During times of hardship, the question, "What is best for the *family*?" was replaced with, "What is best for *me*?"

In 1933 the secular humanist movement published the Humanist Manifesto and for, the most part, the public school systems of America have accepted this philosophy as their core curriculum. The first tenet of that manifesto states, "Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created." There is no place for God in the philosophy of secular humanism. Are secular humanists deliberately trying to destroy the Christian faith upon which this nation was built? Are they using the public school system to further this goal? You be the judge. In the January/February (1983) issue of the *Humanist Magazine* in an article entitled "A Religion for a New Age," the following statement appeared on page 26, "...the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith...The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new - the rotting corpse of Christianity...and the new faith of humanism."

With children being bombarded with a godless view of love and sex from the television all evening and a selfish man-centered view of love and sex all day in the public school system, is it any wonder that young people today don't have a clue as to the Biblical meaning of love or commitment? They enter the covenant of marriage with the attitude, "If it doesn't work out, we'll just split." This scenario plays itself out night after night on the TV: a man and woman meet, they share a few drinks and a bit of light conversation and before the evening is over, they are in bed with one another. The world refers to this act as "making love". Nothing could be farther from the truth. Love, more often than not, has absolutely nothing to do with it. Yet our children are taught to equate this purely physical act with love.

It is interesting to note that the Bible does not refer to love when speaking of the sexual act between a man and a woman. Over and over again the scriptures refer to this act as a man "knowing" a woman. (See Genesis 4:1,17,25. I Samuel 1:19. Matthew 1:25) that is not to say that the sexual union between a man and woman cannot be an act of love. When two married people exercise scriptural, spiritual love toward one another, the physical act of sex takes on a new mystical dimension. Having "sex" and "making love" are often two separate acts. Sex, in and of itself, can be the product of;

1. Lust, where one selfishly seeks his own satisfaction,
2. Love, where sex becomes the ultimate expression of caring between two married individuals, or
3. Anger, as in the case of rape.

This present generation has accepted the world's definition of love apparently without question. They either do not understand the covenant of marriage or they deliberately choose to renege on their vow before God and fellow man. One week before her wedding, a young lady told me that she and her husband had decided to give their marriage a two year trial period. "If things don't work out we can always get a divorce." With that lack of determination at the outset, how could this marriage possibly work in today's complex world? It did indeed fail after four years when the young lady took her own life in a sad suicide.

XV

THE MEANING OF LOVE.

It was the Lord himself who first made the observation in Genesis 2:28, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” The Bible begins with the marriage of Adam and Eve and the New Testament miracles begin with the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee and ends with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It seems God is really pro-marriage and pro-family!

With the first marriage of Adam and Eve, relationships began. A good relationship can build us up and give us self-esteem and confidence but a bad relationship can drag us down to the lowest depths of depression. Everyone needs human companionship. The scriptures clearly teach in I Corinthians 7:1-9 that marriage is not necessarily for Everyone and you don't need to get married to please God, but Everyone does need companionship and human involvement. Everyone needs love; it is essential to our well being. But what is love?

Some people would say that love is the butterflies you get in your tummy when you are around that special someone. Many people without a scriptural foundation equate physical intimacy with love. In fact, as we have just discussed, the term “making love” is often the worldly term used for an act that can be performed with a total stranger whose name may never even enter the conversation. Some people say, “Well, love is give and take.” The old song proclaims that *love is the stuff that makes the world go 'round*. A popular movie once propagated the false idea, “Love is never having to say you're sorry.”

But what does God say about love, for God's opinion is the only one that counts? We will do well to consider what the Bible says about love. In the English language we use the word “love” very loosely. I love my wife. But I also love chocolate candy bars. I use the term “love” in both cases because that is the nature of the English language. That does not mean that should my wife and I go canoeing and take a cooler full of candy bars along, when the canoe topples over, I struggle with the dilemma of who or what to save - my wife or the candy bars. This is an exaggerated example of the weakness inherent in the English language. However, the New Testament was written in the Greek language and there are three principle terms used in the Greek language for the word we translate “love”. First, there is the Greek word “eros” from which we get our term “erotic”. It is born most often in the physical needs of mankind. We know that man is a triune being in the image of God. He is made up of a body, a soul (or heart) and a spirit (or mind) and the seed for this “eros” love stems from the physical body.

Then there is the Greek word “philadelphos” or “phileo.” This is the kind of love two friends have for one another. This love is a fellowship type of love. It is generated when two people share the same likes and dislikes, have the same interests and in general “think” alike. Therefore the seeds of this kind of deep friendship are generated in the “feeling” part of the being or the “soul” part of man, thus the term “soul mates.” the antonym for this type of love is “hate”.

There is a third word often used in the Greek for love, “agape.” This is the very highest love God allows man to experience, and he is incapable of experiencing this love on its highest spiritual level. Jesus had “agape” love when he went to the cross for our sins. It is a deep giving love. It is an unconditional love - the kind that keeps on loving no matter what. It is a spiritual love that often defies logic and understanding. It is “spirit” love whose seed is planted by God and watered by his Word. The antonym for this type of love is simple “apathy”.

The Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 exercised “agape” love. He came upon a traveler who had been robbed and beaten and left for dead. Earlier in the day, a priest passed by and chose the path of apathy and did not get involved. Also a Levite passed by and did likewise, but the Samaritan got involved. He showed unconditional love, love that expects absolutely nothing in return.

Even though the traveler was apparently a Jew from Jerusalem, and Jews generally hated Samaritans and referred to them as dogs, he still chose to clean the man's wounds, dress them and take him to an inn where he paid for his further care and keeping. This is the kind of love that God plants in the heart and we nurture it with the appropriate actions taken from God's principles in the Bible.

Agape love requires us to act. Apathy requires nothing. God repeatedly tells us to love one another. Some people view this as a very difficult and odd command since they feel they have no control over their emotional being. This flaw in thinking is born because we only have a single word "love" in our vocabulary which we use interchangeably for all three of these distinct Greek words with very different shades of meaning. God can tell us to love (agape) one another because this love is based on a definite spiritual decision and has nothing at all to do with how we feel. It is a made-up mind, determined to act in love. This is why God can tell a husband to love (agape) his wife. That does not mean he has to have some emotional overpowering sensation for her but his actions must ever be those of love with spiritual motive. **God says we love by choice and not by chance, conversely, the world says we love by chance and not by choice.** Agape love is the product of spiritual determination and has nothing to do with whether I "feel" anything or not. When we cast our spiritual eyes on another person, we can make the conscious choice to love (agape) them with our actions or take the more often traveled path of apathy. However; the more we are obedient to God in performing these acts of agape love, the more the path of apathy moves out of our sight. The more we bring our own body under subjection; the more we crucify "self" with all its self-centered rationale and obey the clear command to love our neighbor as our self, the closer we will get to God and his blessings and, amazingly, the closer we get to the object of our agape love. Somewhere along the path a curious phenomenon occurs: we reach a point of unconditional love. We really do love them, and curiously, we begin to feel love for them which is what we usually rely on anyway. Now our whole trinity of being, body, soul, and spirit, become involved. But it all began with a deliberate conscious effort to love and do the acts associated with loving.

Our erroneous view of the principle of Scriptural love has caused a great deal of heartache in our families and in society. When a man meets a woman (or vice versa) the most shallow part of his being comes into play. He sees her physically - his eyes behold her. If he has a great physical attraction for her then the lowest form of love (eros) may stir itself. He may become infatuated with her. In our quick-fix society many couples assume this is all there is to love and begin a physical, intimate relationship based solely on these carnal shallow feelings. But at this point, all the man has truly said is, "I like what I see." After the man gets to know her, he may realize they have a lot in common; same religion, same tastes, same philosophy of life, same political view, etc.. Here the man makes an often subconscious observation, "I like what I perceive with my mind." At this point a second, somewhat deeper, "phileo" or "philadelphos" or "fellowship" kind of love is born. This is the love between two friends. Every marriage should begin with this kind of love.

Then as their relationship matures, somewhere in the spirit "agape" love is born and he makes the conscious decision to do acts of love and kindness toward her. He likes what he perceives in his spirit and he willingly relinquishes parts of himself and his desires and rights to her. He thinks of her welfare above his own.

The teenage girl who is being pressured so hard by her boyfriend to have a sexual relationship can be sure he has not reached this point of unselfish love. Only when love reaches this third, deepest level are we really ready for marriage. Many a failed marriage can be traced back to a poorly developed or completely absent "phileo" love and the unwillingness to surrender some of our rights and desires which can only exist in "agape" love. (I Corinthians 7:4,5)

When all three types of scriptural love are present they form a three link chain that is very difficult to break. The woman holds more tightly to the emotional link (phileo love) this comes natural to her. She was created for fellowship. God saw that it was not good for the man to be

alone so he developed a creature whose heart desires companionship. She needs companionship, closeness, cuddling, and fellowship.

The man, on the other hand, clings more tightly to the physical link (eros love). This comes natural to him. He was created to have dominion over things. This is what God commanded him and created him to do. He is by nature a conqueror and subduer of things. These two creatures must forge the center link in the chain out of unselfish agape love. This center link makes both willing to compromise and give or take to bring fulfillment to the other.

If you think of the three types of love as three pillars and when the relationship rests on these three pillars, it withstands all of life's heartaches because it has the proper foundation. If one pillar crumbles due to neglect, or is never seated to begin with, the relationship is vulnerable and weak.

XVI

MAN OR MOUSE?

Ephesians 5:25 tells husbands to love their wives in the same way Jesus loved the church. This is a command and not an idle suggestion. It is interesting to note that the scriptures do not command wives to love their husbands and if they do not love their husbands there is no place in scripture that relieves the husband of his obligation to love his wife! This idea needs some elaboration because many mates abandon “agape” love if they have lost (even temporarily) their “eros” or “phileo” love. However, we do not have this option. The love mentioned in Ephesians 5: 25 is an act of the will and a product of commitment and in no way depends on the emotions or feelings. It is unconditional. While the wife is commanded to be submissive to her husband (see Ephesians 5:22), the husband is not relieved in any way of his duty to love his wife even if she chooses the path of total rebellion against his authority in the home. Every scriptural duty that a husband has to his wife will be met if he obeys the command to love his wife like Christ loves the church. These needs are mentioned in the Bible.

1. Emotional needs. Genesis 2:24, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Closeness and cuddling are scripturally based.
2. Material needs. I Timothy 5:8, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”
3. Spiritual needs. Joshua 24:15, “...but as for me and my house, we will serve the lord.”
4. Physical needs. I Corinthians 7:4,5, “The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. (Inability to restrain).”

As we practice “agape” love in discipline toward the people God has placed in our lives, we not only experience the peace and blessing of God but those around us, our wife and children, gravitate to their rightful place in God’s order of things.

XVII

THE PLAN.

God placed the man to be the head of the household, and placed the responsibility of loving with unconditional love on his shoulders. It is his Godly duty to love his wife just as Christ loved the church. How then did Jesus love the church?

1. Jesus loves with an initiating love. He does not love as payment for our love but he loves us and died for us while we were yet sinners.
2. Jesus loves with an abundant love. He loves us more than we could ever love him.
3. Jesus loves with an unconditional love. He loves us regardless of our actions. He loves us when we are not lovable. He loves us when we are sinful.
4. Jesus loves with an eternal love. There has never been a time and there will never be a time when Jesus does not love us.
5. Jesus loves with an intercessory love. He is constantly in defense of us and seeking our good.
6. Jesus loves with a giving love. He gave his all, his very life for us. He gives us peace and eternal life. Jesus demonstrated love through servanthood.

As to whom should be the head of the household, there can be no question for the Bible believing Christian. Ephesians 5:23 clearly states, "The husband is the head of the wife..." Why would God place the husband over the wife in authority in the home? Aside from the obvious scriptural reason given in Genesis 3:16 relating to the temptation and fall of humanity, which placed Eve in a role of lesser authority because she sinned first, I believe there are practical reasons.

This is my personal opinion and should be valued for no more than that, but consider this; *Adam had seniority*. He was created first, and we are given no indication about how many months or years Adam cared for the garden alone before Eve was created, therefore he had greater experience caring for the garden. He was the logical choice because of his experience. Adam was the logical choice for headship because of his knowledge. I do not at all mean that Adam was more intelligent than Eve. However, in the Genesis account of creation, which I believe to be literal, it was Adam who had received the instructions and commands of God (see Genesis 2:15-17). All of Eve's knowledge about God's commands was second hand information received from Adam. Lastly, there is the matter of brute strength. Adam was not placed in authority over Eve until after the fall. It was at this time that sin and depravity were released into the world. Animals that heretofore had been gentle and tame were now wild and ferocious, presenting a formidable threat to Adam and his wife Eve. It was only logical to make Adam the leader because his strength made him the natural protector. Remember, Eve had been created with a heart for companionship and Adam had been created to subdue and have dominion.

I do not know the perfect mind of God as to why the man was made to be in the leadership role over the woman, but I am certain of some things that were not the reason. He was not made the leader because men are more intelligent than women. The highest recorded IQ in the world today belongs to a woman - Marilyn Vos Savant. He was not made the head of his mate because men have more leadership ability than women. The modern world has seen many brilliant female heads of state. He was placed in the leadership role because that is where God wanted him. This fact does not set well with the feminist nor the secular humanist, nevertheless, that is what God's word teaches. There is no question about who should lead in the home, but there are a multitude of questions about how he should lead.

Since the scriptures command the husband to love his wife just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Ephesians 5:25), it only follows that the husband should lead his wife using Christ as his role model. How did Jesus lead? If you make a careful study of the Events surrounding the last Passover meal from all the gospel records a beautiful picture is drawn about how our Lord led others. When they arrived back in Judea after a trip to galilee, they set off on the trail to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Their recent trip in galilee had produced much fruit and spirits were high. To the twelve disciples of Christ, it must have looked as though this Jesus was indeed the Messiah and he was about to overthrow the Roman yoke of bondage and set up a kingdom. There along the way, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, made a startling request. They asked if they might sit on the right and left side of Jesus when he established his kingdom (mark 10:35-37). This request made the other ten disciples angry (Mark 10:41). When they arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of his disciples into the city and instructed them to bring him a certain donkey (the typical mount for a king during this time). As Jesus entered the city, the Jewish masses, gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, began to hail him as a king (Matthew 21:1-11). This struck awe in the hearts of the twelve disciples who were with him and re-enforced their idea that a new kingdom was indeed about to be established. Their hearts also must have been pricked again with jealousy as they remembered the brazen request of James and John. That evening as they celebrated the Passover meal, the resentment had grown so great among the disciples over the matter of who would be the greatest in this new kingdom, they broke into open argument (Luke 22:24). Apparently as this argument raged and grew louder and louder, Jesus quietly rose and removed his clothing and wrapped a towel around himself to make a crude loin cloth.

There is a great lesson in this. There were in New Testament Judea several classes of slaves. Some were of a higher rank than others. Some were of such high rank and respect that they ventured to advise or even disagree with their masters. There is much historical evidence of female slaves in this class being set free to become the wife of their former master. The lowest possible class of slave wore only a loin cloth and was sold in the common slave markets for thirty pieces of silver. (It is ironic that Jesus would be sold out by Judas later that same evening for thirty pieces of silver!) Jesus, now dressed like the lowest of slaves (and yet he was the Master of the universe, the Son of the living God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords). He filled a bowl and stooped at the feet of these arrogant and angry disciples and began to wash their feet! They had probably not noticed any of Christ's actions until the cold water rinsed their dirty feet.

His lesson that Evening in Jerusalem was bold and blunt. They were arguing about who would be the greatest, who would be leader, who would get the higher honors, who would receive the most prestigious assignment, while Jesus quietly prepared himself to do the work of the lowest of the low slaves. His message was clear; if you would lead -then serve.

This ought to be an awesome example for husbands to follow. It is a great challenge indeed to follow the Lord in humility and lead by way of example and servanthood. Many husbands love to quote scriptures about wives being in submission to their husbands but the greater responsibility lies with the husband. If we truly, sincerely love our wives as Christ loved the church and if we use his leadership style as our example, it is difficult indeed to believe that the wife would not gladly follow. Sadly, the weakest link in God's order of family responsibility is often the husband.

XVIII

WHERE DO I FIT IN?

A minister once told a touching story about his son who was afflicted with Down's Syndrome. The boy was very much mentally disabled but after years of accompanying his father to church, he finally learned where all the electrical light switches were and he took great delight in going to each location and turning the lights on before each service. The boy also loved to bring his Bible to church. He could not read a word and yet he loved his Bible and became very distraught when he forgot and left it at home. His task of turning on the lights at the church was a very menial task indeed, and yet this boy performed it faithfully because it was *his* task...*his* gift to the Lord.

Now the way most people look at things, the boy's job was nothing - a thoughtless job that anyone could do automatically, but how does God look at things? To God, this boy is as precious as any soul on earth. When all things are settled in heaven, the boy's faithfulness will be rewarded with the same enthusiasm as the greatest missionary or evangelist who was faithful to his calling. In the spiritual realm, the world's greatest missionary or evangelist has done no more than this child. He has only done what God called and enabled him to do - just like the little boy. Both have their special spot which no one else can adequately fill. Both do their part faithfully and both will be rewarded according to their faithfulness. Both fit in one place in God's kingdom and only one place.

You and I all have a special spot to fill. But finding that spot requires a spirit of submission and willingness to surrender to the will and choice of God. The principle of Godly submission is the key to finding out where you fit in. This principle does not teach that one person is better than another, nor one sex better than another, nor one ministry more important than another, but it does teach that God has set the world into a definite order and placed his children within the framework of that order. Chaos, confusion and ultimately heartache result when we, through pride, refuse to submit to God's order of things.

The word of God teaches us that God has placed us in the world as guards and sentinels and we are compared to soldiers (II Timothy 2:3). Everyone around us suffers and is spiritually affected when we abandon our post. In I Corinthians 12:12, the Apostle Paul talked about the diversity in the church. "For as the body is one, and hath many members and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." And in verse 14, "For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?" Paul concludes this little illustration by commenting in verse 18, "But now had God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him."

There is something innately humbling about submission. Somehow in our mind we equate it with helplessness. We want to take charge of things. We want to control things. Most of the time we believe we *can* control things. It is only when we have put forth our very best effort and fallen on our face that we usually turn to God. It's a last resort.

Our minds demand fairness, or at least what we perceive to be fairness, though we are fully aware that if ten people are gathered together in a room we will have ten opinions about any given subject. People see things differently. Suppose three men rent three different motel rooms and room #1 is 32 degrees while room #3 is 110 degrees. However, suppose room #2 in the middle is a comfortable 72 degrees. In the morning if all three gather in room #2 where the temperature is 72 degrees you will have three different opinions as to the room's comfort. The gentleman from room #1 will declare the room to be hot. The man from room #2 will say the room is perfectly comfortable but the fellow who spent the night in room #3 where the temperature was a blistering 110 degrees will insist that room #2 is chilly. Each man is being

honest and telling the truth as he sees it. However, each has come from a different background and had different experiences and each perceives things differently because of where he has been.

This is the problem with fairness. What one man demands as fairness will be unfair to the next man. That is why almighty God established an order for things without consulting us. He is wiser and able to see things from a better vantage point. It is a mark of pride when we persistently insist that our opinion about what is right or fair is the only correct one. On the other hand, it is a mark of humility when we leave the task up to God to decide what is fair or right for our life. Ultimately we must leave it all up to God anyway. If we constantly scrutinize things from our sinful, fallen point of view, we are bound to come to erroneous conclusions.

Plenty of things do not seem fair to me. It is not fair (as I see things) for the male black widow spider to be killed and eaten as soon as he has mated with the female. It does not seem fair to me that the weakest or youngest gazelle must become supper to the hungry lion. Life is filled with circumstances and problems which seem unfair to me. Divorce is unfair to me. It is a painful injustice that must be dealt with. But I must recognize who I am and yield my heart, mind and faith to a God who loves what he has created and looks out for our best interest even though I do not understand how.

God set authority in the world to help us exercise submission. When we allow ourselves, through an act of our will, to hide under these authorities they provide a shield of protection for us. Our common sense tells us that when we yield a portion of responsibility to another, we carry less our self. Chastisement is what we feel in terms of misery and conviction when we try to take the responsibility that scripture has placed in the hands of another. Bluntly speaking, we are thieves.

God placed children under their parent's shield of responsibility and every child, without exception, who tries to wrest that responsibility from his parents will meet with God's chastisement. Obedience and honor to parents or any authority figure takes an act of self-denial and is a willful choice. By nature we are not obedient and we are certainly not submissive but when pride leads us to rebellion, failure and heartache can be the only outcome.

It is easy for us adults to see and understand this relationship between children and parents but we fail to see that God has an established order all the way up the line. For instance, God has placed the wife in a place of submission to her husband. Once again, we are not talking about what we think is fair - we are talking about the opinion and command of God. This is the order God has established in Ephesians 5:22,23. Now we can certainly, through willful rebellion, change that order of things. After all the wife is certainly just as intelligent and certainly as capable of leadership as her husband, perhaps more so in some cases. We are not talking about ability or intelligence however, we are talking about God's order for the home. The woman who chooses submission does so as an act of obedience to God and her actions are a demonstration of her godly strength and not weakness. She is fully capable of leading but as an act of humility and obedience to God she deliberately chooses to follow. There is abundant historical evidence that women who have taken the gentler role of submission have exerted a tender but powerful influence on their husbands which at various times has saved nations from war and reaped an abundance of other good fruit.

The book of Esther in the old testament is the touching story about a gentle submissive queen and the tremendous impact she had on the decisions of her husband, who was the ruler of the known world. Her obedience to God's order of things placed her in a position to save the entire Jewish race in her day from a holocaust that would have equaled or exceeded Hitler's "final solution". On the other hand, look at the horrible influence of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of Israel. She certainly sought to lead in rebellion rather than follow in submission. Her story is found in I Kings, chapters 16 - 21, and in II Kings, chapter 9. There is a sad statement in the Bible about Ahab and his relationship with his wife; "*but there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.*" I

Kings 21:25. Her willful rebellion against God and his established order of things, led to the death of countless thousands including her husband and herself.

Submission is not a Biblical principle that ends with wives and children. Husbands are commanded to be submissive also. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls..." There is that word "submit" again and this time it refers to church leaders who watch for our souls. Here again is a shield of protection the Lord has given us. Here is a new opportunity to exercise willful obedience and humility. He has placed pastors to shepherd the flock and watch for our souls. Do we willfully surrender our rights in submission to those God has placed over us spiritually? I am not talking about some cultic slave-like obedience but the honor that is rightfully due to God's anointed servant. Many church quarrels and divisions would be avoided if we learned to submit and fill the role where God has placed us instead of seeking to take the responsibility or honor that belongs to another.

There is also a matter of submission to the government and civil authorities. There is a powerful portion of scripture that deals with this in Romans 13:1-6. We are told that governments are set up by God's authority and we are to submit ourselves to them. Of course this does not mean we must obey civil laws if they conflict with the word of God. The three Hebrew children in chapter three of Daniel did not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image and worship it even though it was the law of the land. We are commanded to live quietly and obey the laws of our land in all matters that do not compromise our faith. It is hard to exercise humble submission on April 15 at income tax time, nevertheless, that is exactly what God says we should do. The King James version of the Bible calls government officials, "...the ministers of God to thee for good..." Romans 13:4.

Submission is hard work. It is not easy to yield our rights. It is difficult when we realize we can do the job (and possibly even better) and yet choose to follow in obedience. We must, however, be mindful of the fact that all power - the power of the government, the power of the church, the power of the husband or parent - yes all power is given by God. "For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God." Romans 13:1. The road we seldom want to travel is the road of submission. That is understandable because someone else is driving the vehicle of life and we are giving up a measure of control, but that road leads us to peace and security in God's order of things and keeps us from God's chastisement and judgement. When we maintain our assigned spot in God's order of things, he hides us there and covers us with his Spirit. Ephesians 1:13.

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Proverbs 14:12. A thousand voices scream at us from every side to give up the old fashioned ideas. We are told that they no longer fit in modern life. Since the end of world war II, there have been drastic changes in the American family. Television bombards the home day after day with a new but totally inadequate value system. The feminist movement has offered insult and degradation to the woman who would choose to be homemaker and mother and American men have come to face a subtle but far-reaching identity crisis.

With all this sociological "progress", the home has paid a horrible price in terms of divorce and the well being of our children. Our only hope is renewed surrender to God's principles of scriptural love and submission.

XIX

WILL I EVER GET BETTER?

It was many years ago but I remember it like it happened this morning. We left the marriage counselor's office for the last time. She was the fourth marriage counselor we had visited. The tension was so thick in the air that it seemed you could actually feel it, much like static electricity. We arrived at home and I was torn apart emotionally and felt like all hope and all energy had been slowly drained from me. I was so upset I could barely sleep. In one last grasp for hope or some minute glint of promise, I called back to the marriage counselor's office. I asked her if she felt there was any hope at all for my marriage. After a lengthy pause, she spoke with kindness but deliberately, "Dan, sometimes, regardless of how badly we want it and how much effort we put into it, some marriages simply cannot and will not work. I believe your marriage falls into that area." She was very apologetic and we had grown close over the previous months but no matter how kindly she put it, she may as well have cut my heart out.

That night the cloud of depression grew darker and darker until at about two in the morning I sat down at the desk and contemplated what it all meant. There seemed to be no hope for my marriage. I thought of my two precious daughters and the tragedy of divorce that they were about to undergo. I thought of how difficult it would be for them. I suppose that night was the lowest point in my journey. Things could only get better. Months later I was still having a very difficult time emotionally. I would be driving down the interstate and hear some old song that would remind me of my wife and I would burst into tears.

Months dragged by and my depression remained. I have written a lot about this part of my life in my book, *The Deliberate Enemy of Christ*. Finally, someone at work told me about a divorce recovery seminar being offered by a local church. I had never heard of this type of program before but at my friend's urging, I signed up. About 150 people attended this seminar and some of the stories they told about the tragedy and loneliness of their divorce was heartbreaking and yet for the first time since my divorce I realized two important facts. First, I was not alone. And second, there were a multitude of people who had just gotten divorced or separated and their wounds were fresh. They were actually in worse shape than me. Here was a group I could identify with and a group that *needed* me! I could actually help. For the first time in months, I felt that I was actually worth something as a human being. Through the next few months, as I lost myself in the work of the Divorce Recovery Program and helping those who were just beginning this difficult journey, I realized that ever so slowly, I was getting better. The more I looked outward in an effort to relieve the pain of others, the better I got. Every hour spent helping others was an hour I could not be looking inward at my own pain. I have worked for a number of years now in divorce recovery work of one kind or another and I have seen some incredibly sad stories and some amazingly brave journeys. There is some consolation in knowing that character is forged in adversity.

At some point in time during the course of my difficult journey, though I don't remember exactly when, I woke up one morning and went to the mirror to shave. I had traveled through suicidal depression, bitter anger, absolute loneliness, and utter hopelessness...and with God's help, I had survived. With great pleasure and unspeakable gratitude I looked at the man staring at me in the mirror that morning. It was peculiar because I had not *really* seen him for so very long, but that morning he looked into my eyes and I realized that he remembered how to smile.

About the Author

Dan Hankins resides in Memphis, Tennessee, with his wife Gisele. He has been involved in writing, publishing, and speaking for over 30 years. He has written a number of books including; *What if God Does Not Dance When I Play the Fiddle?*, *The Deliberate Enemy of Christ*, and *The Reluctant Pilgrim, My Journey to an Ancient Faith*