



LIVING LIBERATED

Are we bound forever to vices, bad habits, addictions, and other sins that shackle and put us in bondage?

Today we can learn HOW to free ourselves from that bondage by the power of Jesus Christ!

Steve Flatt

Living Liberated in a Sinful World

God is love, righteous (justice), truth, mercy and peace. Man was created in His image and likeness and lived in God's presence for a period of time. God even talked to him. But Adam and Eve chose to do what they knew God told not to do. They exercised their ability to choose, ceased to be in control and yielded to their desires. That decision resulted in separation from God, pain, suffering and even death. Adam became a slave to sin in need of a redeemer, a savior. It cost him his freedom.

By yielding to our desires, we become slaves to sin. The following lessons depict situations where we have yielded control of our lives to the undesirable things in life and provide the solution for us to regain control.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1	Freedom From Anger	3
Chapter 2	Freedom From Harmful Attitudes	12
Chapter 3	Believe It Or Not - Conquering Myths of Misery	18
Chapter 4	Why Should I Forgive?	29
Chapter 5	Is Homosexuality a Sin	38
Chapter 6	Freedom From Chemical Dependency	45
Chapter 7	Freedom From Procrastination	56
Chapter 8	On Pride and Humility	64
Chapter 9	Taking Steps to Freedom	74
Chapter 10	God's Principles on Pain	85
Chapter 11	Self-Control Set Me Free	94
Chapter 12	How to Handle Pressure	102
Chapter 13	Freedom from Debt	109



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Freedom from Anger

Did you know that the average man loses his temper six times a week? The average woman only loses her temper three times a week. Women tend to get angrier at people. Men tend to get angrier at things such as flat tires and non-working vending machines. Single people express anger twice as often as married folks, and yet the home is the place where we're most likely to express our anger. Anger is most frequently and intensely expressed toward people that we love, rather than strangers.

We all get angry it is a normal response. God made us with that capacity. Jesus got angry, didn't he? Remember the cleansing of the temple? Three hundred and seventy-five times in the Old Testament, we read that God was angry. Ephesians 4:26 states, "Be angry, and do not sin." In other words, there's a right way and there's a wrong way to get angry. So, anger, in and of itself, isn't wrong.

The issue isn't how do you get rid of all your anger; you're not going to do that. You were made with the capacity to anger at times. The issue is, how can you control your anger so that your anger doesn't control you, so that it doesn't cause you to sin and hurt yourself and other people.

I. Anger Expressed

1. The Monster.

This is the person who just explodes. He or she is a walking time bomb. They have a hair trigger, and when they get angry, everything breaks loose, yelling, stomping, ranting, raving, throwing and cursing. Does that sound like someone you know?

A Biblical example of the monster-type of anger is Cain, Abel's brother. Genesis 4:5, "So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast." Now listen to verse 8, "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him." You see that's the monster, it's somebody who loses control. Most of the time, those who express monster anger, are immediately sorry and beg for forgiveness, but the damage is done. Does it surprise you that men more than women express their anger in this way?

2. The Mute.

The mute is the exact opposite of the monster. The mute is the silent type. They clam up and they hold it in. Sometimes they even pretend that they're not angry. Have you ever been with a mute, and said "You're angry, aren't you?" They reply, "No, I'm not." "Yes, you are." "No, I'm not." "Yes, you are." "No, I'm not!!" They're concealing their feeling, letting it simmer. I call it the crock pot version of anger. It smolders all day.

This type of anger is not as volatile as the monster, but it's no less destructive on the individual. Someone said, "When you swallow your anger, your stomach keeps score." Folks like this, are susceptible to ulcers, headaches and hypertension. In fact, Dr. F.I. McMillan has written a book called, None of These Diseases, in which he lists 51 different types of major illnesses that are caused by bottled-up anger.

A biblical example of this kind of anger is the prophet, Jeremiah. He said, "I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?" (Jeremiah 15:17) Poor old Jeremiah is sitting there alone holding it in and it's killing him.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "This just burns me up."? They're speaking more truth than they know. It's not so much what you eat, it's "what's eating you?"

3. The Martyr.

This guy is the pro at pity parties. He's self-punishing and passive. One of the chief characteristics of the martyr is depression. Many people will go to psychologists and say, "Do you know, I'm depressed." Sometimes after talking with the psychologist, the psychologist will say, "Yes, you're depressed, but what you really are experiencing is angry."

A biblical example is the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Remember his reaction? The elder brother was so angry that he would not go into the party. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. (Luke 15:28) Now if that older brother had been a monster, he would have gone into the party and trashed the place. If he had been a mute, he would have gone into the party and very obviously stood in the corner and sulked. But he was a martyr. He stayed outside in his own pity party so that his father had to come out and plead with him. One of the characteristics of the martyr is to make everyone else around them miserable. They're good at that.

4. The Manipulator.

This is the, "I don't get mad, I get even." This kind of anger is the key to most TV and movie dramas. Someone is offended, they get mad, they decide to get even, you know the story.

On the domestic front, it may happen when the wife intentionally burns the toast, just a little bit. Or, when the husband teases hurtfully and then says sarcastically, "Can't you take a joke?" Now believe it or not, religious people are particularly susceptible to the manipulation form of anger expression. We don't think it's very spiritual to explode. We know it's not very spiritual to sit around and mope. But if you put a smile on your face, you can stab somebody in the back by manipulation.

A classic biblical example is the Pharisees. "But they were furious and began to plot with each other what they might do to Jesus." (Luke 6:11) See, they're not getting angry, they're going to get even.

If you fall into any one of those forms, I've got great news for you. You weren't born with it, you learned it. You learned that anger response. You learned it from your parents, television, friends, environment or somewhere else. The great news is, you can unlearn it. You don't have to be any of those four. You can release yourself and free yourself from those types of anger expressions.

II. **Disseminating Anger**

1. Understand why.

Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience" The better I understand myself, the more I'll be able to control my anger. The truth of the matter is, anger isn't the problem. Anger is a warning light that something else is wrong in my life, and that's why I'm getting angry.

Causes

a. Physical or emotional hurt.

I read an interesting article lately about divorce, and those who have gone through the trauma of divorce. It said, "The divorce is far from over for the spouse who lives angrily ever after" and "one-third of those who have been divorced

for over 10 years, still feel intense anger." Why? They've been hurt deeply and the deeper the hurt, the more intense the anger.

b. When nothing is going right, everything is going wrong and you have to wait.

Anger comes out of your frustration. The classic example is traffic, isn't it? People do things in traffic they wouldn't do any other time. I've been in heavy congested traffic and seen two people up there jockeying and blowing horns, and I knew them both, and they knew each other, and they're both Christian folks. They were making those faces and yelling and shaking a fist, and all of a sudden, they get up beside each other and recognize each other, and feel shame. They're embarrassed. Why? They lost their temper out of frustration.

c. Insecurity.

We're angry when we're threatened, afraid and insecure. When somebody takes away my security, I'm like a passive animal that's cornered. I come out with my claws ready.

Understanding yourself is step one. What is it that makes you angry most often? Is it a hurt that you can't get over? Is it an insecurity that happens commonly? Is it a frustrating experience you go through daily? Understand yourself, that's the key.

2. Look to God, not to others, for your self-worth.

A sense of self-worth is essential for controlling your anger because insecure people are easily angered. Confident people are not easily angered. When you've got a good sense of self-worth, you can handle your hurts, your frustrations, your insecurities. "Don't pay attention to everything people say." (Ecclesiastes 7:21) The secret to overcoming a huge amount of anger in life is to develop a God based sense of self-worth, then it doesn't matter what everybody is saying about you.

I love the example of the apostles in Acts 4: 29, when Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, and were threatened by them not to preach any more about Jesus, or else. Peter and John said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than God, you'll have to choose, but we can't help but speak the things we've seen and heard." See they didn't get mad, they didn't get defensive, they just told the truth. Why? Their self-worth wasn't based upon what the Pharisees thought about them. Their self-worth was based upon what God thought about them.

There's a statement that I really like, "If God likes me, and I like me, and you don't like me, then you're the one with the problem." Isn't that right? It is important that I look to God for my self-worth. That way, the frustrations, the insecurities and the hurts won't bother me as much.

3. Stop and think before reacting.

Our mouths usually run faster than our minds. Have you ever noticed that when you get angry, your sharp tongue is the quickest thing to cut your own throat?

Proverbs 13:16 says, "Sensible people always think before they act." The key word to anger management is the word, "T-H-I-N-K." Start thinking before you start responding. That's why James said in James 1:19, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." Do you know why you need to be slow to anger? Just give yourself a little time so that you can think. Thomas Jefferson once said. "When you're angry, count to ten." He also added, "When very angry, count to a hundred." That's good advice it will give you ten good seconds to think. I'll guarantee

you, very few times will you come to the conclusion, the best way for me to respond is to be a monster, a mute, a martyr or a manipulator. THINK!

I know what some of you are thinking. "Oh, yeah Steve, that sounds great, sounds nice, neat, clinical and logical, but you don't understand. When I get mad, I get mad. I can't control it. I lose it. I can't help myself." Yes, you can! Do you hear me? Yes, you can. Don't you dare believe the lie that you can't stop and think before you lose it? In fact, I'll prove it to you.

Have you ever had an argument at home? You're at home arguing with your spouse or maybe your children, (everybody is arguing loudly), all of a sudden, the phone rings. "Hello (softly)." "How are you doing?" "Good, so nice to hear from you!!" Oh, you've never done that, have you? Why the change? Why the drastic change? You changed because you wanted to. You changed because you chose to. Let's be honest. No one makes you mad, you choose to be mad. I choose my anger. Do you know why? Because the hurt, the frustration, and the insecurity gets up, and I want to do something, so I just get mad.

Let's be honest about it. Sometimes it feels good to be mad, doesn't it? Just kind of vent your spleen. It feels good to be mad. The problem is, in the long run, it hurts you terribly. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." That's so rich, it's worth repeating. "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." You can take two people, you can put them in the same environment, same conditions, same circumstances, same stimulus, one of them will blow the top, and the other will be cool. It's not the circumstance, it's the choice.

Galatians 5:22 lists the beautiful nine-fold fruit of the spirit. The last one is the capstone. It's self-control. When you walk with God's spirit, you've got the blessing of keeping it under control. THINK, before you react.

4. Learn to relax.

Proverbs 14:30 says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body." Have you ever noticed that when you're uptight, you're more inclined to be angry? Temper and tension always go together. Have you ever been late for a morning meeting, you're in a rush and you can't find something you must have? Oh, what will I do? The pressure and frustration elicit my anger. I must learn to relax. Some of you are a walking time bomb because of the tension you feel all the time. Some of you feel so much tension at work that as soon as you come home, you snap your spouse's head off. You blame them for the tension you're under. The following are things to do to control our tension:

- "Be aware that tension is building and seek to diffuse it. You may have to change jobs. You may need to do something totally different, but don't let tension ruin your life."
- Exercise. I know that Paul said bodily exercise profits a little, but this is one of the ways it does profit a little. We are designed to build up stress, but we are designed to relieve it physically. You will relieve it, if you exercise.
- Carry around a little pocket New Testament. Open it up and read a little something, and pray a one-minute prayer. That will put everything in a better perspective. There's not that much to get uptight over.
- Get a sense of humor. God made us to have a sense of humor. God has a sense of humor. He made you, didn't he? He made me. He's got to have a sense of humor. And now the last thing.
- Continually ask God for help. You cannot have your life filled with the things that God's spirit gives and still have room for wrongly displayed anger. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

III. Summary

Here is a real deep metaphor. If you were to go into Wendy's, McDonalds, Burger King or some other fast-food restaurant and take that little mustard packet, tear the corner, set it on the table and smash it, what's going to come out? Whatever is inside. Right? Mustard! Now the world squeezes you with its deadlines and expectations, whatever is inside of you will come out. If you are full of the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, they will come out!

Listen to this statement, "When you're filled with love, almost nothing will upset you. When you're filled with anger, almost anything will upset you." It's what's on the inside that counts.

That's why we want to be filled with God's spirit so that he'll bear his fruit. Replace the hurt, the insecurity and the frustration that is causing your anger with Jesus. He can heal. Amazing Grace Lesson #1199

Questions:

1. God is?
 - a. Love
 - b. Righteous (just)
 - c. Truth
 - d. Mercy
 - e. Peace
 - f. All the above
 - g. a and c
 - h. a, c and e
 - i. a, b and c

2. Everyone gets angry as it is a normal reaction.
True False

3. Anger can be expressed by?
 - a. Exploding (verbal or physical assault)
 - b. Pouting (the silent treatment)
 - c. Martyr (self-pity)
 - d. Getting even (manipulator)
 - e. All the above

4. Anger can be caused by?
 - a. Physical or emotional hurt
 - b. Frustration
 - c. Afraid, threatened and insecurity
 - d. All the above

5. What is the key word for anger management?
 - a. Ten (count to ten)
 - b. Cry
 - c. Laugh (or smile)
 - d. Walk (away)
 - e. Think

6. One can control anger by
 - a. Biting tongue and saying nothing (seething)

- b. _____ Understanding cause of anger
- c. _____ Think before reacting
- d. _____ Remove tension and stress
- e. _____ a, b and c
- f. _____ a, c and d
- g. _____ b, c and d

Chapter 2

Freedom From Harmful Attitudes

Picture the face or the name of the person that you admire most in life? Can you get that face? Get that name? Now, what is the single most reason that you admire that person so much? Boil it all down. Reduce it to one word if you can. Did you think of loving, honest, faithful, unselfish, loyal, caring, happy, kind or humble? I could go on. The interesting thing about all these words is they all describe attitudes. Isn't that fascinating? All of those are attitudes. Did you choose appearance, ability or intelligence? I doubt that many, if any, did. Doesn't that tell you something?

Jesus tells us about human attitudes in the "Good Samaritan" parable. "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:30-36)

Jesus shows us in this parable three very basic attitudes:

1. What is yours is mine and I'm going to take it.

Somebody had that attitude in the parable can you figure out who? The thief or the thieves, the ones who found the man, beat him, took what he had and left him for dead. We know this about him. His attitude was "what's yours is mine and I'm going to take it." Frankly most of the people don't have that attitude. Oh, it's prevalent in this world. Folks with that kind of attitude are like the old dog that had the bone. He went to a lake looked over and saw his reflection. He saw what he thought to be another dog with a bone in his mouth and he wanted that one too. So, he let go to begin to bite at the other dog and what happened? He lost the bone he had. "What's yours is mine and I'm going to take it."

2. What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it.

It's interesting to me that Jesus talks about a priest and a Levite, both religious men. They were probably going from Jericho to Jerusalem to do service in the temple. The priest and the Levites one week out of every year had to perform temple service. They had to do all the duties and prepare the sacrifices. To go along this route was not an unusual thing as Jericho is not very far from the Jerusalem, and many priests lived there. They saw this man beaten, bleeding, and robbed, but they chose to pass by on the other side.

Now there could have been one other thing at work here. You see if a priest or Levite were heading toward the temple to perform a service, the last thing that individual would want to do would be to become unclean. According to the Jewish law, if you were to touch a corpse, it would make you ceremonially unclean. They may have been in a hurry with important work to do. They could have even thought about the risk of becoming ceremonially unclean. This man may either be dead, or he may die in my hands. So, rather than risking becoming unclean they went on their way. "What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it."

These are the kind of person folks who goes through life hurting no one, breaking no rules, and making no enemies. In fact, that's the kind of person who goes through life determined to leave things just like they are. They won't bother you and don't want you bothering them. They do not consider those who went before and prepared the way. Somebody invested yesterday in what they enjoy today. When you've got an attitude of "What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it" you just want to be left alone. No, you are not a society drainer. But you're not giving anything to anybody either.

Years ago, when I was a young teenager, I would spend a week every summer with my grandfather on the farm. Some of the greatest lessons I've ever learned in life have been those weeks out on the farm because I lived in the city, a suburban kid. One time I was with my granddaddy Flatt, we called him "Pap" was planting fruit trees. They were just little tiny saplings, it was a hot day, it was a lot of work and my granddaddy was almost 80. I said, "Pap what on earth are you planting those fruit trees for? You're not going to live long enough to ever eat one apple off that tree." He looked at me and in his own humble way, he taught me one of the greatest lessons about servant hood I've ever known. He said, "Now son, I'm not planting these for me. But much of what I've enjoyed on this farm is here because somebody else did some work before me. I'm not naive enough to think I'll pull an apple off this tree, but that's not the point, life didn't begin with me and life doesn't end with me." He said, "If my life is really going to be useful, I'll leave something here that somebody else can enjoy."

Therefore, it's not enough to say, "What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it."

3. What's mine is yours, and I'm going to give it.

The Bible says that the Good Samaritan saw the victim and had compassion on him. He carried him to an inn, he paid for his care and said I'll come back by to check on him to see if I need to do anything else.

All three of the main characters, the Levite, the Priest, and the Samaritan had something in common. Don't think that only certain people can have certain kinds of attitudes. They had a lot in common.

- a. They saw the same problem, a man in need lying there bleeding.
Many people say "I don't do much, I give much, because I don't have much opportunity." It's not the exposure to the need that makes a man or a woman a good servant. It is the attitude. It's not the person who has the most opportunities, who becomes the greatest servant.
- b. They all had something else to do.
It's not how much time you have in your schedule that dictates whether or not you reach out and touch your fellow man. It's the person who has the best attitude. Some of the best stewards that I've ever known were also the busiest people. You see it has nothing to do with your agenda. It has nothing to do with your schedule. It has nothing to do with how much opportunity.
- c. They all had reasons not to help.
They needed to do some work. They didn't want to risk touching a corpse. But listen to this. The Samaritan had the most significant reason of all for not helping. It was the enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The

Jews hated the Samaritans. They called them to their faces, dogs. For that Samaritan to look over and to see that Jew bleeding there, it wouldn't have been at all unusual for a man who had gone through the kind of isolation and persecution Samaritans have gone through to say, "Look who the dog is now." Or, if he had a particularly bitter spirit to just go ahead and finish him off. But you see that's the beauty about attitude.

- His attitude helped him overcome his prejudice and it's the only thing that will. You and I have prejudices. We develop them as we go through life and the only way they'll be conquered is by attitude.
- It helped him conquer his convenience. See none of us want to have our convenience rattled. But, the attitude on the part of that Samaritan made him give his donkey, his money, his time and all because he had the right attitude, not because he had more availability or more time, but because he had the right attitude.

Four observations

1. Your attitude is more important than your abilities. That was proved in the person that we admired the most. We admire the person most who has the right attitude. Attitude is the way we influence this world not by looks or our brain. Every person has something to give to his fellow man and something to give to God. Don't think: "I have nothing to give God" because you might also be thinking "God has not given me anything." That's paramount to blasphemy.
2. Your position doesn't count anything next to your attitude. The classic example is right here in this parable. The first two men were religious men. There was a Levite and a Priest. If anybody was trained to help people, it was them. If anybody had gone to school to learn to devote their life to people, it was the Priest and the Levite. Isn't it fascinating that the people who were trained the most, qualified the most, and schooled the most, helped the least?
3. Your attitude is more important than timing. In this parable the Good Samaritan had the poorest timing of all. You see if that beaten up Jew was half dead when the Priest and the Levite passed by, he was probably three-fourths dead by the time the Good Samaritan got there. But it didn't stop him from serving. Don't look for a time to have the right attitude. Have the right attitude and let time work itself out. Remember the purpose of this parable was for Jesus to respond to the question, who is my neighbor? Jesus says your neighbor has nothing to do with proximity, neighborhood associations, or timing. It's whoever has the right attitude to help.
4. A right attitude is active. Which of these three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers, the expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him? Jesus told him, go and do likewise.
 - a. Look around to see who needs help
 - b. Eliminate your excuses
 - c. Help them "Just do it."

Amazing Grace Lesson #1106

Questions:

1. Match the character(s) with the attitude by circling the appropriate letter.
 - a. What's yours is mine and I'm going to take it.
 - b. What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it.
 - c. What's mine is yours and I'm going to give it.

1. Levite and Priest	a	b	c
2. Robbers	a	b	c
3. Samaritan	a	b	c
2. What attitudes did the Priest, Levite and Samaritan have in common?
 - a. _____ They all saw the same problem
 - b. _____ They all had something else to do

- c. ____ They all had reasons not to help
 - d. ____ All the above
 - e. ____ They did not have anything in common
3. Your ability is more important than your attitude?
True ____ False ____
4. Your position in life is just as important or even more important than your attitude.
True ____ False ____
5. Scheduling your time to accomplish the most is very important and has a higher priority than attitude.
True ____ False ____
6. A right attitude is active
True ____ False ____
7. Which of the three men in this parable was “a neighbor” to the injured man?
- a. ____ Priest
 - b. ____ Levite
 - c. ____ Samaritan

Chapter 3

Believe It or Not Conquering Myths of Misery

We've all been taught certain myths as we grow up and most of them are frankly, harmless. But there are some myths that are extremely harmful.

There are just all kinds of things that we've heard and absorbed, that the world has taught us that just aren't true: Myths about yourself, myths about God, and myths about life and the future and money and sex and relationships, myths about heaven and hell. Some of those bring with them some extremely negative consequences.

One myth that undergirds so many of the others is “it doesn't matter” what you believe as long as you're sincere.” Have you ever heard that? Sure, you have. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. That sounds so mature, that sounds so accommodating, so politically correct. But the problem with this commonly accepted cliché is, it's absurd. It's absolutely ridiculous, it's naive and it's irrational.

As you go through life, you'll find that so many times there are beliefs that are antithesis of each other; they can't both be true, that's just an impossibility. A few weeks ago, my wife and I had arranged via phone to be at a certain place at a certain time. You know how busy we get, a two-car family kind of thing, and I misunderstood. I believed I was to meet her at a certain place at a certain time and that's not what she believed. Now is it all right to believe whatever you believe as long as you're sincere? We were both sincere, but we never rendezvoused. It cost us both about three hours out of our day. You see you can be sincere, but you can be sincerely wrong.

I was channel surfing the other night and came across the middle of a movie about some terrorists who had gotten in and rearranged the computer and the radar signals for major airports. In this fictitious movie an airplane was coming in to land. The pilot thought they were 300 feet above the ground when in fact as they came through the clouds, the

runway was there and they crashed and burned. But you see the pilot thought he was 300 feet above...he was sincere. He was just sincerely wrong.

There are beliefs that we encounter that, if we don't correct them, will cause us to crash and burn. There are some very simple principles about belief. Some of these are going to seem elementary and fundamental, that's because they are. Some of these we aren't even conscious of, but let's go right to the root and build on it.

1. You choose what you believe.

It's true that there are numerous influences on our lives, but nobody forces you to believe anything. If I don't want to believe something, I don't have to. If I want to believe in something, I can. Nobody can stop me. If I want to believe the Bible is the word of God, I can believe that, and I do. If the Republicans and the Democrats are at an impasse, you can choose to believe the Democrats, or you can choose to believe the Republicans. It doesn't make any difference; you can choose to believe whatever you want.

Nobody forces you to believe anything. The point is you can't blame anybody else for what you believe. My parents, my teachers, my peers, they influence my belief, but they don't control them. This is a key point as we analyze the beliefs that we have. You may find you've embraced a belief that's been wrong for years, but you can change that belief.

God said in Proverbs 8:10 "Choose my instructions, instead of silver." In Romans 1:25, Paul was talking about some depraved godless people and said, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie." Do you see the two things these verses have in common? The idea is choice, choosing what you believe.

2. Your beliefs control your behavior.

In other words, they determine how I act. Proverbs 4:23 in the NIV says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life." I like the way the Good News translation renders this particular proverb, "Be careful what you think, for your life is shaped by your thoughts." That's exactly right. The old King James Version says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

There is a belief behind every single action that you take in life? When you sit down in a chair, you believe consciously or unconsciously that it's going to support your weight. Now for some of us that could take a great act of faith, but that's the belief. When you went out to your car this morning, put the key into the ignition and turned it, you believed the car was going to start. Every action we take has a belief behind it. The problem comes when my beliefs are wrong; because my beliefs will still determine my behavior.

Look at some practical applications. If you believe that you are an ornery person, how do you think you're going to act? Pretty ornery. If you believe you are a clumsy person, you'll find yourself stumbling over everything. If you believe you can't trust anybody else, you're going to go through life looking at everybody suspiciously. You'll act like they can't be trusted. If you believe that you cannot understand the Bible, you'll never read it. If you believe that God doesn't really care about you, you will not pray. If you believe God is out to get you, you will do everything you can to avoid God. See every action you have has behind it a corresponding belief. The point is, even if your beliefs are wrong, they affect your behavior, so all our beliefs must be examined.

3. The world bombards us with false beliefs.

I mean bombards us. One place to find these is the checkout line in the grocery store. Look over the Enquirer and Globe headlines. Every week there's a new cure for cancer, if you will just eat this the cancer will go away. I'd like to believe that, except right beside that article is one about the latest alien to visit earth. A preacher friend of mine

clipped out one I really enjoyed. It said, "New Discovery – Fat Burning Prayers." The whole article said, "You just pray these prayers, and the pounds will melt away."

It's hard to know what to believe anymore, isn't it? We used to say, "I'll believe when I see it." But you can't even trust that anymore. Technology has come up with a thing called, "Virtual Reality." They blend fact and fiction so that you can't tell the difference such as the movies Forrest Gump and Jurassic Park. So, we really can't determine if what we see is real or not. The following are my own top ten myths that are fostered on these television talk shows. They are not funny. But these are some cultural myths that people are buying into without exception.

- a. My happiness comes over my responsibility.
- b. You'll be happy if you get what you want. (That's a lie.)
- c. The world owes you a living and happiness.
- d. All beliefs are equally valid. (Discussed in this lesson.)
- e. You can have it all. (No, you must sacrifice something.)
- f. There is never any reason to feel guilty.
- g. You shouldn't have to wait for anything.
- h. Man is basically good and unselfish.
- i. All your problems are somebody else's fault.
- j. The answer lies within you because we're all God.

(Propagated on talk shows) If the answer was within me, I would have figured it out a long time ago. Wouldn't you?

You see those are the kind of things that over and over again, we're hearing. Over 2,000 years ago when he was in his 90's the apostle John warned "Dear Friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1) and "For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world." (1 John 2:16) The world is bombarding us with false beliefs.

4. False beliefs.

A belief doesn't have to be true to affect your happiness and your emotional stability. If somebody ran in through one of the doors right now and began yelling, "Fire! Fire!" but there's no fire. It wouldn't make a lot of difference for a lot of us, because as soon as you heard somebody that emphatically screaming that alarm, you'd believe it. Then a number of things would happen. Your pulse would become rapid, your blood pressure would elevate, your muscles would tighten, and your stomach would begin to secrete acid. You would become just a nervous wreck, great emotional turmoil, even though it's not true.

That happens all the time in everyday life, and you don't even realize it. You worry about things that are not true. You're afraid of things that aren't real. You rely on things to give your life meaning and purpose that never were designed to do that. The result is confusion and misery. So even if a belief is not true, it still causes emotional turmoil in your life. If you want to overcome stress, guilt, anger, worry and emotional problems, you've got to clarify and correct the misbeliefs in your life.

I found a statement by a psychologist, Dr. Chris Thurman. He said, "Truth is the road map for negotiating the difficult challenges of life. Without it we get lost and develop emotional problems that tell us we're lost. We often settle for half-truth or no truth at all because it's easier." That's a great line, he's right. There are some made by psychologists I don't agree with, but I think he is right on target. He also said, "But truth is the only road to emotional health, there

is no other path." That's a great quote, but Jesus had a better one. It was more powerful and more concise and said essentially the same thing. "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

The goal of this series of lessons is to expose the lies that we've been taught and that some of us have bought into. We're going to also unveil the truth, and the truth will set you free from those things that bring misery to your life.

5. The only source of absolute truth is God.

Mark that well. He is the only source of absolute truth. "I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right." (Isaiah 45:19) Jesus, who was the Son of God, was God come in the flesh. John said, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6)

The fundamental question that you need to ask yourself and every human being has to ask whether you're a Christian or not is: What is going to be the authority of my life? What is going to be my standard? What is going to be my compass? What is going to be my guide? What am I going to base my life on?

You have got two options. You can base it on the world, or you can base it on the Word. You either have what man says, and man will say a million different contradictory things, or you can have what God says. You can build your life on what culture says, or upon what Christ says. Which of those two do you think is more reliable?

The problem is not just that man is often dishonest and will share outright lies; the problem with man is that we are so ignorant that even when we think we're telling the truth, we don't know all the truth. Newsweek magazine has a section called Conventional Wisdom. Have you seen that? Think about what that means. Conventional Wisdom means it's wise today. Real wisdom is never conventional; real wisdom is eternal. One of the problems with man is we're always learning more. So, we have a hard time discovering what's infinitely wise.

I noticed something a few years ago that some of you can really relate to. Seventy-three million of us are Baby Boomer children who were raised on the second best-selling book of all time, second only to the Bible. Do you know what that book is? Dr. Spock's Baby Book. He wrote it, "How to Rear Your Children." An entire generation of Americans was brought up on that book. The only problem is that just a few years ago, in his seventies, Dr. Spock publicly held a press conference and he said, "Whoops! I was wrong." You were what? It's too late, I'm dysfunctional. What do you mean you were wrong? An entire generation was reared on a man's theories and he comes to find out those were never correct in the first place. That's Conventional Wisdom.

The average life span of a science text used at the college level today is 18 months. That's the life span of a science text. In that kind of environment, you don't put your faith on something that you can't depend upon tomorrow, otherwise you might think you're climbing the ladder of success and you find out it's leaning against the wrong wall.

What am I going to base my life on? Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Luke 21:33) David said "Your word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89) People, God's word has stood the test of time like nothing else ever has or ever will. You can trust it as your standard and your compass and your guidebook because it's not based on conventional wisdom, it's based upon on the very character and ultimate knowledge of God. He is the only source of absolute truth.

6. Build your life on God's truth!

It's the key. Now God's truth is found on every page of the Bible. I encourage you to read every bit of it, if you will. It is ultimately and most clearly embodied in Jesus Christ. One of the reasons 1 Peter 2:21 says Jesus came, is that he came to give us an example. A lot of us hear and a lot of us read, but most of us learn better when we actually see a

model. Jesus was God come in the flesh. He said, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." In everything he said, in everything he did, in everything he was, it was the truth.

While recovering from knee surgery I decided to reread the gospels. I read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, because if I'm going to teach you about truth, I want to know this man who said, "I am the truth." Eighty different times in Scripture, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth." Isn't that something? Eighty times, he says emphatically, I want you to hear this. Twenty different times, he said, "Now you've heard it said, but I want to say it to you." Do you know what he was doing? He was clearing up myths that bring misery. He said now here are things you've bought into, but now let me tell you the truth.

As you study things Jesus said and things that other biblical writers have shared with us that are true, commit to three things.

a. Commit to seek the truth

Have that desire on your heart. "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly." (1 Timothy 4:7) Later Paul warned Timothy, a young preacher, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

The point is test everything you hear, see or experience against God's truth. The world, or people around me, may say "It's hot, it's the in thing, everybody's doing it," The truth may declare it's not okay. I could take too long right here giving you a classic example. Let me tell you what pops into my mind. Astrology and the psychic hot lines, those things have to be making millions of dollars, there are too many on television not to be. I'm sure most people that dabble in those things, some of them are serious, some of them are for fun and some of them are just a joke. God's word says it's not funny. I can show you a dozen different passages that say it's wrong, it's evil, stay away from it. I test everything by God's word, even my own experience.

One of the things our generation believes in is personal experience. It's the ultimate truth. If I know it, feel it or sense it, it's got to be the way it is. Now you think about that. If technology can create a virtual reality experience so lifelike that I can't tell if it's false, don't you think the devil can do the same thing? In fact, don't you think he's had that power for years, and years, and years? I test even the experience that I'm convinced I've had against the truth of God's word, and if the two clashes, which do I accept? I accept the truth of God's word, Period. Just because you've experienced it doesn't mean it's right, true, or correct.

Most of us have seen the bumper sticker that says, "God says it, I believe it, that settles it." It's not a bad bumper sticker, but I've got a better one for you: "God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not." Whether I believe it or not, it doesn't make any difference; God said it, that's the way it is. Truth is truth whether I believe it or not.

The point is for me to seek it. But where do I seek it? Not from the grocery store checkout lines.

(1) I seek it in Christ. Jesus said, "I came to this world to testify to the truth." (John 18:37)

(2) I seek it in the word of God. The Bible says, "Thy word is truth." Proverbs 30:5 says, "The word is flawless."

(3) I seek it through his church. Paul told Timothy, "You will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)

b. Commit to believe and embrace the truth.

It's not enough to seek it and it's not enough to know it, it has to be embraced. The word, "believe," is another word that popped out at me all the way through the gospel accounts. John 3:18, states, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Even the devil has an intellectual ascent of God, a belief and not an embrace.

c. Commit to live the truth

I seek it, I believe and embrace it, and I live it. I obey it. I do it. I start by obeying the gospel putting my trust in the good news that Jesus is truth personified, God who came into the world. This guidebook, His Word [The Bible], shares with us the simple way that's done. It starts with the belief that Jesus is God's son, a belief that leads to us confessing him verbally, declaring to the world your allegiance to him. (Romans 10:9-10) It says once you have a commitment of your heart and your affection to him your whole obedience to the gospel is culminated by an experience called baptism, a physical immersion into water. Before Jesus' atoning death on the cross, He said to Nicodemus "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) *"All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:3-4)

Folks, that's the truth about your commitment to Jesus. That's the truth about how you start your life as a Christian, how you become a Christian. From that commitment, you live loving him and walking in the light of God's truth. But it's up to you. Remember you've got the freedom to believe anything you want to believe. But whatever you believe, the truth is still the truth.

But there is a great warning, *"They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."* (2 Thessalonians 2:10) Somebody asked me the other day: "Will smoking send me to hell?" I said, "Well, I don't know about that, but it will smell like you've been there." But you know let's don't start picking out little sin. We all commit sin. Do you know what's going to send anybody to hell? 2 Thessalonians 2:10 tells us, it is to refuse to accept, love and follow the truth. God does not send anybody to hell; he lets everybody choose what they are going to believe and what they are going to do about those beliefs.

Amazing Grace lesson #1244

Questions:

1. It doesn't matter what one believes as long as he is sincere?
True _____ False _____
2. One is free to choose whatever he wishes to believe?
True _____ False _____
3. What one believes does not affect their action?
True _____ False _____
4. My happiness comes over my responsibility?
Fact _____ Fiction _____
5. You'll be happy if you get what you want.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
6. The world owes you a living and happiness.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
7. All beliefs are equally valid.
Fact _____ Fiction _____

8. You can have it all without any sacrifice.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
9. There is never any reason to feel guilty.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
10. You shouldn't have to wait for anything.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
11. Man is basically good and unselfish.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
12. All your problems are somebody else's fault.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
13. The answer lies within you because we're all God.
Fact _____ Fiction _____
14. The source of absolute truth is
 - a. _____ Man's intellect
 - b. _____ Science
 - c. _____ God
15. To build a life on God's truth one must
 - a. _____ Commit to seek truth
 - b. _____ Commit to believe and embrace truth
 - c. _____ Commit All the above to live the truth
 - d. _____ There is no absolute truth

Chapter 4

Why Should I Forgive?

Peter asked Jesus one day a long, long time ago "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21) What's really written between the lines or the thought behind the lines is: Lord, why do I need to forgive? I find it interesting that Peter asked, "how many times do I need to forgive my brother?" Sometimes it's easier to forgive a onetime offense, even if it's something that's as major as an assassination attempt, than it is to forgive those repeated irritations.

Each of us has one, two, maybe three sources of constant irritation in our lives. "Heavenly sandpaper," I call it, just rubs off our rough edges. Who's your heavenly sandpaper?

Peter asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother?" It didn't dawn on me until this week that there's a chance that Peter could be extremely literal here. He may have been talking about his physical brother. I read just a couple of weeks ago that ninety percent of all resentment occurs in our own families. Most of the resentment that we harbor in our lives is toward people who are closest to us.

You know the old adage: "To dwell above with those we love that will be a glory, but to dwell below with those we know, now that's a different story." Sometimes it is the people who are closest to us. Maybe it was Andrew, Peter's brother. It's not out of the scope of the imagination to consider that Andrew kept leaving the milk out, or squeezed the toothpaste from the middle of the tube, or something which was a constant irritant to Peter. But whether it was Andrew or a figurative brother, Peter was having a hard time with this whole forgiveness question.

Peter may have been expecting Jesus to say, "Peter, that's pretty magnanimous of you. I'm impressed." Jewish law only required that you forgive a brother three times. After you forgave him three times of the same offense, you could tell him to get lost. So, Peter could have thought the law says "I ought to forgive my brother three times, I'll double that and I'll add one for good measure." "Lord, do you think it would be all right to forgive a brother seven times?" Our Lord said, "No Peter, would you believe 70 times seven times" or there is no limit to the number of times you need to forgive.

If it's keeping score, it's not really forgiveness. Have you ever kept score with somebody? After Jesus tells Peter, "No, not seven times, but seventy times seven times." Jesus tells a parable, a story, to explain why we must learn to forgive.

The story begins this way. Jesus said, there is a man who is hopelessly in debt to a king. The Bible says in Matthew 18:23-24, that he owes the king ten thousand talents. Now talents were really more a measure of weight than it was of pure money, so it depends upon what the precious metal was. But the debt here is acknowledging all scholars to be millions and millions of dollars. Now that's a major debt! How do you get that far in debt? How can a servant borrow that much money? In those days, whenever you couldn't pay it back, the bankruptcy principle was simple. They simply took your wife and your children and sold them into slavery and put you into prison. That was bankruptcy.

"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'" (Verse 26) You've got to see the humor in that; it's one of the most hilarious statements I've ever read. A servant owes \$16 million and he says, "give me a few more days". To do what, get a passport and buy a one-way ticket to another country?

I did a little calculation. If he paid back a thousand dollars a day at current interest rates, it would take him 40 years. Now the point of the story, folks, is to show us three reasons that you and I need to forgive other people.

We need to forgive each other because we've been forgiven by God. "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." (I've underlined that in my Bible.) Do you know anybody else who will forgive a \$16 million debt? Who will say, all right let's just write it off and let him go? What a king! Completely forgiven. But the point of the parable is: That's nothing compared to the forgiveness that God has given to us, absolutely nothing.

Here's the parallel. I owe a debt to God, and you do, too. The Bible even calls it a sin debt. When I transgress against God, it builds up a debt to owe to him that I can never repay. The Bible says, in Romans 3:23, "*All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" The Scripture makes it abundantly clear, I can't pay my debt, you can't pay yours, but God has chosen in His love through the gift of His Son Jesus as the perfect sacrifice to forgive us, to wipe the slate clean, to cancel the debt and say, "Let's just start over." That is the gospel, the Good News. It's all tied up in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The good news Jesus has for us when we obediently come to Him confessing, repenting and being baptized in His name asking Him to forgive and wipe our slate clean.

God expects me to do for others what he's done for me. In fact, that's really the message. How would you feel if you just had a \$16 million debt wiped clean? Would you feel relief, joy and freedom? Those words may be too shallow.

How about excitement, ecstasy or undying gratitude? How do you think you would treat people if you had just been forgiven of a \$16 million debt that was hovering over your head? Don't you think you'd be easygoing? Don't you think you would say, "Yes, I'm in a great mood? That's all right, I'll forgive you."

Look at this servant's reaction beginning in verse 28. "*But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, equivalent to one hundred days wages. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison'*" Now can you believe that? He owed \$16 million to his boss and he was forgiven. Now his fellow servant owes him a hundred denarii, extremely small compared to the amount he had been forgiven by his master. He refuses to show any mercy instead he throws him into prison.

You say, how in the world can he respond that way? That servant who owed the cancelled \$16 million debt didn't really feel forgiven. He still, for whatever reason, felt like a sword was still hanging over his head. So, he was foolishly trying to collect such a small amount to still pay off this perceived \$16 million debt.

The real tragedy is that a lot of Christians live that way today. They obey the gospel, they came to Christ and the sin debt is cancelled; but they still live their lives feeling, Lord, I'll make it up to you. I know I owe you a lot, so I'm going to pay that off. I'll work off my sin debt knowing that they never can. They are demanding, exacting, and unforgiving to other people around them in their frustrations. Sadly, I've seen all too much of that. That is why it is so important that every Christian understand grace. When you believe you are forgiven, you will be able to forgive others and not until.

Notice the first servant's harshness in the parable. He grabbed and began to choke that second servant demanding that he pay his debt. Under Roman law you could do that. If somebody owed you money, you could go choke him until he paid. But after this guy choked him a while and didn't squeeze anything out of him, he had him thrown into jail.

Whenever you find someone harsh, judgmental, hypercritical, negative, unforgiving, and ungracious, he is carrying with him unresolved guilt. A judgmental and negative person, who is always putting someone else down, never extending to anybody the offer of forgiveness, is carrying unresolved guilt. When we feel unforgiven, we tend to be unforgiving.

Sometimes you see that in parents. You see a parent who is demanding, rigid and overbearing. They are reacting to the guilt that they feel as a parent. Sometimes you see it in bosses. Sometimes you see it in coworkers. Paul said in Ephesians 4:32, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" The key to forgiveness is to recognize how much God forgives me today.

Resentment makes me miserable.

It's a hell on earth. It tortures you. Look with me in the parable at verse 31, "*When the other servants saw what had happened,*" (this was after the first one had tossed the second one in jail) "*they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*" See, when the king found out how unforgiving his servant was, he went to him and said, if you're going to be that way, I'll be that way, too. He then handed him over to the jailer to be tortured.

Somebody asked if this parable is a symbol of hell. Yes, it is, but it's also symbolic of a hell on earth. Because when resentment gets inside you and resentment grows and infects you, it tortures you, and it locks you up in a prison. It

destroys you far more than it does the person you hate and won't forgive. The question we need to ask ourselves from time to time is are bitter and unforgiven actions robbing us of happiness? What hurt is still hurting you? If you find one someday, let it go. It's only tormenting you. The other person that you are hating and not forgiving may not even know - they may be totally unaware. All around us are millions of people imprisoned by guilt, enslaved by their own anger and anxiety and tormented by resentment, sometimes year after year after year. The forgiveness of Christ is the only key to unlock that jail. For your own sake, forgive. Learn to ask for forgiveness and learn to offer forgiveness. My motto is: Forgiveness, enjoy it and employ it, or you live a life of misery.

I will need future forgiveness.

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

John Wesley was once told by a man who knew him, "I could never forgive a certain person." Wesley responded, "I hope you never sin." The point of his admonition; if you're going to live the rest of your life in perfection, then perhaps you don't need to forgive anybody else. But if you're going to commit another sin, you'd better make sure forgiveness is ready and willing because forgiveness is a two-way street. Don't dare burn the bridge that you're going to have to walk over to get to heaven.

In what we call the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount where our Lord teaches us how to pray; He said, *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"* Do you understand what that prayer says? That is praying, "Father, you forgive me as much as I'm willing to forgive the other people around me." Now I ask you, do you really want to pray that prayer? See, the Bible says we can only receive what we're willing to offer to other people.

In that same Sermon on the Mount in the part we call the Beatitudes. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy."* What we offer to somebody else we are able to receive, but what we're not willing to offer somebody else, we cannot receive. God says, be forgiving because I want to be able to forgive you.

Look at verse 35 again, "unless you forgive from your heart," not lip service, not some little faint intellectual acknowledgment, but from the heart, right down in the core of your spirit. Put simply, the parable is teaching forgiveness is a way of life. It's the only way to live and the reason is we're all imperfect beings. You're going to hurt others, and other people are going to hurt you because we're just imperfect beings, so we have to live in a constant state of forgiveness. You've got to enjoy it and then employ it as a lifestyle.

Why do I need to forgive?

1. Because God has forgiven me.
2. To escape the torment of resentment that's going to shackle me if I don't forgive.
3. Because I don't want to burn the bridge that I'm going to have to walk across. I want to forgive so God will forgive me.

Who do you need to forgive?

1. Do you blame anyone else in the world for your unhappiness? Do you blame a spouse? If only my husband would get his act straight, then I'd do a lot better. I'd be able to come to church more if he'd come with me. Do you blame your parents? If my parents hadn't done this to me when I was little, if that hadn't been a part of that, then my life would be a lot better today. Do you blame a teacher? If my teacher would have just. Do you blame a boss? If I just had a different boss. If you blame anyone for your unhappiness, that's an indication of resentment. Blame is

an indication of an unforgiven wrong, rather real or perceived, it doesn't make any difference, and it's you that's not forgiving. You need to let it go right now. Let it go or it will torture you and harm your future life.

2. Have I been keeping score? Is there a score sheet in my mind with regard to this person so that whenever they're doing something, you're thinking, they owe me? Did your spouse make a major mistake sometime in the past? He or she is sorry, and life has gone on, but you're holding it over his or her head. You've become an unpleasable person because no matter what one does, it's part of a bottomless pit of repayment. No matter how good a person is, you're thinking in your mind, he owes me. I want to tell you something today as straight as I can tell you. As bad as whatever was done, you're the one killing the marriage. You're killing it by your unforgiveness. You've never forgiven, and the spouse may be getting to the point of asking, "What's the use? I can't seem to ever be forgiven."
- Marriage is just one of the areas that can apply. You may have been neglected as a child. You may have been abused as a child. You may not have been loved as you should have as a child. I don't know any of us who were loved as we should have been as a child. Why? Because we are not able to love perfectly. We're imperfect beings.
3. Do you find yourself acting a certain way toward someone because he reminds you of someone you resent?

I know that sounds strange, but there are all kinds of people who they will look at a person and say, "He reminds me of someone back in my childhood." So, he will treat them totally different simply because of a past problem they - he never lets go. If we search our souls, a lot of us have a lot more forgiving to do than we give ourselves credit for. We need to do it now!

Amazing Grace Lesson #1239

Questions:

1. God is?
 - a. Love
 - b. Righteous (just)
 - c. Truth
 - d. Mercy
 - e. Peace
 - f. All the above
 - g. a and c
 - h. a, c and e
 - i. a, b and c

2. How many times should you forgive?
 - a. One
 - b. Seven
 - c. One hundred
 - d. Every time someone ask.

3. When one forgives does he keep score of offenses?
Yes No

4. Obedience to the Gospel cancels our debt to God?
True False

5. When is man's sin and rebellion cancelled?
 - a. Our physical death
 - b. Our death to sin

- c. Our confession that Jesus is Lord
- d. When we trust God to forgive and obey Him
- e. a, b and c

6. The key to forgiveness is to recognize how much God has forgiven us?

True False

7. Why do I need to forgive?

- a. Because God has forgiven me
- b. To escape the torment of resentment
- c. I do not want to burn the bridge I will have to walk across
- d. I want God to forgive me
- e. All the above
- f. a and d

Chapter 5

Is Homosexuality a Sin?

Twenty-five years ago, the word homosexuality was spoken only in a whisper, and rarely, even at that. Then about two decades ago, homosexuality made its way to the public's attention in a very major way. This time with a new name, "the Gay Community", and with a new movement, called "Gay Rights". Homosexuality literally came 'out of the closet' and was no longer something that was taboo in the media or in public conversation. Instead, it was being billed as something called "an alternative lifestyle."

It is interesting that for centuries now, Christian people have believed that homosexuality was an unquestioned and direct violation of God's will. But now that premise is being confronted by a far more liberal public opinion, which is right? Is homosexuality an alternative lifestyle, or is it sin? It is a blatant digression from God's law. Well, those of us who accept the Bible as God's inspired and inerrant Word, God's very breath to man, we have no other choice than to turn to this Word to find that answer. Before we look to the Bible and its specific verses in their context, I think it might be helpful to consider just a few facts about the background of this issue, worldwide.

For example, homosexuality is not really a contemporary issue at all. Anthropological investigations have indicated that homosexual behavior occurred, even among the most ancient of tribes. There is very little about it in recorded history. But it is interesting in western civilization, especially British history, you find some fascinating facts, most of them in the forms of prohibitions against homosexual behavior. For example, in the year 1290, British law commanded that a Sodomite be buried alive. In 1533, Henry VIII changed the mode of execution, but it was still a capital offense. Finally in British law, in 1861, it substituted life imprisonment for capital punishment, but it was still considered a very hideous type of offense. Would you believe that life imprisonment was still the penalty for a convicted homosexual in Britain until the year 1967? There have been similar laws in the United States, though with less severe type of penalties.

Times have changed. Not only are homosexual practices largely legal, but they are also becoming increasingly commonplace and accepted in our culture. The question arises, "just how commonplace?" Frankly, there is very little reliable data. The first major study this century about homosexual activity in United States didn't occur until 1950. It was conducted by Dr. E. G. Kinsey. He traveled all over the country, interviewing literally thousands of men--his

study was on males only--and he concluded that about ten percent of the male population engaged in at least three years of homosexual experience between the ages of 16 and 65. In 1972, Dr. Paul Gebhardt was commissioned by the National Institute of Mental Health to conduct another study. His study showed even significantly higher results--up to one-fourth of male America were involved in such behavior.

There have been more conservative scholars who have rebuked and rebuffed those claims. Reliable data is still very difficult to come by. But most experts, both conservative and liberal (and anywhere in between), would agree that at least seven percent of the American male population and about five percent of the American female population are actively engaged in practicing homosexuality. While we don't know the numbers, the fact of the matter is the Gay Rights movement has picked up a world of steam. They now have their own magazines and their own communities. They run their own places of entertainment and nightspots, and they have one of the strongest legislative lobbies in the United States of America.

There is one other thing I want us to look at, though, before we turn to the Bible and see what scripture says about homosexuality. I think it is necessary for us to define the terms, though I am sure that all of us have a connotation in our minds of what homosexuality is.

A homosexual act is an act of sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex. It is an act. I want to differentiate that by definition from a homosexual orientation. Listen closely. A homosexual orientation is a tendency or a desire to prefer a homosexual relationship over a heterosexual one.

There is a difference between those two and you will see why we distinguish these in a moment. A homosexual act is an action; a homosexual orientation is the desire or the longing. Those two are as different as a heterosexual act is different from a heterosexual orientation. Now there are two technical terms that need to be defined, pervers and inverts.

There are those who would be labeled as pervers. Pervers, or perversion, are those individuals who were heterosexual in nature, but have changed to a homosexual orientation. You say, "why would anybody change their sexual longing, their sexual orientation?" Again, research is sketchy, and the reasons vary. It is interesting to note that there has been a stronger correlation between perversion and certain environments, for example, mono-sex institutions. Places where there is a single gender, for example, prison or boarding school, even the Armed Forces, have generally sighted higher incidence of perversion than the population at large.

Then there is a second category of those individuals who would be homosexuals. These individuals are called inverts. Inverts are individuals who can never remember being attracted to members of the opposite sex. From their very beginning of their cognizant adult lives, they have felt attracted to the same sex. Research is sketchy as to what causes inversion. But a correlation exists. One of the factors has been the absence of father figures within the home. In fact, in ghetto situations in America where there is a higher incidence of the absence of a father, there is a corresponding incidence of inversion - about twice that of the national population.

We are going to come back to those terms later, but remember, the difference between a homosexual act, a homosexual orientation, perversion and inversion.

Now let's get to the Bible. What does the Bible say about homosexual behavior? The Word of God doesn't have a wealth of material on the subject, but when the Bible has something to say about homosexuality, it speaks strongly against such behavior. I suppose the first place you run across it in the Bible is Genesis 19. Lot, who was kin to Abraham, received two strangers in the town of Sodom and his house was literally bombarded by the lewd, base fellows of the town, men who were obviously homosexual, both in their orientation and in their action. So, they

stormed Lot's home. Eventually by the way, Sodom and its sister city, Gomorrah, were destroyed. In Judges 19, you read about a similar situation, this time in the city of Gibeah.

D. S. Bailey in his book, Homosexuality and the Christian Tradition, has tried to argue that the transgressors (particularly in the episode involving Lot and the strangers in his home) were really violating rules of hospitality and that's why they were being reprimanded, not for their homosexual activity. Mr. Bailey's theory doesn't stand the test of scrutiny, because we are given an interpretation of what occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is found in the little book of Jude, verse 7. "*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*" That makes it pretty clear, doesn't it? The letter that we call Jude is written to let us know--at least that part of it--that those individuals were condemned because of their homosexual behavior. Frankly, that corresponds to some Old Testament prohibitions, like Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 where male homosexuality is described as an abomination for which the death penalty is prescribed.

The strength of these statements is found both in their context and also with the severity of the penalty that is attached. Then when you go from the Old Testament into the New Testament, you find that Paul continues to deplore homosexual activity. "*Even the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another.*" (Romans 1:24-25) All of that is within the context of those individuals who have turned away from God--they are Godless--and God will not tolerate that type of behavior. Strong words, but really the same thing Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 6:9 when he listed those who were unrighteous, and he included homosexuals. In 1 Timothy 1:10, Sodomites were listed among the lawless and disobedient.

Now I want to point something out here that, if you haven't heard before, you will probably hear in the future. There has been a movement afoot, among liberal theologians, to stress that Paul in those three admonitions against homosexuality, was condemning perversion, not inversion. You remember the difference? That Paul was saying to those individuals who were "born with a natural attraction for the opposite sex", but who have changed, that for those individuals to do so is wrong. The implication there is, "if anyone is an invert who chooses to practice homosexual behavior, that person would not be prohibited."

That is not right. There are at least two reasons from scripture that this is true:

1) The primary reason is the word that Paul used to condemn homosexual behavior in Romans 1, in 1 Corinthians 6, and in 1 Timothy 1. He uses a Greek word that is really an umbrella term that refers to all homosexual behavior. By contrast, he could have used one of three different Greek terms that would have referred specifically to sexual perversion, but he chose not to do that. So, the implication is clear, whether inversion or perversion, homosexual activity is condemned.

2) Notice that the context in Romans 1 is that of creation. The prohibition against homosexuality isn't just aimed at individuals, whether inverts or perverts. It states that that's in violation of God's order of things. "*Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible quality, his eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.*" (Romans 1:19-20)

You see, the context of Romans 1 is that God's made it clear what his design was. It is for a man to choose a woman, and for the two to be together within the context of marriage, in a life-long relationship. That is the natural way God made things, the way He has chosen to run this world. It is very clear from the language.

Conclusion:

A. In General

- 1) Homosexuality is likely more common in our culture than any of us would like to admit.
- 2) Homosexuality is an issue that is making its way to the forefront today.
- 3) The consistency and the fervor with which the Bible speaks against homosexual acts mean that a Christian cannot accept such a practice, as a God-ordained or a God-accepted lifestyle. That would be true regardless of an individual's sexual orientation or motivation.

B. To Christians

- 1) The Bible teaches that we abhor sin, but we love the sinner. When we call a man or a woman a homosexual, are we referring to what they are, or to what they do? Now think about that for a moment. When would you call a person a murderer? When they have committed murder, right? When would you call a person a thief? When he or she has stolen something. On a more positive note, when would you call a person a plumber? Only if they have demonstrated skill in that task. For many of us, who are Christians, the nature of the sin homosexuality is of such distaste for us, then perhaps we have had a harder time of segregating the sin from the sinner.

There are those in our world who may have a homosexual orientation, but who are fighting the sin. God can rescue them from that, just like he can rescue you and me from our tendencies to whatever our "Achille's heel" of sin is-- and ours may be totally different. But I implore Christians, as we face the homosexuality issue, don't run from the problem, face it. Love the sinner while abhorring the sin. That's what Jesus did, that's what he would expect us to do regarding the sin of homosexuality as well as the sins of prostitution, chemical dependency, anger and all other sins.

Years ago, the Interpreter's Bible (a commentary) wrote this about Romans 1:27 "The subject is one, in which, in honesty must be faced, but one on which no man of fine feeling should linger."

I suppose that's described our outlook on homosexuality and homosexual behavior for decades. I'm afraid we live in a time where our minds must linger on it longer, because of the place it has taken in our society.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1013

Questions:

1. Since creation homosexuality has been accepted or tolerated by society?
True _____ False _____
2. A homosexual act is sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex?
True _____ False _____
3. Homosexual orientation is a tendency or desire toward homosexual relation over a heterosexual one?
True _____ False _____
4. Men of Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to sexual perversion?
True _____ False _____
5. All sexual activity outside marriage both homosexuality and fornication, is sin?
True _____ False _____
6. The apostle Paul condemned homosexuality and is quoted as saying "Even the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way, the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another."
True _____ False _____

Freedom From Chemical Dependency

A preacher looked out on his 300-member congregation. Each parishioner is characterized by a smiling face, nice clothes, combed hair, polished teeth. The preacher had just preached a strong sermon on Christian lifestyle, including a recitation on the evils of drinking and a passionate admonition to his people to totally abstain from the occasional use even of alcohol or stronger drugs.

Concluding his lesson, he looks over the crowd assuming deep in his heart that maybe a few would imbibe upon occasion, but he feels sure that none of his members have a serious problem with drinking or with drugs. Little does he realize, halfway back on the left there sits Mike. Mike is a 24-year-old medical student who teaches the high school Bible class. He serves on the mission committee and everybody admires him for his zeal and his work and his dedication. But what nobody knows is that Mike's father lives in another town and he's an alcoholic, and that Mike is compulsively driven to achieving greater and greater accomplishments in a vain attempt to gain his father's approval and to raise his own self esteem. Everybody in the church thinks that Mike has it together. They think he has a healthy, vital relationship with God. But what they don't see is a profound sense of worthlessness that's driving Mike to an ulcer.

Four rows behind Mike, there are Clarence and Sharon. Sharon attends faithfully while Clarence only comes about once a month. The preacher knows Clarence is an awfully successful businessman. He's heard he earns well into six figures, what he doesn't know is that Clarence is an alcoholic. And when he gets drunk, he gets mean, violent and beats Sharon.

Across the aisle there's Tim and Allison, and their little daughter Amanda. The preacher has heard they're having trouble, even separated for a while. Just this week, he got wind that Tim may be having a hard time at the job. He has no idea that it's all due to Tim's cocaine binges every two weeks.

Then on the third row, down front on the right, there's sweet little Emma. A widow now, Emma was a charter member of the local congregation when it began 47 years ago. Always faithful in attendance, Emma started missing some services lately, friends noticed her hands shook. And they feared that she was suffering in the early stages of Parkinson's disease. Little did they know that her shaking hands came from temporary withdrawal from prescription pain medication that she began taking two years ago, following a minor surgery, prescriptions that she had repeatedly refilled by lying to her doctor and deceiving her pharmacist.

On the back row, there's Marvin, whose 12-year-old son was killed by a drunk driver. Across the way, two teens who vandalized the area school after they had drunk beer and smoked pot. The list goes on and on and on. Now folks the names that I presented to you are purely hypothetical, but the scenarios that I just shared with you are real. They and hundreds of others are repeated in this and every church in America. Chemical dependency and drug abuse are plaguing our country and destroying millions of lives. Five out of 12 people have had their lives touched by chemical dependency.

Now let's stop a few moments and consider what we're talking about. What do we mean by chemical dependency? Chemical dependency is defined as the state that results from the process of increasingly turning to chemical use to meet life's needs. In other words, the chemical may be alcohol, the most prevalent, dangerous, costly, deadly drug in our culture. It may be nicotine, cocaine, crack, heroine, amphetamines, morphine, tranquilizers or any number of prescription drugs., If there is a reliance on some chemical substance to make it through life, the day, the week or to

meet life's needs; whatever the substance may be, that's called chemical dependency. It may mean having a drink a day. It may mean having to have several drinks every two hours. It may mean an evening tranquilizer so you can get to sleep. It may mean a cocaine binge every other weekend. That's chemical dependency.

Chemical dependency often leads to a physical addiction. Now look at that definition, let's understand what we're talking about. Physical addiction occurs when the cells of the body change the way they function because of the use of certain substances. A physical addiction literally means you are physiologically altered and your body craves that chemical in order to function.

The tragedy of those two things is chemical dependency invariably fails to meet the life needs that the user is seeking to meet. Let's not lie about it. A fix of something to a drug user feels good initially. That's why they take it. There is a pleasure. But over just a short period of time, that chemical begins to isolate those people, isolate them from God, from others they love and from the things that really can meet their life's needs. After a period of chemical dependency physical addiction begins and physical addiction is a death process. Sometimes it's slow, often fast, but always fatal unless the cycle is broken and that seldom occurs.

How devastating is the dependency and abuse problem?

It is catastrophe.

Statistics from the Alcohol and Drug Council of Middle Tennessee show that in Nashville Tennessee drugs are involved in 50 percent of all spouse abuse, 50 percent of all traffic fatalities, 35 percent of all suicides, 62 percent of all assaults, 52 percent of all rapes, 49 percent of all murders, alcohol or chemical addiction involved, 38 percent of all child abuse, 68 percent of all manslaughters, and 69 percent of all drownings.

But the one that really blew me away was a 1994 Tennessean article that said in Metro Nashville, more than 80 percent of the locally sentenced felons are because of an offense related to drugs. Now let that sink in. If it weren't for drugs, you could take four out of every five convicted felons out of jail in our community. It is destroying lives, it's destroying families.

It's wiping us out.

It's the tool that's Satan is using to just kill us. Nationwide in 1960, in our country there were fewer than 30,000 arrests for drug-related offenses. In 1990, there were over one million. Today, 1994, American prison cells are filled with drug dealers, addicts, alcohol abusers and the mentally ill, often mentally ill because of substance abuse.

Some people tend to say, "Well, let's just put more of them in prison." We've already got four million of them in prison right now. Today, America has the highest incarceration percentage of any industrialized country in the world. Five hundred and nineteen of every 100,000 U.S. citizens are in prison; 80 percent of that because of drugs. Compare America to Canada which has 116 for every 100,000 and in Japan only 36 for every 100,000. Drug-related cases are so epidemic that our nation's courtrooms are becoming impotent.

Medically in our country, drugs are costing us \$75 billion a year; and half-a-million newborns every year. This one breaks my heart. A half-a-million newborns every year are exposed to drugs during pregnancies. Crack babies that were a rarity just a decade ago may crowd and fill \$2,000-a-day pediatric wards today. It is a catastrophe.

Specific causes.

The cause did not start as an epidemic; it goes back to one on one. Why do people mess with drugs? What's the whole root? You already know them.

Peer pressure - This pressure particularly affects young people. Their curiosity wants to know what it's all about. Some people like to play with fire. I don't know why, but they do.

Pain - Every alcoholic is seeking to relieve pain. It's the number one reason for drinking. It may be emotional, physical or psychological. But pain is a reason.

Lack of self-worth and self-esteem - Young people who turn to drugs are typically the ones who are most insecure. Oh, some of them are big and bold and a lot of bravado, but you when cut through that, they're the ones who are insecure. Adults are the same way. The whole idea of the cocktail party is the idea that I can't relate in my natural state but give me a little chemical and I'll loosen up. I'll be acceptable, I've got self-worth.

Root cause.

Some of you are going to think this is simplistic, but this is the truth. The root cause of the epidemic goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve chose to sin, they lost life. They lost real life meaning they not only lost an endless quantity of life on what was then a perfect earth, they lost a quality of life. Prior to that point, they didn't know what pain was, they didn't know what frustration was, they didn't know what worry was. They didn't know what it was to be sad. They had absolute meaning in life. But when they sinned, they lost it, and they lost it for all of us. For centuries, men and women have been trying to get it back. We tried drugs, money, power, work, play, religion, and 1,001 other things.

Core message.

There is only one thing that will recapture the real life that was lost in the Garden of Eden, it's Jesus Christ.

Jesus often talked about being life? He said, "*I am the bread of life*," (John 6:48) "*I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life*," (John 14:6), "I have come, so that they might have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:10) and "I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) Eleven different times in the gospel accounts, Jesus said, "I am life." He's the life we lost. A genuine relationship with Jesus is the only thing that can replace what was lost in Eden. Using anything else to try to fill that void is sin.

Sin.

Do you know what the word, "sin," means? In the Hebrew it means "to miss the mark." It was used of an archer who missed the mark. By the way, I hear this question all the time. Is alcoholism a sin, or is it a disease? Is chemical dependency a sin, or is it a disease? It is always asked as if it has to be an either/or answer. The truth is, it's both. It's BOTH! It is sin, like materialism, or greed, or work-aholism, or a thousand other things, it totally misses the mark in the quest for real life. That's sin, but so are a lot of others. But it becomes a disease once chosen and frequented. Those chemical substances rack and ravage the body literally beyond the individual's control.

For about 10 percent of our population that are alcoholic, once they start to drink, the combination of their physical, their psychological make-up, and the power of the drug, makes it virtually impossible for them to stop by sheer will-power. Something will have to intervene. For us to look piously at a person who's an alcoholic and say "Quit drinking" would be like telling a drowning man "Start swimming." Both of them would if they could. They can't.

Enslavement

The psychological and the physical addictive powers of drugs are incredible. In 1 Corinthians 6:12, the Corinthians were saying "Everything is permissible for me, everything is permissible." They were misusing their freedom. Paul says "*Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.*" Read that last point again, "I will not be mastered by anything." The fact is those who fool with drugs, become fools. They will be mastered by those substances to where they will have to have a snort, a fix, a drink, a smoke, a pill or a shot, whatever.

Paul says we're slaves either to sin or we're slaves to God. "I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves." Now we don't admit that, but every one of us is weak. We're weak as kittens. "*Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*" (Romans 6:19) He says, don't offer yourselves that way. But I'll tell you something about the drug enslavement. Here's the key: Satan, if you'll remember in John 8:44, is called by Jesus a liar, and the father of all lies. Do you know what Satan tells the chemically dependent, and those of you out there who are chemically dependent? Do you know what he's telling you? He's telling you over and over again, you can stop anytime you want to. Do you know what the chemically dependent do? They'll stop for a little while, just to give themselves a false proof that they can do it. But they can't.

There are 18 million alcoholics in America today, just one drug, 18 million alcoholics. Only 15 percent are seeking help. Do you know why only three million seek help? It is because the other 15 million believe the lie. They believe the lie that they've mastered the drug, when the drug has mastered them.

The cure

Will power can't do it. Is it an absolutely endless cycle? No, there is a cure for the dependent person.

1. Realize the inadequacy and destructiveness of drug abuse.

First, he or she must realize the inadequacy and the destructiveness of drug abuse. The person must come to a point that if they continue on their present course, it would be more painful than recovering. In other words, the person has to realize that he or she is chemically dependent. The first step of the 12-step program developed by Alcoholics Anonymous is (and this is the foundation): When an individual will come and say in the presence of others, "I admit I am powerless over alcohol and that my life has become unmanageable." Until they are willing to admit that there's no help. When they admit that, the door becomes open.

2. Believe that Christ can fill the void in life.

He or she must believe that Christ can fill the void in life. You say, what void? The void we talked about earlier. The void created when sin entered the world, the void that drug and chemicals are trying to fill in the first place just to help you get through the day, to get over the pain or to give you the high. They don't do it, but Jesus does. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

This isn't a new thing, it goes back 2,000 years when Paul said in Ephesians 5:18, "*Don't get drunk on wine.*" There's the alcohol drug. He said, that doesn't fill the void. "But instead, be filled with the Spirit." What's he talking about? He's talking about the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God and the Holy Spirit that God lets dwell in you when you come to Christ. By the way, the second step in Alcoholics Anonymous is to say, "I have come to believe in a power greater than myself that can restore me to sanity." They're right, only I'll go further. The source of that power is Jesus Christ. He and He alone will ultimately restore you to sanity.

3. Become part of a healing community.

The dependent person becomes part of a healing community. A "healing community," can be the AA, the NA or another support group. But I want you to hear this and hear this well. We are not just talking to dependent folks, we're talking to a lot of people who are part of a family, you become codependent. A chemically dependent person will not get well on their own. Did you hear that? A chemically dependent person will not get well on their own. They will not identify the problem on their own. They will not seek help on their own. They will not stay the course of recovery alone. That's why God was so wise when he said in Ecclesiastes 4:9-11, "*two are better than one. Because if one is walking alone and falls down, there's nobody to pick him up. But if there are two and one falls down, he's got somebody to pick him up.*"

Recovery from chemical dependency is a lifelong process. That's why alcoholics who've been sober for 10 years can still be seen attending AA meetings, because the dependent person has to become part of a healing community. Now I want to say something to church folks. Folks, that ought to be the church. Do you hear me? It's a shame that a program like Alcoholics Anonymous didn't rise up in churches, but outside of them.

In 1978 in a Gallup Poll, one out of four Americans admitted having a personal alcohol problem. But only eight percent said they would turn to the church or its trained personnel if they or a family member had a drinking problem; only eight percent. See, we've done an awfully good job pointing out that chasing a drug is wrong, we've not done a very good job of trying to extend a hand and saying, "Here's how you get it right. Here's how you get it fixed." We've got to do both.

Galatians 6:1 says, "*Brother, if anyone is caught in a sin, ye who are spiritual restore him gently.*" And then the next verse says, "You carry one another's burdens." And the word there means a prolonged journey, not just saying, "You ought to quit that." Get the burden and put it on your back and carry with them over the long haul.

4. Be open and honest about manipulation, lying and rationalization.

The dependent person must become open and honest about his manipulation, his lying, his rationalization, because every drug dependent person goes through that. They lie to everybody.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive them and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)
He's got to come clean. It frees his spirit.

5. Relearn healthy living skills.

The dependent person relearns healthy living skills.

6. The family's part.

a) Maintain agape love for the addict, for the dependent. That means a love that seeks the best for them, never gives up, but it does what's best.

b) Don't aid or abet the dependent behavior. Don't fuel the fire. You keep the agape love. Be like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He didn't keep sending money. He knew the boy had to come to his senses; he had to come home.

c) Confront carefully. You do have to confront at times. They will not get well alone. You've got to show them what's happening to their lives. Do you know how many confrontations it takes on the average for a dependent person to seek recovery? Fifty-four, yes 54. If you're living with an alcoholic, if you're living with a drug addict and you have tried over and over again to help them find the help they need to get well, take some heart in that statistic.

If you're chasing anything to give you real meaning in life other than Jesus, you're missing the mark. It may be your job, it may be play, it may be your pocketbook; or whatever. If you are chemically dependent today, I hope you're at the point where you'll say in the presence of somebody right now, your family, or a small group, "My life has become unmanageable, and I am powerless to change it." Until you do, you'll continue to be enslaved.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1202

Questions:

1. Chemical dependency is the process of increasingly turning to chemical use to meet life's needs.

True _____ False _____

2. Chemical dependency never leads to physical dependency.

True _____ False _____

3. Why do people mess with drugs?
 - a. _____ Peer pressure
 - b. _____ Pain
 - c. _____ Lack of self-worth
 - d. _____ All the above
 - e. _____ None of the above

4. The root cause of chemical dependency is
 - a. _____ “One is created that way”
 - b. _____ Society
 - c. _____ Hunger
 - d. _____ Sin

5. One can stop being dependent any time they wish
 True _____ False _____

6. To free and heal from chemical dependency one has to:
 - a. _____ Realize the inadequacy and destructiveness of drug abuse.
 - b. _____ Believe that Christ can fill the void in life.
 - c. _____ Become part of a healing community.
 - d. _____ Become open and honest about manipulation, lying and rationalization.
 - e. _____ Relearn healthy living skills.
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ None of the above

7. Family love will confront chemical dependency but will not fund it
 True _____ False _____

8. How many confrontations does it take before a person dependent on chemicals will seek recovery?
 - a. _____ 24
 - b. _____ 54
 - c. _____ 84
 - d. _____ 104
 - e. _____ 1004

Chapter 7

Freedom from Procrastination

Introduction:

Procrastination... millions of lives are less than they can be or should be spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally, etc., because they perpetually procrastinate. How do we get freedom from procrastination?

Procrastination is a universal problem a most of us put off dealing with. Most of us know what to do but we just tend to put it off and after a while it becomes our lifestyle. Are you a procrastinator? Do you constantly put things off? Does this little poem describe you?

Procrastination is my sin,
 It only brings me sorrow.

I know that I should give it up,
In fact, I will, tomorrow.

This lesson discusses the causes, costs, and cure for procrastination.

Causes

1. Indecision.

Have you ever been in a restaurant, the waiter comes over and you make him go away because you can't make up your mind? Or, have you ever perused the menu, order and after the entrees arrives say, "I wish I had selected what you ordered." Indecision makes us procrastinate, makes us put off buying a car, choosing a college, or changing jobs.

2. Fear.

When I'm afraid I put things off. Has anyone ever postponed a visit to the dentist you know you need? Any one put off needed surgery? Have you put off sharing your faith with a co-worker? Why? It's because you're afraid. Fear makes us procrastinate.

3. Perfectionism.

Perfectionism tends to make us procrastinate. Solomon said, "Whoever watches the wind, will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 11:4) In other words, if you wait till everything is just right, the clouds and barometric pressure, you'll never get it done. The Living Bible paraphrases that verse: "If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done." Amen. Perfectionism will cause procrastination.

4. Anger.

Procrastination may be a way of getting back at people that we don't like, or people we don't want to please.

Have any of you who are parents ever told your children "Turn off the TV, wash your hands and come to the table to eat?" Two minutes later you repeat, "Turn off the TV, wash your hands and come to the table to eat" Five minutes later, "...". Why is that? Is it because the show is so good, or kids are masters at procrastinating to let you know that they are wanting their independence?

Does anybody have a mate that you've been asking to do a certain thing for months, and they're not doing it? One reason may be that they are resisting your control. Procrastination is sometimes a form of passive resistance. It may be caused by anger.

5. Laziness.

The most frequent of all causes is pure and simple, laziness. Proverbs uses a word to refer to a lazy person; "slug" and refers to a slow crawling mollusk of which we are well familiar. "The sluggard (lazy) desires and gets nothing, but he who is diligent will prosper." (Proverbs 13:4)

Our generation has a low tolerance for sacrifice and pain. I can remember when my great-grandfather worked diligently out in the field right up into his early 80's. By contrast, our "couch potato" culture loves the word, "easy." If it's easy, I like it, if it's hard, I don't. Have you ever seen how often the word, "easy" is used in advertising? Easy to use, easy to apply, easy to get. Would these books become bestsellers; "Ten Difficult Steps to Change Your Life" or "Seven Gut-Wrenching Ways to Get Into Shape"? Who would buy them? We want it easy. Two common misconceptions about procrastination are (a) "It's easier to avoid this problem than to face it" and (b) "It will be easier to handle tomorrow." No, the longer it is delayed the more difficult. It's rarely easier tomorrow.

Cost

1. Procrastination creates obstacles.

"The way of the sluggard (the lazy procrastinator) is blocked with thorns." (Proverbs 15:19) Procrastination always makes the problem worse. What happens when you put off that leaky roof, and put it off, and put it off? You need a new roof! Has anyone ever had a major engine repair because you've put off checking or changing the oil in your car? Procrastination turns a problem into a crisis. It creates obstacles.

2. Procrastination wastes opportunities.

"A sluggard does not plow in season, so at harvest time, he finds nothing." (Proverbs 20:4) The procrastinator doesn't take advantage of the opportunity to plant, so he doesn't reap. When opportunity knocks, open the door.

John Greenleaf Whittier said, "The saddest words of tongue in men are, 'It might have been.'" "If only" are two of the most useless words in the English language. While we are postponing, life is passing. Procrastination wastes opportunity.

3. Procrastination hurts other people.

Laziness keeps us from being loving. Love requires commitment and effort. A lot of people don't want to exert that effort.

It's easier to be lazy, than it is to be loving. I can't tell you how many marriages break up simply because two people are lazy. They put off doing what they know they should do. I've heard couples sitting in my office and say, "I know what I should do, but I just can't." No, it isn't you can't, it's you won't. You think you'll put it off, and it will get better.

People who procrastinate hurt their children. Lazy parents produce problem children. It creates problems with your children if you put off (a) teaching them about the facts of life, when you know they need it, (b) discipline to build character and responsibility and (c) postpone another family vacation where family bonding occurs and fond memories are developed. You're destroying your children. Procrastination really does hurt other people.

Cures

1. Quit making excuses.

"The sluggard says, 'There's a lion outside', or 'I'll be murdered in the street.'" (Proverbs 22:13) If you missed the point of that proverb, let me make it clear. How many lions do you suppose roam the Land of Israel, in the days of Solomon? Solomon is saying the procrastinator comes up with all kinds of excuses. Everybody else has excuses, but I have reasons. I ran across something this week that I thought was great. It was a list of excuses that people had submitted to insurance companies to collect for accidents. One of them said, "The guy was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him." How about this one? "I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law and drove over the embankment." Another fellow said, "In my attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole." I like this one, "I've been driving my car for 40 years when I fell asleep and had an accident." Well, no wonder, that's a long time. How's this guy, talking about an excuse, trying to put responsibility somewhere else. "The telephone pole was approaching fast; I attempted to swerve off its path when it hit my front end." My favorite is this last one, "The pedestrian had no idea which way to go, so I ran over him."

What's your excuse? What is it that leads you to say, "One of these days..."? The Bible says, "The lazy man is full of excuses." Benjamin Franklin said "People who are good at making excuses are seldom good at anything else." The number one excuse people use for procrastinating "When things settle down, I'll _____" (You fill in the blank.) I've got news for all of you. Things will never settle down. They will only settle down when the Lord comes again.

2. Stop stalling.

For the procrastinator "One of these days," is "none of these days." Stop stalling, do it today. Start now.

If you tend to procrastinate, these three words will change your life. "Do it now." Write that down. Take a magic marker, write on piece of cardboard; put it on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, desk or on your car visor. Have it staring you in the face, "Do it now!" Every time you begin to think, "I'll get to that later," look those three words in the face and do it now!

NASA tells us that the greatest amount of energy expended is getting the rocket off the pad. Once it gets into orbit, it's a cinch. Stop stalling, get started and if it cannot be finished today, do part of it. Do 10 minutes today, 10 minutes tomorrow, and 10 minutes the next day. See how much you will accomplish in six short weeks. It will astound you.

3. Start scheduling.

"Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house." (Proverbs 24:27) In other words, set your priorities, what needs to be done first, and schedule a time to do them. You don't ever have time - you must make time!

Schedule the important and the unimportant. Schedule time for personal and family Bible study, time to be with your wife, additional time for family and schedule time to be alone (your quiet time). If you don't commit time for things, they simply won't get done. However, just scheduling something is not sufficient; you must work your schedule and more than once per day. On rare occasions when waiting on someone or for something, it may be impossible to continue working on your top priority task. Then work on a less important task until the obstacle is removed or resolved on the top priority task.

"Make the most of every opportunity." (Ephesians 5:16) There was a famous author who wrote his first book while he was riding on the subway in New York, and he made the most of every opportunity. Another man memorized a thousand Bible verses at stop lights. That's making the most of every opportunity! Wise men and women plan, schedule and execute.

4. Face your fears.

Remember, the main cause of procrastination is fear. When you're avoiding something, you're probably afraid of it. Identify it and face it. The greatest fear is the fear of failure. That's why we put more things off than anything else. We're afraid we'll fail. Folks, just face up to it, fear isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of humanity. Mark Twain said, "Courage isn't the absence of fear, it's moving on in spite of your fear." If you flee from your fears, they grow bigger. If you face them, they grow smaller.

There are two things to ask yourself when facing a fear: (a) "What's the worst thing that can happen?" Usually, it's not nearly as bad as you think and (b) Recite Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Recite that over about three times, it becomes easier to tackle whatever it is in front of you knowing God strengthens.

5. Focus on the reward for your efforts.

There are very few things in life are easy. Life is tough. You have to persevere to see the reward. Concentrate on the gain beyond the pain. Concentrate on how good you'll feel when you finish the task.

Here is a little illustration. When children come home from school, if they sit down and complete their homework first, they will enjoy the rest of the afternoon and they will enjoy their evening more because undone homework is not hanging over their head. It's the philosophy "you can pay now and play later, or you can play now and pay later."

The principle is, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at a proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9) The wrong question is "what do I feel like doing". The right question is "what does God want me to do". It's only a very immature person who lives his life by his feelings. Everything above leads us to the following two questions.

What is it that needs changing in your life?

- Is it "one of these days I'm going to become a Christian"?
- Is it "one of these days I'm going to get involved in the ministry God has assigned to me"?
- Is it "one of these days I'm going to read and study the Bible daily"?
- Is it "one of these days I'm going to quit drinking, be a better parent, spend some time with the wife and kids or whatever I've have been putting off that I know needs to be done"?

What is it going to take to get you in gear?

God says, "I want to help." The biggest mistake in life is to postpone or delay the opportunity for Jesus Christ to change you and to save you.

" I don't know of anybody who doesn't eventually want to get their life right with God. They say, "One of these days, I'm going to make that commitment. One of these days, I'm going to get my life in order. One of these days, I'm going to obey God by repenting of my sins, confessing my belief that Jesus is God, to be buried for remission of my sins in water baptism and to arise a new Christian cleansed being forgiven of all my sins." Why not now? A good intention is only procrastination. You know the old saying, and it's true: "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Why not today?

Amazing Grace Lesson #1200

Questions:

1. The Causes of Procrastination.
 - a. _____ Indecision
 - b. _____ Fear
 - c. _____ Perfectionism
 - d. _____ Anger
 - e. _____ Laziness
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ a and c
 - h. _____ a, d and e
 - i. _____ b, c and d
2. The Cost of Procrastination.
 - a. _____ It creates obstacles. (Prov. 15:19)
 - b. _____ It wastes opportunities. (Prov. 20:4)
 - c. _____ It hurts other people.
 - d. _____ All the above
 - e. _____ a and b
 - f. _____ a and c
 - g. _____ b and c
3. The Cure.
 - a. _____ Quit making excuses. (Prov. 22:13)
 - b. _____ Stop stalling.
 - c. _____ Start scheduling. (Prov. 24:27)

- d. _____ Face your fears. (Phil. 4:13)
 - e. _____ Focus on the rewards of your efforts. (Gal. 6:9)
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ a, b and c
 - h. _____ a, c and d
 - i. _____ b, c and e
 - j. _____ b, c, d and e
4. A procrastinator's favorite expression is "one of these days I" whereas God's states "Today is the Day."
True _____ False _____
5. What is the most important thing generally postponed by a procrastinator?
- a. _____ Expressing their feeling of love to a family member
 - b. _____ Telling someone of their sorrow asking for forgiveness
 - c. _____ Salvation, obedience to God for forgiveness

Chapter 8

On Pride and Humility

Many people desire the answer to the questions (1) how do I free myself from lust, addictions and hang-ups that mess up life and (2) how do I get the power to make the needed changes or how do I get God's power in my life?

The beginning point is to admit the problem, not just the physical manifestation of the problem, but the root problem. The root problem is "I'm in charge, and I don't need God." That was the problem Adam and Eve had. Paul wrestled with it in Romans 7, and it's our problem.

The key is found in James 4:6. Everything in the rest of the lesson is going to spring from that great text. James said, "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." That's worth repeating. "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble." The Bible states the key to power in your life is humility and the key barrier to God's power is pride, because a person full of pride cannot see a need to change or to improve. Only when one is full of humility, will he be given the power to change.

The Bible talks about two kinds of pride. There really is a good kind of pride. If you don't believe that, read Galatians 6:4, or 2 Corinthians 7:4. The good kind of pride is synonymous with self-respect, satisfaction for a job well done and the enjoyment of seeing others succeed. Only two or three times in the Bible do you see pride referred to that way. Ninety-nine percent of the time, you'll find pride referred to in a very negative way, where it's linked with conceit, selfishness, arrogance or egotism. Somebody said, "Egotism is the only disease that when you've got it, it makes everybody else sick." By looking at a number of famous and important people, one can see how one can easily become victim.

Remember Muhammad Ali, those of you in my generation or above, and how brash and proud Ali was in his prime? The story is told that Ali was on a plane one time and it was about to take off. The flight attendant came to Ali and said, "Sir, you'll have to buckle your seat belt." Ali in his typical brash, showman-type manner said, "Superman don't

need no seat belt." To which the flight attendant responded, "Superman don't need no airplane either." He buckled the belt.

Pride's very easy to see in others, but it's difficult to see in ourselves, but it's there. It's not only the basic human problem, it is your basic problem, and it's my basic problem, too.

Pride that leads to other problems.

1. Pride prevents personal growth.

You think you've got it altogether and don't need to change, grow or improve. You have pride dwelling in your spirit. Somebody said, "When the head starts swelling, the mind stops growing." The one sure way to know that you need this lesson is if you don't think you do.

Solomon said "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him." (Proverbs 26:12) "He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray." (Proverbs 10:17) These two verses together are saying the proud man or woman only goes by self-evaluation. They think they know everything there is to know and there's no sense getting any counsel.

If you've got marriage problems and you won't talk to anybody about it, that's pride. That's all it is, pure and simple. If you've got financial difficulties and you won't seek counsel about that, that's just your pride. If you're failing at your work, school, or some relationship and you're just trying to cover it up, that's pride. All too often we'd rather look smart than be smart. The way to become smart is by being humble. Pride prevents one from growing.

2. Pride sabotages my relationships.

Pride is the root of all relational conflict and disharmony. When you act out of pride, you tend to be demanding, unsympathetic, even obnoxious and rude.

Have you ever seen a proud person treat a waiter in a fancy restaurant? It's disgusting, they are demanding and never being satisfied. Pride makes us hold grudges and keep score. It makes us unable to admit we're wrong. "Pride only breeds quarrels." (Proverbs 13:10) I'm going to repeat that. "Pride only breeds quarrels."

The root of virtually every argument or quarrel in a marriage is pride. You don't want to admit that your husband or wife may be partially right. So many family conflicts could be resolved if we could just swallow our pride.

How many times do you think this scenario has been acted out? A young man gets rebellious and lets loose at his dad and the father loses his temper and says, "Get out of the house and don't come back." They are alienated for who knows how long because neither of them can force out these six most difficult words in the English language, "I was wrong. I am sorry." Pride destroys relationships, and pride also produces stress and anxiety.

They drift apart for who knows how long because neither of them can force themselves to utter these four most difficult words in the language: "I made a mistake. I'm sorry."

The focus of a pride-filled person is on self. It's on my status and my image. Politicians now have spin-doctors. They don't care about the truth; they just want the image to be right. Image is everything. But it really reveals an insecurity and a feeling of inferiority.

Have you ever watched on FOX, CNN or another channel one of the worldwide summits, or a UN meeting? You see these tinhorn dictators and the ambassadors from the tiniest countries come marching in with eight rows of braids

and 40 medals and these brightly adorned uniforms, but the presidents and the ambassadors of other countries, come in just in a modest dark suit. Why? They don't need to impress anybody. They're secure.

Have you ever seen on FOX, CNN or another channel one of the world summits, or a UN meeting those dictators and ambassadors of the smaller countries parading in uniforms brightly adorned with eight rows of bars and forty medals? While others enter simply in a modest dark suit. Why? They don't need to impress anyone. They are confident.

Tony Campolo, one of my favorite authors, said, "Pride often destroys those that we love the most." The pride of parents can lead to the destruction of children. People who are out to prove they are better than others often use their children to this end. Campolo goes and explains what we already know. "How many parents have pridefully lived through their children's grades, through their children's sports career, through their children's beauty, and all under the guise upon doing it for their betterment. They're wrecking their psyches, while they're inflating their own personal egos." Campolo concludes by saying, "Happiness is often the casualty of pride."

Proverbs 29:25 says it's a dangerous thing to be concerned about what others think of you. Pride causes anxiety and stress because if I'm trying to live one image, but inside I'm something else, I become stressed, discouraged, and disillusioned. By contrast, the very first thing Jesus our Lord said on the Sermon on the Mount was "Happy are the humble."

Happiness through humility

If you're going to break free of the things that shackle you, there's no way you're going to do it until you begin to develop the mindset of humility. This is the real core of the lesson.

1. Recognize your weaknesses honestly.

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) If you don't admit your weaknesses, if you do not admit your perpetual areas of spiritual failure, neither you nor God will be able to work on them.

I love the story of the teenage boy who said to his sister, "Sis, I'm afraid I'm guilty of the sin of vanity." She looked at him and said, "You, vanity, how?" He said, "Well because every time I walk by the mirror, I catch myself stopping and looking and saying, 'Wow, what a hunk.'" She laughed and said, "No, that's not vanity, that's just ignorance."

Many of you will bow and pray tonight before we go to sleep, and say, "Lord, if I've committed sin today." Stop right there, just stop and think. Leave off the "if," because there's no question about it, you have committed sin today. Take the time to isolate the sin in your life, particularly the perpetual sin, the sin you're trying to stuff in the closet. Maybe it's your adulterous affair, maybe it's your lying tongue, maybe it's the hatred of a parent, maybe it's a broken relationship at work or maybe it's something you're just pretending doesn't exist. Get it out on the table and stretch it out before God. Until you admit your weakness, you'll not know genuine humility.

2. Evaluate your strength realistically.

Pride is based upon a false evaluation of self, but humility is based upon the truth. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Paul said, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment." (Romans 12:3) In other words, be realistic about who you are. Some people think humility is an inferiority complex. Humility isn't saying, "Oh I'm wretched, horrible, worthless or nothing. I'm just an old worm." That's not true. You're not a worm, you're not nothing, you're something. Jesus didn't die for nothing. Every one of us, unique in creation, is made in the image of God. The fact is you have strengths. All of us

do. God gave them to us but we're also weak in areas. Humility is being honest about your weaknesses and realistic about your strengths.

I love the story of the little girl who walked in Baskin Robbins. She could barely see up over the counter, and said, "Sir, I want one of those hand-packed pints, no lid, just a spoon." The fellow looked at her and said, "Well little girl, are you sure you can eat all that?" "Oh, yes sir," she said. "You see I'm much bigger on the inside than I am on the outside."

Pride is pretending you're much bigger on the outside than you are on the inside. "Each man should test his own actions, then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to someone else." (Galatians 6:4) That is one of my life texts. There is also a good kind of pride. Paul said, you enjoy your own abilities, enjoy your own successes, a job well done, but don't compare. There are two reasons not to compare.

- a. You can always find someone who is not doing as good a job as you and you'll be proud.
- b. You can always find someone who is doing a better job than you and you'll get discouraged.

God says, I don't want you being either of those. I made you absolutely unique. You're like the snowflake, no two are the same. God just wants you to be you. If you're not going to be you, who's going to be you? Don't compare with other people - you'll either be proud or discouraged.

Galatians 6:4 is a difficult command to obey, particularly in a culture where everything is built upon competition. Let's just be honest, in America, we only want top dogs. We only want gold medal winners. We only want the salesman of the year. You watch during the fall when the camera goes down to the sidelines in the football game and they pan that sideline, all the players take that helmet off and turn. What do they say? Their team record may be four and seven, but they'll look at the camera and say, "We're number one, we're number one." How many times have you ever seen a football player turn to the camera and say, "We're number four, we're number four, and we're proud of it."? No! No! Being number one is not what it's all about, never has been God's standard. It's all about admitting your weakness honestly while recognizing and using your strength.

3. Enjoy your successes gratefully.

Paul said "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did not receive it, why do you boast as though you did?" (1 Corinthians 4:7) Do you know what Paul was saying? Everything you and I have has been given to us by God. We say, I've built my business with my own two hands. It was my idea. Great, but where did you get that mind, your health or your hands? They all came from God. Where did you get the DNA that fashioned your chromosomes that made you like you are? You see the fact is, we all do have designer genes, if you'll pardon the pun. But we didn't design them, God did.

How many of you chose your parents, where you were to be born or when you were going to be born? Those are all gifts from God, and what you do with them is your gift back to God. Humility then enjoys success in life, but it does so gratefully, knowing the origin of that success. "Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father." (James 1:17) We need to remember that and the lesson of the whale. When the whale gets to the top, and starts to blow off, is when he gets harpooned. One minute you can be a hero, and the next minute you can be a zero. Don't ever forget, there's just 12 inches difference between a halo and a noose. What we need to do is enjoy our successes gratefully.

4. Serve other people unselfishly.

In October 1989, Psychology Today did a great article about depression. It was focusing on the epidemic that major depression is becoming our culture. It particularly focused on the Baby Boom population, people between ages 30 and 45. Do you realize that people who are in the Baby Boom generation are three to ten times more likely to suffer

major depression than their grandparents? That seems bizarre to me because our grandparents were the ones who went through the Depression, the ones who had to struggle to raise ten kids from the milk of one cow. I mean, isn't it amazing?

It continued, "It can be traced to the historical and cultural occurrences which have exalted the individual." In other words, the article said, depression is a result of the "Me" generation---me, my image and my goals. It is plain old selfishness and pride. What they found out, is that a person who's all wrapped up in himself makes a pretty small package.

The article also stated "Just as belief in the nation was crumbling, and belief in God was also fading, the sky-rocketing divorce rate was eroding belief in the family. When people no longer believe that their country is so powerful, that the family can be a source of enduring unity and support, or that a relationship with God is important, what else can they turn to for identity, satisfaction, and hope? People then only have one alternative; they turn to themselves and depression results."

In that same magazine, there was another article called, "Beyond Selfishness." Keep in mind this is Psychology Today. It's not trying to promote any particular Christian value. But it said that helping other people overcomes depression. In fact, the article said that when you help others, it actually creates endorphins in your brain. Some of you who are runners and athletes know what endorphins are. It's the hormone chemical that literally gives runners a high. The article stated that when you volunteer to help somebody else, physically you get that same kind of thing. "Volunteering to help makes people feel good physically and emotionally. Like runner's calm, it's good for your health."

What Psychology Today said in 1989 was simply restating what Paul said in Philippians 2, over 2,000 years ago. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:3) Paul is saying humility isn't thinking poorly of yourself, it's just thinking more about others. The focus is off my needs, my desires, my wants, and the focus is on what other people need. I like to put it this way: humility isn't thinking less of yourself; humility is thinking less about yourself. The model is Jesus. When all the apostles were in that Upper Room, all too proud to wash each other's feet, Jesus walked in, took a basin and towel, and began washing their feet. Oh, it embarrassed them so much. But proud and insecure people can't serve others, they're too wrapped up in themselves. Each of us needs to lighten up on the introspection, i.e., what about me? Let us just dive in and serve other people.

5. Humble yourself voluntarily.

"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:10) I want you to notice that humility is a choice, it's a verb. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to ask God to humble us, it's something we're to choose. We choose to act, speak, and think in a humble way and the promise is, if we humble ourselves, then Christ will lift us up. That's called a paradox. God says the way up is down. The more I humble myself, the more I do admit my weaknesses and recognize my strengths, enjoy my successes in a grateful way, the more I serve others, the more God lifts me up. But the opposite is also true, just as the way up is down, the way down is up.

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) How many personifications of that proverb have you seen? The moment I start getting filled with pride, the moment I think I've got all the answers, is the moment I begin walking right out to the end of the gangplank. If you're thinking that you don't need God, you will. You will, it's just a matter of time. That's true regardless of whether or not you believe it. It's going to happen. But the longer you wait to see it, the more you'll lose. In a nutshell the worst thing about pride is it cuts off all the

wonderful things that God wants to give us. God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.
Amazing Grace Lesson #1197

Questions:

1. God is
 - a. _____ Love
 - b. _____ Righteous (just)
 - c. _____ Truth
 - d. _____ Mercy
 - e. _____ Peace
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ a, b and c
 - h. _____ a and c
 - i. _____ a, c and e

2. God is the perfect example of being pleased in doing a good job without any egotism or self-centeredness (pride) in what He had done.
True _____ False _____

3. Egotism, self-centeredness, is the only disease that makes everyone else sick.
True _____ False _____

4. Disharmony and relational conflicts their roots in pride?
True _____ False _____

5. Pride is destroyed by
 - a. _____ Maturity, one just gets older
 - b. _____ Education
 - c. _____ Hard work
 - d. _____ Humility

6. Pride is based upon a valid self-examination.
True _____ False _____

7. Pride is pretending to be bigger on the outside than you are on the inside.
True _____ False _____

8. Pride is the opposite of humility
True _____ False _____

9. One can make a choice to be prideful or humble
True _____ False _____

Chapter 9

Taking Steps to Freedom

"They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity---for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him." (2 Peter 2:19) Listen to that last sentence again. "For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."

Not long ago the New York Times carried an article about addictions, and the whole premise was that Americans seem hooked on this idea of addiction. Not too long ago, you only heard the idea of addiction mentioned with regard to drugs and alcohol. Now it says that there are addictions to all kinds of things, food, cigarettes, exercise, relationships, shopping, work, sex and video games. In fact, there's now a monthly publication called, Lifeline America, that focuses on nothing except our addictions. There are over 200 different kinds of addiction support groups meeting throughout the country.

Many if not most of us tend to be addicted to something. There is something that literally has a mastery of or a control over our lives. You may be into one of the new ones, or you may be victim to one of the oldies, like drinking. Over 18,000,000 Americans are problem drinkers. It disrupts their lives and their families. Surely some of us are addicted to eating, I don't mean for livelihood, but for pleasure. Did you know that Americans are 2.3 billion pounds overweight? What is your addiction? What is your life-controlling vice? Whatever it is, I want to share with you seven steps to freedom.

1) Freedom starts today.

Freedom starts today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next month. Have you ever noticed how many more people go on a diet tomorrow instead of today? I love what Solomon says in Proverbs 27:1, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." In other words, quit telling yourself, "one of these days." The truth is, it's going to be harder to change tomorrow than it is today, because delay always makes the problem worse. Begin today.

"Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 11:4) In other words, don't get distracted. Don't make excuses, the greater the delay, the bigger the problem. So, step one is, freedom has got to start today. Don't put off until tomorrow what can be started today.

2) Refuse to blame others.

Refuse to blame others. You'll never get out of your addiction until you refuse to blame others. But this old cover of "alibiing" is as old as Adam and Eve. Do you remember? Adam sinned and blamed his wife; Eve sinned and blamed the snake, serpent, But the point is we tend to want to blame somebody else. I'll never get better until I take personal responsibility. It's my life, I make choices.

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible states. "Let each one carry his own load." (Galatians 6:5) It's talking about personal responsibility. It's not saying we don't help one another. Because three verses earlier, it says "to bear one another's burdens, so fulfill the law of Christ." But I am responsible for me and you are responsible for you.

"Do not be deceived: God will not be mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7) Who are you blaming for your big problem in life? Are you blaming your parents, your husband, your wife, your teacher or your boss? Or are you blaming the devil? Are you blaming God? To break free, you must take responsibility for your life then you will not seek a remedy to your problem. Stop excusing yourself and stop accusing other people. Refuse to blame others.

3) Examine your life.

Take a personal inventory of your life. Do a frank evaluation. Ask some tough questions: What is my addiction? Why do I have it? When did it start? How frequently do I fall victim to it? When are the situations in which I'm tempted most? Why am I afraid to do something about it? It's hard to ask those questions, but they must be asked if we are to correct our problem.

"Let us examine our ways and test them and return to the Lord." (Lamentations 3:40) To change we have to stop pretending. We can't cover up our faults. We must come face to face with them. The fact is, hiding our hurt only intensifies it and makes it worse. Denial prevents healing.

"For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'--and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalms 32:4, 5) David said, I wouldn't face my problem, and I was drying up.

David examined his own life, and when he did, he came clean before the Lord. It was like lancing a boil. All of a sudden, he felt this freeing relief. Examine your life. Let me tell you something, that's not a once in a lifetime thing. We need to be examining our lives regularly because vice, addiction and other sins will insidiously creep in and control you before you even know it.

4) Employ Christ's sovereignty.

Christ is waiting to help. Employ his sovereignty - you can't do it alone. You need a power greater than yourself. Why don't you go straight to the source and get the greatest power? "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life." (Roman 6:12, 13)

For a man is a slave to whatever masters him. So, you are a slave. Romans 6:20 states, you're either a slave to sin, or you're a slave to righteousness. The bottom line is we all really are a slave. But the good news is, you can choose your master. "Submit yourselves, then, to the Lord." (James 4:7) The solution to your addiction is to choose the right master. Every day you're controlled by something. You're controlled by a bottle or by a pill. Many are controlled by other people. You may be controlled by the thirst for power, you may be controlled by food. But you are going to have to serve something. Why not choose the right master? God says, "Let me be sovereign."

Often, we only want to give God the problem. We say to God, I've got a problem. I need you to take care it. But to tell you the truth, I really want to run the rest of my life. God says, if you want me to work on the problem, you've got to give me every area of your life, and give it all to me, not just part. When we do, it produces incredible power to change.

So, why don't more people do it? The truth is, they're afraid. They're afraid that by submitting their lives to Christ it will turn them into something they don't want to be. They're afraid it means no fun, no freedom, and becoming some distorted view of a fanatic for Christ. That's one of the biggest lies that has ever escaped from hell. Did you hear that? That's a lie straight from the flames of hell. Jesus said, "I've come so that you can have life and have it to the full." What God is saying is, "Don't you know I was your architect? Don't you know that I was your chief construction engineer? Don't you know that I know the way you work? Don't you know that I know you need fun? Don't you know that I know you need freedom? Therefore, in the short term and the long term, you submit your life to me, and I'll give you more joy than you can ever find anywhere else."

You think about the epitome of Christian people that you know and look at their lives and tell me they are not joy filled. If I get a picture of somebody in my life that is dour and sour and down on anything, he does not rank at my list of top ten Christian people, because he is not, he has missed it somewhere. Jesus said, "I've come so that you can have life, and have it to the full. Make God sovereign in my life.

5) Distance myself from temptation.

If you don't want to get stung by the bees, stay away from them. Avoid situations where you know your temptation is going to be looking you in the eye. The Bible says, "Resist the devil and he'll flee from you." This is not only biblical, it's just good old common sense.

That means if you've got a problem with drinking, don't stock a bar in your house. If I've got a problem with lust, I don't need to go to places that sell pornography. If I've got a problem with overeating, I don't need to line the shelves with junk food. Stay away from the things that cause me problems.

Now can I confess something to you here? I've got weaknesses. I have things in my life that have controlled me and that I still wrestle with daily to keep from controlling me. One of them is food, but my real Achilles heel is ice cream.

Eleven years ago, my wife and I were building a house. While we were building a house, we moved into a little apartment complex on Murfreesboro Road. Across the street in the shopping center was a Baskin Robbins. About 8:00 every night, two hours after our evening meal there was this little churning in my stomach. I'd say, "I believe I'm going to go across the street." It started out slow, one dip. In a couple of weeks, it was two scoops. Within a month, I said, "give me pint and don't put on the lid, just stick a spoon in there." In eight months, I gained 30 pounds. But thank God, I broke that addiction. I'd like to tell you that I applied all these spiritual principles. I didn't, we moved. Baskin Robbins just went "out of sight and out of mind." The key to overcoming temptation is planning in advance not to be around it.

Can I give our teenagers a little word of advice? About a year ago, a year ago this month, a lot of our teens went through a great program called, "True Love Waits," where you made a commitment to stay sexually pure until marriage. I hope you're still on track with that commitment, but if you're going to fulfill that commitment, here's a great piece of advice. You don't wait till you're in the back seat of a car, or you're sitting alone on a couch at your date's house alone, to then ask yourself the question: Do I want to stay pure? If you wait to that point, it's going to be too late. You plan in advance; you decide to avoid the temptation in advance.

Teen, if you want to live your life the way God wants you to live it, you plan your dates. My youth ministers told me a long time ago, "You either go by your plans, or your glands." Let me tell you, you want to go by your plans. Don't you give the devil an opportunity to make you fall! One fellow quit smoking, and somebody asked him, "How did you quit smoking?" I love his answer, he said, "I wet my matches." That's good. Every time he tried to get it out and strike one, he couldn't get that match to strike. He planned in advance.

"Do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:27) It's like climbing a mountain, you get a foothold that allows him to step up and get another foothold, then another and another. Don't let the devil be the king of your mountain. You start by not letting him get a foothold. That may mean you have to choose new friends, get a new job or move somewhere else. The Bible says, "Flee from temptation." You don't toy with it or flirt with it, you run from it. If we're honest, when we flee from temptation, most of us leave a forwarding address. Sometimes we say, "I'll be right down the road, come see me, down there." We want to play with it. Playing with the temptation will not work - you must distance yourself from it.

6) Opt for something better.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7) The battle for your life is fought in your mind. Whatever captures my attention, captures me.

My thoughts control my emotions, my emotions control my decisions, and my decisions control my actions, right? The beginning point of the end product, our actions, starts with our thinking. If you have an addiction, a sin that is

mastering your life and you are pretending you could break, you can't break it because it's got you by the throat, I will assure you that you dwell on it every day mentally. In fact, you may be dwelling on it every single hour.

The real key to resisting temptation is not in resisting but refocusing. Do you understand? The real key to resisting temptation is not in the resisting, it's the refocusing. You can't just look at that temptation that's got you by the throat and say, "No, no, no, I don't want it, I don't want it, I don't want it," when every ounce of your flesh desires it. You do want it. That won't work. If you just try to resist, you'll lose. However, you must refocus your attention, you mentally change channels so that when temptation calls, you drop the phone. You don't try to argue by saying "I don't want that; I don't want that" because it is a lie. That's why it's a temptation. The only way you'll have victory over temptation is to refocus your attention on something else, whatever you concentrate on gets you.

That's why so many people fail on a diet. What do you think about while you're on a diet? Food! You say, "Fifteen more minutes and I can have another celery stick." You sit there and look at that clock." Resistance will not work, you must refocus.

I took my mother to the doctor the other day. She's had to go on insulin because of diabetes. But we were in the office talking with the doctor. I was hungry when I went in, but over on the side on the table, he had a big old gunky yellow model of a five-pound blob of fat. I saw it and kept staring and I lost that hunger real fast. Why did I lose my desire for something to eat? It was by refocusing.

Paul says in Philippians 4:8 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable---if anything is excellent or praiseworthy---think about such things." Do you realize that's called the principle of replacement? You replace the bad with the good, because nature will not allow a vacuum. When you say that your gas tank is empty, it's not empty, it's full of air. You fill it back up, it's full of gas and the air is gone. When you think "I'm going to get rid of this thought", it will come right back if it's not replaced by something better. That's the principle of replacement. It's the principle of a positive affection. Opt for something better.

Don't sit around all day saying, "No, I don't want to be drunk. No, I don't want to give in to sexual desire. No, I don't want to use all my money gambling. No, I don't want to keep smoking." Whatever the problem, that's the wrong way to fight it. The Bible says, you fill your mind with positive things. That's part of knowing the truth, and letting the truth set you free. Opt for something better.

7) Make solid relationships.

Every human being needs a support group. You may not want to call it that, but you sure need it, and so do I. Every person needs a circle of caring people to give him reinforcement and support. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 4:9, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" That's truer spiritually than it is physically.

January 1st people make resolutions to become a new person. "I'm going to break all my bad habits," and then what? Two months later we are right back into the same old thing. There's a cycle.

We are not what we want to be, and so we humble ourselves. We say, "God, I need your help. I'm failing." The Bible says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He'll lift you up." So, we humble ourselves, God gives us the power to do better. We start doing better and after a few weeks or a couple of months, we start getting proud about how good we're doing. Beware! "Pride goes before a fall." We go right back down. We get down in the depths and we begin to humble ourselves again, and the cycle goes over and over.

How do you break that cycle? You need friends. You need Christian friends who will pray for you, who will care for you, who will encourage you, who will help make you accountable and keep you on track. Two are better than one, because they pick each other up.

I'll give you a parallel verse to this, so important. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16) Did you understand? Now tell me the truth, do you like that verse? "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you..." Do you like that verse? Oh, be honest, you don't like that verse much. I think it's the least obeyed verse in the Bible. We don't want to confess our sins to each other. Nobody does. I don't want to open up. Now it says, "so that we may be healed." We like that part. We want to be healed.

We want the power to break the addiction grip on my life. That comes only by confessing my sin, not only to God, but to each other. That doesn't necessarily mean in front of all the brethren and giving a generic statement. I think in the context that James wrote it, it meant more to a select few Christian brothers and sisters, who know me, who love me, who trust me, and whom I trust implicitly and who I know will talk to me every day and say, "how are you doing? I prayed for you today."

Now many of you are thinking right now, I have this addiction that is mastering me. I want to break it, but I don't want anybody to know about my problems. I don't give you any hope of ever coming to a lasting solution. I don't give you any hope at all. Because that's the attitude, I can do it on my own, I don't need God. I'll take it all by myself. That attitude will keep you in bondage.

It is essential that we learn to live transparently before God and before the people in our lives who love us the most. Just say, "I have strengths, and I have weaknesses. This is me." The Church, Christian people not the church building, is designed by God to be transparent so we can encourage one another and pray for one another. It is the number one reason God designed a church in the first place. That's why you need to be in some kind of small group. It may be a care group, a Bible study group, just a group of friends who live around you or Christian friends you've developed over years. But you need close, intimate friends where you can sit down sometime with tears in your eyes and say, "I'm burned out, I'm about as depressed as I can get." Or where you can look them in the eye and say to maybe others your age, "I'm having trouble parenting. I've got a child that I don't know what to do with, and I'm at the end of my rope." They will probably look at you and say, "I didn't know anybody else was the same way, but I'm that way, too."

You need somebody close enough in your life that you can look in the eye and say, "You know five years ago I went on a business trip, and I started nipping a little bit of booze, and I didn't think anything of it. But now, I drink every day and I hide it in the closet, and I don't want anybody to know that I'm addicted." Until you can get a group of people that you can confide in, you'll stay in your addiction.

To paraphrase James 5:16, revealing your feeling is the first step to healing. Others of you are thinking, well I'm going to quit. I'm just not going to tell anybody. That's a cop-out. That's making provisions for the flesh, Romans 14:13. You're guaranteeing failure by making an escape hatch so that you can bail out and nobody will know you ever failed. Everybody needs a support group.

Summary

Seven steps to freedom, straight from the Word, clear as a bell, no mistaking and no short cutting.

- 1) Freedom starts today.
- 2) Refuse to blame others.
- 3) Examine your life.
- 4) Employ Christ's sovereignty.

- 5) Distance yourself from temptation.
- 6) Opt for something better.
- 7) Make solid relationships.

"The God who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:4) When God heals me of my addiction, my life-controlling sin, I receive comfort from him. This is the very same comfort I'll pass on to somebody else. The best people to help somebody overcome a particular addiction, whether it is booze, workaholism, or whatever, are people who've come out of the same thing. Because the comfort they've received from God, God uses them to pass it on. That's what we need to be and do. We want to be more that way.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1198

Questions:

1. God is
 - a. Love
 - b. Righteous (just)
 - c. Truth
 - d. Mercy
 - e. Peace
 - f. All the above
 - g. a and c
 - h. a, c and e
2. All mankind is a slave to whatever has mastered him?
True False
3. When is it time to start controlling your life?
 - a. Tomorrow
 - b. As soon as time is available
 - c. Today
4. Who is to blame for your addiction or lack of self-control?
 - a. Parents
 - b. Society
 - c. Someone else
 - d. Self
5. How does one identify their addiction or lack of self-control?
 - a. See a doctor
 - b. Seek help from a friend
 - c. Self examination
6. People are afraid to submit to Christ because they think it means no more fun or freedom?
True False
7. Flirting with a temptation is okay as long as one does not yield to the temptation?
True False
8. The battle for your life is fought in your mind (heart)?
True False

God's Principles on Pain

This lesson is about myths involving pain. We are a very pain-conscious society. Everywhere you turn there are ads for pain relievers and painkillers. Technology has led us from aspirin to Tylenol to Ibuprofen to Naproxen to I don't even know what's out there. It seems like the whole world has a headache, doesn't it?

One of the facts of life is that we all face problems, and we all feel pain. As long as we are alive, we are going to have pain. You are going to have physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. The world gives us a whole collection of myths about what to do with that pain.

The world basically says pain is an awful thing. It's the worst thing you can experience. So just avoid problems if you possibly can; don't face them. Two major myths the world would have you believe are (a) ignore it, it will go away and (b) escape it, take a drink, a pill or something else. All myths have a grain of appeal in the short term, but they tend to bring major misery in the long run.

The eminent psychologist Scott Peck said, "Fearing pain, almost all of us to one degree or another, attempt to avoid problems. We procrastinate, hoping they will go away. We ignore and pretend they don't exist. We attempt to get out of them, rather than to suffer through them." He concluded with, "This tendency to avoid problems and the emotional pain inherent in them is the primary basis for human mental illness." Did you hear that? "The tendency to avoid problems and pain inherent in them is the primary basis for human mental illness." He's right, and the fact is God doesn't want you to ignore your pain. He doesn't really want you to run from your pain. God wants you to discover the cause of your pain and then go to the root for real relief.

Pain is like a warning light on the dashboard of your car. When that warning light comes on, it indicates that something is wrong. You can take a hammer and crash it if you want to ignore it, or you can just turn your head. But the fact of the matter is, if you're prudent, you'll go find out what's causing the problem (or pain) and cure it. The myth then is to run from pain, to ignore pain, to find an escape from it. The truth is that pain is a tool that God uses to bring good in my life. The problem is, we don't tend to understand it or recognize the good that pain can ultimately bring to our lives.

This lesson is not how to do away with your pain. Nothing short of death will do that. It is to help us to understand pain. Once we understand a purpose behind pain, it's a lot easier to deal with.

Those of you who are ex-athletes can remember the endless practices in whatever sport you were involved in. You would have the conditioning time, lining up and doing those wind sprints. You think your legs were going to buckle and your lungs were going to explode, but you knew there was a greater purpose than just the running. It was to accomplish something better.

God uses our pain to:

1. Motivate me.

He uses my pain to spur me into action. Some people are so afraid to go to the dentist that the only thing that will make them go is a pain that is greater than their fear. Pain can be a great motivator. I like what some wise fellow said, "We don't change when we see the light, we change when we feel the heat." That's when we're motivated to make a change. The alcoholic, drug addict and chemically dependent will seldom seek help before they hit bottom. To hit bottom, simply means, experiencing enough pain physically, emotionally, and spiritually, that their pain is worse than

their desire for the drug. They say, "I can't see going on like this anymore." Nothing short of that will get them to change.

In the Bible, the parable of the Prodigal Son is the classic example. He goes to father and says, "I want all that's due to me, and I want it right now." Then he takes it and goes to some far country where he just wastes it, he blows it. The Bible says he went out looking for a job. He got a job feeding pigs, it's a shame and disgrace for a Jewish boy to feed pigs, but he got so hungry he would have scooted the pigs over and got right down there and eaten with them. The hunger pain motivated him.

2. To mold me.

Pain will mold or shape me like clay into what I need to be. David said, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." (Psalm 119:71) David says pain is a teaching tool. It makes us pliable. God uses pain not just to motivate me, just to get me off square one; he then uses it but to mold me, to teach me. It's like a bit in a horse's mouth. Are you equestrians or raised on a farm with a horse or a mule? You put that bit there and just the slightest pull causes the pain. It causes the horse to go one way or the other. That's the way God uses our pain. Somebody says that God whispers to us in our pleasure, but he SHOUTS to us in our pain. Has God ever shouted to you through your pain?

Aristotle rightly observed that there are some things that a human can only learn through pain. Mark Twain putting it in his homespun way said, "If a cat ever sits on a hot stove, he'll never sit on a hot stove again." Of course, he'll never sit on a cold one either. But the point is, by being burned, he learned like that cat. There are some things you can learn only by being burned.

Has God ever gotten your attention through pain? I know some workaholics. God has gotten their attention through an ulcer, through angina. I know some workaholics for whom God has gotten their attention through emotional pain when their spouse came to them and said, "I'm not putting up with it anymore."

Some folks have been overextended financially, been up to their eyes in debt, leveraged everything they owned, had a severe case of "wantitis." Do you know what happened? They got burned. If they've got an ounce of common sense, they learned through that pain. You don't want pain to be the only or the main source of your total education. You're going to have an extremely miserable life if that's the case. But some of life's deepest insights are learned only at the expense of pain. Those lessons are there because God loves you. He will motivate, and mold you.

3. To measure me.

It helps us see what we are really like on the inside. For instance, when I experience pain, the way I react to it measures my faith. My commitment can be measured by how I react to pain. My maturity is measured by how I react to pain. My patience is measured by how I react to pain. Your problems and the pain that they bring with them are among the best ways to see what's inside of you. The reason pain is among the best barometers of what's inside of you is because it's impossible to maintain an image when you're in pain.

Now let's be honest, we all project images, don't we? Sure, you do. We project physical images. We comb our hair and we brush our teeth. Ladies, you put on your make-up. We project a social image. We smile and we have pleasant social conversation. But give yourself three days at home with the flu and see how much any of those things matter to you. You just drag into the bathroom and look into the mirror, you've got that bad case of bed-head look, like a wreck and you don't care. The pain has stripped away the image.

Now that's not just true physically. That's true with emotional pain. All the time, people will get up, dress up and go

to work. They've got their image shields up, but underneath, there is a personal problem, there is a relationship problem, there is a sin that's beginning to dominate their life. It's no longer got just a foothold; it's developing a stronghold over their heart. As that pain intensifies, sooner or later in front of somebody, those images will come down. Sooner or later, that person will fall and just break down. The image is gone and as unpleasant as that sounds, God says that's not really bad because you ought to be more concerned about your character than your image. Pain tests character.

You may say, "I'm a person of integrity." But when the pain gets intense, you'll find out if you stand for the truth or if you buckle under. You may declare, "I'm committed to Christ." But, when pain is there, you'll run to what you're most committed. The real question is: What does pain say about your life? When you're in a squeeze, what comes out of you? Are you a fair-weathered believer or a consistent believer?

As long as things were okay, the Children of Israel were okay, but when pain came, they yielded. This is the reason they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years instead of getting to the Promised Land. God says, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way into the desert these 40 years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." (Deuteronomy 8:2) After they had gone through a parted Red Sea and seen the Egyptians defeated, they yielded to the pain of thirst and began griping and complaining. This pain of thirst measured their hearts. God knew they were not ready to obey His commands. They were not ready to have a commitment that will extend through pain. In my pain, God measures me.

4. To monitor me.

God will use my pain to keep me on track, just to put parameters around me and just make sure that I don't get too far afield. For example, a fever is the way your body is telling you that you may have an infection somewhere. The pain you feel with a sore throat tells you that there is a deeper problem. But if you never have either or those symptoms, those problems could have gotten much worse, maybe even life threatening. God uses pain to monitor us and to allow us to monitor ourselves.

A practical application of this is painful emotions. These painful emotions are telling you that something is out of kilter. When I feel depressed over a prolonged period of time, feel resentful and I can't get over it, feel increasingly hostile, totally fearful, or get apathetic and say, "Nothing matters," my painful emotions are telling me something is wrong. They are our barometers. They are letting us know. We should get a thing checked out. Pain is a monitoring device for our protection.

Two thousand years ago Shepherds who had a sheep or a lamb that was a little too aggressive or tended to get a little wayward would break its legs. They still do that today. After they break its legs, they put a splint on it. That little old sheep can hardly move. It just pegs around a little bit. I know that sounds cruel, but they're doing it for their protection.

Sometimes God puts a splint on your life to keep you from wandering too far from the flock. You may resent it, resist it and you may curse it, but it's because God loves you.

Do you recall the story of Joseph? It's a story of pain. He was betrayed by his brothers and sold by them into slavery. He goes to a place where he doesn't know the people, he doesn't know the language or the customs. He is a slave in a man's house, but he walks uprightly and faithfully. While he is there he is falsely accused by his master's wife, thrown into prison and forgotten. Years later he comes out and by God's amazing providence, rises the second in charge of all Egypt. But even then, there's a pain. There's a pain of about 20 years knowing that he was abandoned by his family.

Finally, his brothers come down looking for food and Joseph reveals himself to them and all the family comes down, but at the very end of the book of Genesis, after Jacob, Joseph's father, dies, all of his brothers feared that Joseph was going to get even. He's going to get his revenge. Instead, Joseph said, "You intended it for my harm, but God intended it for good." You intended it for harm, but that's all right, God intended it for good. God was monitoring Joseph's life all along. He was watching him. God used the pain in Joseph's life to motivate him, to mold him, and to measure him for greatness.

There are people in your life who mean to harm you. We all have those people. They may have harmed you as a child, they may be harming you right now, physically, emotionally, some other way and it hurts. But the great news I have for you is that God says to you, I've got a plan, I've got a purpose that's bigger than that. They may mean it for your harm, but don't worry, I'm your God and I'm going to work it out for your good.

At the end of Joseph's life, we find out he had two sons. One of them was named Manasseh and the other one was named Ephraim. I don't know about you, but I like the meaning of names. Manasseh means "he made me forget" and Ephraim means, "fruitful" or "successful." Joseph named his two boys that because Joseph realized that in all the pain he had endured, God worked and monitored his life for preparing him for greatness. He said, "God has made me forget that pain and now he has made me successful. He has made me fruitful." Folks, God will use that same pain that you feel to monitor you to greatness. But you must allow Him to do so.

5. To mature me.

It is possible to grow spiritually and emotionally during bright, healthy, cheerful, sunny days of spring and summer, when everything is going great, and life is fantastic. You can grow during good times but will grow far more and far deeper in the dark days of the soul. You will grow far deeper in the valleys than on the mountains. That's just the way humans are made.

Through the years, people have told me countless times as they have gone through the valley, "I've learned more this past year being out of work, than I've ever known prior to that time." Somebody said, "I've learned more through this financial crisis than I ever could have matured any other way." Speaking of the death of a loved one somebody said, "I didn't know how to trust in God until I went through this, and now I know how to trust in God." These are true statements because grace does grow best in winter. That's when God matures you.

Jesus's brother said, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything." (James 1:2, 3) He said all the perseverance and all the problems work together so you can be mature and complete. Pain is the high cost of growth! We've heard it since we were kids, it's trite but it's true, there is no gain without pain. Contrary to what the world wants to tell you there are no five easy steps to a wonderful life.

The truth of the matter is that we live in a time when we want the product without paying the price.

The product we want is maturity, emotional stability, a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, happiness and wisdom. That's the product we all want, but we don't want to pay the price. The price is pain in one form or another. There are no shortcuts.

The very thing that is discouraging you the most, God is using to develop you. The apostle Paul said, "I've got a thorn in my flesh, and three times I sought the Lord and said, 'Lord, take that thorn away from me.'" (2 Corinthians 12:7 - 10) We don't know what that thorn was and I'm glad we don't, because we can relate to it. But I know one thing about

a thorn. It hurts. I've never had a thorn in me that didn't hurt. It brought pain. As badly as he wanted the pain of my thorn taken away Paul concluded, after God refused to remove the thorn, "through it I learned how desperately I needed the presence of Jesus Christ in my life."

You really don't know that Jesus Christ is all you need until Jesus Christ is all you've got and then you'll know.

Amazing Grace lesson #1247

Questions:

1. You can ignore most problems and they will go away?
True _____ False _____
2. Pain is used by God to bring good into one's life?
True _____ False _____
3. Pain motivates some into action
True _____ False _____
4. Pain is an education tool as it causes one to change?
True _____ False _____
5. Pain measures the internal man?
True _____ False _____
6. Painful emotions are telling you that something is out of control?
True _____ False _____

Chapter 11

Self-Control Set Me Free

Sometime back I received a piece of direct mail. It was colorful and on the outside of the envelope it said: "If you have ever felt fat, clumsy, or depressed, this letter is for you." Wow! I couldn't resist. I opened it up and "For only \$29.95 plus \$3 for shipping and handling," they would send you this kit that would take care of all your problems. Change your life for only \$29.95!

When I see that stuff, I wonder who buys those things. I know the answer. People like you and me, people who want to get things that are out of control in their lives and wanted them under control. Did you know that over 2,000 new self-help books flood the market each year? We just gobble those things up. Why? Because they are things and habits in our lives that are out of control, things like temper.

Do you have a problem with your temper? You may be like the wife who said: my husband is very temperamental. He's 90 percent temper and 10 percent mental. Anybody have a problem with spending? Anybody got spending out of control? If you do, you need this bumper sticker, "Anybody who says money can't buy happiness, just doesn't know where to shop." Anybody have a problem with mood swings, eating or procrastination, drinking, sexual desires or some other addiction?

How can we really break free from these life deforming habits and hurts and hang-ups?

The Problem

Why is it that we have these things and can't seem to get out of the cycle? Well Paul tells us in Romans 7:15-8, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Can you relate to what Paul is saying? Paul said, all the things that I want to do, I don't seem to do, and all the things that I really want to refrain from doing, I just go ahead and do them.

Have you ever broken a bad habit only to have it return maybe within a matter of days? Let me give you an example. How many of you made New Year's resolutions? How many have kept all the resolutions you made? Probably none of us, because resolutions will not suffice. Good intentions are seldom good enough. It takes more to change.

How many times have you promised, "I'll never smoke another cigarette again"? How many times have you promised yourself, or your family, or God, "I'm not going to lose my temper anymore," or, "I'm never going to drink again," or, "I really am going to begin my diet tomorrow," or, "I'm going to be a better father, I'll never strike you again," only to drift right back into the behavior from which you came.

The Results

1. Frustration. The apostle Paul tells us three things. He said, "The first result is, it's frustrating." It's greatly frustrating. "I do not understand what I do." Why do I keep making the same mistakes? Why do I do what I don't want to do? Why do I do things that I know are bad for me?

2. Confusion. Paul said, I had the desire to do what's right, but not the power. If you've ever been on a diet, you know that goes. You start out the morning with great resolution and intention, don't you? Then as the day begins to go on, do you watch that resolution begin to drift away? So, by the time you get home, you're so hungry you could eat a almost anything and everything. By that time, my idea of a balanced diet is a Big Mac in both hands. That's the way we are. I want to change, but I don't know how. I have the motivation, but I don't have the determination. I've got the desire, but I don't have the power.

The reason self-help books don't work is that they don't empower us to do it. They'll tell a negative person to stop being negative. I've known hundreds, perhaps thousands of negative people in my life. I've never known one to change by my saying to them, "Just stop being negative." Have you? The self-help books tell the procrastinators "Try to get there 10 minutes early." They know that that's why they bought the self-help book. They can't get there; they just keep putting things off.

3. Defeat and discouragement. "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) Paul said, I'm losing the battle. I'm defeated. I just can't change. How many promises have I made to God and to myself that I've broken, often within a matter of a few hours? So, you just want to throw up your hands and say, "I'm tired of trying." If you have felt that way or if you feel that way today, do I have some great news for you. You can change, and the power is there. You don't have to stay in this cycle of failure/defeat, failure/defeat, failure/defeat, over and over. The Bible makes clear the principles of how you can gain control over that which is out of control.

The promise

Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The secret to personal change is not willpower. That's not enough. The secret to personal change isn't a pill. The secret to personal change isn't hypnosis, it's not a fat farm or some gimmick. Jesus said, the way to break free from the habits, hurts, and addictions in your life, is by knowing the truth.

But how can that be? How does knowing the truth set me free from my bad habits? To unlock the secret of Jesus' statement, you've got to remember a basic axiom. Your thoughts control your emotions, and your emotions control your decisions, and your decisions control your actions. Do you see that? That's the way it always flows. Have you ever said, "He makes me so mad"? He can't make you mad. She can't make you mad. They don't have that power. What you are really saying is "every time I look at him, I think negative thoughts". Those negative thoughts may result from remembering something that happened in the past. Consequently, I get a negative emotion which leads to negative decisions. These negative decisions may even lead you to a very negative action.

It all starts with the thought process. Solomon in Proverbs 23:7 stated, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." If I'm acting depressed, it's because I'm feeling depressed. I'm feeling depressed because I am thinking depressed thoughts. Most of us try to work on the action not the cause. We try to work on the external things. God says, you've got to start with your thinking.

That's why Jesus says, if you know the truth, if you'll focus on the truth, it will set you free. Bad beliefs lead to bad behavior. Every behavior you have is based on a belief. It's based on a value in your life that you have either consciously or unconsciously. This is important: Behind every self-defeating behavior is a lie that I'm believing. If you are involved in a wrong behavior, the root cause is you are believing something that is not true. The devil is fooling me and deceiving me.

The prescription

1. Admit my problem.

Admit the root of my problem. That's the starting point for breaking free. Most of us have this vague feeling that something is wrong with me. We don't know what it is, and we can't put our finger on it, but something just doesn't seem to be right.

God put his finger on it. He says your basic problem is your basic attitude of life, regardless of your hang-up. This attitude has a name, it's a word that we don't hear much anymore, it's not hip, it's not cool, and one certainly won't hear it in the media. The word is disgusting and repulsive. It is SIN.

You and I have all kinds of wrong perceptions about sin. Sin is not, first and foremost, doing drugs, getting drunk, robbing a bank or running off with somebody's wife. Those things are really the second wave of sin. They are the result of the underlying sin. The root problem is an attitude that says, "I'm in charge, and I don't need God." That is the core of what Paul called in Romans 7, the sinful nature. It's man's oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. I'm going to ignore God, and I'm going to do my way, my own thing.

Every one of us is grappling daily with that basic response attitude of sin. We wrestle every day in that tug-of-war. Who's in charge, me or God?

John said "If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Put that together with what Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." So, by denying your sin, you have no truth in you.

We act like we've got it all together. Who do you think you're trying to fool? If you're acting like nothing ever gets out of control in your life, are you trying to fool God? Are you trying to fool other people? You're only fooling yourself. Nobody has it all together. Every one of us every day has that tug-of-war. When you pretend you have everything together and that you're in charge, you're only hurting yourself.

2. Stop deceiving myself.

I have to stop deceiving myself. That's worth repeating. In order to stop defeating myself, I have to stop deceiving myself. The root problem is, I think I'm in charge and I don't need God. We are not made to live that way.

When an alcoholic goes to Alcohol Anonymous the very first thing required of him is to admit, "I am powerless to control my situation and my life has become unmanageable." Too often we have to hit rock bottom before we admit anything, not when we feel a little heat, but when the fire is out of control. Then we begin to say "maybe I could use a little help."

Most people wait too late to seek help. They wait too late to admit the problem. I have men come into my office and say, "my wife dropped a bombshell on me. She said, she's fed up with my neglect, my abuse, my vile tongue, my temper and she's walking out. What can I do? I need help." Down deep I'm sitting there thinking there's often very little that I can do, very little, because he has waited too long.

- a. Admit your problem. You have a hang-up in life, come clean with it in the mirror, and before the Almighty God.
- b. Believe that Christ can change me. Remember Romans 7:24, "Who can deliver me from this body of death? ... Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul said the answer to my problem is a person. Through Jesus Christ, God will provide the power that you are lacking. If you don't believe that, you won't get rid of your hang-ups. Because "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2) There's a way-out folks. The law of the Spirit of Christ will set me free.

If I were to go outside and, on the grass, somewhere find a dead bird, pick that little bird up, that dead bird, throw it in the air and say, "Fly," what's going to happen? It's going to fall back down. I pick it up and throw it back up and say, "Fly!" It's going to fall back down. What is the only thing that's going to make that bird fly? The only thing that is going to make him fly is a new life, become a new creation. He doesn't need to turn over a new leaf, he needs a new life. He needs power under those wings. A new life is the only thing that's going to make him fly.

Why don't you try Jesus? I've seen him change hundreds and hundreds of lives. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; behold the old is gone, and the new has come." That's the truth for anyone who will let Christ do His transforming work. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A few years ago, a letter was printed in Time magazine in response to its cover story, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Of course, the article had all these opinions from many scholars. Mike Mandel wrote "As far as I'm concerned, the liberal theologians can keep their historical Jesus and their cut and paste Bible. I'm a former alcoholic and adulterer set free by the pow-er of the living Christ Jesus. Who cares about higher criticism when the resurrected Son of God can transform you here and now?" Amen, Mike, Amen!

Paul says, in 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (self-control)" Some of you who were baptized into Christ a long time ago are holding back. You're not committing all that you are to him, you're holding back, you're also holding on. You're holding on to your addictions, to your hang-ups, and to your perpetual sins.

You have bought the world's lie that if you've really committed all that you are to Jesus Christ, you'd become some kind of weird fanatic. You'd sell everything today. You would just be absolutely weird. Folks, that's a lie. You would be in self-control because Christ is controlling you. You'd be powerful. You'd be loving. You'd be the person you've always dreamed of being. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17) That's the foundation for our study.

Amazing Grace lesson #1196

Questions:

1. The reasons for lack of self-control are?
 - a. Frustration
 - b. Confusion
 - c. Defeat and discouragement
 - d. Improper training Inherited
 - e. a, b and c
 - f. a, b and d
 - g. a, b and e
 - h. a, c and e

2. The secret to personal change is willpower
True False

3. Your thoughts control your emotions
True False

4. Your emotions control your decisions
True False

5. Your decisions control your action
True False

6. As a man thinks in his heart, mind, so is he
True False

7. One can overcome lack of self-control by
 - a. Stop deceiving self
 - b. Admit there is a problem
 - c. Commit life to Christ
 - d. a and c
 - e. b and c
 - f. a, b and c

8. God gave us a spirit of
 - a. Timidity
 - b. Power
 - c. Love
 - d. Self-discipline
 - e. a, b and c
 - f. a, c and d
 - g. a, b, c and d
 - h. b, c and d

How to Handle Pressure

Let's take a poll. How many of you have at least one worry? We do worry, don't we? We live in an era where we are filled and bombarded by stress, anxiety, worry, and pressure. In fact, we are literally worrying ourselves sick. The American Psychiatric Association has labeled ours "The Age of Anxiety," and their diagnosis is borne out simply by the facts. The American Academy of Physicians say that at least two-thirds of all the patients they see come to them with stress-related illnesses. Then, the three best selling prescription drugs are: 1) Tagamet, an ulcer medication: 2) Enderol, a medicine for hypertension and 3) valium, a tranquilizer.

In 1988, Newsweek magazine ran an article that projected that American businesses lose over \$150 billion a year through stress and anxiety related illnesses. Now the amazing thing is we really don't have all that much to worry about. Consider 40 percent of the things we worry about never happen, 30 percent concern old decisions that can no longer be changed and 12 percent center on criticism which is often untrue and usually made by people who feel inferior. Incidentally, most of life's critics are people who have a deep inferiority complex. A few percent of all the things we worry about relate to our health, which if we worry about will only make it worse. That leaves only eight percent of all the things that could even begin to be labeled "legitimate," needing mental attention. But, the truth of the matter is, you and I don't often hearken to those statistics. Instead, we tend to be engulfed by worry over and over again.

I want to share with you some things that Jesus had to say about a prescription for an antidote to worry and to stress. During the last week of Jesus' life, He is undergoing great anxiety. He knew He was going to die. He makes that declaration to His disciples in John 13. He tells them He's going to die and one of them was going to betray Him. In chapter 14, He states the good news that He is going away to prepare a place for them. In John 15 & 16, He tells the disciples the bad news. He says, the world is going to hate you just like it has hated me, you're going to scatter and I won't be able to find a single one of you. Then Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace." (John 16:33) Underline John 16:33 in your Bible, then highlight "in me" with a yellow highlighter. When Christ dwells in you and you dwell in Christ, you can have peace.

Later in the same verse he said, "In this world you will have trouble." That's right. Put your hope in the world. Get involved in all worldly things, you'll have trouble. You'll have anxiety, strife and stress. But then he said, "take heart! I have overcome the world."

The umbrella statement is, if we are in Jesus, we can have peace. Our Lord gives us a prescription for overcoming worry that is tremendous. "After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.'" (John 17:1-4)

Why would Jesus be under stress? Why would he need to say these things about peace? He had every reason in the world.

1. He was misunderstood.

One of the reasons you and I tend to come under stress and pressure is when we are misunderstood. They misunderstood Jesus' motive. They misunderstood his mission. They misunderstood his message.

2. He was not accepted.

Don't you feel stress when someone around you doesn't accept you? Particularly your peers. It was the peers of Jesus who didn't accept him. The religious people, the ones who were looking for a Messiah, but they turned him away.

3. He was tempted.

That's why he felt stress. Hebrews 4:15 said he was tempted in all points like as we. I'm going to go a little farther than that. I think Jesus knew temptations that you and I can't even imagine. He was tempted to take a shortcut around the cross and you and I can't identify with that. We don't have the option of saving the world.

4. He had many enemies.

Now you and I know something about that. Any one of us have some people who don't care a great deal for us, but if the truth be known, I don't know that I have anybody that really wants to crucify me, to take my life or wrench it away from me.

5. His disciples were slow learners.

That would have killed me. I'm just not as patient as our Lord. He spent over three years with them day and night trying to let it all sink in and they still couldn't figure it out. He loved them enough to die for them. I think I would have wanted to kill them. They were slow learners. He faced the stress and pressure of tremendous responsibility. Victory over sin, victory over the grave, the opportunity of salvation, the opportunity of heaven for every single human being, all that was on his shoulders. That's pressure and his time running out.

6. He was going to hand over the advancement of the kingdom into the hands of infallible men.

How did Jesus deal with it and how does he tell you and me to deal with it?

1. Jesus knew who to go to.

Feeling all this pressure he says, Father, I've got to talk to you. You and I need to know and practice what Jesus knew and practiced.

2. He knew why he came to earth.

He had a purpose and when he says, Father, the time the hour has come, he's saying his mission is just about complete.

3. Jesus gave up his rights.

It relieved a tremendous amount of pressure. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you." Why would Jesus pray that the Father glorify Him? Jesus was God come in the flesh. He was part of the Trinity. He was part of the Godhead. But, you see He had to pray that God glorify Him because Jesus in coming to this earth and taking on the human form of a servant had given up his rights. Folks, I want to tell you something that too many of us don't know. It's amazing the pressure that comes from each one of us trying to protect every inch of the turf of our rights. We don't want to yield on this, we don't want to relinquish on this, and we are going to guard every right to fight for the chance. Jesus gave up his rights and it relieved a tremendous amount of pressure.

4. He had something to give.

He was granted the authority over all people that he might give eternal life. He had something to give all right; it was the greatest gift of all time. It is eternal life to everybody who would come to him, put their trust in Him and obey His gospel.

5. He did a good job.

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."

How do you and I get relief from stress and pressure that we face every day? We do the same thing Jesus did.

1. Turn everything over to God.

Like Jesus, we too must turn everything over to God. "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Two observations a) God is concerned about me. God cares for me; He cares for you and He cares for all of us; b) He cares about everything in my life. He said "cast all your anxieties."

2. Understand your purpose in life.

We've been created with different abilities all for the purpose of glorifying God and serving others. When you have a purpose in life, it can help you handle pressure. Now one of the things that I do following Jesus' lead is when I feel the pressures coming in on me and I feel them like you do, when I feel stressed, I revert back to my basic purpose in life.

3. Give up your rights.

This is probably the one most of us need work on and the one that gives us the greatest difficulty because we live in a culture that is so filled with assertiveness training. It's contrary to the way the world thinks. There are five destructive emotions that damage and hamper our life - resentment, bitterness, anger, hatred, and fear. They'll eat you up and they'll spit you out and I will guarantee you that a major source of each of those five is often when people are not willing to give up their rights.

I want you to think with me for a moment. It is rare for you to have an argument over an issue if you understand and practice this principle. Now let me be clear, I'm not talking about being a wimp or a perpetual dish rag. There are a few things in life that are worth drawing a line in the sand for, but not 98 percent of the time that we do. I found that the really strong people in this world are the ones who are willing to yield their rights. It's the weak who fight for their turf. The greatest example I know is Jesus. Philippians 2:5, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."

I have observed in my lifetime that fighting for rights can make you do some awfully foolish things. When Abraham Lincoln lived a rich man loaned a poor man \$2.50 and after a while the poor man was unable to repay, the rich man was so upset he went to Lincoln and asked for representation. Lincoln didn't want to take the case, but he came back and said, well I'll tell you what. You give me \$10 up front and I'll take it. The man gave him \$10 then Lincoln went to the poor man and gave him \$5. He said, "you take \$2.50 of this and pay him back and you can keep that \$2.50" and Lincoln pocketed \$5.00. You see that man spent \$10 to get \$2.50 back. You may say, people don't do those kinds of stupid things. You wouldn't believe what I've seen husbands and wives accuse each other of doing as they fight for their rights instead of yielding.

4. Be a generous person.

That's what Jesus did. You give things away it relieves pressure. Be generous with your prayer, your money, and your talents.

5. Glorify God with excellence.

Do the best you can do in a day, then go to bed and put your head on the pillow. It's amazing how good you feel. Some of the stress that we feel in the world is when we know we have not done what we could have done, it haunts us. Just do your best and then feel the relief as the stress lessens.

Amazing Grace Lesson #1108

Questions:

1. Which statements regarding worry are true?
 - a. _____ 40% of concerns do not ever occur
 - b. _____ 30 % are old decisions that cannot be changed
 - c. _____ 12 % are based on untrue criticism
 - d. _____ All the above
 - e. _____ None of the above

2. Peace is found in?
 - a. _____ Loving family
 - b. _____ Financial security
 - c. _____ In Jesus

3. In this world you will have trouble?
True _____ False _____

4. Jesus was under stressful situations because
 - a. _____ He was misunderstood
 - b. _____ He was not accepted
 - c. _____ He was tempted
 - d. _____ He had many enemies
 - e. _____ His disciples were slow learners
 - f. _____ All the above

4. Jesus overcame stress because
 - a. _____ He knew who to go to
 - b. _____ He knew why He came to earth
 - c. _____ He gave up His rights
 - d. _____ He had a purpose and something to give
 - e. _____ He did a good job
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ b and d

5. We can overcome stress and pressure by
 - a. _____ Turning our life over to God
 - b. _____ Understanding the purpose of life
 - c. _____ Giving up our rights
 - d. _____ Being a generous person
 - e. _____ Glorifying God
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ a, c and e
 - h. _____ a, b and e
 - i. _____ b, d and e

Freedom From Debt

One of the most common, frequent and dominant shackles of our day is debt. Debt literally fetters millions and millions of Americans. In fact, there are precious few people that I know, particularly in my generation and under, who aren't up to their chins in debt. Others are up to the top of their heads in debt, almost bankrupt.

Why is debt so consuming? I've done a great deal of research and have reached one key reason. We spend more money than we make. Okay? Is that profound? Our yearnings exceed our earnings. A 1995 survey indicated that the average American puts \$1,300 on credit for every \$1,000 that they make. That's the problem. Somebody put it this way: "When your outgo exceeds your income, then your upkeep will be your downfall."

The result of borrowing is a record number of personal and business bankruptcies. Millions of families are so strapped for money that every month is a difficult ordeal because of burgeoning debt.

Causes of debt

1. Covetousness.

The root of 95+ percent of this debt dilemma is an old-fashioned thing the Bible calls coveting. There is an epidemic in our culture of "wantitis." For most of us, our debt is not caused by our need but our greed. We want to buy things that we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like. Isn't that right?

The reason for this is we are being bombarded by all this "wantitis" message. By the time a student graduates from high school, he or she has seen on an average 350,000 commercials. All those commercials are saying one of three things; (a) "Having more things will make me happy," (remember in America we are guaranteed life, liberty, and the purchase of happiness); (b) "Having more things will make me important." (It's the devil's old ploy about what I have makes me what I am. Such as "Having a MasterCard won't really make you a better person, well then again, maybe it will") and (c) "Having more things will make you secure." God says these are all lies.

a) Lie number one - having more things will make me happy - "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income...As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" (Ecclesiastes 5:10-1)

b) Lie number two - having more things will make me important - "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

c) Lie number three - having things, more things, will make me secure. "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf." (Proverbs 11:28) That's what God's Word has to say. Most of us still buy the lies, and as we buy the lies, we want to buy things with money that we don't have, and we go into this thing called, "debt."

2. Pretend we are somebody we are not

It's a shallow and harmful view of borrowing. Debt beckons us like the sweet, siren song luring a mariner to the destructive, rocky shores. The lyrics suggest that borrowing is the way to achieve the beautiful, wrinkle-free life. Just like little children who dress up in daddy's and mama's clothes and pretend to be bigger than they are. Debt allows us to pretend to be somebody we're not.

Here's what Solomon said about debt in Proverbs 12:9, "Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than to pretend to be a somebody and have no food." Here's what he said in Proverbs 13:7, "One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another man pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth." Isn't that true?

Have you ever noticed in the paper some guy with the yacht, a fleet of Rolls Royces, jewels and an Aspen home then all of a sudden, he goes bellyup. Why? Because what he owed on all that stuff was more than it was worth. On the other hand, it seems like every few months, I find out about somebody who has the modest of lifestyles, who's worth a fortune. See, the former is a pretender, and the latter is the real thing. The problem with pretending is, sooner or later, you have to stop likewise with debt. Sooner or later, you have to pay it with interest.

Now believe it or not, there was a time in this country where credit was very difficult to obtain. I know that's hard to believe. There was a time in this country when you could keep spending to a minimum because when you run out of money, you stop spending. That did not stop coveting; it just put a damper on your spending. Ironically, about the same time that our federal government began living on money that it didn't have is about that same time debt and credit became available to practically everybody. We all became like the "Eveready Bunny." We just keep on spending, and spending, and spending. We have a very shallow and harmful view of debt.

Cures for becoming debt free

If you could take care of the causes, you should find the cure. Then how do we attack the causes? The tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet" and is followed by a long series of things that you are not to covet. Paul included coveting when he summed up the Law stating in Romans 13:9 "Do not covet," and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But in our materialistic, consumer-oriented culture, frankly, that's easier said than done but it can be done. There are three things to consider in dealing with your covetousness:

1. Resist comparison with other people

Comparing always leads to coveting. That's why in the tenth commandment, it says, "Don't covet your neighbor's house, or your neighbor's ox, or your neighbor's manservant." When you start comparing with your neighbor, you're going to end up coveting.

"Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else." (Galatians 6:4) Can you look at what someone else has and not covet that? What I'm really asking is, have you learned the secret of being able to admire without having to acquire? I don't have to acquire everything that I enjoy. If you're a person who has to actually own everything you enjoy, you're going to be perpetually miserable. Learn to admire without having to acquire. Remember, if the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, the odds are that the water bill is higher, too.

2. Rejoice over what God has given you

Focus your attention on what God's given to you. "Every good and perfect gift comes from above from the Father of light." (James 1:17) Or, I like Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5:19, "...When God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, ...this is a gift from God." God says, enjoy my gifts as I give them to you. That's what we need to do.

Have you ever been a victim of that? "When and then" thinking says, "When I get _____, then I'll be happy. You can fill in the blank, whatever it is for you. The idea is when something changes, I'll be happy. No, you won't. Oh, you'll be happy for a little while. Can you remember what you received last Christmas? "When and then"

thinking, what is it that you're waiting on to make you happy? What is it, a new house, new job, new car, a new position, marriage? "When and then" thinking never makes you happy. I become as happy as I choose to be and when I focus on what God has given me.

3. Remember what's really important

"So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18) As you decide what your priorities in life are going to be, and where you're going to focus your attention, you should always be asking yourself, can I see it? If you can see it, then you're focusing on the temporary, the wrong thing.

It's a little sobering to look around and realize that a hundred years from now what you see will not be here. The carpet, the chairs, the walls, the building, our clothes, the people won't be here. Paul was absolutely right, "If you can see it, it's temporary." Everything you can see will eventually erode, it will rot, rust, wear out, and go away as opposed to things you can't see i.e., your relationship with God and others, love, honesty, values and your soul. See what we need to do is quit coveting and remember what's really important. That's how you deal with covetousness.

You must put the axe to the taproot of covetousness before you can apply the next cure. You apply key biblical principles to money management. Remember it will not work unless you deal with the heart problem by conquering your coveting problem. But there are four great pillars that the Bible teaches about using your money.

a. Earn your money slowly, but surely.

Get rich quick schemes almost never work. They're a dime a dozen, and they're more accurately called, "go broke quick" schemes. Proverbs 13:11 says, "he who gathers money little by little makes it grow." In Proverbs 6:6, Solomon uses a metaphor that we can all identify with. "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest." He said, be like the ants, work and supply and store little by little.

Now sure, there are some vocations that pay higher salaries than others, but no matter what your choice of work, put in a good week's work, a reasonable number of hours with maximum effort, and earn your money.

b. Save money regularly.

The word, "save," is practically a forgotten term in modern American economics. But the "little by little" principle doesn't just mean earning, it also applies to saving. Listen to what Solomon said in Proverbs 21:20, "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all that he has."

Teach your children and grandchildren this and teach them well. The day that a person starts earning an income is the same day that person should begin to save and do it every time he receives income. If they start earning an income at age 14, throwing papers in driveways, start saving right then. If they're 24, or 44, it's not an option, it's a priority. If an individual saved between seven-and-a-half and ten percent of his income regularly, he or she will be prepared for emergencies, contingencies, temporary unemployment, and retirement. I'm not talking about putting your trust or your security in your money, remember if you can see it, it's going anyway. Money is nothing more or less than a tool that's placed in our hands as God's stewards.

Contentment comes through saving including some type savings account and by any number of good investments. But contentment comes through saving. Stress and panic come when we spend to the limit and beyond. We panic over every unexpected financial challenge and there are people all over America living in that situation.

c. Share generously.

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21) Now those words from Jesus tell us a couple of absolutely critical things: (a) where we put our money is where our affections are. You cannot separate the two) and (b) when we give money to the Lord's work, we're storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Now I'll confess to you, I don't fully understand that. I know what heaven is metaphorically, it is a spiritual place. But I know that God promises me that anything I forfeit on this earth for the good of His cause will somehow reap a reward in heaven.

God required the Children of Israel to give 10%. He requires Christians to give as they have been prospered which could be more but, in some situations, and circumstances it could be less. God expects us to give because we want to give, but it is not limited to money. We must also give ourselves. By giving ourselves wholeheartedly to Him, we will focus our attention on things above and be less inclined to desire material things, power, position or prestige.

How is giving money going to keep me out of debt?

The more you give to him, the more God will bless you. Jesus said "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over in your lap." (Luke 6:38) Now that doesn't mean that God is some slot machine that when we put money into him, he's going to give it back all that time. It means he's going to bless us in every way, but you test it. Have you ever seen anybody out give God? Have you ever seen anybody give more to God than he somehow returns to them?

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Do you know what the Hebrew word there, the Aramaic word for "blessed" literally means? Happier. You are happier when you give than when you receive. And a lot of us know that firsthand. Now the happier you are, the less inclined you'll be to spend money to buy things to make you happier. In other words, the happier you are as you give that money away, the less inclined you are to go covet things you don't really need. So, earn money little by little, save regularly, share generously.

Budget consonantly and responsibly. It's clear from Scripture that we've already examined, God expects planning and stewardship concerning his assets placed in our hands. Another is "What man would build a tower without first counting the cost." (Luke 14) He is saying you need to have a plan, a budget addressing the desire to be debt-free.

That ought to be every Christian's desire. The Bible does not place an absolute moratorium on debt, but it says in Proverbs 22:7, "the borrower is the servant of the lender." Somebody put it this way, there are two kinds of men in this world, there are men who earn interest, and there are men who pay interest. I will guarantee you the latter are servants to the former. It may take a while, but every one of us ought to have the goal to be debt-free as soon as we can.

The question: how much is enough? Your plan should ask three basic questions:

1. What are my family needs?
2. How much do I want to give to God?
3. How much can I save?

Debt doesn't have to bind us. But unmanaged debt in many ways is synonymous with sin, that's how it's gotten to be.

Amazing Grace lesson #1203

Questions:

1. It is wrong to pretend to be rich when you are not; but, not wrong to pretend to be poor when you are not.
True _____ False _____

2. The common cause, root, of debt is
 - a. _____ Sickness
 - b. _____ Education
 - c. _____ Unemployment
 - d. _____ Covetousness

3. Lies of covetousness are
 - a. _____ Having more things will make me happy. (Eccl. 5:10-11)
 - b. _____ Having more things will make me important. (Luke 12:15)
 - c. _____ Having more things will make me secure (Prov. 11:28)
 - d. _____ All the above

4. The cure for the debt dilemma
 - a. _____ Take matters in you on hand, self-control.
 - b. _____ Resist comparison of self with others. (Gal. 6:4)
 - c. _____ Focus on what God has provided and rejoice. (James 1:17; Eccl. 5:19)
 - d. _____ Remember what's really important. (2 Cor. 4:18)
 - e. _____ All the above
 - f. _____ a, c and d
 - g. _____ b, c and d
 - h. _____ a, b and d

5. Which of the following are biblical principles?
 - a. _____ Earn money slowly. (Prov. 13:11; 6:6-9)
 - b. _____ Save regularly. (Prov. 21:21)
 - c. _____ Give generously. (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 6:38)
 - d. _____ Budget responsibility. (Luke 14:25-33)
 - e. _____ Desire to be debt free. (Prov. 22:7)
 - f. _____ All the above
 - g. _____ None of the above
 - h. _____ b, c and d