

NEW HOPE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

**6240 VERNER AVE.
SACRAMENTO, CA 95841
916-348-6997**

AGONIA[®] STUDENT'S MANUAL

DOUGLAS AND SITA SHEARER • AUTHORS AND FOUNDERS

GETTING STARTED

“GETTING STARTED” IS THE FIRST OF EIGHT SEPARATE MANUALS WHICH TOGETHER CONSTITUTE THE ENTIRE COURSE

AUGUST 20, 1999 EDITION

DO NOT REPRINT OR COPY

Special Note: This manual is meant only for students enrolled in properly certified Agonias. The changes it presses cannot be effected by single individuals or by counselors attempting one-on-one therapy. A small group setting is essential - overseen by instructors who have been properly trained. This manual is meant to build the church of our Savior Jesus Christ and bring peace and joy into the homes of the saints for whom he died.

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REQUESTED DONATION: \$20.00

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PLANNING THE CEREMONY

GETTING STARTED[©]

CHAPTER I

EXPECTATIONS AND STAFF TESTIMONIES

- - THE EXPECTATIONS - -

1. The Agonia must assume top priority - sacrifices must be made in its behalf and for its sake. It will certainly exceed one full year in duration - *perhaps extending as long as fourteen or fifteen months*. It won't be easy. You need to count the cost.
2. It's important that you realize ahead of time that two items must take second place to the Agonia: (a) children; (b) jobs. Quickly, let me explain why it's important for you to put your marriage ahead of your children: *bitterness always defiles - not just you, but those around you; therefore, bitterness between you and your spouse inevitably defiles your children.*

Heb. 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby *many be defiled...*

The best way to bless your children is to live out a joy-filled marriage - a marriage that exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. Putting your children first - before your own marriage relationship - is a recipe for disaster - *for both you and your children.*

3. You must make it a priority to attend (a) all Sunday morning services of the church; (b) all church conferences and important church functions; and, (c) if not attending a home fellowship, you must select one to attend - and begin attending it just as soon as possible. Those are your top priorities. All other church and ministerial responsibilities must take second place. Honoring the priorities listed here will (1) help break you free from isolation and (2) imbed your marriage in a welter of other relationships. Isolation is a key factor underlying troubled marriages. You must learn to "*get out*" regularly - and do it as a couple.
4. Read two chapters each day from the Gospels. After reading through the Gospels at least three times, you may begin reading through the Psalms and Proverbs. But, then, return to the Gospels.
5. You must spend at least fifteen minutes each day in prayer.
6. You must keep a daily prayer journal.
7. Transparent honesty is expected always.
8. You must cultivate and assiduously maintain respect and reverence for the "coaching staff." Their evaluations and assessments always stand.
9. Success depends upon three factors: (1) insight - approximately fifteen percent; (2) sheer, individual effort - approximately thirty five percent; (3) willingness to exhort others and to be exhorted yourself - approximately fifty percent. Monitoring one another, therefore, is critical; however, husbands are to monitor only other husbands, never another man's wife; and, likewise, wives are to monitor only other wives, never another woman's husband. I don't want to ever hear of a husband monitoring or counseling another man's wife - or of a wife monitoring or counseling another woman's husband. There can be no crossing over for any reason whatsoever.
10. Exhortation requires "space invasion." You must be prepared to "be invaded" - and, likewise, to invade others. You must learn to handle criticism with grace, dignity, and gentleness. There will be little toleration for "flashes of anger" and constant defensiveness.
11. Exhortation must occur on a *daily* basis.
12. Each person must promise not to "cover" his or her spouse's sins, shortcomings, and failures. And, correspondingly, each person must resolve not to press his or her spouse into "covering up" his or her sins.
13. The coaching staff will not assume the role of "policing agent;" *you* must police one another; *you* must learn to be tough with one another - respectful but very firm.

14. Confidentiality is important, but not "*all important.*" If a breach of confidentiality occurs, that can't justify shrinking back from the transparent honesty you've promised. The breach will be dealt with appropriately; but, in the meanwhile, the transparent honesty must continue unabated.
15. Monitoring forms will be used throughout the course - and you'll be expected to fill out each one honestly and on time.
16. All reading assignments made during any given week must be completed *before* the next class - and sufficient time must be set aside not only to complete the reading, but to reflect and meditate on it as well.
17. After successfully completing this course, each person will be expected to teach the course himself - in conjunction with his spouse and at least one other couple. You must regard this as a promise - a holy vow. We're not helping to restore your marriage so that you can simply "*go on with life.*"



HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK

Starting tomorrow, you must begin to keep daily track of your spiritual disciplines on the *Daily Monitoring Form*. You'll find a copy of it at the beginning of each lesson. Use only columns #1 - #3 for the time being. The other seven columns, columns #4 - #10, will be brought into use later. A copy of the *Daily Prayer Journal* is also included at the beginning of each lesson.

Please also note that a page is included at the end of each lesson for you, the students, to jot down notes you take during class or during your personal study time.

Next week, you'll introduce yourselves to one another. You should plan on covering at least the following eight points:

1. How long a Christian?
2. How long in New Hope?
3. Job, if any?
4. Home fellowship, if any? (If you're not enrolled in a home fellowship at this point in time, you must select one asap - and enroll immediately. Do not procrastinate.)
5. How many times married?
6. How many children - including children by past marriages?
7. How do you "feel" about your marriage?
8. Describe one or two of the most troubling aspects of your marriage - from your perspective, not your spouse's.

WHAT EACH STUDENT NEEDS TO PURCHASE AND BRING TO CLASS

1. Your Student Manual.
2. Bible, pens, pencils, etc. (I strongly recommend that you purchase the new *Nelson Study Bible*. In my opinion, it incorporates many improvements over the older *Ryrie Study Bible* - and will enable you to understand the Bible more clearly.)
3. We will be asking each of you for the following donations:
 - a. \$20.00 for each of the eight separate manuals you'll be given over the course of the next twelve to eighteen months - that's \$40.00/couple; and, in addition,
 - b. \$10.00/month/person for the class - that's \$20.00/couple.

The donations will be used to help defray the costs of providing materials for the class and other necessary overhead expenditures.

GETTING STARTED®

CHAPTER 2

THE ENROLLEES INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #2	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #3	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #4	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #5	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #6	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #7	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

THE ENROLLEES INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER

EXPLAINING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Let me explain why I want you to stick to the Gospels - and, in addition, why I want you to keep a daily prayer journal. The Gospels will keep you focused on down-to-earth, existentially real, day-to-day life. And that's what we want in the Agonia. The epistles are more doctrinal - more likely to induce flights into intellectual esoterica. I don't mean to suggest that the epistles were ever intended for that purpose; however, persons whose lives are troubled and who have developed well entrenched and cleverly justified coping devices sometimes twist the epistles to that end.

I want you to meet Jesus - *the person Jesus*. And that's best facilitated through reading the Gospels. I want you to call to mind that God is alive and deeply concerned about you - and that he can be *encountered personally*; that, furthermore, someday you'll be called upon to give an account of yourself - not just in terms of what you've learned, *but what you've done*. Again, I'm not suggesting that doctrine isn't important. It's vital. And this class will be crammed with doctrine; but doctrine that's not being lived out is useless. Your judgement at the "bema" will focus on what *you've learned and done, not on what you've learned alone*.

2 Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, *according to that he hath done*, whether it be good or bad.

After reading through the Gospels at least three times, you will be allowed to read the Psalms and Proverbs. But, then, you must return again to the Gospels.

A prayer journal serves the same purpose; more specifically, it makes prayer *existentially real*. You need to keep track of what the Lord puts on your heart to pray - and then take note of the answers God provides. *God answers prayers* - sometimes not quite the way we expect; but God does indeed answer our prayers. He *interacts* with us. And that's the key. Prayer without a prayer journal lends itself easily to esoterica. And that's not what we want. *We want concrete interaction*.

THE ENROLLEES INTRODUCE THEMSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER

Last week, no attempt was made to have you introduce yourselves to one another. That should comprise the remaining time for this week. Don't rush. You've got at least a year and a half ahead of you - plenty of time. It's important to take your time and not rush. Cultivate an atmosphere of warmth and trust. You should cover at least the following points:

1. How long a Christian?
2. How long in New Hope?
3. Job, if any?
4. Home fellowship, if any? (If you're not enrolled in a home fellowship at this point in time, you must select one asap - and enroll immediately. Do not procrastinate.)
5. How many times married?
6. How many children - including children by past marriages?
7. How do you "feel" about your marriage?
8. Describe one or two of the most troubling aspects of your marriage - from your perspective, not your spouse's.

BEGIN THE INTRODUCTIONS

Begin introducing yourselves; don't rush.

TRANSPARENT HONESTY AND SPACE INVASION

Let me stress once again (1) the need for transparent honesty and (2) the principle of "space invasion" - that each of you must become accustomed to "space invasion" - to letting others know about yourself.

Remember: *inordinate privacy* is a very common feature of bad marriages - and it must be renounced to achieve victory.

Please also remember that we don't guarantee total confidentiality. Everyone, of course, should do his best to maintain confidentiality; but if a breach should occur, that can't justify anyone shrinking back from being transparently honest. That can't be permitted. A good marriage is open - without a lot of "private spheres." All too often "privacy" is merely a closet in which sin is hidden - plain and simple.

Each of you must state your opinions freely - without regard for its impact on your spouse. I don't want to catch a wife glancing furtively at her husband - worried about his reaction to what she's saying. I won't let that continue. I'll bring it out into the open - and stop it. If I hear of any husband upbraiding his wife because of what she says in the Agonia, I will put a stop to it at once. And if it continues, notwithstanding my admonition, I'll be severe. Clearly, the same principle applies to a husband worried about his wife's reaction.

HOMEWORK

Please read *Chapter 3 - A Study on Prayer • The Content of Prayer*. Make sure that you set aside sufficient time to read through this chapter thoroughly.

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 3
A STUDY ON PRAYER
THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
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				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Positive Responses
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

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A STUDY ON PRAYER

THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

Prayer is a vital part of the Agonia. Why? Because it's not possible to achieve genuine spiritual victory apart from it. Prayer is fundamental! Nevertheless, prayer is not that well understood. Therefore, right at the outset we're going to examine a few of the truths that undergird an effective prayer life - and we'll be using the Lord's prayer as the basis for our study. The passage of scripture we'll be studying is Luke 11:2-4. But let's first examine its context - because in Luke, the Lord's prayer is built around principles laid out for us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and in the story of Mary and Martha - the two narratives that are its immediate backdrop and that constitute its "lead-in."

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN¹

We know that the Parable of the Good Samaritan¹ begins with a question: *How can I obtain eternal life?* And, of course, I hardly need mention that when the scripture speaks of "eternal life" it has more in mind than merely *duration*. It includes the sense of goodness, beauty, perfection, joy, etc.

The Parable teaches us that *eternal life* is a gift. It's **not** a matter of merit; it's wholly a matter of grace; it's based, in other words, on God's kindness. It's impossible to earn salvation. It's beyond anyone's reach. If you want eternal life, you've got to accept it on God's terms: ***which means that you've got to acknowledge that it's a gift*** - and, in doing so, admit that you didn't earn it and you don't deserve it. And you've got to live out that confession each and every day of your life.

Now, you'd think that would be easy. But for some people it's not easy at all. Why? Because they don't like confessing: "*What I have — I didn't earn.*" Think about it honestly for a moment. Let's try to put it into perspective:

1. I drive a beautiful Lexus; and, oh, incidentally, I didn't earn it. My father bought it for me.
2. I live in a gorgeous house in a very expensive, upscale neighborhood; and, oh, incidentally, I didn't earn it. My father bought it for me.
3. I work at a job that pays a handsome salary; and, oh, incidentally, I didn't merit it. I'm working in my Dad's business and he got me the job.
4. I was educated at Harvard; and, oh, incidentally, I didn't get in on my own merits. My father got me in.
5. I'm going to live forever - in God's very presence; and, oh, incidentally, I didn't merit it; my Father ***bought my way in.***

Eternal life is **not** yours because of merit; it's yours only because your heavenly father "*bought your way in.*" That's how you were saved: *God bought your way in.* And for anyone who clings to *even a shred* of self-righteousness, that's hard to confess daily - ***and actually mean it.*** The Parable of the Good Samaritan is about, at least in part, a priest and a Levite who got sick and tired of making that confession: "...and, oh, incidentally, I didn't earn it; my father bought it for me."

FOOTNOTE

1. A complete exegesis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is provided in Manual 2 entitled *Forgiveness*; specifically, "*Chapter 10, Confession and Grace.*"

1. I'm a priest - in covenant relationship with God - with all the privileges and status that the priesthood affords; and, by golly, ***I deserve it.***
2. I'm a Levite - in covenant relationship with God - with all the privileges and status that the Levitical order affords; and, by golly, ***I deserve it.***

Being a Christian is a matter of always remembering ***and*** confessing: "I didn't earn the status of 'son of God' on my own merit; my father bought it for me." There's no room for boasting. ***And all of us are chronic boasters.*** Oh, we may not be openly boastful, but we sure want others to take note of our merit, don't we? It's second nature to us. But Romans 3:27 tells us that for a Christian, there's no room for boasting.

Rom. 3:24	Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
Rom. 3:25	Whom (i.e., Christ) God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
Rom. 3:26	To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
Rom. 3:27	<i>Where is boasting then? It is excluded.</i> By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

Confessing daily that we don't deserve what God has given us ***keeps us pointed more toward kindness than toward justice.*** Why? Well, think about it. Isn't justice built around the principle of "***You get what you deserve***"? But I didn't get what I deserved, did I? And neither did you. *What I deserved was hell; what I got was heaven.* Instead of meting out justice to me, God meted out kindness to me. So, in light of God's kindness *to me*, shouldn't I ***always*** be thinking...

1. less in terms of what ***others*** deserve, and
2. more in terms of what ***others*** need - with little or no thought given to merit.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that grace is the governing principle of salvation. It's the very air a Christian breathes.

MARY AND MARTHA

The story of Mary and Martha takes us one step further. The whole story is about ***how best to honor God.*** And it's set against the cultural backdrop of Middle Eastern hospitality. In the Middle East at the time of Jesus - and even today - one of the best means of honoring someone was to extend him hospitality. Do you remember the story of Abraham on the plains of Mamre? Let's pick up the story in Genesis 18...

Genesis 18:1	And the Lord appeared unto (Abraham) in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;
Genesis 18:2	And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,
Genesis 18:3	And said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant...

Note here that Abraham knows he's in the presence of God - and is desperate to honor him appropriately. So what does he do? *He extends him hospitality.*

Genesis 18:4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

Genesis 18:5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on...

Verses 4 and 5, of course, hardly tell the whole story - because the meal that Abraham goes on to provide doesn't consist of a "little water and a morsel of bread;" instead, it's a lavish feast.

And that's what Martha was doing. She was honoring Jesus *in* her hospitality. Martha has been given a "bum rap." It's not that she's some duty-bound fussy budget who doesn't know when to take a break from work and enjoy life. That's not at all the point of this story. *She's trying to honor Jesus.* That's the point.

The counterpoint to Martha is Mary. *Her* means of honoring Jesus is *fellowship*. That's the *point/counterpoint* of the story here. Which is the better means of honoring Jesus - and, of course, by implication, of honoring God?

1. Is it Martha's way - *the way of service?*

Or

2. Is it Mary's way - *the way of fellowship?*

The answer, of course, is that it's Mary's way - *the way of fellowship.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Now, at last, we come to the Lord's prayer. And it's built on these two truths...

1. that salvation celebrates the goodness and kindness of God - and should cause me to think less in terms of what others deserve and more in terms of what others need and how best to meet their needs; and
2. that salvation is less about service than it is about fellowship.

Let's now read the prayer:

Luke 11:2 ...Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

Luke 11:3 Give us day by day our daily bread.

Luke 11:4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

The prayer begins by highlighting the principle laid out in the Parable of the Good Samaritan - that God meets our need *in kindness* - *which is exactly how a father meets his child's needs.* We are God's children - and, as such, God attends to our needs with compassion and love.

John 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he the right ("exousia" can be translated "right") to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name...

That means that we have his ear at all times, doesn't it? We can break in on him at any time, right? Isn't that what you can do with a father?

HOW A FATHER RESPONDS TO HIS CHILDREN'S NEEDS

There're so many needs that are far more significant and far more urgent than mine. Think about the needs of all the persons suffering hunger and deprivation throughout the world; think also about the countless victims of war and ethnic strife. Not only so, but step out into the night on a summer evening - and look up at the stars. That's what David did thousands of years ago - and he was at once struck with his own apparent insignificance.

Psalm 8:3	When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
Psalm 8:4	What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

There they are - the two considerations that most frequently paralyze our prayer life:

1. There are many persons whose needs far outweigh mine; and, in addition,
2. I'm so small - how can God possibly be concerned about me?

But the different needs of his children don't determine a father's priorities. Nor does the importance and scale of a father's business affect the utter importance he attaches to his children.

As a father, I remember once spending time with Kendra when she was terribly sick in bed, but also, *that same day*, finding the time to help Margo tie her shoelaces. Kendra's more pressing need didn't keep me from helping Margo.

I found the time to help Greg when he was getting ready to leave for college - a big moment in his life; but while helping Greg, I also found the time to attend Alan's Friday night football game. Again, Greg's more pressing need didn't keep me from spending time with Alan.

And, yes, God's "*busy*" with the universe. But, on a much smaller scale of course, that's true of all fathers, isn't it? What father isn't - to one extent or another - immersed in his job? It's just that whatever the job, a *good* father doesn't let it come between him and his children. I remember flying home from a critically important business meeting just to be with Greg on his second birthday - and then boarding the same plane the next day and flying back to Los Angeles to continue my series of meetings. *That's what a father does!*

A father finds the time to meet *each* of his children's needs - regardless of how different they might be. It can be a shoelace; or it can be a sickbed. It can be preparing for college; or it can be a football game. It doesn't matter! What touches a father's heart are his children, *not their need, but them*. A good father always finds the time to be with his children whenever they call him. That's what makes a father *a father*. So stop thinking that your need is too trifling for God's attention. Stop thinking that your prayer requests are a nuisance. Nothing could be further from the truth!

GOD KNOWS MY NEEDS - I DON'T NEED TO PRAY

Do you ever find yourself thinking:

"What's the sense of praying; God is sovereign; he's all-knowing. God is aware of my needs without any prayer on my part."

Is that what you sometimes find yourself thinking? If you do, you've missed the truth laid out in the story of Mary and Martha: *what God most wants from us - what most honors him - what most pleases him - is our fellowship. Prayer is less about petitioning God than it is about fellowshiping with God.* Prayer draws us

into God's presence - and provides a setting for fellowship. That's the way it was for me with my own children. Whenever they'd come to me with a request, I was always quick to turn it into an opportunity for fellowship - and so were they. The request, as urgent as it might be, became almost a pretext for fellowship.

But there's more to it than even that. Prayer also enables us to actually *deepen* our relationship with God. Here's how: keep track of what you ask of your heavenly father - and then watch for his answers. He *always* answers. *But watch how he answers!* Sometimes it will be radically different from what you expect; but, once again, because God is your father, it will always be the answer that's in *your* best interests. *Watch for it and learn from it - and God will deepen your walk with him.*

Let me give you an example. Often we pray to God asking him to spare us from affliction. And frequently he does: he directly intervenes - personally and sovereignly - and spares us suffering - often suffering we've brought upon ourselves. But sometimes God knows that our best interests lie elsewhere - not in sparing us from suffering, but in showing us that his grace is sufficient. That was the case with Paul, wasn't it? Do you remember Paul's account of his own personal suffering recorded in the 12th chapter of 2 Corinthians. Paul tells us that God had honored him with a series of staggering revelations - a privilege, however, that risked the possibility of arousing his pride. We pick up the story in verse 7...

2 Cor. 12:7	And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.
2 Cor. 12:8	For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.
2 Cor. 12:9	And he said unto me, <i>My grace is sufficient for thee:</i> for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, <i>that the power of Christ may rest upon me.</i>

God answered Paul's prayer; but his answer was neither what Paul was expecting nor what Paul initially wanted; nevertheless, Paul eventually acknowledged that God's answer, not his, was the best - because it taught him a deeper truth about God - and drew him into a more intimate fellowship with him. *He learned the sufficiency of God's grace and the closeness of God's presence.*

I remember once when I was no more than five years old my Dad took me swimming at Will's Plunge here in Sacramento. Always before Dad had put me on his back - and would then swim out into the middle of the pool. I felt safe as long as I was on his back. But this time he took me by my hands and held me out in front of himself - and then began to walk backwards into the middle of the pool. I remember pleading with him to put me on his back; I didn't feel safe not being on his back. And then it happened: *he let go of me.* I began to sink. I was panic-stricken; but then I felt his strong arms lifting me out of the water. Saved! But then he did it again - he let go of me; and the whole scenario played itself out once more. All the while he was talking to me - assuring me that he wouldn't let me drown - that he was right there next to me. Finally, I started to listen to what he was saying - and began paddling with my arms and kicking a little with my feet - *and there I was - swimming!*

Dad had taught me how to swim! I had pleaded with him to put me on his back so that I wouldn't drown; *well,* he didn't let me drown, but he didn't put me on his back either; ***instead, he taught me how to swim.*** He'd answered my plea, but not the way I'd expected. But his answer was better than the one for which I'd been pleading. Not only did I learn to swim, but I got to know my Dad better. He was helping me to grow up - and in the process drawing me closer to himself - leading me into a deeper understanding of our relationship with one another. I learned that what my Dad most wanted to help me with was *"growing up."*

And that's the way it is with God. When God doesn't answer your prayer in exactly the way you've put it, don't think for a moment that he's not answering it; it's just that he's doing it in a way that will enable you to *grow up* - that will, so to speak, teach you how to "swim." And in the process - *if you'll look for it* - he's showing you more of himself. You're getting to know him better.

MY FATHER IS GOD

Let's move on now. Not only is God my father; **but my father is God.** That's what the phrase "*hallowed be thy name*" is meant to convey. He is holy. He always deserves my reverence. Why? Because **he is God.**

1. Knowing that *God is my Father* enables me to believe that he'll listen to me; and
2. Knowing that my *Father is God* enables me to believe that no request is too tough for him.

My faith needs to strike a balance between these two fundamental truths.

1. If I forget that God is my father, I won't pray - *because I'll think myself too insignificant*; but, likewise,
2. if I forget that my heavenly Father is God, I won't pray either - *because I'll tend, every once in a while, to think that what I'm praying for is too out of reach - too impossible.*

THY KINGDOM COME - THY WILL BE DONE

Next, I'm to pray that God will extend the sway of his kingdom from heaven to earth. That reminds me that at present the earth is under the rule of the devil. There's your explanation of all the evil that plagues mankind! Don't blame it on God! He's not the one who gave the devil dominion over the earth. It was our disobedience - mankind's disobedience - that ceded dominion of the earth to the devil!

God gave man, not the devil, authority over the earth.

Genesis. 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have **authority** over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

But our disobedience put the devil in authority. 1 John 5:19 tells us unmistakably that the whole world lies under the devil's rule.

1 John 5:19 ...we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wicked one.

What's so interesting about the clause "*...thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*" is the verb tense of the word "*come.*" It's in the Greek aorist tense - which indicates that what Jesus has in mind here is *not a process but an event.* The same holds true for the verb "*be done.*" It too is in the aorist tense - pointing, therefore, to an event, not a process.

The event that Jesus has in mind must surely be the **Second Coming.** It's then that God will extend the sway of his sovereign reign over the whole earth. Until then, the church, and each of us personally, wages an on-going battle against the forces of darkness. But don't be dismayed; God has cast his mantle of protection over us - and if we stay hidden in his will and walk closely by his side, the evil that surrounds us can't possibly touch us - not in any ultimate sense. I'm reminded of David's song of assurance, the 23rd Psalm.

Psalm 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, ***I will fear no evil***: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psalm 23:5 ***Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies***: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Imagine that! What assurance! *God prepares a table for us in the very presence of our enemies.* In my own life, I've watched God's faithfulness in this regard work itself out on countless occasions. How frequently I've been overwhelmed by the goodness and kindness of God at the very moment I've been the most hard pressed by circumstances far beyond my control! Over and over again, God has stretched out his hand for me when I've been the most under assault! I've felt his anointing touch - and sensed my cup running over. And when at last I close my eyes in death, I'll do so with the calm assurance that he will raise me up - that even there he has set a table for me.

OUR DAILY PROVISION

Next, we're asked to pray for our *daily* provision. But hasn't God *promised* to provide for our daily needs? Hasn't Jesus himself reminded us of that promise?

Matt. 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matt. 6:32 ...for your heavenly Father ***knoweth*** that ye have need of all these things.

Why then should we petition God daily to provide what he already knows we need and has already promised us? It's because of the principle we learned in the story of Mary and Martha. The requests we make in prayer have less to do with petitioning God than with fellowshiping with God. Prayer is more fellowship than it is anything else; God wants our fellowship, ***so he asks us not to take him for granted; not to presume on his promises.*** Isn't it true that whenever we take someone for granted we destroy our fellowship with that person - whether it's a wife, a husband, a friend, a colleague? The same holds true for God. ***Presumption always destroys fellowship.***

In addition, asking for my daily provision each and every day causes me to remember that all I have is mine ***by the grace of God.*** In the end - though I may be cooperative and obedient - all that I *have* and all that I *am* is ***by the grace of God.*** That's the principle we learned in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

FORGIVENESS

Next, we're to ask God to forgive us - and, in doing so, it follows that we'll find it easy to forgive others. If, however, we forget the kindness God has extended to us, it's inevitable that we'll hold grudges and find it hard to forgive others. ***We'll begin making judgments based on justice rather than kindness and mercy.***

Let me ask you a question. And I'd ask you to think carefully about it. Don't we all render judgments each and every day? Not an hour goes by without passing judgment on some person, right? It's unavoidable, isn't it? It's part of life. ***But what's the basis of your judgments?***

1. Do you base most of your judgments on the principle of justice? Do you consider what a person ***deserves*** in rendering your judgments?
2. Or do you base most of your judgments on the principle of grace? And is love and kindness the guiding principle of whatever judgments you render?

That's why God asks you to remember daily - each and every time you pray - that ***he's passed judgment on you - and the judgment he rendered was not based on justice - not on what you deserved - but on kindness.*** His kindness engulfs you this very moment. It sustains each breath you draw. And if you're sensitive to it, you can't help but find yourself thinking less and less in terms of justice and more and more in terms of grace, mercy, and compassion. Is that true of you? ***Really?*** Think hard about it. Be honest. Is it true of you? If it's not, you've lost sight of God's grace - *and it won't be long before God sends a "good Samaritan" to shame you - just as he sent a good Samaritan to shame the priest and the Levite in the parable Jesus recounts in the Gospel of Luke.*

TEMPTATION

Finally, we're to ask God to keep us safe from any temptations that might overwhelm us - and to deliver us from the power of evil. The word "*temptation*" is a translation of the Greek word "*peirazo*." And what it means is "*test*." It doesn't necessarily mean an enticement to evil. And, in the case of God, it ***can't*** mean that.

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man...

Here, in James 1:13, the word "tempted" does indeed convey the sense of "enticing to sin." And God doesn't do that. But God does indeed set "tests" before us - challenges - that are meant to push us forward toward maturity. Without those tests, we'd settle down into a "*steady state*" far short of what God wants for us - far short of his glory. If my Dad hadn't *pushed* me to swim, I'd probably never have learned how. God's tests are meant to push us beyond ourselves. The request here is for God not to confront us with tests that are beyond our ability.

You might ask, "*What's that all about? It doesn't make sense in light of God's promise recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:13.*"

1 Cor. 10:13 There hath no test (not temptation, but "test") taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tested above that ye are able; but will with the test also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

The principle here is the same principle we learned in relationship to asking God for our daily provision - each and every day. Once again, prayer is more *fellowship* than it is *petition*. It brings us into God's presence - which is what most honors God and which is what he most desires.

In addition, asking God daily for what he's promised enables us to avoid taking God for granted. Presumption, as I've already pointed out, destroys every relationship it touches.

Finally, it reminds me again of just how dependent I am on God's grace - that without it, I'm helpless - and I'd be overcome by the power of the devil in the twinkling of an eye.

What keeps me safe from the devil and enables me to avoid temptation? *It's God's presence.* It's not some *force aura* that envelopes me. Stop thinking like that! ***It's God's presence!*** The devil is not going to *take me on* when I'm walking at my Father's side - after all, my *Father is God.*

Everything the Bible teaches about salvation is couched in terms of fellowship - fellowship with God and fellowship with his people - everything. Even the Lord's Prayer. Most especially the Lord's Prayer! We speak a lot these days about the need for intercessory prayer. But the most important qualification for being

an effective intercessor is unhindered fellowship with God **and** with his people. And if you find your fellowship with his people hindered and wanting, it's inevitable that your fellowship with God is hindered and wanting as well. Remember the Parable of the Good Samaritan - how living out Leviticus 19:18 - which enjoins me to love my neighbor - proves that I'm living out Deuteronomy 6:5 - which enjoins me to love God¹. If my fellowship with God's people is hindered and wanting, my fellowship with God is also hindered and wanting. And if so, there's no possibility that my intercession will be effective. ***Are you holding any grudges? Be honest here! Your prayer life depends on it. There's no room here for fudging.***

Let's summarize:

1. Your prayer must be grounded in an acutely sensitive awareness of how desperately ***undeserving*** you are of God's goodness - of how utterly devoid of merit your standing is.
2. Likewise, your judgment of others must be based ***not*** on what they deserve, but on kindness and charity - and you must see yourself as God's personal agent to meet whatever their need consists of.
3. You must see prayer ***not*** as a heavy yoke - ***not*** as service to be rendered, but as fellowship with God.
4. You must watch for the answers God grants - and use them to deepen your walk with him.
5. Finally, your eyes should be fixed on the Second Coming. You should be lifting your prayers to God - and pleading ever more fervently - with every passing day - for his return - when at long last, he will roll back the curse from off the face of the earth - and the mountains and the hills will break forth into singing - and all the trees of the field will clap their hands - when at last the wolf will lie down with the lamb - and all the earth will be filled

HOMEWORK

Please read *Chapter 4 - A Study on Prayer • The Attitude We Bring to Prayer*. Make sure that you set aside sufficient time to read through this chapter thoroughly.

FOOTNOTE

1. A complete exegesis of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is provided in Manual 2 entitled *Forgiveness*; specifically, "*Chapter 10, Confession and Grace*."

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 4
A STUDY ON PRAYER
THE ATTITUDE WE BRING TO PRAYER
WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted / Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse		Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	Your's / Your Spouse	
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

A STUDY ON PRAYER

THE ATTITUDE WE BRING TO PRAYER

Let's move on now to the verses that follow the Lord's Prayer, verses 5-8. Verses 2-4, the Lord's Prayer, reveal *what we should pray for* - in other words, the *content* of our prayer. Verses 5-8, on the other hand, reveal a very important *attitude* that we should bring to prayer:

Luke 11:5	And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;
Luke 11:6	For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?
Luke 11:7	And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.
Luke 11:8	I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

Here we have "*The Parable of the Friend Who Came At Midnight.*" It's a well known parable - and has become a part of western literature generally. But, I'm afraid, it's not that well understood. The traditional teaching makes *persistence in prayer* the point of the parable.

Standard Interpretation

A friend has come at midnight - after a long journey. And the householder (the host, the visitor's friend) finds himself unable to provide his guest with a decent meal. So he hurries next door to his neighbor's house - and requests a few loaves of bread so that his friend can be properly nourished after such a long journey.

At first the neighbor is unwilling to get out of bed - it's just too inconvenient; but - *so the traditional interpretation goes* - he continues to knock, making a pest out of himself, until finally - because of his persistence, his "importunity" - the neighbor relents and rises from his bed and gives him what he needs to refresh and nourish his friend.

Again, the supposed point of this interpretation is to encourage an attitude of *persistence* in prayer. But is that really what the parable is teaching? Let's look at it more closely.

Let's begin by hearkening back to the story of Mary and Martha. We now know that the key to understanding the Mary/Martha narrative is to grasp the role of hospitality in Oriental culture - *that it's a means of according honor*. That's the purpose it serves. With that truth in mind, let's take a fresh look at *The Parable of the Friend Who Came at Midnight*.

A friend has come at midnight after a long journey - which is *not* uncommon along the Eastern Mediterranean coast. It's hot and humid during the day; consequently, travel during the hours from sunset to midnight is quite normal. It's not at all unusual.

It's unthinkable that the host wouldn't want to honor his friend with an elaborate display of hospitality. If he fails to do so, their friendship would inevitably suffer a serious setback. In all Oriental cultures, honor is the foundational virtue upon which a friendship is built. Furthermore, it's preserved by means of honor as well. So, what's at issue here is *not* a meal as such; it's *not* a matter of providing sustenance for his guest; *it's wholly a matter of honor - and what honor protects and undergirds - friendship.*

But his arrival is unexpected - and it has caught the host unprepared to provide for an adequate display of hospitality. He doesn't possess the necessary provisions. However, there can be no thought of just sloughing it off:

"Oh well, it doesn't really matter; he'll understand."

As a matter of fact he won't understand. That's *not* how the Oriental mind thinks. Not only will the friend call into question the host's affection, but **both** host and friend will suffer a loss of honor.

1. The host is honored in providing the hospitality; consequently, if he fails to provide it, he will suffer dishonor.
2. His friend is honored in having hospitality ministered to him; consequently, unless it's ministered to him, he too will suffer dishonor.

Honor, then, is the key here - just as it was in the Mary/Martha narrative. *But that's not the all of it.* There's another misconception that's worked itself into the standard interpretation. Just about every commentary that's published regarding this parable makes much about the inconvenience the host's request imposes on the neighbor:

1. He's retired for the night;
2. he's bolted the door;
3. his wife and children are asleep with him - and in getting up, he'll inevitably awaken them.

There are a good many humorous anecdotes that are spun out of speculating about the inconvenience to which he's being exposed:

1. You're first asked to imagine the neighbor refusing the host's request.
2. Then, you're asked to imagine the host - refusing to be put off - continuing to knock on his neighbor's door - making a nuisance out of himself.
3. Next, you're asked to imagine that a baby awakens.
4. The fatigued mother, mumbling under her breath, awakens as well to calm her troubled child.
5. Now the older children are awake - and they too are crying. The whole house is in an uproar.
6. And the uproar is occurring in a darkened house.
7. Still, the neighbor persists; he won't stop pounding on the door;
8. Finally, in desperation, the neighbor - worn down to a frazzle - lets the host into his home and supplies his needs.

It's all quite humorous; **but it's wrong.** Why? Because honor is a matter of concern not just for the friend and his host, but for the neighbor as well. Honor is not just a *personal* matter in the Middle East. **It's a community matter.** If the host fails to afford his guest adequate hospitality and in so doing fails to honor him, it's not just that he dishonors himself and his friend, he also dishonors the whole community - the whole village. *Everyone in the village is dishonored. The whole community will bear the shame of the host's failure.*

Now, with all this in mind, let's back up and take a fresh look at the whole parable.

The clause in verse five which reads “*which of you*” translates a colloquialism that’s common in the Gospel of Luke - “*τις ἐξ υμῶν...*” And what’s so significant about it is that, almost always, it introduces a *rhetorical* question. What is a rhetorical question? It’s a question that presumes an expected answer - *and it’s posed only for effect*. For example, you might ask me, “*Doug, are you going to Saturday’s football game?*” And I, in turn, might answer with a rhetorical question, “*Does the sun rise in the east?*” My answer to your question is “*yes;*” but I’ve said “*yes*” by asking a rhetorical question. It’s more dramatic than a simple “*yes.*” Most rhetorical questions, however, assume an answer of “*no.*”

Luke 17:7, several chapters on, is a case in point. It too begins with the colloquial expression, “*τις ἐξ υμῶν...*” - “*which of you...*”

Luke 17:7 But *which of you*, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

The obvious meaning here is:

Can any of you imagine a situation where your servant, after plowing your fields and feeding your cattle, comes in to you, and you say to him, "Go, sit down and eat?" Can you imagine such a situation.

And the answer is clearly, “*No! It’s completely unthinkable*” - which is exactly what Jesus goes on to say in verse 8.

Luke 17:8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

In other words, Jesus asks a rhetorical question in verse 7 for dramatic effect. The question assumes a “*no*” answer. And it “*sets up*” verse 8.

Now, let’s return to Luke 11: 5 - 6. The translation here in the King James - and most of the other translations as well - does indeed retain the sense of a question, but it’s not a rhetorical question - which the clause “*τις ἐξ υμῶν...*” (“*which of you...*”) almost always suggests. Let’s turn it back into a rhetorical question - and see what we get.

Can any of you imagine a situation where a friend comes at midnight and you haven’t the means to provide adequate hospitality, going to a neighbor and asking him to make up your lack, and, instead of immediately arising and giving you what you need, he concocts a couple of lame excuses for refusing to help? Tell me, can you imagine such a thing? Can you imagine that sort of thing ever happening?

The answer, of course, given an Oriental mind-set, would be, “*Absolutely not! It’s completely unthinkable!*” Of course the neighbor would help! His *own* honor is at stake. If the host fails in his responsibility to honor his guest, he, *the neighbor, will share in that failure*. The honor of the whole village is at stake. *Of course he’ll arise* - and give him all that he needs. Not just a mere three loaves of bread, but all that’s required to properly display the necessary honor.

And verse 8, the very next verse, tells us that's exactly what the neighbor *will* do.

Luke 11:8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

Of course he'll arise. There's no question about it. Still, the verse seems to indicate that he'll arise because of "*importunity*" - meaning that he'll arise because of all the racket the host is making outside in his yard. But let's examine the word that's translated "*importunity*." It's the Greek word "*anaideian*" ("*αναιδειαν*") - and it doesn't mean "*importunity*" at all. It means "shamelessness"¹ Furthermore, it's not the shamelessness of the host, it's the shamelessness of the neighbor. Kenneth Bailey, a well known and highly respected scholar specializing in the Greek language, has undertaken a careful examination of verse 8 - and that examination provides the key to unlocking this insight². The key, Bailey points out, lies in identifying the subject of the verse's six clauses. His analysis is sketched out below:

I say to you,

The subject of each line is:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| (1) <i>if he will not give to him</i> | the neighbor |
| (2) <i>having arisen</i> | the neighbor |
| (3) <i>because of being a friend of his</i> | the neighbor |
| (4) <i>but because of his shamelessness ("αναιδειαν")</i> | ? |
| (5) <i>he will arise</i> | the neighbor |
| (6) <i>and give him whatever he needs</i> | the neighbor |

The subject of lines 1 - 3 and 5 - 6 is clearly the neighbor. It's therefore evident that the subject of line 4 should be the neighbor as well. In short, whatever the host is doing outside in the yard - whatever it is - that's not the reason the neighbor is getting up out of bed to help. He's getting out of bed because he doesn't want to be accused of shamelessness. In other words, ***he's fearful of suffering a loss of honor.***

Bear in mind that one way of saying "*loss of honor*" is saying "*shamelessness.*" Someone who isn't concerned about being accused of *shamelessness* is not concerned about honor. Honor means nothing to him. He's shameless!¹

FOOTNOTE

1. Bruce Malina, a cultural anthropologist specializing in the ancient Middle East, states that "shame, in a society dominated by a concern for honor...is a positive (value). Positive shame means sensitivity about one's own reputation, sensitivity to the opinion of others. To have shame in this sense is an eminently positive value. Any human being worthy of the title 'human,' any human group worthy of belonging to humankind, needs to have shame, to be sensitive to its honor rating, to be perceptive to the opinion of others. A sense of shame makes the contest of living possible, dignified, and human, since it implies acceptance of and respect for the rules of human interaction. On the other hand, a *shameless* (my italics) person is one who does not recognize the rules of human interaction, who does not recognize social boundaries. The *shameless* person is a person with a dishonorable reputation beyond all social doubt, one outside the boundaries of acceptable courtesies." Malina, Bruce J., *The New Testament World*, Rev., John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky. 1993. p. 50-51.
2. Bailey, Kenneth E., *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, (A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke); William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1983. Chapter Six of *Poet and Peasant* (pages 119 - 141) provides an exhaustive exegesis of Luke 11:5-13.).

So here's how the parable should read - the sense of it - a paraphrase.

Can any of you imagine a situation where a friend comes at midnight and you haven't the means to provide adequate hospitality, going to a neighbor and asking him to make up your lack; and, instead of immediately arising and giving you what you need, he instead concocts a couple of lame excuses for refusing to help - something about the door being bolted and the children asleep? Tell me, can you imagine such a thing? Can you imagine that sort of thing ever happening? Of course not!

I say to you, though he will not rise and minister to him for friendship's sake, yet to protect his honor - to keep himself from being accused of shamelessness - he will rise and give him as much as he needs.

Now, here's the point of the parable - here's what Jesus is teaching by means of this parable:

Let's look once again at the Lord's prayer:

Luke 10:2	And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, <i>Our Father</i> who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.
Luke 10:3	Give us day by day our daily bread.
Luke 10:4	And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Notice once more how the prayer begins: it begins with "*Our Father...*" And certainly if your father was what a father should be, beginning the Lord's prayer with "*Our Father*" helps you to believe that God will both *hear your prayer and answer it*. But what if that's not the case?

Jesus is saying:

I know that some of you find it very difficult when you pray to think of *God as your Father*. You simply can't bring yourself to think in those terms. The privileges it suggests are just too staggering.

Moreover, for some of you, it might be that the word "*Father*" doesn't mean much. Perhaps your father died when you were quite young. Or perhaps your own father was abusive or neglectful. In either case, the word doesn't convey the ***rich assurance*** it should.

In other words, we have at least two unfortunate circumstances here that Jesus wants to address.

1. You understand the meaning of the word "*Father*," but you can't bring yourself to believe that God is really *that* to you. It's too staggering for you to get a-hold of.

Or

2. The word "father" doesn't generate any confidence - because either you lost your father early in life - or because he was abusive or neglectful.

“OK,” Jesus is saying, “*Let’s take it from your standpoint.* The word “Father” doesn’t mean much to you; but *this* you can get your mind around: **that for God honor is very important.**” Look at the very next clause that follows “*Our father who art in heaven.*” What is it? It’s “*hallowed be thy name*” - meaning, “*May your name always be held in the utmost reverence; may it always be honored.*”

1. You may not be able to bring yourself to believe that God is your father; or
2. for you the word “father” may not convey much assurance;

...but **this** you **can** acknowledge as a believer: *God’s honor is all important to him.* **That** you should have no trouble with at all.

And just as the neighbor in the parable arose from his bed because his honor was at stake, so God will arise and answer your prayer - and meet your needs - **because his honor is at stake.** If the *consideration of honor* is important to a next door neighbor, how much more important is it to God?

Do you see the point that Jesus is making? Let's spell it out.

OK, don’t think of God as your father. But certainly you can acknowledge that in becoming a believer, you have put yourself in a covenant relationship with God. Isn’t that right? And won’t God respect that covenant? Of course he will! Why? Because his honor’s on the line. That’s why!

Jesus wants us to start praying - because he knows that it will eventually *cultivate a walk with God.*

OK, for your sake, let’s start with honor, not with love. Just start praying - believing that God will answer *for the sake of protecting his honor.* Start there - and eventually, in developing a prayer life, you’ll find yourself *walking with God.* And that walk will reveal to you God's love; and pretty soon you’ll find yourself praying expecting to be answered not simply because God’s honor is on the line, but because, at last, you know he loves you - you know he's your father and you understand what that means - the assurance it's meant to convey.

God will get you past all the damage you’ve suffered at the hands of an abusive or neglectful father; or he’ll get you past the wounds you suffered when you lost your father early in life.

That, then, is the meaning of the parable here. It has nothing to do with “*shameless boldness*” on the part of the host or with his “*persistence.*” Its meaning is far more sublime than that. What Jesus wants you to do is just start praying - because he knows that prayer will introduce you to *the joy of walking in God’s presence.* Whether you begin with honor or with love, it doesn't matter; just start praying - start walking with God. That's the point!

.....

SQUABBLE RULES

SQUABBLE RULES

This next week, I want each of you to consider thoughtfully and prayerfully how you fight with your spouse. Is it constructive? Is it fair and equitable? Does one person always tend to dominate? Which of you tends to dominate? Why? Are the squabbles punctuated with demeaning comments and threats of violence?

Then, I want each of you, individually, to construct a set of rules which, in your opinion, will make the squabbles more fair and equitable - and, hopefully, more fruitful and far less intimidating. The husband should construct his own; and the wife, her own - with both seeking to eliminate whatever features leave the other at an unfair advantage. If the wife finds herself stonewalled by her husband whenever a disagreement arises, she should construct a rule which keeps him from doing that. Likewise, if the husband finds himself the target of demeaning comments whenever a squabble arises, he should formulate a rule which prohibits his wife from doing so. What we want is a set of rules which makes "squabbling" **constructive**. We want to eliminate all the destructive elements. That's your homework for next week. A form is provided for this assignment.

Next week, the best rules will be pulled together to form a complete set - and that set will be observed by all of you.

Please also write a brief essay concerning conflict. What do you think about conflict? How do you respond to conflict? What's the first impression that crops up in your mind? Is conflict always destructive? Should it be avoided at all costs? How did your parents fight? Did they fight? A form has been provided at the end of this lesson for you to use. Write your essay on that form - and be prepared to read it next week.

AGONIA STATUS

Clearly, at this stage, only the fourth week, the Agonia has not yet been well established and effectively integrated; however, even at this early stage there are certain terms and conditions we want honored:

1. **Getting to Know One Another - Transparent Honesty**
Everyone should start getting acquainted. Exchange phone numbers and addresses with one another. Start inviting each other over for dinner or out for lunch following the Sunday services - and, of course, whenever else possible. You must **make** the time to get together, **not simply find the time**. Remember that setting aside sufficient time won't come easily; it requires you to very consciously reorder your priorities.
2. **Abuse and Addiction**
 - A. Wives who are being abused - either physically or emotionally - must resist the temptation to "*keep it quiet*." They must cultivate the habit of talking about the abuse they're suffering with the other "Agonia wives." They must stop "*enabling their husbands*." It serves only to perpetuate the abuse. If you're a wife who's suffering abuse, please remember that you've **already** agreed not to "*cover*" your husband's sins (See Point #12 on the Expectations Sheet.). You've **already** agreed to provide "*full disclosure*" of any on-going abuse. (Note: any kind of an on-going addiction must be considered "abuse;" and it must be treated in that light. Addictions can include a whole range of vices - including, but not limited to drugs, alcohol, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, gambling, etc.)
 - B. The other wives, in turn, must tell their husbands about the abuse. The men who have been so informed must then confront the offending husband and pointedly inform him that his abusive (or addictive) behavior must not continue. Personal, direct confrontation is absolutely vital. Each person in the Agonia has **already** agreed to "*space invasion*" (See Point #10 on the Expectations Sheet.). Abuse (including addiction) must be brought **fully** into the light. Everyone in the Agonia needs to be made privy to it. Sin is carried on in the darkness - that's its medium; and that darkness must be dispelled if the sin is to cease. The offending husband may complain bitterly that he's being needlessly exposed - and that he can't trust his "agonia-mates" to maintain confidentiality. That's merely a coping device. You're to pay no attention to it. Don't sympathize with him. Lend his complaints no credence whatsoever. Everyone in the Agonia has **already** been warned that confidentiality is not all-important - that it's often no more than a facade behind

which abuse and addiction are hidden (See Point #14 on the Expectations Sheet.). The possibility of a breach of confidentiality cannot be used to justify secrecy. Each person in the Agonia has *already* agreed to abide by this principle.

- C. There must be no "flashes of anger" on the part of anyone whose abuse has been exposed. He must not become vindictive. He cannot sulk or withdraw. He must maintain an attitude of humility. (See Point #10 on the Expectations Sheet.)
 - D. Clearly, the same principles apply regardless of gender. Any wife who is abusive or suffering from an addiction is, likewise, subject to the same rules.
3. ***Respect for the Teaching Staff - Even in Private***
Even in private, the utmost respect for the teaching staff must be maintained on the part of each Agonia participant. Neither spouse should permit the other to be disrespectful of any of the teaching staff - *even within the confines of the home.*

Luke 12:2-3 But there is nothing covered up, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.
Wherefore whatsoever ye have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light; and what ye have spoken in the ear in the inner chambers shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Ecc. 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Compartmentalized lives are an abomination to God. God does not honor a show of respect in public - while disrespect is evidenced in private. If any spouse is guilty of disrespect in private, the other *must* (not "should") expose that disrespect to the rest of the Agonia. Spouses must get into the habit of not "protecting" their mates from the light. A troubled marriage is at least in part due to this kind of "misperceived loyalty." It's not loyalty; it's sin. And it keeps us from growing in Christ.

4. ***Obeying the Squabble Rules***
It will be up to everyone in the Agonia to see to it that the Squabble Rules are strictly obeyed. The Agonia, as a whole, will participate in drawing up the rules - *and in seeing to it that they are enforced.*

MORE HOMEWORK

1. Organize treats and snacks among yourselves for each teaching session.
2. You, as a whole group, should design a t-shirt for this Agonia. Every Agonia needs to have it's own t-shirt - with its own unique design. It's part of building esprit de corps - establishing group cohesiveness. Set a deadline for getting it done.
3. Be sure to bring your Squabble Rules this next week - as well as your essays concerning conflict. Use the form you've been provided in this week's lesson to draw up your squabble rules.
4. Please read Chapter 5, "*Squabble Rules,*" for next week's lesson.

SQUABBLE RULES

What my spouse does that makes our squabbles destructive and unfruitful?	The rule that I want to see observed to keep this from happening.
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

<p style="text-align: center;">What my spouse does that makes our squabbles destructive and unfruitful?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">The rule that I want to see observed to keep this from happening.</p>
<p>6.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	
<p>10.</p>	

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 5
SQUABBLE RULES

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #2	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #3	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #4	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #5	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #6	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Day #7	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Positive Responses
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

SQUABBLE RULES

READ YOUR ESSAYS

Begin tonight's class with each of you reading your essay on conflict.

We will have you review your squabble rules later on this evening.

After you've read your essays on conflict, read together the lesson for this evening.

SOME PERSONS AVOID CONFLICT AT ALL COSTS

For some persons, conflict is tantamount to rupture. Conflict *means* rupture. And so it's avoided at almost all costs. The link they've forged between conflict and rupture is probably based on the bickering they witnessed between their parents. Fighting between mom and dad may have led to physical and emotional abuse - and in many cases, ultimately, to divorce. In all likelihood, it was seldom constructive - resolving either very little or nothing at all¹.

Others use conflict to vent "free floating" anger. Whatever prompts the anger is not so much *a cause* as it is *a trigger*. These individuals don't get angry; *they are angry*. Anger is part of their basic makeup. It's there all the time - lurking just below the surface of their consciousness - ready to boil up at the least provocation. The scriptures use several words to depict anger and hostility - including: "thumoi" (θυμοι), "orgé" (οργη), and "ekthrai" (εχθραι). *Thumoi* is occasionally used interchangeably with *orgé*; however, there's often an important, though subtle, distinction: *thumoi* is frequently used to denote anger that arises from a specific cause - usually an offense; it's an act, not an underlying disposition. *Orgé*, on the other hand, denotes a *frame of mind* - a profound, rather permanently settled *disposition*. *Ekthrai* is much the same: it's used to describe a hateful, vengeful *personality*, not just a specific act or a passing emotional outburst.

A wife whose husband is marred by an angry disposition - either "orgé" or "ekthrai" - avoids conflict not simply because she fears the possibility of rupture, but because she fears the outright violence that's likely to ensue. She knows that she's unable to manage any kind of conflict with him; that conflict - whenever it's incited - is bound to get out of control; that she can't keep her husband from "*going ballistic*" - regardless of the care she takes to be discreet and tactful. She's forever "*walking on eggshells*." The same, of course, holds true for a husband whose wife is marred by an angry disposition.

But is conflict always bad? The answer is "No!" It's not conflict itself that's bad, it's "*what's brought to the conflict*" by way of past associations and basic personality. Indeed, conflict, when it's managed scripturally, can be very positive. It can lead to a level of fondness and affection otherwise impossible.

Conflict can bring to the surface difficult issues which are not being addressed - which, instead, are being "*swept under the rug and hidden*." You need to learn that conflict can actually point the way to healing; it can be made the *starting point* for achieving a deeper and more profound level of intimacy.

FOOTNOTE

1. This is not a universal indictment of parents. Far from it! A good many parents *are* able to squabble constructively. However, when children link conflict with rupture, it's a pretty good indication that mom and dad did *not* fight constructively.

Our physical bodies are often used as a metaphor for the church - so much so that Paul twice¹ calls the church the "Body of Christ."

1 Cor. 12:27 Now ye are the *body of Christ*, and members in particular.

Eph. 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the *body of Christ*...

And though the term is not specifically used elsewhere, its meaning is conveyed in numerous² other passages of scripture. But there's one important dissimilarity between our physical bodies and the Body of Christ. When we're born, our physical bodies boast joints that, though initially not well coordinated, are remarkably well articulated and supple. The joints move smoothly - and the motion is by and large effortless. Furthermore, as we move through infancy and adolescence, they become ever more coordinated as well. And that continues, under normal circumstances, well into adulthood.

But with the onset of old age, our joints lose their elasticity. Their articulation begins to break down. Inflammation occurs around the joints; and, quite often, arthritis develops. Pain and swelling become an on-going fact of life.

Our bodies, in other words, *begin* with all their joints pain-free, well articulated, and pliable; and it's only with the onset of old age that arthritis develops.

But with the Body of Christ, we *begin with arthritis - and work ourselves out of it. And that's the case for all interpersonal relationships - especially marriage.* It's true that most relationships begin on a "high." There's an initial period of congeniality and grace. But soon, inevitably, disagreements arise. And it all assumes the form of *conflict*. Conflict is to interpersonal relationships what arthritis is to our physical bodies.

$$\frac{\text{Conflict}}{\text{Interpersonal Relationships}} = \frac{\text{Arthritis}}{\text{Physical Bodies}}$$

Conflict indicates poor articulation - and wherever there's poor articulation, there's bound to be friction and "pain." *The parts don't fit perfectly.*

FOOTNOTE

- 1.. The term "Body of Christ" is used on two other occasions (1 Cor. 10:16 and Romans 7:4), but neither passage refers to the church; both refer to Christ's physical body.
2. For example, the entire twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Colossians 1:24, Eph. 1:23, etc.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE "JOINTS" THAT COMPRISE OUR PHYSICAL BODIES AND THOSE THAT MAKE UP INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

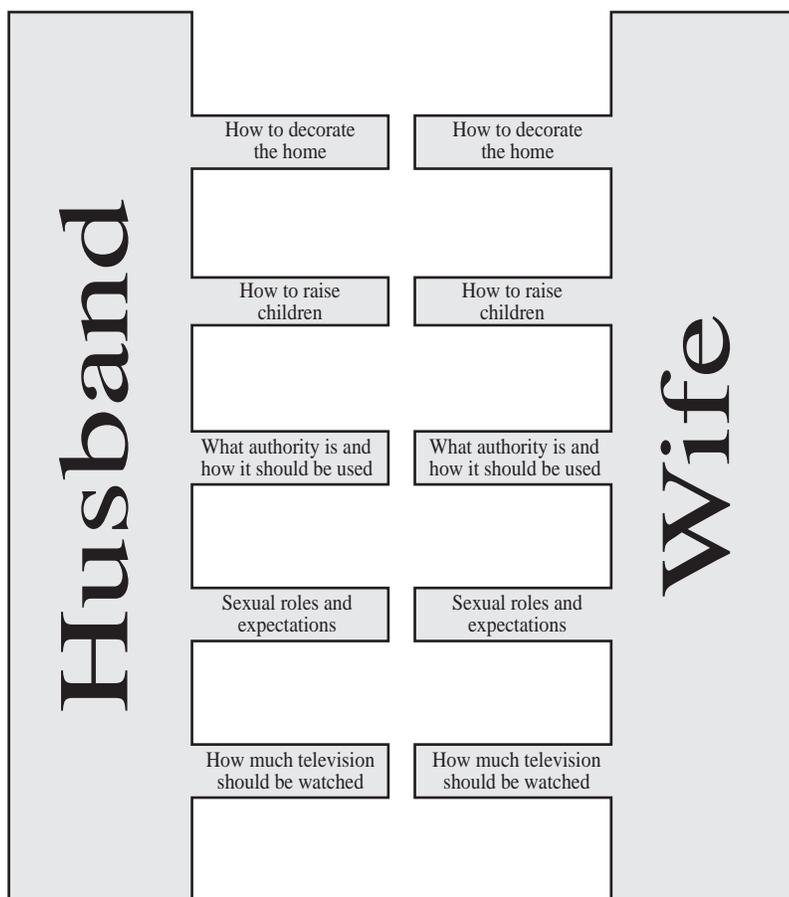
	Beginning State	Ending State
Physical Bodies	Joints well-articulated, elastic, and supple. No arthritis. No inflammation. No pain.	Joints are inflamed. Arthritis is an on-going fact of life. Joints have lost their elasticity.
Interpersonal Relationships	The relationship is likely fraught with conflict. The "joints" that comprise it are not well-articulated. "Arthritis" is on-going.	The relationship is largely free of conflict. There's no "arthritis." The joints move smoothly and effortlessly.

*Conflict shows us **where** our parts don't fit well together. But all too often, instead of taking the time to "make the fit better," couples simply cease using the specific joint that's "inflamed." That part of the overall relationship is "abandoned." But if too many sites develop "pain and swelling" - indicating a "poor fit" - and those sites are subsequently "abandoned," the entire relationship is jeopardized.*

A RELATIONSHIP CONSISTS OF MANY "JOINTS" OR POINTS OF ARTICULATION

In our schema below, we have a symbolic representation of a husband and wife. Each of the "outcroppings" signifies a point of articulation between the two individuals. *Each point helps to define the overall relationship.* There are five points of articulation which make up this symbolized relationship. In any concrete relationship, of course, the actual number of points would be vast; and their specific nature would run the gamut from the simple to the extremely complex - including how to raise children, role definition, household budgeting, sex, home decoration, careers, religion, politics, the nature and use of authority, ad infinitum. *How many of these points become well articulated helps to determine how intimate the relationship becomes.*

POINTS OF ARTICULATION - WHEN TAKEN AS A WHOLE - DEFINE A RELATIONSHIP



We have chosen five specific "points of articulation" for our symbolic schema. Each of the points represents a "connection" or a "joint" linking the two individuals, husband and wife. *The points of articulation - taken as a whole - define the relationship.* Therefore, how well articulated the joints are determines how intimate the overall relationship is. No relationship at the outset is well-articulated. The "fit" between each of the "joints" is usually not good. In all likelihood, the nature of the "fit" is not even that well known. But over time, as the two individuals become more familiar with one another, disagreements arise. Those disagreements, then, become conflicts; or, put in physiological terms, the "joints" become inflamed. And motion at whatever site is affected becomes painful. The more "sites" are inflamed, the more doing anything together becomes distressing - often agonizing - or, at the very least, unpleasant. Affection and companionship begin to diminish - and the relationship is put at risk. Some couples simply "avoid" disagreements; *but because disagreements arise at the very points that define the relationship, that kind of strategy all but guarantees destroying the relationship in the long run.* It's important, therefore, not to become frightened of conflict - not to avoid it at "all costs." For those frightened of conflict, they must, by faith, overcome their fear of it. For those tempted to use conflict to vent "free-floating anger," they must cultivate self-control - and learn to rein in their tempers.

Conflict/Joints 2

Again and again, encourage one another to put conflict in a positive light; and enable yourselves to do so by constructing rules that will make your squabbles fair and constructive. Remember the purpose of the rules: to eliminate the destructive features that you've insinuated into your usual mode of conflict; e.g., threats of violence; threats of rupture; stonewalling; parlaying sexual favors, etc.

GOING OVER THE HOMEWORK

Each of you should now read your list of proposed rules - giving your reason for suggesting it - what specifically it's meant to correct.

WATCH YOURSELF FOR ANY VINDICTIVE REACTION

Watch yourself carefully for any vindictive reaction; watch your agoniamates as well. And if it occurs, put a stop to it at once. Help one another become accustomed to transparent honesty. List the proposed rules one by one and discuss them thoroughly. There will obviously be a lot of redundancy. Work hard to eliminate it. We don't want an endless list. The rules will lose their impact if too many are formulated.

MELDING THE RULES FOR NEXT WEEK

You, the students, not the instructors, should take charge of melding the proposed rules together into a unified list - and then printing them up for distribution. Nor is it the job of the instructors to actually enforce the rules; that too is your responsibility. This list should be ready for distribution at next week's class.

HOMEWORK

1. Please reread Chapters 1 - 5. It's an important review.
2. One you - or perhaps a small two or three person committee - should meld the proposed rules together into a unified list - and then see to it that they're printed up for distribution next week.

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 6
UNDERSTANDING THE STRATEGY

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

UNDERSTANDING THE STRATEGY

DISTRIBUTE THE MELDED "SQUABBLE RULES"

1. Distribute among yourselves the *melled* "Squabble Rules" formulated during this last week. Do not review them at this point. You'll do that later this evening.
2. Your instructors will make sure that you've completed the homework assignment you were given this last week - specifically, you were asked to reread all the material that has been thus far distributed to you.

A QUICK REVIEW

Please close your manuals. You're going to be tested on the material you studied in last week's class. Be sure to look over the answers to the questions your instructors pose to you this evening. Spend some time reflecting on the answers - and making sure that you thoroughly understand the material that we've going over. It's very important for your healing.

1. Last week we distinguished between three types of anger - corresponding to three Greek words. Please elaborate.

Answer:

The scriptures use several words to depict anger and hostility - including: "thumoi" (θυμοι), "orgé" (οργη), and "ekthrai" (εχθραι). *Thumoi* is occasionally used interchangeably with *orgé*; however, there's often an important, though subtle, distinction: *thumoi* is frequently used to denote anger that arises from a specific cause - usually an offense; it's an act, not an underlying disposition. *Orgé*, on the other hand, denotes a *frame of mind* - a profound, rather permanently settled *disposition*.

Ekthrai is much the same: it's used to describe a hateful, vengeful *personality*, not just a specific act or a passing emotional outburst.

2. What's it like for a woman whose husband is marred by either "orgé" (οργη) or "ekthrai" (εχθραι).?

Answer:

A wife whose husband is marred by an angry disposition - either "orgé" or "ekthrai" - avoids conflict not simply because she fears the possibility of rupture, but because she fears the outright violence that's likely to ensue. She knows that she's unable to manage any kind of conflict with him; that conflict - whenever it's incited - is bound to get out of control; that she can't keep her husband from "*going ballistic*" - regardless of the care she takes to be discreet and tactful. She's forever "*walking on eggshells*." The same, of course, holds true for a husband whose wife is marred by an angry disposition.

3. Why can conflict be good?

Answer:

It shows us "*where the parts don't fit.*" We need to remember that conflict is to interpersonal relationships what arthritis is to our physical bodies; specifically, "pain" develops wherever specific points of contact aren't "*fitted*" properly.

$$\frac{\text{Conflict}}{\text{Interpersonal Relationships}} = \frac{\text{Arthritis}}{\text{Physical Bodies}}$$

4. In light of this truth, why is it that *avoiding conflict* is so bad?

Answer:

Conflict develops at those very points of contact that define the relationship; therefore, to abandon those sites for the purpose of avoiding the pain that conflict generates jeopardizes the whole relationship.

5. What is our Agonia "mantra"?

Answer:

Conflict is good! Conflict is good! (We assume, of course, that the conflict is governed by well defined rules that keep it from becoming destructive - which, of course, is the whole purpose of the "squabble rules.")

6. On what basis can you set aside your fears of conflict?

Answer:

The "squabble rules"! The "squabble rules" have been formulated to keep conflict with your spouse positive and free of any destructive features.

7. Who's responsible for enforcing the "squabble rules"?

Answer:

The Agonia! Not the instructors, but the students! Anyone caught breaking the "squabble rules" needs to be "*ratted out*" to the entire Agonia.

8. Is it always necessary to avoid conflict in the presence of your children?

Answer:

No. It helps to model the resolution of conflict to your children. It teaches them that conflict doesn't necessarily lead to rupture. It helps them to learn the need to confront offenses instead of sweeping them under the rug - where, almost invariably, they fester - eventually producing bitterness and a profound sense of alienation. Conflict is an inevitable part of life - and, ironically, it marks the road to intimacy; therefore, *conflict avoidance*, as a way of life, makes intimacy impossible.

WHO VENTS AND WHO APPEASES

Your instructors are now going to ask each couple (1) which spouse tends to vent free-floating anger and (2) which spouse tends to appease and placate for the sake of avoiding conflict. It's important to get these characteristics in each marriage out in the open.

List below each of the couples - and then identify (1) who vents and intimidates; and (2) who appeases and placates:

The Couple

- | | | | |
|----|-------|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. | _____ | Who vents? _____ | Who placates? _____ |
| 2. | _____ | Who vents? _____ | Who placates? _____ |
| 3. | _____ | Who vents? _____ | Who placates? _____ |
| 4. | _____ | Who vents? _____ | Who placates? _____ |
| 5. | _____ | Who vents? _____ | Who placates? _____ |



Note to the Instructors:
Have Your Students
Continue to Read Aloud



A WORD TO THE PLACATERS

There it is - out in the open: we know now who "vents" and intimidates on the one hand and who appeases and placates on the other hand. Let me begin with a word to those of you who tend to appease and placate - usually the wife, but sometimes the husband. From here on out it's going to get pretty rough on you. Why? Because you've got to start drawing a line in the sand - and "*girding up your loins*" to "*face off with your spouse.*" And I know that just the thought of "*facing off with him*" is likely to terrify you; nevertheless, there's no way out. You've got to do it. It's like paying your taxes; there's no way around it. It's just got to be done. You're not alone, however. You've got your fellow agonia-mates to stand alongside you. They'll help you through the whole ordeal. Remember, you're on the threshold of a new era; but you won't be able to cross that threshold *unless* you begin "facing off with your spouse" - *unless* you stop placating him.



A WORD TO THE INTIMIDATORS

A quick word now to the intimidators - usually the husband, but sometimes the wife: *this is going to be just as hard for you.* Perhaps more so! You've become accustomed to getting your way. It's not that you've always meant to be malicious. And it may well be that your spouse has so surrendered her will to you that she's all but forced you into the role of "*Mr. Take Charge.*" We've witnessed that scenario played out again and again. We're not assessing blame here. But just as she's being encouraged to "draw a line" and "face off" with you, so you're being encouraged to take stock of your intimidation techniques and begin setting each one aside. When your spouse begins to square off with you, it won't be easy. You'll feel that your dignity is being called into question; that you're being walked on - and that your "rights" are being violated. It's going to be tough. Stay close to your Agonia-mates - and get ready for the devil to strike hard at your pride.

A WORD TO THE AGONIA AS A WHOLE

You've now got a list identifying both the "*intimidators*" and the "*placaters*." We're counting on you to intervene: to provide (1) the encouragement the "*placaters*" are going to need and (2) the warning and admonition the "*intimidators*" are going to need. Don't pull back here!

Every so often, we're going to be checking up on the progress the placaters are making. The form you'll be using is on the next page. It's provided here simply to show you what it looks like. Don't fill it out this evening. But be prepared to fill it out every three or four weeks or so.

THE PERIODIC PLACATERS REPORT



Placaters are usually cast in the role of “victim” - and, in a very real sense, that’s an accurate depiction - because they’re so easily “pushed around” and “controlled.” They “walk on egg shells” to preserve the peace. They won’t confront! But the peace they purchase produces a profound bitterness - and dooms any possibility of intimacy. What we want to do is help the placaters - usually the wife, but sometimes the husband - to start holding their ground and “engaging” their spouses. And, toward that end, we’ll be periodically monitoring the progress they’re making in overcoming their fears. There will be three grades that are assigned: (1) the placaters will give themselves a grade; (2) their respective spouses will give them a grade; and, finally, the Agonia, as a whole, will grade their progress. The grades will be letter grades: A, B, C, D, and F. ***This will be a group effort. Let’s work hard at it!***

Names of the Placaters	Placater's Grade	Spouse's Grade	Agonia's Grade
 _____			
 _____			
 _____			
 _____			
 _____			
 _____			
 _____			



A spouse who bullies and intimidates - usually the husband, but sometimes the wife - won’t be backed off until his spouse starts to hold her ground and face off with him. When that begins, the whole weight of the Agonia can swing in behind her and provide support. ***But she is the key.*** She must begin standing her ground. Until that happens, the Agonia is paralyzed - and its resources can’t be brought to bear. We aren’t grading the progress he’s making - because he’s not the key here. ***She is.*** He’ll begin to change when she starts to “engage.”

GOING OVER THE HOMEWORK: THE SQUABBLE RULES

Earlier this evening, the melded "Squabble Rules" were distributed to each couple. Spend a little time going over the rules you've compiled. Begin this next week using column 4 on your *Daily Monitoring Form*. Your instructors will show you how to use the *Daily Monitoring Form* to keep track of your violations. Transparent honesty must be practiced. Remind yourselves that you've already promised to honor Rules 7, 12, and 13 on your "Expectations Sheet."

UNDERSTANDING THE STRATEGY

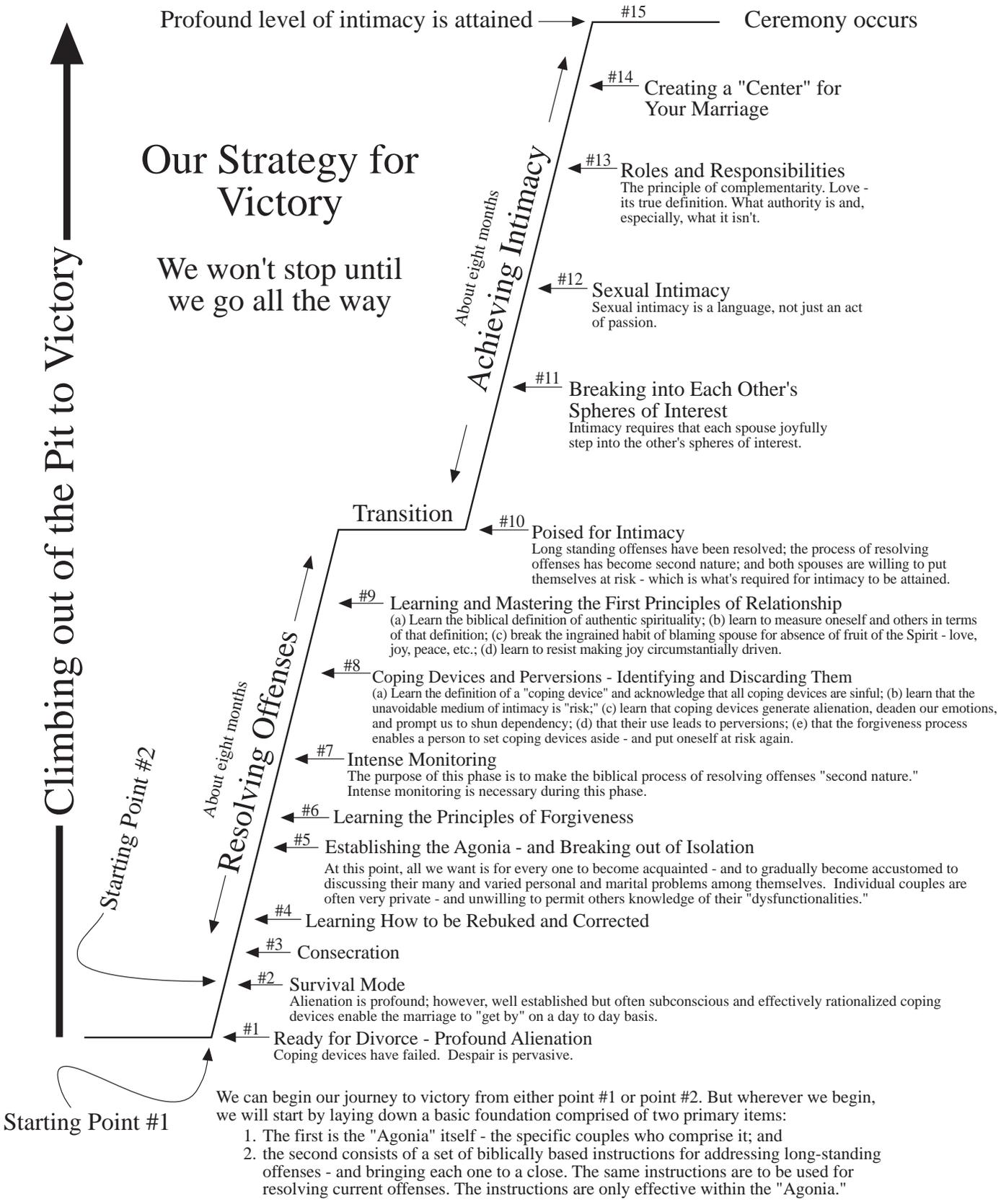
Your instructors will now help you understand the Strategy Sheet on the next page. Each of you needs to clearly understand the goal toward which you and your spouse are pressing - and the various stages along the way. Remember: what you're gearing yourselves toward is not merely a marriage that "*gets by*," but a marriage that's victorious - that's filled with joy and peace - and that fully reflects God's intention in marriage - a microcosm of Christ and the church.

- Ephesians 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
- Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Climbing out of the Pit to Victory

Our Strategy for Victory

We won't stop until we go all the way



We can begin our journey to victory from either point #1 or point #2. But wherever we begin, we will start by laying down a basic foundation comprised of two primary items:

1. The first is the "Agonia" itself - the specific couples who comprise it; and
2. the second consists of a set of biblically based instructions for addressing long-standing offenses - and bringing each one to a close. The same instructions are to be used for resolving current offenses. The instructions are only effective within the "Agonia."

Marriage Restoration Freehand

HOMEWORK

1. For next week, Please read *Getting Started: Chapter 7 - Running to Win - the Agonia*. You need to read it over thoroughly for next week's lesson.
2. Be sure to review the answers to the questions you were posed at the beginning of tonight's lesson. That's very important. The instructors will be checking up on you next week.

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 7
RUNNING TO WIN - THE AGONIA
WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

RUNNING TO WIN - THE AGONIA

REVIEWING THE EXPECTATIONS SHEET

This evening, before we begin tonight's lesson, we are going to review with you the *Expectations Sheet*. It's important to refresh your memory concerning the commitments you've made.

- - THE EXPECTATIONS - -

1. The Agonia must assume top priority - sacrifices must be made in its behalf and for its sake. It will certainly exceed one full year in duration - *perhaps extending as long as fourteen or fifteen months*. It won't be easy. You need to count the cost.
2. It's important that you realize ahead of time that two items must take second place to the Agonia: (a) children; (b) jobs. Quickly, let me explain why it's important for you to put your marriage ahead of your children: *bitterness always defiles - not just you, but those around you; therefore, bitterness between you and your spouse inevitably defiles your children.*

Heb. 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby *many be defiled*...

The best way to bless your children is to live out a joy-filled marriage - a marriage that exhibits the fruit of the Spirit. Putting your children first - before your own marriage relationship - is a recipe for disaster - *for both you and your children.*

3. You must make it a priority to attend (a) all Sunday morning services of the church; (b) all church conferences and important church functions; and, (c) if not attending a home fellowship, you must select one to attend - and begin attending it just as soon as possible. Those are your top priorities. All other church and ministerial responsibilities must take second place. Honoring the priorities listed here will (1) help break you free from isolation and (2) imbed your marriage in a welter of other relationships. Isolation is a key factor underlying troubled marriages. You must learn to "*get out*" regularly - and do it as a couple.
4. Read two chapters each day from the Gospels. After reading through the Gospels at least three times, you may begin reading through the Psalms and Proverbs. But, then, return to the Gospels.
5. You must spend at least fifteen minutes each day in prayer.
6. You must keep a daily prayer journal.
7. Transparent honesty is expected always.
8. You must cultivate and assiduously maintain respect and reverence for the "coaching staff." Their evaluations and assessments always stand.
9. Success depends upon three factors: (1) insight - approximately fifteen percent; (2) sheer, individual effort - approximately thirty five percent; (3) willingness to exhort others and to be exhorted yourself - approximately fifty percent. Monitoring one another, therefore, is critical; however, husbands are to monitor only other husbands, never another man's wife; and, likewise, wives are to monitor only other wives, never another woman's husband. I don't want to ever hear of a husband monitoring or counseling another man's wife - or of a wife monitoring or counseling another woman's husband. There can be no crossing over for any reason whatsoever.

10. Exhortation requires "space invasion." You must be prepared to "be invaded" - and, likewise, to invade others. You must learn to handle criticism with grace, dignity, and gentleness. There will be little toleration for "flashes of anger" and constant defensiveness.
11. Exhortation must occur on a *daily* basis.
12. Each person must promise not to "cover" his or her spouse's sins, shortcomings, and failures. And, correspondingly, each person must resolve not to press his or her spouse into "covering up" his or her sins.
13. The coaching staff will not assume the role of "policing agent;" *you* must police one another; *you* must learn to be tough with one another - respectful but very firm.
14. Confidentiality is important, but not "*all important.*" If a breach of confidentiality occurs, that can't justify shrinking back from the transparent honesty you've promised. The breach will be dealt with appropriately; but, in the meanwhile, the transparent honesty must continue unabated.
15. Monitoring forms will be used throughout the course - and you'll be expected to fill out each one honestly and on time.
16. All reading assignments made during any given week must be completed *before* the next class - and sufficient time must be set aside not only to complete the reading, but to reflect and meditate on it as well.
17. After successfully completing this course, each person will be expected to teach the course himself - in conjunction with his spouse and at least one other couple. You must regard this as a promise - a holy vow. We're not helping to restore your marriage so that you can simply "*go on with life.*"



REREREAD SERMON ON YOUR OWN TIME

If you haven't yet read the sermon on your own, you must do so this next week. It will be read in class this evening; but that's not sufficient. You need to read it alone - by yourself. You need time to reflect on what it means - its *personal* ramifications. It's got to "*sink in.*" It must be bathed in prayer - and read through thoughtfully. What we're gearing you toward is a *change of thought patterns* - and that will occur only with careful, quiet, unhurried reflection on your part.

NO DOUBLE STROKING

I want to warn you against "double stroking." That won't work in the long run. Once again, what you've got to face is the necessity of reordering your priorities - that it's unavoidable. Some of the activities you've woven into the fabric of your lives - and made a part of your daily and weekly routine - activities you may enjoy or even believe are necessary - some of those activities must be set aside for the duration of the Agonia. You will inevitably find that simply adding the Agonia to your already crowded daily and weekly schedule is not feasible. *We will be pressing this truth relentlessly.* You must ***make the time*** to do your homework, *not just find the time*; you must ***make the time*** to meet with one another, *not just find it.*

THE AGONIA[©]

by Pastor Douglas Shearer

It was May of 1954. I was thirteen years old - still in junior high - and getting ready to begin high school in September at El Camino. Like most thirteen year old boys, I wasn't at all interested in academics. That didn't come until later. At the moment I was caught up in sports - especially track and cross country.

And El Camino was a track and cross country powerhouse - with a fabled coach by the name of Ross Clover at the helm. In the previous eleven years, stretching all the way back to 1944, Coach Clover had amassed ten Northern California cross country and track championships. He had built his reputation around his uncanny ability to gather together motley bands of n'er-do-wells showing little or no championship caliber - and turn them into indomitable winners. It wasn't that he could spot potential - and, having spotted that potential, mold and develop it. That's what any good coach is expected to do. No, Coach Clover seemed able to actually create the potential itself - where none had apparently existed before. He seemed able to first inject it; then shape it; then prod it; and, finally, drive it relentlessly - drive it to the point of winning championships. I could hardly wait to meet him.



COACH CLOVER

Each May the Northern California track championships were held at Eagle Stadium on the campus of El Camino High School; and that May, as was expected, El Camino swept almost every event. She crushed all opposition - from the sprints to the two mile. I was in the stands; but after the last race was over, I made my way onto the infield grass to meet Coach Clover - and to let him know that I was going to be attending El Camino in the Fall - and that I was planning on going out for cross country. I got within ten feet of this storied figure; but, at the last moment, I chickened out. I thought to myself, "*How dare I introduce myself to him. I'm a nobody; he's a legend.*" So, I left the stadium never having met him.

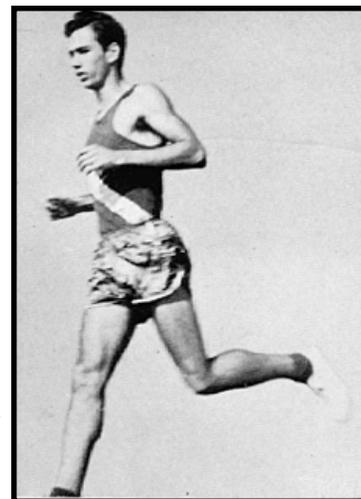
That fall, when high school opened, the only thing on my mind was cross country. Sign-ups were scheduled for 3:00 in the afternoon - and Coach Clover himself was going to be there. After school, trembling with anticipation, I made my way out to the stadium. I recognized many of the runners. The best known runners, of course, had graduated in June - and many had gone on to college - some just 80 miles west to Berkeley - where Brutus Hamilton was coaching - the same Brutus Hamilton who had coached America's 1952 Olympic track team to victory at Helsinki. Northern California had become a seedbed for track and cross country stars - both at the high school level and at the college level.

But Coach Clover was never without replacements - that was part of his genius. He was always working with younger

runners on the freshman and junior varsity teams - taking a personal hand in grooming them eventually for his championship varsity teams. I spotted Bill James who in his sophomore year had "blown away" all competition in the junior varsity races. And there next to Bill was Phil Cordero who even in high school was running below 1:57 in the half-mile - and who, later on in college, under Brutus Hamilton, got down to 1:50.

Now bear in mind that this was 1954, just two years after the first sub-four minute mile had finally been run by Roger Bannister in England - when coaches and athletes throughout the world were still saying that a sub-four minute mile was all but impossible. Roger Bannister, it was thought, was a one-in-a-million aberration. But already Bill James and Phil Cordero were inching their way toward that at one time impossible goal; and doing so in high school - under the tutelage of Coach Clover.

Coach Clover was talking with both James and Cordero - and the closer I got, the more my knees knocked. I actually began to tremble. I couldn't control my shaking; so, once again, I chickened out. I wasn't able to walk up to the three of them and introduce myself. I just couldn't do it. Who was I? So I walked off the infield grass, jumped over the three-foot high fence separating the track from the stands, and made my way up to the top bleachers where I sat down dejectedly - disgusted with my cowardice. By the time I got there and managed to compose myself, Coach Clover had organized the warm-up exercises; and everyone was doing jumping jacks and stretching their muscles.



PHIL CORDERO

And then it happened. The coach spotted me up at the top of the stadium. I must have been at least thirty yards from where he was. "*Hey up there. What's your name?*" he yelled. "*Come on down here.*" I couldn't believe he meant me. "*Me?*" I yelled back. "*Yea, you,*" he replied. "*Come on down here - right now.*" I bolted out of my seat and ran on down to meet him - four and five steps at a time. He took one look at me - and said, "*You're sure a skinny little guy. But here, sign your name on this sheet of paper; pick up your medical forms at the office and turn out for practice beginning tomorrow. And be on time.*"

The next day, he gathered together all his freshman runners. And I'll never forget what he said:

People say I can take nothing and turn that nothing into a champion. People say I don't believe in differing potential; that you've all been blessed with same potential. But that's not really what I believe at

all. I do believe that some of you possess more potential than others of you; that some of you have more to work with than others of you.

But I don't believe that potential is what limits any of you. It's what you're determined to do with whatever potential you've been given - that's what matters. I've seen some men with lots of potential lose races and championships to men of lesser potential - only because the man with lesser potential was determined to do more with what little he had.

And I've never seen any athlete use all his potential. In fact, I don't believe I've ever seen anyone use even half the potential he possesses - even the very best of runners. That means that any one of you here can be the next Northern California champion.

Don't limit yourselves to what you see in yourselves. And don't be frightened of what you see in others. You've got more than enough potential to be a winner; in fact, if I can get you to use only half of what your potential consists of, I'll turn you into a champion runner.



Doug Shearer
Training under Coach Clover
Spring of 1958

What a thought! I'd always been told that I was limited by my potential; that I could go only so far and no further; that there were built-in limits that I couldn't get beyond. But here was a man telling me that potential had nothing whatsoever to do with what I made of myself; that I possessed so much of it that - as successful as I became - I'd never reach the end of it. Never! In fact, I'd never really get close to it.

And, sure enough, at the end of my junior year, I'd become a "dang-good" runner. And I was running on a championship team. And the trophies I helped to win are still on display at El Camino High School - forty years later. And it was all because a man taught me a new way of thinking about myself - that my potential will never

determine what I become; it's what I do with whatever potential I possess - that's what counts.

Did you know that's exactly what the Apostle Paul tells us in the eighth chapter of Romans? Turn with me to Romans 8:37.

First, let me read from the King James

King James
Rom. 8:37 ...we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us.

Now, let me read from the NASB.

NASB
Rom. 8:37 ...we *overwhelmingly conquer* through Him who loved us.

The phrase that's translated "*more than conqueror*" in the King James and "*overwhelmingly conquer*" in the NASB is a single word in Greek: "*hypernikomen*" (*υπερνικωμεν*). It's composed of: (1) "*hyper*" and (2) "*nikao*." "*Hyper*" means "*beyond measure*" - "*far in excess*." Some of you have *hyperactive* children; so I'm sure you can appreciate the meaning of the word "*hyper*." "*Nikao*" means "*conqueror*." How many of you own "*Nike*" tennis shoes? The word there is from this Greek word. The meaning here is that Christ has made us "*superconquerors*." In short, we possess in Christ a potential to overcome that's far in excess of what we'll ever need.

Coach Clover produced championship teams by showing young men that they possessed the potential to become champions; in fact, more potential than they would ever need; that if only they'd develop and use a little of that potential they'd win a champion's crown. And that's exactly what Paul the Apostle is telling you and me here in Romans 8:37. We possess all the potential we need - in fact, much more than we'll ever need. It's not that we lack potential; it's what we do with what we've been given that counts - and we've been given more than we'll ever need - much more.

Turn with me now to Ephesians 1:19

Eph. 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward...

The word "*exceeding*" is "*hyperballon*" (*υπερβαλλον*). It's a compound Greek word consisting of "*hyper*" - meaning, as we've already learned, "*far beyond*" and "*ballo*" meaning "*to cast*." So what we have here is the sense of being "*cast far beyond measure*." The power that's been given to us has been *cast far beyond measure*.

The word "*power*" is "*dunamis*" (*δυναμις*) - and implies "*raw power*" - the raw power to crush disobedience - to break opposition. It's often contrasted to the Greek word "*exousia*" (*εξουσια*) - which means "*authority*" - and which implies willing obedience. *Dunamis* is often used whenever opposition to authority is threatened. It's brought to bear when willing obedience is not forthcoming - when *exousia* is contested. In other words, it's not simply that we possess authority, it's that we possess the raw power in Christ to make good our claim to the authority we've been given over sin.

Now, let's go on to verse 20

Eph. 1:20 Which (i.e., the power) he (i.e., God) wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead...

The power we possess in Christ is *far beyond measure*. It's the same raw power God used to raise Christ from the dead. And the power God used to raise Christ from the dead is far in excess of the power He used to create the universe. Never before and never since has God exerted such power. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is God's most awesome display of power. And that power is "*to usward*" (verse 19). Let's read now the two verses together:

Eph. 1:19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

Eph. 1:20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places...

The power we possess in Christ is unimaginable. We'll never get to the end of it.

Now don't get me wrong. Not everyone Coach Clover trained became a champion runner. Nor do all Christians manage to *tap into* the power that's been given them. Some fail miserably.

Some of the young men Coach Clover trained could never quite bring themselves to believe that they actually possessed the potential to win. And without that belief, their expectations were never raised to the point that they'd push themselves the way real champions do - *push themselves to develop their potential*.

When a runner undergoes the rigors of training, he's got to believe that he possesses the potential to win - there must be no doubt whatsoever in his mind. If he doesn't believe that he possesses that potential, he won't train hard; he won't push himself. *"What's the use? It won't do any good. I'll never reach the finish line first; I just don't have the potential to do it."*

Nobody is going to submit himself to the rigors of a disciplined, *always* painful training regimen unless he sincerely believes that what he's training for can actually be achieved.

Not long ago, I was counseling an individual who was caught fast in the bondage of homosexuality. Tragically, he no longer believed that he possessed the potential to beat it; that, therefore, no disciplined regimen would ever prove sufficient. I knew he was wrong; but it wasn't what I knew that counted; it was what he believed - that's what counted. It wasn't that he lacked the potential to break free from his sin; what he lacked was the belief to develop that potential into the raw power he needed to break himself free.

You've got to believe that you possess the potential to win in Christ. Because that's the kind of belief that *you'll act upon* - the kind of belief that prompts you to work out your salvation to the point that every bondage is broken.

Phil. 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation* with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12 is telling us to work out our potential. It's there; but we've got to *work it out*.

Paul never doubted that he possessed the wherewithal to break the power of sin in his own life; and that belief caused him to push himself relentlessly; he never ceased developing that wherewithal. You catch a sense of Paul's relentless drive in Philippians 3:13-14

Phil. 3:13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,

Phil. 3:14 I press (i.e., I drive myself) on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 9:24 - and let's continue with our examination of the potential we possess in Christ to overcome sin - and the need on our part to develop that potential.

1 Cor. 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

The race to which Paul refers here is most likely the competition at the ancient Isthmian games at Corinth. Vast crowds attended those games - often as many as eighty thousand - as many as a modern football arena holds - almost as many as the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.

Everyone who made the decision to compete in the games was required to adhere to a very strict training regimen - called the "*Agonia*" (*αγωνία*) - from which we derive our word "*agony*." The athletes were selected from various local trials held throughout Greece - and were then enrolled in the "*Agonia*" - which was ten months in length - and which included all the athletes chosen to compete. *No athlete was ever permitted to train on his own - by himself - alone. He was assigned to a group - which was overseen by a trainer.*

Every morning there were two trumpet calls. The first was a warning to get ready. The second was the signal to begin the daily workout. Marshals observed the workouts - and if any athlete was caught slacking off - just once during the ten months of training - he was disqualified. He was declared to be *unworthy* of the competition; it constituted *prima facie* evidence that he was not seriously *developing his potential* - and that, therefore, he would never compete at his best; and by not doing so, he was guilty of disrespect and irreverence. He was declared "*adokimos*" (*αδοκιμος*) - *disqualified*.

1 Cor. 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery (or supremacy) is temperate (possesses self-control) in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

Verse 25 speaks of discipline - mastery - faithfulness. In order to develop our potential in Christ, we can't allow ourselves the luxury of slacking off - we must be always striving for mastery. *We've got to train hard each day.* We must read the Word faithfully, pray consistently, attend Bible studies, and meet with others regularly. We must submit ourselves to the criticism of our trainers - and be ever mindful that the "marshals" are observing our efforts.

And why am I willing to so discipline myself? Because I want to win a crown. I want to *work out* my salvation; I not only want to possess the potential of my salvation, I want to bring it to the surface of my life - and put it on display. I want to display it in my marriage, in raising my children, in my friendships, on my job, in my ministry, in my church life.

I want to be free of all addictions; free of all sin; I want to break all my bondages - and I want to lead others into the liberty that I enjoy. And, finally, I want my Lord and Savior to crown me with the laurel wreath of victory at the Judgment Seat of Christ - I want to hear him say, "*Well, done.*"

1 Cor. 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (adokimos).

Too many of us don't take our training seriously. That's the meaning of verse 27. Don't you realize that you won't even be given a chance to compete unless you train seriously and rigorously? You'll never get to the starting line. You'll never even get to the infield grass. The word "castaway" in verse 27 is the Greek word "adokimos." And, once again, what it really means is "disqualified."

I can't tell you how many Christians I counsel who want victory in their lives, but who don't want to submit themselves to the rigorous training required to make them victorious. The potential is there; but it's got to be developed. And only rigorous, disciplined, and **always painful** effort under the watchful eye of trainers and marshals can foster that development.

First, you've got to decide whether or not you really want to compete. The decision I'm asking you to make is "consecration." Consecration is an act of dedication. You don't hear that word used much anymore; but forty years ago, consecration was an act that was carefully explained to every new Christian - each of whom was then asked to make a decision in its favor. It was a decision pressed upon him just as forcefully as the decision to embrace Christ. "Without it," he was told, "you'll never follow through to victory. You'll never complete the training regimen necessary to bear the fruit of the

Spirit." Turn with me to Romans 12:1 and 2. Romans 12:1-2 is plea for consecration.

Rom. 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Rom. 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The Holy Spirit, through Paul's writing here, is pleading with you to present your bodies to the Agonia - to make of yourselves "a living sacrifice." Yes, the Agonia requires sacrifice. Of course it does. But the sacrifice is worth it. The mercies of God are at your behest. The grace is there; *just do it.* Stop making excuses for a marriage that's barely "getting by." You shouldn't settle for that; and you don't have to. Enroll! Train for victory! Work out your salvation. Put it on display - so that you can *prove* it to the hundreds of people your life touches.

Having consecrated yourselves, let's get to work. And let's begin to expect changes; let's begin to expect victory. The angels in heaven are peering over heaven's parapets. *Go for the gold.*



QUIZ AND REVIEW

Please close your manuals; you're going to be tested.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Why is it that the extent of our potential will never be what determines how successful any of us becomes?

Answer:

Because in Christ we've been given more potential than we'll ever need.

2. What verse can you give that proves this?

Answer:

Romans 8:37

Rom. 8:37 ...we are *more than conquerors* through him that loved us.

3. What Greek word is translated "more than conquerors" - and what's the significance of it?

Answer:

It's the Greek word "hypernikomen" - and it means "*superconqueror.*" It clearly implies that we possess in Christ all the power we need - and more - to overcome sin.

4. Can you give me one more verse?

Answer:

Ephesians 1:19

Eph.1:19 ...the *exceeding* greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power...

5. What Greek word is translated "exceeding" - and what's the significance of it?

Answer:

It's the Greek word "hyperballon" - and it means "cast beyond measure." In other words, the power we've been given in Christ is "cast beyond measure" - it's more than sufficient to assure us victory - there's no getting to the end of it.

6. What's the importance of Philippians 2:12?

Philip. 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Answer:

Philippians 2:12 tells us that though we possess the potential to "win" - to "overcome," we must work on that potential - bring it to the surface of our lives - put it on display. The potential is there, but we must work it out.

7. What happens to a person who fails to "work out" his potential?

Answer:

He's declared "adokimos" - meaning he's "disqualified."

8. Does that mean that he loses his salvation?

Answer:

No. The text does not suggest that. What, then, is it that he's disqualified from? In all likelihood, ruling and reigning with Christ during the millennial kingdom. He'll be told to "stand aside" - that though he remains a son, he has failed to prove himself worthy of "stewarding" Christ's millennial kingdom.

9. In the ancient Greek Olympic Games, was any athlete ever permitted to train alone - in isolation?

Answer:

No. All the athletes were assigned to an "agonia" - which consisted of other athletes. The "agonia" was overseen by a trainer - and the daily workouts were observed by marshals who were given the authority to disqualify any athlete who was guilty of "slacking off."

10. What's the first step in consecration?

Answer:

Romans 12:1-2 gives the answer. We're told to present our bodies. That's the first step we take in consecrating ourselves.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ***ye present your bodies*** a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

HOMEWORK

1. Please read Chapter 8 - "*The Need to Call Sin 'Sin'.*" It's a very important lesson designed to teach you the importance calling sin *sin*.
2. If you didn't read the *Agonia Sermon* on your own this last week, you must do so next week. You will be checked up on.
3. Stay in touch with one another.
4. By now you should be enrolling in a home fellowship - and attending regularly.
5. Go back over "Agonia Status" delineated at the end of Chapter 4. It's very important for you to know what your responsibilities consist of - and to be stringently honoring them.
6. Go back over all the answers to the questions you were posed this evening.

GETTING STARTED[®]
CHAPTER 8
THE NEED TO CALL SIN "SIN"
WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Overtures Attempted Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse		Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	Your's Your Spouse	
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

THE NEED TO CALL SIN "SIN"

by Pastor Douglas Shearer

Let me begin with an article from the Sacramento Bee, dated Wednesday, October 13, 1999. The article's entitled "*Hearts in Motion, Officially.*"

Pop singer Amy Grant has gone public with "her thing" with longtime buddy, country crooner Vince Gill. "A lot of disparaging things have been said about my very public friendship with Vince," Grant said in a weekend edition of the Nashville Tennessean. "One of the reasons that the friendship was so public was because it never occurred to me to hide it."

She said her daughter, Millie, a fourth-grader, brought it to a head recently by asking if Gill was her boyfriend. "I kind of took a breath," noted Grant, "and said, 'He is, honey. Yeah.'"

In June, Grant divorced hubby of 16 years, Gary Chapman. Gill, 42, jettisoned wife of 17 years, Janice, in 1997. Grant, 38, said her friendship with Gill had nothing to do with her marriage's downfall.

Amy Grant rationalizing sin! Learning to live with it! Learning to excuse it! Learning to slough it off! Buying into the same kind of moral relativism that she at one time so clearly condemned.

Fifteen years ago, who would have guessed it? Amy Grant's commitment to God back then was unquestioned. She knew God had blessed her - that whatever success she was just then beginning to enjoy was wholly his doing. She not only knew it, she was forever confessing it. She loved God and wanted everyone to know it.

Not long after her first recording hit the "big-time" on the Gospel Music charts, she and her husband, Gary, bought a large estate with a big barn on it - and they'd hold weekly teen gatherings there - teaching from the Bible and encouraging everyone who attended to lead lives that were above reproach and that glorified God.

About ten years ago, when her daughter was born, she recorded a "cross-over hit" that reached the top of the charts almost immediately - and stayed there for weeks on end. The title of that recording, which I'm sure most of you have heard, was "*Baby, Baby*" - but what you may not know is that it was meant to celebrate her first daughter's birth.

MTV awarded her a contract for a video production; but the MTV moguls insisted on a few changes. Instead of making it a celebration of her daughter's birth, they changed the wording a little - and turned it into a romantic ballad with sensual undertones. And when the video was released - there was Amy Grant flirtatiously singing "*Baby, Baby*" to a handsome, hunk of a man who wasn't her husband, but who'd been hired to be the foil against which "*Baby, Baby*" was sung. It wasn't what anyone expected from Amy Grant; but she brushed it all off - claiming it was nothing more than a "show-biz" ploy she'd been required to do. Her own marriage was well founded - and her commitment to God was uncompromised.

In July of 1995 - just four short years ago - she once again confirmed in an interview that she was fully committed to her marriage; but what else she said during that same interview gave many of her fans cause for concern:

I go from moments of ecstasy to acute pain. I'm married to a great guy, I have a career that I love and I have a wonderful family, *but every now and then I feel like a caged animal and I can't seem to feel happy.*

Her marriage break-up this last June is sufficient proof of a whole series of personal choices that have turned her heart away from God - choices that no doubt extend back long before her decision to produce the MTV rendition of "Baby, Baby."

Let's read again what last Wednesday's Sacramento Bee reported Amy Grant said:

One of the reasons that my friendship with Vince Gill was so public was because it never occurred to me to hide it.

There it is: *not hiding sin* - being out-front with it - that's what today passes for moral integrity. Why? Because here in America we've somehow managed to convince ourselves that there's nothing more repugnant than pointing out someone's sin and condemning it - that's what we're being taught today. That's the kind of ethical nonsense we're faced with at every turn - that's exuding from every pore in the "American body politic." Moral condemnation - in whatever form it assumes - is the worst of all sins.¹

FOOTNOTE

1. The following excerpt is an example of just how easily Amy Grant rationalized her sin. It's taken from an article written by Glenn T. Stanton of *Family News in Focus*:

The hardest thing Nashville baker Leland Riggan faced in getting ready for the big wedding was crafting a six-tier almond amaretto cake, festooned with 2,500 miniature white-chocolate grapes, all on a two-and-a-half week deadline. But that was nothing compared to the hurdles the bride and groom overcame in preparation for their special day.

Christian music megastar Amy Grant and country crooner Vince Gill both had to dispose of existing marriages before their latest nuptials could take place. The couple was married earlier this year in an outdoor service, with an intimate gathering of friends and family, on a rural piece of Grant-owned property near Nashville.

The cake was perfect.

Grant's theology of marriage was not.

Grant said she recognized that God hates divorce, but she also realized a more personal and freeing truth. In August 1998, after undergoing what she called "tons of marital counseling," she went to the pastors with whom she had sought guidance and to her then-husband, singer/songwriter Gary Chapman, and told them all, "I believe and trust that I've been released from this [marriage]. And I say that knowing that even the Bible says the heart is deceitful."

She further explained how she knew this was God's will, and "to the best of my level of peace, I had a very settled, unshakable feeling about the path that I was going to follow."

Some advice from another counselor added to her blessed assurance. Amy recalled her counselor's words: "He said, 'Amy, God made marriage for people. He didn't make people for marriage. . . . He provided this so that people could enjoy each other to the fullest. I say if you have two people that are not thriving healthily in a situation, I say remove the marriage.'" "

A fine counselor, don't you think? One who views marriage as a life enhancement, a mere adornment or utility, rather than a sacred institution to be honored and worked at.

It wasn't Clinton's sins that eventually became the focus of public outrage; it was the condemnation of those sins that garnered the most outrage. It wasn't, ultimately, Bill Clinton who stood accused in the docket of public opinion last spring, it was Ken Starr who was left standing there - and not because the facts he gathered were inaccurate, but because he'd gathered those facts in the first place - and dared to make them public.

No one ventures anymore to point out sin - let alone to make it public. And that includes Christians. Christians hide behind 1 Peter 4:8...

1 Pet. 4:8 ...love covers a multitude of sins.

"Let's keep it all quiet," we say. *"Remember, love covers a multitude of sins."*

But do we ever bother to check out the real meaning of 1 Peter 4:8? It's taken from an old Jewish proverb - and what it actually means is far different from what most of have been taught. What Peter is saying here is that whenever anyone we *love* sins, his sins don't keep us from reaching out to him. Others might turn away from him in scorn; but we don't. Why? Because we love him! That's what 1 Peter 4:8 means. ***It's not suggesting that we ignore a person's sins - or that we fail to point them out.***

A father discovers that his teen-age son has stolen \$100.00 from a neighbor's home. If the boy were anyone else's son, he might be tempted to write him off. But the boy is *his* son. His own *beloved* son. Therefore, though he's terribly disappointed, he doesn't turn his back; he reaches out to help. Why? Because love pushes him past whatever moral revulsion and disappointment the sin begets.

But does that imply that the sin is going to be ignored? That it's not going to be brought up between the two of them - father and son - and thoroughly dealt with? That there won't be restitution and punishment? Of course not! No good father is going to ignore his son's sins.

We've got to get a grip on ourselves - and somehow overcome our reticence - our reluctance - to call sin *sin*. That doesn't mean that we form sin-patrols - that we start looking for sin under every rock and behind every bush. That's not at all what I mean. That's unhealthy and detrimental. But when sin is staring you in the face - when

1. it's obvious in your husband's life and he's doing nothing about it -
2. or your wife's life and she's doing nothing about it -
3. or your child's life and he's doing nothing about it -
4. or your best friend's life and he's doing nothing about it,

you've got to point it out - and you may even have to enlist the help of others if your challenge is brushed aside. You can't let sin go unchecked and unchallenged.

And that's going to be difficult. Why? Because, once again, here in America, it's not sin itself that's condemned, it's pointing out sin - that's what's condemned today among Americans - including Christians.

We've got to get a handle on what sin does - regardless of how petty and trifling it might seem.

The Book of Leviticus teaches that once each year the high priest was commanded to take the blood of a sin offering into the Holy of Holies - where God dwelt in the midst of the Tabernacle - surrounded by the twelve tribes of Israel - and sprinkle that blood on the Mercy Seat which was between the cherubim where God's glory rested. The blood cleansed the Holy of Holies of all the sins that had accumulated throughout the year. Unless that cleansing took place, God's presence was put at risk. God would not dwell in a tabernacle that was not clean and holy.

A bright student of scripture might ask, "How could that happen? How could sin accumulate like that - to the point that it penetrated the Holy of Holies and put at risk God's very presence? What about all the sacrifices for sin that were offered on a daily basis - not counting all the other sacrifices offered on the Sabbaths and during the festivals? Wasn't that sufficient to keep the tabernacle cleansed?"

The answer's no. And here's why - and, please, pay close attention here. The people of Israel - however dedicated and well intentioned they might be - only offered sacrifices for sins that they knew about - only for sins that they were aware they'd committed. Those sins were indeed atoned for - and the stains they caused were indeed washed away.

But not all sin was thereby atoned for and washed away. There were lots of sins that were so small and trifling - so apparently insignificant - that they were overlooked. And because they were overlooked, no sacrifice was brought to atone for them. The stains and blemishes they left were therefore uncleansed. And it was the accumulation of all those apparently petty and insignificant sins and the stains they caused that over the course of a full year put at risk God's presence - and which required, therefore, the great sin offering on the Day of Atonement. That's what the Day of Atonement was all about. That was its purpose.

Chapter 16 of the Book of Leviticus - which is the chapter that explains the Day of Atonement - teaches us just how important it is that we not overlook apparently petty and trifling sins. It teaches us that those sins accumulate - and their accumulation over time can generate an impact on our lives that's just as devastating as one of the "biggies."

It also teaches us that just because we aren't aware that we've sinned - that we haven't taken notice of it - that we've so effectively rationalized a sin that our consciences aren't troubled, *that in no way lessens the impact it generates*. Whether or not we notice it, the effect it causes is exactly the same.

We live in a culture that makes it easy to rationalize sin - so much so that we find it hard to acknowledge sin - to even discern it when it occurs. And so we don't confess it; and in not confessing it, the stain it leaves behind puts at risk the presence of God in our lives. Do you understand that? God will always withdraw his presence from a sin-stained life.

And what makes it even more difficult is that so few of our friends are willing to risk the condemnation that pointing out our sins might incur. After all, once again, what have we been taught is the worst sin of all? ***It's the "sin" of pointing out sin.***

1. So, in the first place, we have a hard time discerning many of the sins we commit - because the "social cues" of American culture make it so easy for us to rationalize and justify our sins; and, in the second place,
2. our friends won't help us because they don't want to risk being condemned as unkind and uncharitable "finger-pointers" - what they've been taught is the worst of all sins and that garners the most moral condemnation here in America. And if our friends are fellow Christians, they've been given an additional rationalization by well meaning pastors - a rationalization that serves to further reinforce their refusal to help: "*Love covers a multitude of sins.*"

And so the stain of sin accumulates in our lives - and

1. we don't even notice it.
2. And because we don't notice it, we don't confess it; and
3. because we don't confess it, we aren't cleansed; and
4. because we aren't cleansed, God begins to withdraw his presence.

Remember 1 John 1:9

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But we don't confess, and so we aren't cleansed.

Amy Grant probably didn't even know what was happening to her. Sin - unnoticed because she rationalized it and because her friends didn't have the "moxie," the chutzpah, to point it out to her - went unconfessed. And with each unconfessed sin, her life became more stained; and those stains began to accumulate - and soon God's presence was put at risk. He didn't withdraw himself from her life all at once; it occurred little by little. There was no doubt a growing emptiness that she wrestled with as God's presence began to fade. Remember what she said in her 1995 interview:

I go from moments of ecstasy to acute pain. I'm married to a great guy, I have a career that I love and I have a wonderful family, but every now and then I feel like a caged animal and I can't seem to feel happy.

There it is: an unease that she couldn't quite pin down - a growing distress that was troubling her life but that she couldn't quite identify. What was it? What underlay that distress? It was God's withdrawal. That's what she was so poignantly feeling.

How could Amy Grant have gone from holding Bible studies for teen-agers in a barn she and her husband bought for just that purpose to a divorce that caused her so little alarm and an affair that she didn't bother to hide? It was God's withdrawal - caused by sins that she rationalized and that her friends wouldn't point out to her - including her own husband.

We need each other's help now more than ever. Why? Because we just don't see our own sins that well. Everywhere we turn in America, we encounter cleverly packaged rationalizations that blind us to sin. And so we brush sin off so easily - so effectively. But getting others to help us see our sins isn't going to be easy - because we've been taught not to finger point. And by finger pointing I don't mean condemnation. I mean only a loving reminder by a good friend that what I'm brushing off as insignificant and unimportant - and not really sin at all - is indeed just exactly that: *sin*. And in the end, if it's not challenged and checked, God's withdrawal from my life is inevitable.

Do you want to see your best friends continue to slip away from you? That's exactly what's going to happen if you don't help them acknowledge their sins and then confess them - and, in so doing, get them cleansed so that God's fellowship isn't put at risk.

How many of our good friends have we already lost because we've sat on the side lines - and refused to get involved - refused to call a sin a sin? And gradually God's presence is withdrawn from their lives - until finally - with a gnawing unease dogging every step they take in life - with a growing anxiety that comes to characterize every breath they draw - they begin to give themselves over to really dangerous and bizarre behavior in the hope of filling the void that God's withdrawal has left behind.

And at that point it's often too late. Sin has them so entangled - with their consciences so desensitized - that they can't be called back. It's not that they've lost their salvation; it's that anger and bitterness close in around them. They begin striking out at everyone they know - including - most especially including - the very persons who love them the most and who most desperately want God's very best for them.

That's exactly what happened to Amy Grant. And that's what can happen to any of us *if* we don't begin striking back hard at the devil - *if* we don't begin casting aside all his clever devices - and all the ploys we've bought into.

So, get up off the bench. Get into the game! Get involved. Stop listening to those who tell you that calling a sin *a sin* is the worst of all sins.

1. Indifference is the worst of all sins.
2. Refusing to call sin *sin* is the worst of all sins.
3. Letting your good friends spin out of control and fall into the devil's embrace because you were too intimidated to speak up - that's the worst of all sins.

Finally let me point out to you that there's no such thing as a *personal* sin - in the sense that there's a sin that I can commit that affects only me. Such a sin doesn't exist! The Book of Leviticus teaches us that whenever an individual Jew was guilty of sin, that sin stained not only his life, it stained the tabernacle in Jerusalem as well. Wherever he might live in Israel - from Dan in the north to Beersheva in the south, his sin contaminated the tabernacle in Jerusalem. That's why when he brought his sin offering to the priest at the door of the tabernacle, the blood of that sacrifice was sprinkled on the horns of the brazen altar. That was done to cleanse the tabernacle from the stain *his* sin had left there. He may have committed that sin hundreds of miles away - alone and by himself; nevertheless, its stain polluted the tabernacle in Jerusalem.

And so it is today! Whatever sin you commit - wherever its committed - however hidden you might think it is, the stain it leaves behind touches the tabernacle; and since today the church is the tabernacle of God - it touches all of us. It doesn't simply stain your life; it stains my life; it stains the life of every believer here at New Hope. You carry a grudge against your wife - you rail at your child - you steal a tool from work - you cheat on your income taxes - you down-load pornography from off the internet - the stain that leaves behind not only blemishes you, it blemishes all of us. We're all affected.

Let's renew our consecration to God. Let's plead with him to make us more sensitive to the effects of sin - let's cleanse the temple of our own lives - and, in so doing, cleanse the temple of the Body of Christ, the church. Let's pledge ourselves to point out sins when we see them being committed - to do it lovingly and redemptively - *but to do it!*

HOMEWORK

1. Have your students read over Chapter 9 - "*Learning How to Handle Criticism.*" Use it next week as a basis for discussion. Read it carefully yourselves. You can't use it as a basis for discussion unless you understand it thoroughly.
2. Remind anyone who did not read last week's lesson on his own to do so next week. He will be checked up on.
3. Remind them to stay in touch with one another.
4. Press once more the issue of enrolling in a home fellowship. ***Be pointed.***
5. Remind them of the Agonia Status; it's delineated at the end of Chapter 4. It's very important for them to know what their responsibilities consist of - and for them to stringently honor them.
6. Be sure to have all your students review the answers to the questions they were posed this evening. Follow up on them next week.

GETTING STARTED®
CHAPTER 9
LEARNING HOW TO HANDLE CRITICISM

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /		Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Your Spouse /	Positive Responses /
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

LEARNING HOW TO HANDLE CRITICISM

POLICING ONE ANOTHER

It's important to bear in mind that your instructors aren't your policemen. That's your job. You must learn to police *one another*. If someone is absent, it's up to **you** to get in touch with that person and find out why he/she was absent. You need to learn to "*invade each other's space.*" You need to learn how to hold one another accountable. You need to learn how to handle a rebuke - and how to deliver a rebuke - without feeling personally insulted or attacked - or, even worse, betrayed.

CHECKING UP

Please read aloud the following questions - and jot down down the answers each couple makes. It's important to "drive a stake" here - so that later when you become a bit recalcitrant, your "Agonia-mates" can pointedly remind you of the "*vows*" you've made. Your instructors will query each of you - one by one.

1. Do you *fully* understand that it's your job to police your agonia-mates - that it's not the job of the instructional staff; it's your job?

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: Check one
yes no

Wife: Check one
yes no

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: Check one
yes no

Wife: Check one
yes no

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: Check one
yes no

Wife: Check one
yes no

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: Check one
yes no

Wife: Check one
yes no

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

2. Do you *fully* understand that if your agonia-mates are not at a Sunday morning service that it's your job to call them to account; that it's not the job of the instructional staff?

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

3. Do you *fully* understand that if you know that some of your agonia-mates are "skipping" home fellowship meetings that it's your job to call them to account - that it's not the job of the instructional staff?

Couple _____ (Last name) Husband: yes no Check one
Wife: yes no Check one

Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>

4. Do you *fully* understand that if one of your agonia-mates is not honoring the expectations he has committed himself to that it's your job to call him to account - that it's not the job of the instructional staff?

Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>

Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
Couple _____ (Last name)	Husband: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check one
	Wife: yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>

ISOLATION AND BAD MARRIAGES

One of the reasons marriages begin to unravel is the failure on the part of couples to put themselves and their marriages in a “*state of invasion*.” They don’t allow their lives to be invaded - nor do they invade others. All too often the only time they “invade” someone else’s life is when they’re motivated by anger: they dash into his life, hurl a few bitter, nasty comments at him, and then quickly retreat - to man their own defenses in preparation for a counter attack. It’s what I call “*an anger incursion*,” not a genuine invasion - and wrongfully motivated. What each of you must learn to do is dismantle your defenses as much as possible; throw open your life; and let others into your marriages *on a more or less permanent basis*.

THE AGONIA IS THE KEY TO VICTORY - YOU MUST MAKE IT WORK

Remember, the Agonia is the framework within which your lessons are going to be learned. It’s impossible for you to learn these lessons *existentially* without the Agonia. So much of the victory you’re hoping for is dependent **not** upon teaching, but upon exhortation - and how much you make yourself willing to both exhort others and be exhorted yourself. And that’s tough for anyone who’s primed to think in terms of *betrayal* - someone who’s afflicted with the “*every one’s out to get me*” mind-set. You’ve got to convince yourself that we’re all here to help one another, not to belittle, humiliate, or injure one another - though, from time to time, there will be pain and embarrassment. Pain is not always meant to be humiliating or injurious - in and of itself. But that’s hard to believe for anyone who has been betrayed. Remember, you can sympathize; but you can’t back off. *You must push yourself and your fellow agonia-mates relentlessly.*

THE AGONIA IS NOT MERELY AN EXPEDIENT

The Agonia is not just an expedient. It’s more than that; it’s the church life *put into practice*. It’s a matter of living corporate lives, not independent, solitary lives - which is what, in all likelihood, you’ve been doing - whether or not you care to admit it.

Romans 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one *members one of another*.

Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are *members one of another*

You must be brought to understand that living a corporate life is not an option; anything less falls short of God’s intention. You **really do** belong to one another. You must be brought to acknowledge this as ***the truth*** - a truth that must be *lived out each and every day*. You must change the way you live. Again, there’s no

option here. You must abandon your solitary way of life - in concrete, tangible forms. Stay on top of one another. *Don't relent.* Your instructors will be hammering this truth home each and every week.

CRITICISM AND BETRAYAL

Every relationship needs to be based upon genuine honesty - because without honesty, it inevitably slips off the solid rock of spiritual truth and eventually collapses.

Honesty, however, occasionally entails frank criticism. But some individuals are unable to sustain a relationship that involves criticism - regardless of the care taken to be tactful and discreet. Why? Because they suffer from an inordinate need for approval - it becomes the *sine qua non* of almost all their relationships; and if for any reason it's withheld, the relationship is jeopardized - and the person withholding it often finds himself accused of betrayal.

The underlying dynamic is not hard to pinpoint: it's a *pervasive insecurity* - an insecurity so dogged that only a steady flow of approval can keep it alleviated. Why the insecurity? There's no one single cause. But whatever the cause, it's very distressing - and only unqualified approval can hold it at bay; consequently, *almost every relationship is forced to serve that purpose.*

Our job, at least in part, is to pry your relationships free from serving *that* purpose. You need to become accustomed to criticism. It's a discipline you'll be subjected to regularly here in the Agonia. You must stop thinking of criticism in terms of betrayal. You've got to stop requiring unqualified approval from your friends - and, most especially, your spouse. You must stop making your relationships - especially your marriage - contingent upon it. You need to embrace criticism - and let it serve the purpose of moving you closer to the truth. You need to learn the importance of examining criticism prayerfully - and not to be quick to dismiss it - *regardless of how it's brought.*

Proverbs 27:6	Faithful are the wounds of a friend...
Proverbs 9:8	... rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.
Ecclesiasties 7:5	It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.
Proverbs 13:18	Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.
Psalms 141:5	Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head...
Hebrews 12:10	For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.
Revelation 3:19	As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

GROWING IN CHRIST - PASSING THE TEST ©

LEARNING HOW TO HANDLE CRITICISM

by Pastor Douglas Shearer

In last week's sermon, I made the point that Christ was *both* fully God and fully man. Let's read from Luke 1:35.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit - and born of the Virgin Mary - making him fully God and fully man.

I tried to explain last week the role Christ's deity plays in our redemption - that it gives to his sacrifice on the Cross the infinite value that atonement requires. Without it, God could not have *passed over* our sins. That's the purpose of *Christ's deity*; its purpose is to deliver us from the *penalty* of sin - death - by enabling God to *pass over* our sins without in any way calling into question his absolute hatred of sin. That's the meaning of Romans 3:25 and 26.

But the purpose of *Christ's humanity*¹ is to save us from the *power* of sin. The power we need to break the grip of sin in our lives - to break all the devil's bondages - that power is found within the scope of Christ's humanity.

That's a truth that needs to be declared again and again. We're so geared toward the supernatural. We tend to think of salvation in terms of the acquisition of supernatural power. And it's not.

Salvation is not a process that transforms us into deities. That's what the Mormons teach; it's what the Hindus teach; and it's what New Age is all about.

There's a growing fascination with the supernatural - both the good and the evil of it - mostly the evil. We tend to think of the developing cosmic struggle - which we all sense is reaching a crescendo - whether Christian or otherwise - only in terms of a clash between awesome supernatural forces - with human beings cast into the role of mere pawns - props - by and large helpless and powerless. You see it on TV and at the movies more and more - *the supernatural*.

1. The threat it poses.
2. How to guard against it.
3. How to sense it.
4. What to do when confronted by it.
5. How to control it.
6. How to acquire its power for ourselves.

It's a recurring theme within the entertainment industry.

Much of it began with the Exorcist over twenty five years ago - but with every passing year, it's becoming ever more elaborated - ever more blatant - and cast in ever darkening terms. And the line here between what passes for Christian entertainment and secular entertainment is very thin - to the point of being at times nonexistent. Christian books, Christian films, Christian seminars have all taken up the same beat: *the supernatural*.

And the message in both realms - the secular *and* the Christian - is always the same: we humans must acquire for ourselves supernatural power - that the coming cosmic struggle will occur fundamentally within the supernatural sphere - that the human sphere is not basically a part of it - that it becomes a part only by being dragged into it.

Our humanity, it's suggested, is far too insufficient; far too inadequate. The power at its disposal is pitiful - and not to be compared to the power of the supernatural. If we're to struggle effectively against the power of the "Dark Side," we need to be trained under the careful, watchful eye of "Yoda" - who will teach us how to control and manipulate the "Force" for good.

And that's a trick of the devil. Because the coming clash is between *man* and the devil.

It's the power of a restored humanity that God plans to pit against the forces of darkness.

Gen. 3:14 And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

Gen. 3:15 And I will put *enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed*; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

It's as the *Son of Man* that Jesus waged his battle against the devil, not as the Son of God. It's as the *Seed of the Woman* that Jesus triumphed over each and every demon sent against him - and, finally, over the devil himself.

We're being tricked - whether it's the "Pretender;" or the "Millennium;" or the "Profiler" - we're being seduced. What we should be focusing on is not the power of the supernatural - but the power that's at our disposal in the *restored humanity* the Holy Spirit imparts to us the moment we're regenerated.

With all this in mind, turn with me to Luke 2:40. Because it's here that we begin to learn exactly how Christ waged his struggle against the forces of darkness arrayed against him. It's

FOOTNOTES

¹ I don't mean to suggest that Christ's humanity played no role in freeing us from the penalty of sin. It was necessary for the penalty to be inflicted upon a man - since, of course, it was man who sinned - and to that extent Christ's humanity played a vital role in appeasing the wrath of God. Nevertheless, it was Christ's deity that provided the infinite value which made the "Passover" possible.

exactly the way we're called upon to wage our own struggle against those very same forces.

Luke 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

The translation here is very poor. Let me provide you with a better translation from the original Greek.

Re-translation

Luke 2:40 *And the child was growing, (not "grew" - it's **not** in the past tense; it's in the imperfect tense - implying continuous action - denoting, therefore, a *slow* process; it didn't occur rapidly; and it most certainly didn't occur instantaneously),*

and was being strengthened (not "waxed strong" - again, it's not in the past tense; it's in the imperfect tense - implying continuous, on-going action - a slow process)

being filled with wisdom (omit the prepositional phrase "in spirit" - it's not present in the best manuscripts; and change "filled" to "being filled")

and the grace of God was upon him.

So, here's how Luke 2:40 should read from the original Greek:

Luke 2:40 And the child was growing and was being strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

What we have here is a process. Humanity is not like deity. It grows and develops. It matures. It doesn't spring forth **complete**. Development and growth are intrinsic to human nature. The power that's there must be cultivated - brought slowly to maturity. It doesn't come ready made.

Jesus grew - and that growth was vital; without it, he would have failed to develop the powers God meant for him to use against the devil - the very powers God means for us to employ.

The key to understanding Luke 2:40 is, in many respects, found in Hebrews 5:8 and Hebrews 4:15.

We'll only touch briefly upon Hebrews 5:8; and then we'll move on to examine Hebrews 4:15 in detail - but hold your place in Luke 2:40.

Heb. 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet **learned** he obedience by the things which he suffered...

Jesus learned obedience. That seems so strange, doesn't it? Imagine, Jesus had to learn obedience. Obedience wasn't his by nature; he learned it. He developed it.

At first glance, it seems almost blasphemous. But there it is. Jesus **learned** obedience. It's very plainly stated.

Let me explain it. It's important.

The fact that Christ learned obedience does **not** imply that at one time Christ was disobedient.

Innocence is **not** obedience.

1. Innocence is the state into which Christ was born.
2. Obedience is the state into which Christ grew.

Let me put it slightly differently:

1. Innocence was Christ's beginning state of being;
2. Obedience was a choice that he, just like all of us, had to make - and not just once, but again and again - over the entire course of his life - culminating with the last, painful choice he made in Gethsemane:

Matt. 26:39 ...O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Christ never departed from innocence - he remained always sinless - which is what Hebrews 4:15 tells us unambiguously - he was "without sin;" **but he progressed from a state of mere innocence - a state of sinlessness - to a state of obedience.**

At every stage along the road to maturity, Christ chose to trust God - and, in trusting God, to obey him. And through those choices, he **became** obedient - a final, mature state of being - which is the pinnacle of human achievement - what human maturity is meant to lead us to. The third and fourth chapters of the Book of Hebrews speak of the *rest* God calls us into through obedience to his will. Obedience to God's will leads finally to God's rest.

Now, let's examine Hebrews 4:15 - which, like Hebrews 5:8, explains Luke 2:40.

Heb. 4:15 ...(he) was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Because Hebrews 4:15 is so important in terms of casting light upon Jesus' growth to full maturity, let's read it together with Luke 2:40.

Luke 2:40 And the child was growing and was being strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Heb. 4:15 ...(he) was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Look carefully now at the three clauses that make up the second half of Hebrews 4:15 - the half that we're concerned with - the half that throws light on Luke 2:40:

1. was in all points tempted;
2. like as we are; and
3. yet without sin.

Let's begin with the first clause "*was in all points tempted...*" "*Tempted*" translates the Greek word "*pepeirasmenon*" - "*πειρασμενον*." And that's an unfortunate translation - because the English word "*tempted*" conveys the sense of moral perversion - the sense of preying upon an *ingrained lust*. But frequently "*pepeirasmenon*" implies little more than a "*test*" - and is meant to be morally benign. And that's its meaning here.

Clearly, "*pepeirasmenon*" is not used here in the sense of James 1:14.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted (peirazetai - πειραζεται - a different form of the same word in Hebrews 4:15, pepierasmenon) when he's carried away and enticed ("deleazomenos" - "δεδεασμενος"), by his own lust.

In James 1:14, there's no question that the issue is "*moral perversion*" - that an ingrained lust is being exploited - that, therefore, the English word "*tempted*" is an appropriate translation. Why? Because it's used in conjunction with the word "deleazomenos" - which means "*to entice*."

So the better translation of Hebrews 4:15

...(he) was in all points **tested** like as we are, yet without sin.

Putting these two verses together, we're able to catch the dynamic underlying all spiritual growth:

1. spiritual growth consists of a series of stages - each of which is marked by a test.
2. Each test is a challenge - which, if mastered, leads to an in-filling of wisdom, which is a translation of the Greek word "sophia" - **we're filled with wisdom**. We're filled with "sophia."
3. Each test, when courageously faced and mastered, leads to ever more wisdom - "sophia."

And we aren't talking here about some esoteric gnosticism - a secret lore of some kind - which is the meaning the word "sophia" is acquiring within the "New Age Movement." We're not talking about the supernatural, non-human realm. We're not intruding upon the mystical here.

"Sophia," does not convey the sense of knowledge alone - far from it. It *includes* the sense of knowledge; but there's more to it than just that. Its definition is best given in James 3:17.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that's from above (the kind of wisdom that's filling Jesus in Luke 2:40)

1. is first pure, then
2. peaceable,
3. gentle, and
4. easy to be entreated,
5. full of mercy and good fruits,
6. without partiality, and
7. without hypocrisy.

The description James gives of wisdom is almost the very same description Paul gives of

1. the *fruit of the Spirit* in Galatians 5:22 through 23, and
2. *love* in 1 Corinthians 13.

Look at Galatians 5:22 through 23

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
Gal. 5:23 Meekness, temperance...

That's the fruit of the Spirit. Here now, from 1 Corinthians 13,

is Paul's definition of "love."

1 Cor. 13:4 Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
1 Cor. 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
1 Cor. 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
1 Cor. 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

That's love. And, here again, is James definition of "wisdom."

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

That's wisdom.

Look again at Luke 2:40.

Luke 2:40 And the child was growing and was being strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

There's **nothing mystical** here - nothing supernatural - in that it's intrinsically alien to human nature. When someone tells you that he's spiritually mature - and to prove it he points

1. to all the Bible knowledge he possesses, or
2. to the unerring accuracy of his prophetic word, or
3. to the truth of his spiritual insights, or even
4. to the miraculous powers he displays

...remind him of Luke 2:40 - its real meaning - that spiritual growth is measured **only** in terms of the fruit of the Spirit - that's the meaning of the word "wisdom" in Luke 2:40 - the concrete form wisdom assumes; it's also the meaning of love - the concrete form love assumes. Remind him of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

1 Cor. 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
1 Cor. 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.
1 Cor. 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, (I am) nothing.

A person who is growing in Christ is becoming

1. ever more loving
2. ever more joyful;
3. ever more peaceful;
4. ever more patient;
5. ever more gentle;
6. ever more concerned with the interests of others;
7. ever more persevering;
8. ever more willing to give ground to others - to make room for others; and, lastly,
9. ever more in control of his passions.

That's the mark of real spirituality. That's what it means to be filled with wisdom. That's what it means to become fully human.

And that's what was happening to Jesus - in the small town of Nazareth - nestled in the high valley solitude of southern Galilee. His humanity was being developed through a series of stages - each of which was marked by a *peirasmon* (πειρασμον) - a test - a challenge - which, when mastered, led to a new level of maturity - marked by a new in-filling of wisdom. And, so, slowly, painfully, his humanity was developed. Jesus' growth to full maturity marked the first time humanity ever reached its zenith - the very pinnacle of what God had always intended.

Remember: spiritual growth is not automatic.

It's marked by a series of crises - specific, well defined challenges - each of which must be mastered before further growth can occur. If the challenge isn't mastered, spiritual growth ceases.

Let's carefully review the dynamic of spiritual growth:

1. Spiritual growth begins with a challenge - what the scripture calls a test (*peirasmon*);
2. if the challenge is mastered and the test is passed, there's an in-filling of wisdom;
3. the concrete form that wisdom assumes is the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, etc.
4. Then, a further challenge is encountered - an additional *peirasmon* - which, if also mastered, leads to a further in-filling of wisdom - which assumes the concrete form of ever more joy, ever more peace, ever more patience, ever more gentleness, etc.
5. And so on - and on - and on - until, finally, we enter into the Promised Rest of the third and fourth chapters of the Book of Hebrews.

The dynamic underlying all spiritual growth is *peirasmon* - the test - the challenge.

And each test marks a fresh stage of spiritual growth. ***Peirasmon is the impetus that propels spiritual growth forward. Without peirasmon, spiritual growth is impossible.***

That's why James 1:2 tells us

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations...

The word that's translated "*temptations*" is, I'm sure you can guess, the plural form of the Greek singular "*peirasmon*" - "*peirasmois*."

Why "*count it all joy*"? Because the test to which you're being subjected indicates that you've reached a new stage of spiritual growth - *and the peirasmon you confront marks that stage*. And if you master the challenge it poses, you'll break into a larger, more expanded realm of joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, etc. - which, of course, is exactly what James goes on to describe in the verses which follow.

As Jesus grew up - passing from infancy through his teen years - and, finally, into adulthood - he encountered at each stage fresh challenges - new tests - new *peirasmois* - each one of which he mastered. The end result was a humanity which is exactly what God had sought for in Adam - but which Adam's

failure had aborted.

When Adam failed - at what stage - we don't know. We know the test; and we know the sin it led to; but we don't know the stage. We don't know how far Adam's spiritual growth had progressed before his tragic failure. Again, we know the nature of the failure, but we don't know the stage of spiritual growth it marked.

But Jesus, unlike Adam, passed through *each and every* stage - perfectly - with no failure. How do we know? Again, Hebrews 4:15 tells us unambiguously:

Heb. 4:15 ...*(he) was in all points tested like as we are, yet without sin.*

Not once did Jesus fail; not once was his growth impeded by sin. He became what God intended man to be. He reached the pinnacle of manhood. Every aspect of his humanity was fully developed. Each feature was perfect. And it was then - having achieved the very zenith of human maturity - that Jesus was sent forth by God the Father to be baptized by John in the River Jordan - which for Jesus was not a baptism of repentance, but an anointing (Acts 10:37-38) - which installed Jesus into the Messianic Office - and invested him with all the authority pertaining thereto.

The dynamic prompting spiritual growth on the part of Jesus is exactly the dynamic that prompts our spiritual growth as well. Each stage is the same. Each challenge is the same; each test is the same; each *peirasmon* is the same. How do I know? Again Hebrews 4:15 tells me.

Heb. 4:15 ...*(he) was in all points tested like as we are, yet without sin.*

"...in all points...just as we are..."

There's no difference! The dynamic is exactly the same.

This process in Jesus was unimpeded - in the sense that each challenge was mastered at every stage of growth. There was no failure. But we have failed in many of the choices we've made. We've failed to pass all the tests we've encountered - to master each and every challenge. Though we've been redeemed by the blood of the lamb - regenerated - our spiritual growth is often impeded - thwarted - because we don't always make the right choices - we don't always pass the *test* that marks each stage of spiritual growth; and until that test is passed, until that challenge is mastered, our growth is thwarted.

So often, we refuse to face our failure - to admit it. And when, finally, we're forced to admit it, we make excuses for it. "*It was too hard. It was beyond my capacity. I wasn't ready for it.*"

It doesn't matter how much we squirm; how much we make excuses. The plain and simple truth of the matter is that we don't grow.

1 Corinthians 10:13 deals with our excuses - *all of them*.

1 Cor. 10:13 No *temptation* (*peirasmon*) has overtaken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you *to be tempted* (*peirasthanai*) beyond what you are able, but with the *temptation* (*peirasmon*) will provide

the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

God carefully measures out each and every test he subjects us to - making sure *that it's not beyond our capacity*. The point of the test - the challenge - is not to make life miserable for us - it's to propel forward our spiritual growth. Spiritual growth and peirasmon go hand in hand.

If we bog down at any one point, God uses rebuke and correction to bring us around - bring us to the point of facing our failure. ***Rebuke and correction are an inescapable part of human spiritual growth.***

- Heb. 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:
- Heb. 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
- Heb. 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?
- Heb. 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Correction and rebuke are meant to

1. help us see *what* we failed;
2. *how* we failed; and
3. *encourage* us to face the test again - and to master it.

Why do so many of us fail as Christians to grow? ***It's not because we fail the peirazmois so often.*** That's not the real reason. ***The real reason is that we cringe from being rebuked and corrected when we fail.***

Oh, how we love to rebuke and correct others; but how difficult it is for each of us to undergo rebuke and correction ourselves. ***That's the real reason we stagnate.***

Someone points out a failing - and, oh, how we defend ourselves; oh, how we become indignant; oh, how we make excuses. ***And so we don't grow.***

And, after a while, the rebukes become more and more infrequent; people give up trying to correct us. Our temper and indignation drive them away. Our excuses become wearisome.

You remember two Sundays ago the three couples who stood here before you - how they told you of the victory they'd gained in their marriages. Each person began his or her long journey to victory with an admission of failure. Each person began by acknowledging defeat. ***That was the beginning.***

And most of the process involved in bringing them to victory consisted of a series of corrections and rebukes.

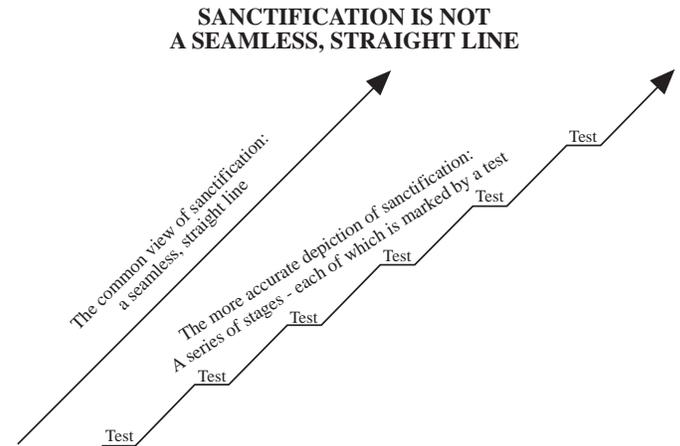
1. They policed one another;
2. confronted one another;
3. encouraged one another;
4. pressed one another.

Of course, part of their victory consisted of learning new insights; but that accounted for only about 30%; ***the remaining***

70% consisted of rebuke and correction.

An unavoidable key to victory is rebuke, correction, and encouragement.

Spiritual growth is not a seamless straight line - moving ever upwards. It consists of a series of stages - each one of which is entered into through a test - a ***peirasmon***. And unless that test - that challenge - is mastered, the next stage is never reached - and spiritual growth ceases.



When we fail, we need to be corrected and rebuked - and, then encouraged. It's a process we can't do without.

And with each stage that's entered into, we reach a new level of empowered humanity - ever more frightening to the devil and his almost numberless hosts.

The devil knows that it's the Seed of the Woman that he needs to fear.

That's why he's bombarding you with the "Millennium," "the Pretender," and the "Profiler." That's why in Christian bookstores so much of what's being sold there pertains to the supernatural - and serves the primary purpose of stirring up your fascination with the supernatural.

The devil is doing everything he can to distract you from perfecting your humanity - to get you to think that the key to overcoming him lies in the supernatural and the mystical. But it's all a lie.

Marriages that work - friendships that are true - patience, gentleness, meekness, joy, peace - that's what terrifies the devil.

And all of that is developed *over time* - through a whole series of stages - each one of which is marked by a ***peirasmon*** - and each one, when mastered, releases more joy into your life - more peace - more gentleness - more meekness.

1. What tests have got you bogged down?
2. What tests have you given up on ever passing?
3. What tests do you cringe from - and make excuses for refusing to take?
4. What "boxing rings" don't you climb into anymore?

I'm going to ask you to recommit yourselves to victory - and in so doing, commit yourselves, perhaps for the first time, to

rebuke and correction - to embracing rebuke and correction.

Wherever it is that you're bogged down - whatever test you've failed to pass - whatever challenge you've failed to master - whatever it is, step up to the plate again. Each of us has failed at some point - and each of us is struggling at some point. There's no shame in admitting failure. It's not failure that should shame us, it's our refusal to admit failure when it's so painfully obvious. It's our refusal to admit that the test we face

can be overcome; that it's *not* beyond our capacity to overcome - that God has *never* permitted us to be confronted by a peirasmon that can't be overcome and mastered. Let's move forward again - break the inertia that has paralyzed us - and begin once more to...

*"...run with endurance the race that's been set before us
- looking unto Jesus - the author and finisher of our
faith..."*

Hebrews 12:2

REVIEW AND TEST

Please now close your manuals. You're going to be tested. Please take the time next week to go over the correct answers given below.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. How many of you sense a growing fascination with the supernatural? Please elaborate for me - in your own words.

Answer:

This is an open-ended question with no specific answer. Encourage your students to discuss openly their feelings about the supernatural. Take notes on their answers:

2. When did you first sense that it was becoming a cultural preoccupation?

Answer:

Again, there is no specific answer. But try to get a discussion going - and take notes on their answers:

3. What's wrong with becoming too engrossed with the supernatural?

Answer:

It keeps us from staying focused on God's actual strategy for overcoming the devil - which is summed up in Genesis 3:14-15.

Gen. 3:14

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

Gen. 3:15 *And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

It's the seed of the woman who has been commissioned by God to overthrow the devil. It's as the Son of Man that Jesus triumphed over every demon sent against him.

4. Was Jesus' humanity ready-made?

Answer:

No. Humanity is not like deity. It grows and develops. It matures. It doesn't spring forth complete. Development and growth are intrinsic to human nature. The power that's there - the power we possess in Christ - must be developed and cultivated.

5. Can you give me a verse that proves this?

Answer:

Luke 2:40

6. Can you give a better translation than what's ordinarily given?

Answer:

Luke 2:40 And the child was growing and was being strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

What this verse shows is that Jesus - like all men - grew and developed. He wasn't created full grown - he grew; wisdom was imparted incrementally.

7. What does Hebrews 5:8 indicate? Please elaborate.

Heb. 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet *learned* he obedience by the things which he suffered...

Answer:

Jesus learned obedience. That is not meant to imply that Jesus was ever disobedient. Sinlessness is not obedience. Sinlessness is the state into which Christ was born. Obedience is the state into which Christ grew. Christ *progressed from a state of mere innocence - a state of sinlessness - to a state of obedience.*

At every stage along the road to maturity, Christ chose to trust God - and, in trusting God, to obey him. And through those choices, he *became* obedient - a final, mature state of being - which is the pinnacle of human achievement - what human maturity is meant to lead us to.

8. Explain the importance of Hebrews 4:15

Heb. 4:15 ... (he) was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Answer:

The word "tempted" means "tested." And it, together with Luke 2:40,

Luke 2:40 And the child was growing and was being strengthened, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

casts light on the dynamic underlying spiritual growth.

1. spiritual growth consists of a series of stages - each of which is marked by a test.
2. Each test is a challenge - which, if mastered, leads to an in-filling of wisdom, which is a translation of the Greek word "sophia" - *we're filled with wisdom*. We're filled with "sophia."
3. Each test, when courageously faced and mastered, leads to ever more wisdom - "sophia."

9. What does the word "sophia" imply?

Answer:

The best definition of what godly sophia implies is given in James 3:17

James 3:17 But the wisdom that's from above (the kind of wisdom that's filling Jesus in Luke 2:40)

1. is first pure, then
2. peaceable,
3. gentle, and
4. easy to be entreated,
5. full of mercy and good fruits,
6. without partiality, and
7. without hypocrisy.

The description James gives of wisdom closely corresponds to Paul's definition of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Therefore, a person who is growing in Christ is becoming

1. ever more loving
2. ever more joyful;
3. ever more peaceful;
4. ever more patient;
5. ever more gentle;
6. ever more concerned with the interests of others;
7. ever more persevering;
8. ever more willing to give ground to others - to make room for others; and, lastly,
9. ever more in control of his passions.

10. With all this in mind, elaborate on the dynamic underlying all spiritual growth.

Answer:

1. Spiritual growth begins with a challenge - what the scripture calls a test (peirasmon);
2. if the challenge is mastered and the test is passed, there's an in-filling of wisdom;
3. the concrete form that wisdom assumes is the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, etc.

4. Then, a further challenge is encountered - an additional peirasmon - which, if also mastered, leads to a further in-filling of wisdom - which assumes the concrete form of ever more joy, ever more peace, ever more patience, ever more gentleness, etc.
 5. And so on - and on - and on - until, finally, we enter into the Promised Rest of the third and fourth chapters of the Book of Hebrews.
11. Is there ever any justification for failing to pass a test - leading to a new and more expanded realm of joy, peace, kindness, etc.? And if not, why not?

Answer:

No. Because God carefully measures out each and every test he subjects us to - making sure *that it's not beyond our capacity*. The point of the test - the challenge - is not to make life miserable for us - it's to propel forward our spiritual growth. Spiritual growth and peirasmon go hand in hand.

1 Cor. 10:13 No **test** (peirasmon) has overtaken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you **to be tested** (peirasthanai) beyond what you are able, but with the **test** (peirasmon) will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

12. Why is rebuke and correction so necessary for spiritual growth?

Answer:

Because, unlike Jesus, we do not always pass the tests that mark the next step on the ladder of spiritual growth. We frequently fail; succumb to sin - and then rationalize our failure. Rebuke and correction are meant to:

1. help us see **what** we failed;
2. **how** we failed; and
3. **encourage** us to face the test again - and to master it.

13. Can you give me a passage of scripture that highlights this truth?

Answer:

Heb. 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

Heb. 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Heb. 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Heb. 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

14. What's the real reason most of us fail to mature?

Answer:

Why do so many of us fail as Christians to grow? **It's not because we fail the peirazmois so often.** That's not the real reason. **The real reason is that we cringe from being rebuked and corrected when we fail.** Oh, how we love to rebuke and correct others; but how difficult it is for each of us to undergo rebuke and correction ourselves. That's the real reason we stagnate. Someone points

out a failing - and, oh, how we defend ourselves; oh, how we become indignant; oh, how we make excuses. And so we don't grow. And, after a while, the rebukes become more and more infrequent; people give up trying to correct us. Our temper and indignation drive them away. Our excuses become wearisome.

15. What, then, is one of the most important keys to spiritual growth?

Answer:

Rebuke and correction.

.....

MONITORING HOW WELL YOU HANDLE REBUKE AND CORRECTION

Each of you should begin using column 5 on your monitoring form. At the end of each day, enter a score for yourself and your spouse. The score can range from 1 - 10 - with "1" being an abysmal failure and "10" a stunning success. A score of "5" is middling. You're to provide two sets of scores - using two criteria to compute each set:

First, your own score:

1. How *non-defensive* were you when being rebuked and corrected by your spouse? Did you assume an intimidating stance? Did you threaten?
2. How *attentive* were you when being rebuked and corrected? Did you stonewall? Walk out? Attempt to turn the tables?

Next, your spouse's score:

1. How *non-defensive* was your spouse when being rebuked and corrected? Did he/she assume an intimidating stance? Did he/she threaten?
2. How *attentive* was your spouse when being rebuked and corrected? Did he/she stonewall? Walk out? Attempt to turn the tables?

The point here is to press yourselves into becoming accustomed to handling rebuke and correction. Unless you're able to learn this lesson, you'll never change.

RELENTLESS USE OF THE MONITORING FORMS

From here on out, you're going to be required to undergo more and more monitoring. Monitoring is absolutely vital. For some of you the monitoring will require a little "*getting used to.*" And, no doubt, you'll find yourselves grumbling from time to time. *But we don't care.* What we're after is not just a change in what you know, but an authentic change in behavior. It's not enough to merely understand the principles we're laying out before you; you've got to *live them out.* Many of you think that merely knowing a principle - understanding it - implies living it; that a principle simply jumps off the planning table, sprouts legs on its own, and begins to produce meaningful change. That's absurd.

The instructors are not going to take your word that you're living out the principles they're teaching. If change were that simple, each of you would have changed a long time ago. It's not that simple. Just wanting change is not sufficient. Change doesn't happen just because you want it. It's a start, but it's not enough.

Every day, you're going to have to fill out several forms; and that means that every day, you'll be taking stock of yourself - not just in terms of what you understand, but in terms of *changed behavior*. And every week, you'll be reporting on the progress you're making. Each and every week, your behavior will be up for review - and will be closely scrutinized.

HOMEWORK

Make sure that you're caught up on your reading assignments; and then read over Lesson Ten. It's the last lesson of "Getting Started." Please also remember that reading the lesson together this evening does not substitute for reading it alone. Anyone who didn't read it alone over the course of this last week must do so this week.

GETTING STARTED[®]
CHAPTER 10
ESTABLISHING THE AGONIA

WEEKLY PRAYER JOURNAL

WEEK OF _____

	Prayer Items	When Answered How Answered
Day #1	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #2	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #3	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #4	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #5	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #6	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
Day #7	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

DAILY MONITORING FORM

<i>Week</i> _____	Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5	Column #6	Column #7	Column #8	Column #9	Column #10
Instructions for scoring have been provided by your instructors. However, a brief description is given below.	Two Chapters from the Gospels	15 Minutes of Prayer	Prayer Journal	Squabble Rule Violations	Response to Correction	Agonia Contacts	Fruit of the Spirit	Does Not Blame Spouse	Shares Joy with Spouse	Rebuffed Overtures
Day #1				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #2				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #3				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #4				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #5				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #6				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Day #7				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Average for Week Eliminate the high and low				Your's /	Your's /		Your's /	Your's /	Your's /	Overtures Attempted /
				Your Spouse	Your Spouse		Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Your Spouse	Positive Responses
Totals	Yes or No					Total				Total Attempted _____ Total Positives _____ Ratio _____

INSTRUCTIONS: (1) The "Three Disciplines," columns 1-3: one "no" for any day for any of the disciplines results in a "no" for the entire week. (2) "Squabble Rules," column 4: keep daily track of (a) how many times you violate the rules and (b) how many times your spouse violates the rules; at the end of the week, eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (3) "Response to Correction," column 5: keep daily track of how often you notice that either you or your spouse does not respond positively to correction and rebuke. The criteria consists of (a) non-defensiveness and (b) attentiveness. Grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and low and average the remaining scores. (4) "Agonia Contacts," column 6: (a) phone call to an agonia-mate over ten minutes = 1 pt.; (b) personal, face-to-face contact over a half an hour = 3 pts.; (c) Having an agonia couple over for dinner = 5 pts; (d) participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself = 5 pts. (5) "Spirituality Indices," columns 7-9: grade yourself on a scale of 1-10 - with "10" an A+, "1" an abysmal failure, and "5" middling. Eliminate the high and the low for the week and average of the remaining scores. (6) "Overtures," column 10: keep daily track of how often you reach out to your spouse; and also keep track of how often, if at all, your overtures are rebuffed. At the end of the week, list the total overtures you undertook; and compute a ratio of positive responses to the total.

ESTABLISHING THE AGONIA

Hopefully, you've made steady, tangible progress toward the goal of building yourselves into the Agonia - of seeing to it that the Agonia becomes existentially real for you and your agonia-mates. In the next several weeks we're going to be taking up the whole matter of resolving offenses - and when that begins, you must be *well* integrated - with each of you made accountable and responsible to one another.

You need to go back over the strategy sheet - and examine carefully what stage you're working on; specifically, stage five - "*Establishing the Agonia - and Breaking out of Isolation.*" Stage five is the foundation upon which each of the successive stages is built. It's the framework within which your marriage will be rebuilt and healed.

Please remember that the Agonia is not just an expedient; remind yourself again and again that you *belong* to others. And that they, likewise, *belong* to you. You should memorize Romans 12:5...

Romans 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one *members one of another.*

Living a corporate life is not an option; anything less falls short of God's intention. You must abandon your solitary way of life - in concrete, tangible forms.

HEALING AND BEING BUILT UP WITH OTHERS

1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and many other passages of scripture liken individual Christians to *parts of a body* - a hand, a nose, an ear, an eye, etc. For example:

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

1 Cor. 12:15-17

And that tells us a lot about how healing and restoration should be handled within the Christian community - and it also explains why so little effective healing and restoration actually take place. Let me illustrate my point for you. Here we have a *severed* hand - which, not surprisingly, is terribly dysfunctional. It's both diseased and injured. It symbolizes a *carnal* (1 Cor. 3:1) Christian - a Christian who is not walking in victory - whose life does not reflect the fruit of the Spirit - whose marriage is beset with many troubling sins.

It's not that he hasn't *tried* to achieve victory; as a matter of fact, he *has tried* on numerous occasions: he has attended Bible studies, special seminars, and has sought out older Christians to disciple him. For several years, he attended church on a consistent basis - even serving on various committees. But nothing has helped - at least not significantly. His temper still lurks just below the surface - ready to explode at the least provocation; he still occasionally slips back into alcoholism and drug addiction. His children walk on eggshells around him; and his wife is a nervous wreck. He's slowly slipping into isolation and despair - and his erstwhile Christian friends are starting to give up on him.

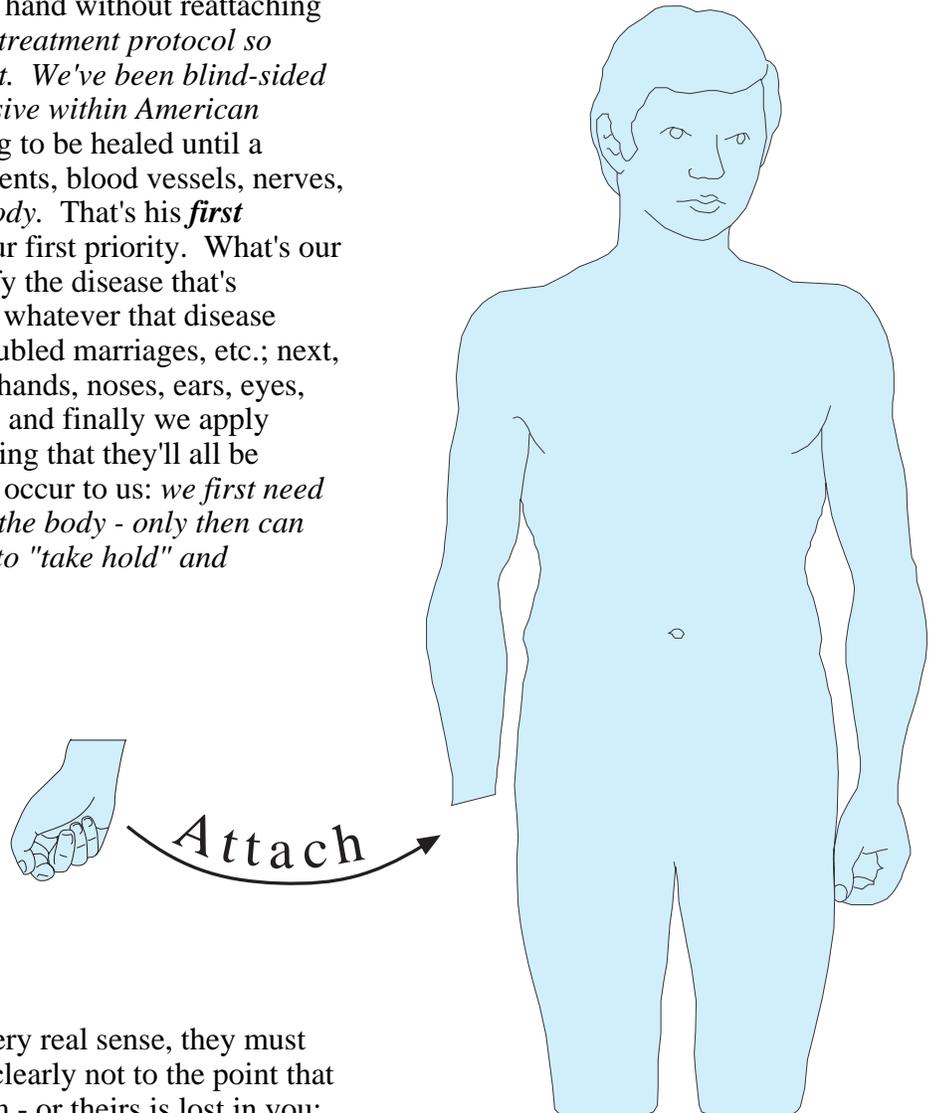


What's the problem? It's that he's neglecting the obvious - *he'll never be healed and restored unless he becomes an organic part of the church - which, at this point, means that he's built up with his Agonia-mates - genuinely and authentically.* Can you imagine trying to heal a severed hand without reattaching it to its body? *But that's exactly the treatment protocol so many Evangelical Christians attempt. We've been blind-sided by the **individualism** that's so pervasive within American culture.* A severed hand is not going to be healed until a skilled surgeon reconnects the ligaments, blood vessels, nerves, and muscles *that make it part of a body.* That's his **first** priority. But quite often that's not our first priority. What's our treatment protocol? First, we identify the disease that's afflicting a specific "severed limb" - whatever that disease might be - addiction, depression, troubled marriages, etc.; next, we gather together all the "severed" hands, noses, ears, eyes, etc. suffering from the same disease; and finally we apply various "scriptural antiseptics" - hoping that they'll all be healed. The obvious never seems to occur to us: *we first need to reattach those severed "limbs" to the body - only then can we reasonably expect Biblical truth to "take hold" and authentic change to take place.*

We don't explain the importance of the church - that it's not simply a helpful expedient; that, instead, it's a basic sine qua non of healing and restoration. Its fundamental! *It's the framework within which the ministry of the Holy Spirit takes place.*

You must be built up with your Agonia-mates; you must become organically attached to them. In a very real sense, they must *own* you; and you must *own* them - clearly not to the point that your personal identity is lost in them - or theirs is lost in you; but *church* must be more than a simple gathering of discrete, atomized believers who merely "bump" into one another at a Sunday morning service - or on a deacon's committee - or in a children's ministry. You've got to become a part of one another's lives - an integral part - a vital part - an essential part!

And that doesn't occur easily in American culture. We're "islands unto ourselves;" we're taught to be "rugged individuals;" we guard our "privacy" with a jealous indignation. It's not surprising, then, that a lot of us gravitate toward ministries that have been adapted to that kind of mind-set. Instead of teaching *dependency* and the *need for integration*, we're taught "*self-empowerment.*" Instead of being told to tear down the walls that separate us from one another, we're told to become more effectively *self-sufficient.* And then we scratch our heads and search our hearts for why so little authentic change occurs in our lives.



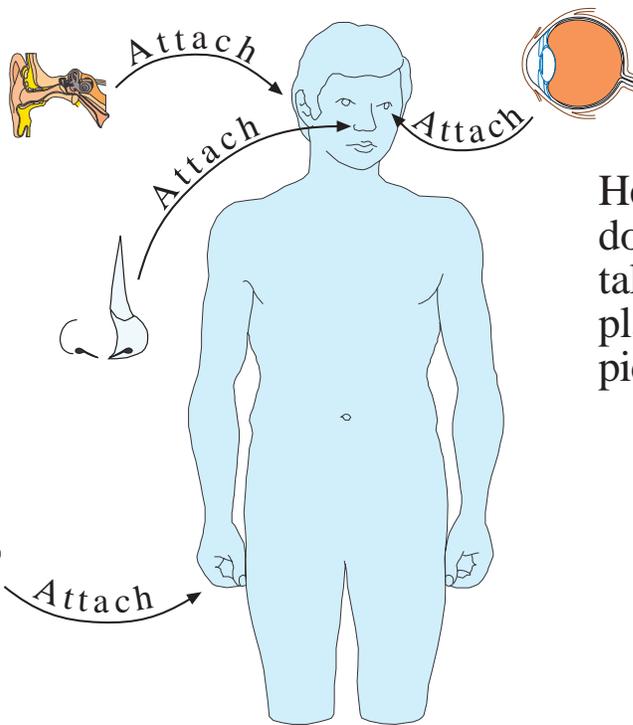
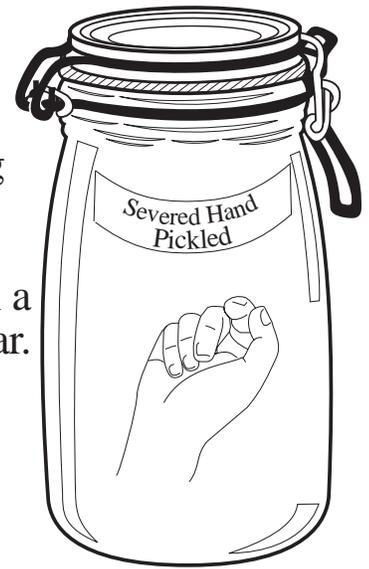
Isolated Christians are "Pickled Christians"!
"Pickled Christians" have a hard time getting healed!



Healing doesn't take place in a pickle jar.



Healing doesn't take place in a pickle jar.



Healing **only** takes place in the Body!

Healing doesn't take place in a pickle jar.

Your first priority in the Agonia is to be built up with one another - to invade one another's lives. Continue to work hard at that! The Biblical truths you're being taught won't *take hold* unless you become an organic part of each other - genuinely and authentically.

MONITORING HOW WELL YOU'RE BEING BUILT UP

From here on out, the instructional staff is going to be monitoring you in terms of your commitment to the Agonia. At the end of the day, you're going to be required to score yourself using the following method:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| 1. Phone call to an Agonia-mate - over 10 min. (20 min. does not count as 2 points)..... | 1 point |
| 2. Personal, face to face contact - over a half an hour in length (an hour does not count as 6 points) | 3 points |
| 3. Having an Agonia-couple over for a meal..... | 5 points |
| 4. Participate in a meeting of the full Agonia other than the class itself..... | 5 points |

You should add up your score at the end of the day - and a total of all seven days should be given to your instructors at the beginning of each class session. It will tell your instructors just how real you're making the Agonia. Remember, victory can only occur if the Agonia is made to work. ***You should start using column #6 on your daily monitoring form.***

HOME FELLOWSHIP PARTICIPATION

By now, you should be enrolled in a home fellowship. Participation is mandatory. A home fellowship serves to break you free from your "privacy spheres." And that's absolutely vital. You will not be allowed to negotiate an exemption for yourself with the instructional staff. You were well aware of this requirement when you enrolled. You cannot be permitted to change the "rules of the game" now that the "game" is actually underway.

HOMEWORK

1. Your instructors will distribute the next Agonia Manual to you. It's entitled "*Forgiveness.*" We encourage each of you to donate \$20.00 for the manual. That's \$20.00/student, not \$20.00/couple! It's a donation; it's not mandatory. However, it just barely covers the cost of making the manuals available - including, of course, overhead costs. Please read the first chapter, "*Forgiveness: Chapter 1 - Lesson I;*" it's material that needs to be carefully studied in preparation for next week's class. Don't forget that each couple is also encouraged to donate \$20.00/month as well. That's \$20.00/couple, not \$20.00/person. But it's each and every month. That too is an important revenue source for the ministry; without it, we won't be able to cover other important overhead costs.
2. Please read the second chapter as well, "*Lesson on Hebrews 6:1-6.*" It includes material that needs to be studied in preparation for the following class.

These two lessons need to be thoroughly assimilated - which requires lots of time set aside for quiet reflection.

