

CHRISTIAN VOL. 25 NO. 4
counseling
TODAY

Repentance, Reconciliation,
and Restoration by the Grace of God
Ed Hindson

Boundaries and Restoration:
Sin, Safety, and Healing
Jesse Gill

Digital Tongues:
A Culture of Hate and Division
Janet Parshall

The Tar of Sexual Sin and Recovery
Jim Cress

Leader Wellness and Recovery Intensives:
Issues, Challenges, and New Life
Michael MacKenzie

A Line in the Sand:
Tough Love, Therapeutic Separation,
and Reconciliation
David Hawkins

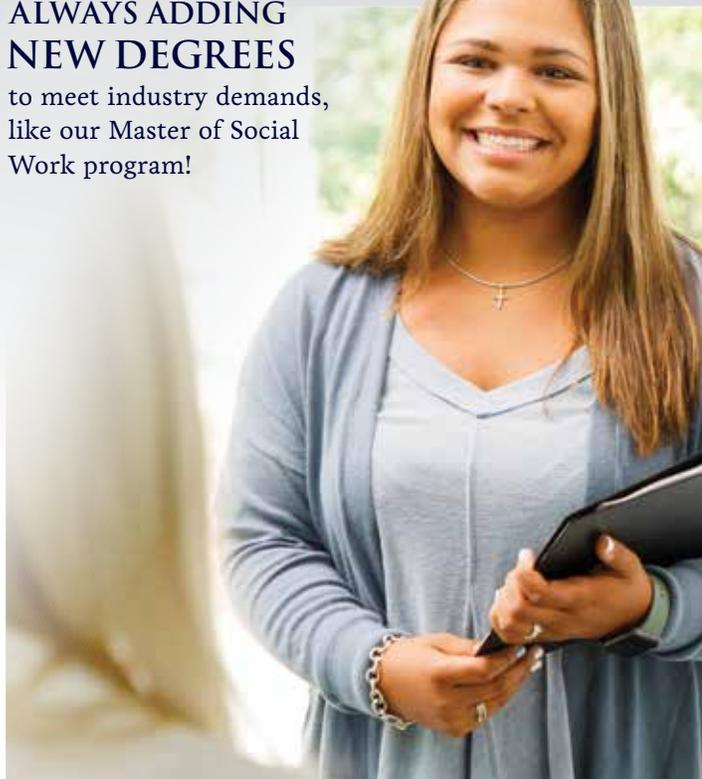
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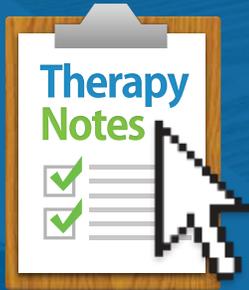
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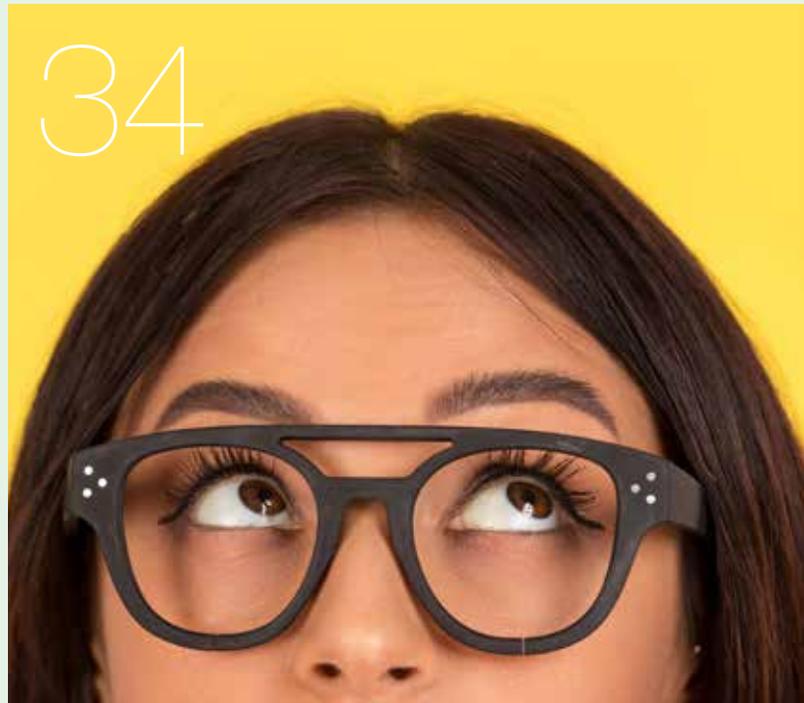
FEATURES



12 Repentance, Reconciliation, and Restoration by the Grace of God *by Edward E. Hindson.* Repentance involves a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. Bible prophecy authority, professor, and author, Ed Hindson, eloquently communicates biblical repentance using the preaching of Peter and Paul as examples and utilizes practical applications to show how God's grace leads to true reconciliation and restoration.

16 Boundaries and Restoration: Sin, Safety, and Healing *by W. Jesse Gill.* Christian psychologist and author, Jesse Gill, describes the need for counselors to accurately understand the important boundaries required in their critical work, have a map for restoring trust, and discern whether restoration is viable for clients. He explains that if a relationship cannot be repaired, the experience of setting boundaries can be profoundly empowering for clients and what is required to build secure attachment.

22 Digital Tongues: A Culture of Hate and Division *by Janet Parshall.* Accomplished nationally syndicated radio program host, Janet Parshall, discusses the widespread atmosphere of anger, hate, and division in America and how the cultural environment influences our actions. She examines how the Internet, through various social media platforms, is used to spread hate and silence biblically-based viewpoints and conservative expression. However, no matter how controversial our culture, God will use our words for healing if we speak the truth in love.





28 The Tar of Sexual Sin and Recovery *by Jim Cress.* Sexual sin stains the body, mind, and soul and has repercussions that often last for generations. Therapist, broadcaster, and speaker, Jim Cress, shares some sobering statistics regarding pornography use among Christians and biblical accounts of defying God and His commands concerning sexuality and idolatry. No matter how dark the tar-stained residue of past sexual sin, there is hope and healing from these dangerous bonds when we return to God and ask for forgiveness.

34 The Voices Inside Our Heads *by Rev. Samuel Rodriguez.* Pastor and leading faith advocate, Samuel Rodriguez, considers how there are so many voices today trying to infiltrate our minds and influence our beliefs. This consequence is particularly problematic as America wrestles with thorny issues such as race. However, he clarifies that we need to stop listening to the voices of anger, confusion, lies, and jealousy and, instead, tune in to the voice of God that leads to truth and love and calls us to His kingdom.

38 Leader Wellness and Recovery Intensives: Issues, Challenges, and New Life *by Michael MacKenzie.* Although Christian leaders provide direction, encouragement, hope, and wisdom to keep moving forward, everyone has a breaking point. There are times when even leaders need to be led. Michael MacKenzie, Executive Director of Marble Retreat, sheds light on the importance of counseling and wellness intensives to combat the increase in stress and serious challenges facing today's Christian leaders.

44 A Line in the Sand: Tough Love, Therapeutic Separation, and Reconciliation

by David Hawkins. Clinical psychologist, marriage therapist, and author, David Hawkins, uncovers the day-to-day issues and challenges every couple is likely to face sometime in their relationship. Despite the very best of intentions, sometimes the reality of our limitations leads to disconnection and even severe conflict. During these difficult times, couples, and those who work with them, must consider “tough love” that most likely will require one or both partners to draw a “line in the sand” and even consider therapeutic separation before healthy reconciliation is possible.

48 The Gracious Gift of Forgiveness *by Chris Gnanakan.* Many Christians carry grudges and a resentful, unforgiving spirit in today's wounded and hurting world, finding it difficult to forgive. Chris Gnanakan, Professor of Theology and Global Studies at Liberty University, fittingly uses Scripture to reveal God's grace and forgiveness. He illustrates how and why we must follow God's instruction to genuinely repent and forgive our offenders in order to find restoration and true freedom over sin.

52 Repentance: The Most Positive Word in the English Language *by Jay H. Strack.*

No discussion on repentance can be understood without reference to the prodigal son in the book of Luke. Evangelist, educator, speaker, and author, Jay Strack, defines repentance and delivers an inspiring message on restoration, offering three steps from his personal experience that can lead those who have strayed and feel overwhelmed by sin back to God's love, forgiveness, and protection.



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Tim Clinton, Ed.D., LPC, LMFT, BCPCC, is president of AACC, the largest and most diverse Christian counseling association in the world. Dr. Clinton also serves as the Executive Director of the Liberty University Global Center for Mental Health, Addiction, and Recovery. He is the co-host of “Dr. James Dobson’s Family Talk,” heard daily on nearly 1,400 radio outlets. Licensed as a Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, Dr. Clinton is recognized as a world leader in mental health and relationship issues and spends much of his time working with Christian leaders and professional athletes. He has authored or edited nearly 30 books.

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W. Jesse Gill, Psy.D., is a Christian psychologist who practices in Hershey, Pennsylvania. He is passionate about integrating Scripture with attachment theory and applies these truths to marriage therapy, counseling, and clergy care. His book, *Face to Face: Seven Keys to a Secure Marriage*, teaches couples to embrace God’s attachment design.

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Diane M. Langberg, Ph.D., is globally recognized for her 47 years of clinical work with trauma victims, having trained caregivers on six continents. She directs a group practice in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, and her most recent book is *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*.

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Michael MacKenzie, D.Min., is the executive director of Marble Retreat, an intensive counseling center for Christian leaders. He has specialized in caring for leaders for the past 20 years and is the author of the recently released book, *Don’t Blow Up Your Ministry: Defuse the Underlying Issues that take Pastors Down*.

Jeanneane Maxon, J.D., Esq., has 11 years of executive level, non-profit leadership. She is an attorney and nationally-recognized speaker. Jeanneane formerly served as the Vice President of External Affairs and Corporate Counsel for Americans United for Life and as the General Counsel of Care Net. She has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and History from Westminster College and a law degree from Boston University School of Law.

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Janet Parshall, B.A., has been in broadcasting for more than 30 years. She is currently the host of the nationally syndicated radio program, *In the Market* with Janet Parshall. Her broadcast and commentaries are carried on more than 700 stations across the country.

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, M.Ed., is the lead pastor of New Season, one of America’s most influential megachurches, and serves as president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, one of the world’s largest Christian organizations. Several news outlets recognize him as America’s most influential Latino/Hispanic faith leader. In 2010, Rev. Rodriguez was the recipient of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award presented by the Congress of Racial Equality.

Jay H. Strack, D.Min., is the founder and President of Student Leadership University and the Strack Center at Charleston Southern University. Over four decades, 10,000 high schools, and training more than 250,000 educators, pastors, and students, his message is the same: “There is always a way” through challenges, crisis, circumstance, and emotional pain into a confident future.

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Leading and Bleeding



I recently spoke to a group of pastors gathered to encourage one another and find some direction as they face a changing ministry world since COVID hit. “It’s different... really different and hard. Our church is slow to get back to pre-COVID numbers. I don’t know if we will ever get back there,” a young pastor shared with me. But what struck me even more was the pain, confusion, and sorrow I saw in some of their eyes. Almost daily, I hear the private cries from those “*whose feet are shod with the preparation of the Gospel*” (Ephesians 6:15).

Have you ever been in a place where you felt you shouldn’t have been? A place where the people were

of a different sort than you? I have. I remember speaking at a mission event in Charlotte, North Carolina, at Calvary Church. I had been invited to do a brief talk and spend some private time ministering to those called to do the work of the ministry. The ones I talked to often sacrificed a great deal of time with their families for the sake of those they serve—those who typically live on a shoestring budget, who are the subject around Sunday meals for good and bad, and whose marriages and families are constantly under scrutiny. While being a pastor or ministry leader is a high calling, it brings considerable burden and responsibility. It was a lesson day for me, as I began to feel genuinely

grieved hearing the stories from those who sacrificed way beyond me for the sake of the Gospel. And in a tense moment, I remember a man raising his hand, and in a gentle voice, saying, “I guess, Tim, we just want to know that we matter.”

His comment stopped me in my tracks, and I felt my eyes begin to water. He had heard a thousand times about the applause of heaven and his reward. He understood that piece... but I can almost hear someone saying, “... and that should be enough,” as I write. However, he was simply saying that it would be good to hear once in a while, “That was a great play... what a hit... you’re making a difference... we see you!”

Over the years, God has placed me in situations to minister to those who serve as pastors and ministry leaders, and I have learned that it is one of the loneliest professions. These leaders tend to have few friends and confidants to whom they can turn for help, hope, and encouragement—those with whom they can share personal challenges and issues.

Old-fashioned Barnabas coaching and encouragement.

That moment reminded me of my years as a pastor's kid and the calling on my dad's life. It took me back to a book I found in my dad's study—an old Chuck Swindoll book with a few words dad underlined that brought tears to my eyes, "You're not a nobody." It was moving because dad loved being a pastor, preaching and caring for those in his flock for nearly 60 years in primarily small, rural, country churches. While he did not have recognition on the world stage, to me he was a giant among men. What I saw and admired the most about him was his kindness; he was the kindest man I have ever met—a man of prayer and a dad who loved our mother. And I cherished the joy in his heart when others showed appreciation and encouragement—those who supported him with gifts during the holidays so he could make days like Christmas special for his family. He received it all as though it was from the Lord.

However, I also remember some of the hits he took in ministry. It hurt my dad to be called a "hypocrite" because he let his daughters wear makeup... or when he took a position on an issue theologically that some did not agree with... or how he got turned down for an ask of \$5 for gas money to do visitation. Sheep can be pretty difficult at times—okay, even nasty.

Over the years, God has placed me in situations to minister to those who serve as pastors and ministry leaders, and I have learned that it is one of the loneliest professions. These leaders tend to have few friends

and confidants to whom they can turn for help, hope, and encouragement—those with whom they can share personal challenges and issues. I remember a doctoral ministry class I was teaching a few years back, and we had locked down the room to have a candid discussion around this issue. The room was full of pastors from churches all over the country, varying in size. While discussing the need to have someone "to look and go to," I was illustrating my point by standing by each student's desk and asking if they had someone they could talk with other than their spouse. The first two responses were, "No one." The setting grew a bit tense as I moved to the third desk. At that very moment, one pastor jumped up in the far corner of the room and shouted, "Why are you doing this? You know that if we share anything with others, we will be destroyed. They will use it against us!" After a few seconds of quietness, I responded, "And if you don't, what happens?"

The bottom line is that God wired us for relationships, and we all need someone. Every Timothy needs a Paul, and every Paul needs a Timothy.

A Growing Concern

Do leaders struggle with personal issues? In their marriages? With their kids? Do they wrestle with sin? Make honest mistakes? Struggle in their daily walk with Christ? Have doubt? Drift into legalism? Liberalism? Do these leaders ever get to the point of wanting to quit their calling? Do they wrestle with confusion, anger, bitterness, and rage toward the Church or certain church members? Has the

Church hurt them and their families? Have they been unjustly accused? Do they ever just give up on life? Unfortunately, we see it every day.

Are some wolves dressed in sheep's clothing—those who hurt and destroy the work and values of Christ in others... those who abuse and live in darkness? Do they need to be rooted out and called to accountability? What about those who have been hurt and abused? We all know the answer. However, perhaps the better question should be, "If so, how?" And what about healing and restoration? What about those who have been unjustly accused, abused by the Church, or crushed by haters filled with their own pain who dish out their anger any way they can? It can be rather repulsive out there!

The Road Forward

I am grieved over some of what I see in modern-day Christianity toward pastors and other Christian leaders. Yes, I have heard about all the scandals, allegations, and horror stories, and in no way am I trying to diminish the pain and trauma associated with egregious and sinful behavior. 1 Peter 4:17 (ESV) is clear, "*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*"

Yet, a nightmare in modern-day Christianity is becoming the cleansing movement in and of itself. A pastor recently told me, "There's a clear desire for people to attack those with authority. Sad days." It is coming from all directions—anyone, at any time, true or not. It is like a rabid thirst for more red meat, scandal,



tidbits, and, at times, is more about getting likes or followers on social media than following Matthew 18. There is almost a gloating of sorts to identify and expose more—the doxing is unreal and obsessive. And there is danger in applying a broad-brush approach indicating that the *whole* is rotten to the core, not to mention their kids, families, and anything with which they are associated.

I say this carefully. Some are destroying the work and name of Christ in all this “righteous labor,” as well as themselves. Go back and look at some of the social media feeds of an organization or individual—it will tell you a lot about their godliness. And it adds fuel to those who hate Christ and the Church. In some ways, I fear we are pushing leaders (especially those who genuinely need help, hope, and encouragement) deeper into isolation and creating a greater fear of dealing with battles of discouragement, depression, sin, and more. What a mess!

Many Christian leaders fear that any exposure of weakness will eventually lead to being the subject of someone’s gossip line or social media feed. The Bible is filled with lots of brokenness, especially broken leaders. It is also filled with beauty, such as Psalm 51 by David, stories like the prodigal son, or the Apostle Paul’s carefully written words in 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV), “... *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*” That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties.

When is God at His best? Some suggest that He is the best in moments like the one with Peter when he denied the Lord three times (Luke 22:58-62). Even after Peter

denied the Lord not once, not twice, but three times, Jesus offered grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Although Peter cold-heartedly turned his back on Jesus, the living Son of God, the One he walked and ate with, the Lord asked, "... *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?...*" And a second time, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?...*" And again, a third time, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?... He saith unto him, Feed my sheep*" (John 21:15-17, KJV). Then came the tears, the healing, and the road forward. Thank God for His grace, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation!

The division in today's world is horrific. We can, and need to, do better. Galatians 6:1 (ESV) is especially appropriate here, "*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*" Sure, there is plenty to discuss—from repentance and godly sorrow to restoration. However, there is also a need to develop a comprehensive plan with organizations that get it—a helping strategy from wellness to crisis 911 support. Let's figure it out together! Hopefully, this issue of *Christian Counseling Today* will be a catalyst of sorts for speaking truth in love. We need the Church to be healthy, and it starts by being more like our Lord.

While I stand for, and with, all those who have been hurt and abused, I want to say thank you, pastors and Christian leaders, for working to honor God, preaching with conviction even when it isn't popular, rightfully dividing the word of truth, being there when no one else is, sacrificing your family to conduct a funeral or wedding, and showing up at the scene of an accident or in the hospital when hope is dim. Thanks for trying to be at the



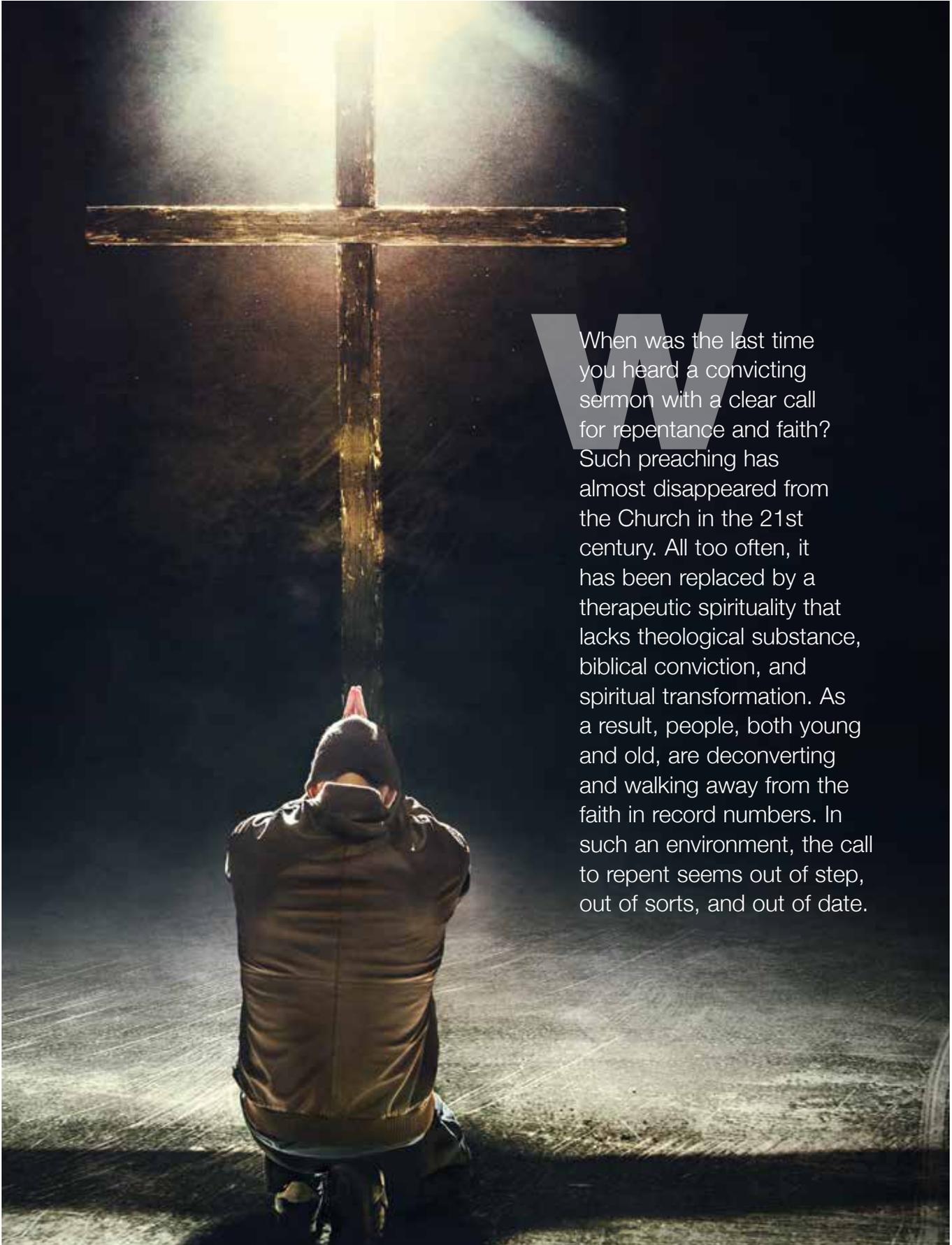
game for your kids, living on a shoe-string budget, pushing through the challenging times of marriage, understanding when we do not feel up to going to church, wrestling internally with the gossip about your children, and standing strong on moral issues. You matter more than you know. We do see you; we do appreciate you; we do love you! If you are leading and bleeding, I pray that God brings into your life all that is necessary for healing.

I will close with one of my dad's favorite verses that put that Chuck Swindoll statement in clear perspective for me and placed joy in dad's heart, "*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Corinthians 15:57-58, KJV). ✘



TIM CLINTON, ED.D., LPC, LMFT, BCPCC, is president of AACC, the largest and most diverse Christian counseling association in the world. Dr.

Clinton also serves as the Executive Director of the Liberty University Global Center for Mental Health, Addiction, and Recovery. He is the co-host of "Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk," heard on nearly 1,400 radio outlets daily. Licensed as a Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist, Dr. Clinton is recognized as a world leader in mental health and relationship issues and spends much of his time working with Christian leaders and professional athletes. He has authored or edited nearly 30 books, including his latest, *Focus on the Future: Your Family, Your Faith, and Your Voice Matter Now More than Ever*. Dr. Clinton and his wife, Julie, have two children and a granddaughter.



When was the last time you heard a convicting sermon with a clear call for repentance and faith? Such preaching has almost disappeared from the Church in the 21st century. All too often, it has been replaced by a therapeutic spirituality that lacks theological substance, biblical conviction, and spiritual transformation. As a result, people, both young and old, are deconverting and walking away from the faith in record numbers. In such an environment, the call to repent seems out of step, out of sorts, and out of date.

REPENTANCE, RECONCILIATION, *and* RESTORATION *by the* GRACE OF GOD

A shallow Christianity that is often a mile wide, but only an inch deep, leaves no room for such a drastic response. In spite of this, the New Testament opens with both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth proclaiming: “*Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Their message also confronted an equally shallow and external religiosity that had failed to bring genuine conviction, conversion, and transformation in their day.

The call to repentance is a call to reconciliation. It is the key to personal transformation by the grace of God. Without repentance, there is no real change in human behavior. The unrepentant mind continues to resist the grace of God through a series of personal excuses, never taking responsibility for its choices and behaviors. How many times have you heard someone say: “I just can’t help myself;” “I guess I’ll never change;” “The devil made me do it;” “I’m doing the best I can;” or “God just made me this way!”

Biblical Repentance

From a biblical standpoint, repentance involves a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. The Hebrew word *shub* means “to turn,” as in “turn away” from sin and “turn to” God. The Greek *metanoēō* means to “change one’s mind” about his or her attitude or behavior. William Mounce defines repentance as “a radical turning from sin to a new way of life oriented to God.”¹ Thus, biblical repentance involves more than mere intellectual assent.

EDWARD E. HINDSON



True repentance involves honesty, humility, and responsibility, but, in the end, it leads to reconciliation and restoration.

Peter and Paul are the two prominent apostolic examples of preaching repentance. In Acts 2:38, Peter urged those at the Feast of Pentecost to “repent and be baptized.” In his sermon at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, he pleaded: “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19). Years later, in 2 Peter 3:9, he wrote, “The Lord... is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

When Paul preached to the Greeks on Mars Hill in Athens, he said, “God... now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). In Acts 20:21, Paul refers to “... repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” He indicates that sincere repentance leads to genuine faith.² In summarizing his lifetime of ministry to both Jews and Gentiles, Paul said, “... they should repent, turn to God, and do work benefitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

Practical Application

Genuine repentance involves a change of mind that results in a change of action. “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Mark Dance notes, “Since our beliefs affect our behavior, a repentant heart will eventually be evidenced by a change of direction.”³ He observes that remorse often leads to repentance (see 2 Corinthians 7:10) but that remorse (feeling sorry) alone is not the final act of repentance. Remorse is wading in our guilt, whereas repentance is walking through it. Dance adds, “God is more interested in taking you on a grace trip than a guilt trip.”⁴

The grace of God leads us to repentance, which involves our being honest with ourselves and others. Hiding our failures and mistakes leaves us vulnerable to repeating them, whereas facing them enables us to deal with them. True repentance involves honesty, humility, and responsibility, but, in the end, it leads to reconciliation and restoration. This is especially important in counseling those who are offended by the behavior of others. Reconciliation between offended individuals only occurs when there is genuine repentance and true forgiveness.

Paul had this in mind when he said, “All Scripture is

given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). From a practical standpoint, we must be willing to confront (reprove) wrong attitudes and wrong behaviors based on the standards of biblical truth (doctrine) with the goal of correction and instruction. Effective ministry in counseling is not limited to exposing and confronting failure. Our ultimate goal needs to aim at correction, transformation, and reconciliation. At the same time, we cannot assume that confession alone is repentance. Admitting our sin is often the first step toward repentance, but some people are willing to confess their failures and mistakes with little willingness to do anything about them.

Once a person genuinely repents, leading to transformation, our ultimate goal should be restoration. Thus, Paul also urged believers to forgive and comfort those who repent “... lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Corinthians 2:7-8, NKJV). The biblical pattern reminds us that all ministry should be motivated by a sincere love for the offender with the goal of transformation, reconciliation, and restoration by the grace of God. ✠



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**BOUNDARIES AND RESTORATION:
SIN, SAFETY, AND HEALING**



**Shattered, angry, numb, raw, broken, wounded...
can you think of other expressions to describe the
experience of relationship betrayal?**

When a trusted person blatantly disregards my needs or abuses my trust to harm me, it has a profound impact. My view of self and how relationships work is constructed in the context of dynamic interactions with the people to whom I am closest. These reciprocal interactions with others imprint a model in my heart for what love is, which is called my attachment style.¹ Those experiences shape the answers to two essential questions: 1) Am I worthy of love?, and 2) Are others capable of loving me?²

Secure attachment is formed when my trusted relationships provide me with emotional safety during times of distress, along with the security to explore my inner and outer world.³ When trusted others offer safety and security in their dealings with me, I feel worthy and believe in the goodness of others. If they betray or harm me, I will struggle with feelings of worthlessness and fear of reaching out to others. Betrayal that happens when I am young may set up an entire life course of worthless feelings and mistrust. These are the two roots of all mental illnesses... but there is hope. *“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close”* (Psalm 27:10, NLT).

All believers have the hope and promise of being healed from the wounds that others inflict upon them. It is possible to cultivate and receive healing on this side of heaven. Counselors are often called to bring healing into the midst of betrayal scenarios. They need an accurate understanding of the boundaries required in this critical work, a map for restoring trust, and discernment to know whether restoration is viable.



The Importance of Boundaries

A boundary is a protective wall within the self and between people. Boundaries serve to define who I am and who I am not and show where I end and someone else begins. They help me know what I am to take responsibility for in the past and also in moving forward.⁴

As an individual, I can establish a boundary to define what I will and will not do, and I can set a boundary to show whether I will allow a person to have access to me. Counselors can also establish boundaries on behalf of clients, regulating the level of involvement they will afford in sessions to people who have harmed their clients. Counselors must also set boundaries to determine the pacing and tempo of the work with clients who have been betrayed, which is particularly important for more vulnerable clients who were abused as children or overwhelmed with more recent betrayal. Boundaries are both protective and liberating at the same time. As a result, they undergird the two key dimensions of secure attachment (Ainsworth)—the protective promise that someone will always have my back and the freedom to launch out and explore.

Picture a child's backyard that is open and exposed. After parents place a fence around it, the child feels more protected and will explore the whole yard with the assurance of protection. Counselors are fence makers who also equip clients to build their own fences.

Boundaries Within and Between in the Process of Restoration

Sin separates, and sin shatters. When a stranger harms me, it can destroy my basic sense of safety in the world. When a loved one harms me, it also breaks my sense of safety, but the injury can deeply permeate my sense of self. The healing process involves a complex balancing of boundary setting, forgiveness, and rebuilding the hypervigilance or shame that has developed to protect me from further harm.

While I must acknowledge my anger about what happened, I also need to separate myself from the unhealthy weight of carrying that anger. I need to forgive the offender, even if I decide never to have contact with him or her again.



Boundaries Within

The first boundary I need is the ability to define myself as separate from what happened to me. Being able to say “no,” even after the fact, is vital if my voice was silenced or ignored during the wounding. Being able to say, “No, that was wrong! No, that is not what I needed! No, that is not what I deserved,” is crucial in reclaiming my voice and redefining my sense of self.

This stance is part of the process of dismantling the shame of being violated. Counselors can provide secure attachment for clients to soothe distress and explore new definitions of self. They help clients move away from shame by delivering empathy and perspective. *“It’s bad enough that you got hurt. I don’t want you to carry the blame and shame of this tragedy any longer.” “It’s not your fault. Your only role in this was being born into a broken family.”*

The second boundary I must reclaim involves taking responsibility for my own protection and self-care. Though I may love the person who hurt me, it is also vital to establish internal boundaries which limit my exposure to him or her. “I value myself and will not be put in a position where I can be harmed again.” However, the process of affirming that *I am worthy* of being protected is easier said than done. Counselors have a vital role in helping clients examine the instinct to return to relationship patterns that are familiar, yet harmful.

The third internal boundary is forgiveness—the process of releasing my right to “get back” at the person who harmed me. While I must acknowledge my anger about what happened, I also need to separate myself from the unhealthy weight of carrying that anger. I need to forgive the offender, even if I decide never to have contact with him or her again.

Forgiveness is a progression, and it begins by accurately naming the wrong inflicted upon me. I cannot bear the weight of this alone. I must lean on Jesus, who has carried the burden of my hurt, anger, shame, and even the sin of the offender to Calvary (Hebrews 12:2). Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it mean trusting those who

have harmed us. However, it does empower us to move forward with our lives, reinforced by the One who laid down His life to protect and set us free.

Boundaries Between

While considering restoration, I must create a safe space separate from the person who hurt me. This first fundamental boundary will limit my exposure to the confusion or pressure that may come from the offender while my healing process gets underway.

Counselors will provide a safe place for their clients within the context of sessions. Clients may also need to take steps to create a safe environment outside of sessions. This can range from sleeping in separate bedrooms to moving out of the home temporarily or even having the offender removed from the home (e.g., mandated abuse reporting).

The second boundary involves accurately discerning whether the offender is suitable for restoration. It is not a “given” that closeness should be restored. I may feel ready to re-engage after making progress in my personal work of healing voicelessness, shame, and toxic anger. However, I will still need to see several improvements from the offender.

- Is the offender genuinely remorseful for the harm caused or merely sorry about being caught?
- Is the offender capable of empathizing with another person’s feelings?
- Does the offender have emotional regulation skills?
- Is the offender investing in treatment and making progress in developing emotional regulation skills?
- Is the offender willing to commit to a process of rebuilding trust by taking ownership for his or her role in creating the wound while also contributing to the healing process?

Suppose a client has established enough stability of self and the offender evaluates well in the criteria previously listed. In that case, counselors may move forward in their work of restoring the relationship between the client and offender.

The third boundary involves regulating the pacing and tempo of the restoration work. It is essential to determine whether emotional safety can be created and maintained within the restoration sessions. Counselors must note whether the offender is self-regulating and making space for the client to express pain. Is the client able to benefit from the process of moving forward? The offender will need to take steps in session to demonstrate empathy and remorse for the wounds he or she inflicted upon the client. Counselors will gauge whether each incremental step builds trust and be prepared to slow the process down if necessary. Rebuilding trust takes time, and new and safe experiences are prerequisites for accomplishing this, but it takes time. It is important to determine if the client and offender are successfully co-creating a secure attachment bond.

Even if the relationship cannot be restored, the experience of setting boundaries can be profoundly empowering and clarifying for clients. Meanwhile, clients can learn more about what it takes to build secure attachment through their relationships with counselors who guide them to the One who makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). ❖



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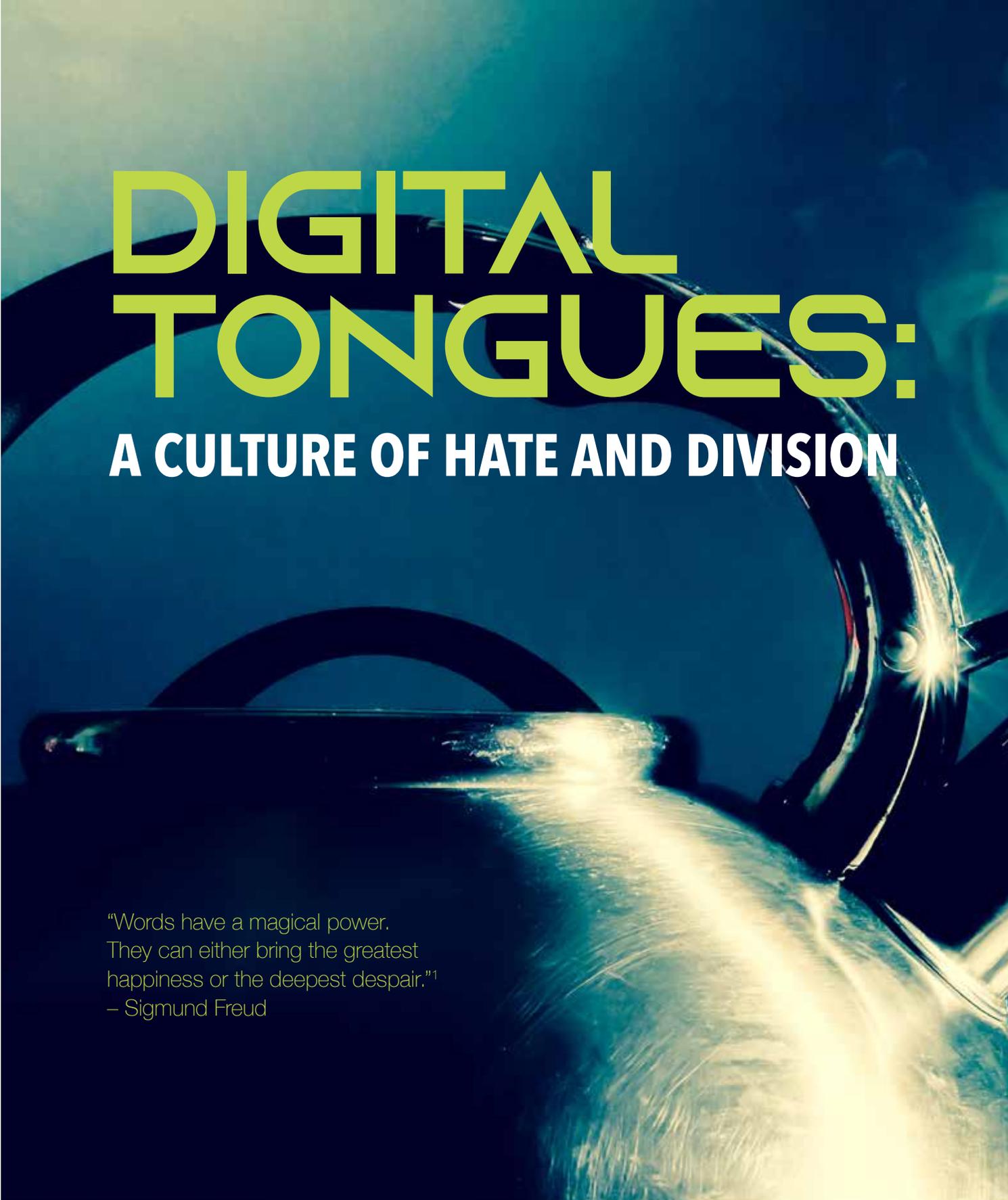
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DIGITAL TONGUES:

A CULTURE OF HATE AND DIVISION

"Words have a magical power.
They can either bring the greatest
happiness or the deepest despair."¹
– Sigmund Freud



A recent op-ed in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* confirmed what many of us have already noticed... America is experiencing a widespread atmosphere of anger, hate, and division. The column documented how the Federal Aviation Administration, for instance, has noted a sharp increase in out-of-control behavior from airplane passengers, how monthly road rage incidents causing injury, or even death, have doubled over the last few years, and how the deep dislike between members of our two political parties has grown by 30 points since the 1990s. In fact, one political poll indicated that 90% of members of both parties felt as though they would not belong in America anymore if the “other side” got its way in terms of their party’s political agenda.² However, this mood is not just about politics. That is a symptom, not a cause. Nor can we lay all of the blame on the doorstep of COVID and how it has interrupted our everyday lives.

I think there is a bigger problem going on. Whether society at large and the national mood, our local communities, or even the streets we live on, our cultural environment tends to influence us. The more corrupt, manipulative, and mean-spirited our environment, the more the temptation to bend to the world. In other words, to use *backlash* when we feel lashed rather than becoming the “living epistles” we are called to be (2 Corinthians 3:3). Hence, the warning from Scripture about avoiding conformity to cultural influences: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2, ESV).

The reality of how the bad side of culture in which we live can press down on us—all of us, Christian or not—is seen in 2 Peter 2:7-8 (ESV), where the Apostle Peter reminds the Church of the Old Testament story of Lot, who was living in the corrupt, licentious city of Sodom. We are told that Lot was “distressed (another translation says “oppressed”) by the sensual conduct of the wicked...” and by what “... he saw and heard.” Here is how pastor and author, Chuck Swindoll, sums it up in his commentary on 2 Peter: “In many ways, Peter’s original readers could relate to Peter’s description of Lot, who lived among the wicked men of Sodom; their sexual conduct oppressed him, and his soul felt constantly in anguish over their lawless deeds.”³

JANET PARSHALL



Each of us can feel that same kind of oppression and anguish as we make our way through the climate of hate and division swirling around us. America seems to be groaning under the weight of anger and bitterness. Granted, some anger may be warranted and might even qualify as *righteous* anger. However, the big question is, like a teapot heating up, when will the percolating cultural vitriol hit the boiling point and spill over?

Yet, as much as we struggle against the same, usual life forces that have always existed all the way back to Genesis—forces that tempt us to join in the hate and distrust around us—there is a much more insidious 21st-century tempter... an invisible one, but one that has features, devices, and content we use and consume every day: *the Internet*.

Where it is Taking Us

First, a word about real “hate” versus fake hate on the Web. The meaning of “hate” has been twisted, revised, and politicized by organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Most of us used to know what a “hate group” was—basically, organizations whose hateful ideologies and bigoted agendas spilled over into physical violence against innocent citizens. However, all of that has changed.

The SPLC has lumped into its “hate group” category legitimate, law-abiding Christian ministries and traditional values advocacy groups simply because they pursue conventional norms or biblical views on sexuality, marriage, or sin. The mainstream media, and other institutions, then picked up the SPLC hate group list and blindly spread that dangerous misnomer far and wide. The tragic irony is that SPLC’s flawed “hate” list, which named the Washington D.C.-based Family Research Council (FRC), actually instigated a shooter to target FRC, seeking to slaughter the entire staff.

Social media giants like Facebook, Google, and Twitter have their own prohibitions against “hate” speech but, sadly, have used their rules as an excuse to silence biblically-based viewpoints or conservative expression with which Silicon Valley companies do not agree. However, that is *not* the kind of “hate” I am referring to here. I am focusing on an authentic hate phenomenon spreading through social media.

As one commentator noted, studies by social psychologists show that "... the growth of these [social media] platforms come with a rise in online hate behavior,"⁴ citing a *Frontiers in Psychology* study that has determined there is now a separate psychological profile of those who specialize in online attacks on others. That study underscored the widespread problem by noting that "... online hatred has been shown to inflate negative emotions... cause suicides... and even lead to the assassination of public figures..."⁵

Meanwhile, the rest of us who are trying our best to avoid the negative aspects of social media while using Internet platforms for good are submerged in this growing digital environment of harshness, personal attack, and hate. What is the solution?

God's Rescue – Speaking Truth in Love

Even as we are "oppressed" as Lot was by a culture of lawlessness and corruption, Peter reminds us that Lot was led out of Sodom, proving that "... *the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials...*" (2 Peter 2:9, ESV).

Yes, our entire nation, in fact, the whole world, is saturated by the influences of social media and the online hate and division that exists there, but didn't Jesus tell His disciples to remain *in the world* and yet not be *of the world* (John 17:14-16)? The culture around us is fallen, as is our flesh. But the story of Lot is one not just of sin but also of *rescue* for those who put their trust in God.

We have the same access to the great Rescuer as Lot did. The means of rescue are:

- **Through His Spirit (Romans 8:14-15).** We who have His Spirit are now longer laboring over the "slavery" to our flesh or the world. Being free from "slavery" should also include being free from slavery to our iPhones, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., and the negative influences they can invite. On the other hand, retreating from sharing the truth on the Internet is not biblical either. It is the opposite of the command of Jesus to stay "in" without being "of."
- **Through His Word (Hebrews 4:12).** His Word is living, powerful, and active. In addition to His Spirit, His Word is a lamp, a light, a path, and a yardstick for our personal behavior. When all else fails, read His instructions.
- **Through Our Renewed Will to Obey Both His Spirit and His Word.** Like Solomon of old, to serve God's purposes, we must first come "... *with a whole heart and with a willing mind*" (1 Chronicles 28:9, ESV). Are we really willing to be loving after a hate screed hits our e-mail inbox or is posted against us on Facebook? Are we still willing to share the truth of God's Word on a subject, even though we know we will be ostracized?

If we carry out the previous three points, then we can speak the truth no matter how controversial it is to the culture or Internet followers, while at the same time showing God's love in the process (Ephesians 4:15).

Finally, let us consider the lasting power of our words. All of this new technology means our words, reactions, posts, and tweets have a very long shelf life. We have been told that while the tongue has no bones, it is still strong enough to break a heart. It has the power of both life and death (Proverbs 18:21). Choose your words wisely. American poet, Emily Dickinson, reminded us of the lasting impact of our words when she penned, "A word is dead when it is said, some say. I say it just begins to live that day."⁶

While our digital tongues have great power, we still have a choice. We can make our words rash, like sharp sword thrusts, or use the "better angels of our nature"⁷ and choose to have the tongue of the wise, bringing healing to a hurting world. The choice is up to us. ✘

Are we really
willing to be
loving after a
hate screed hits
our e-mail inbox
or is posted
against us on
Facebook?



JANET PARSHALL, B.A., has been in broadcasting for more than 30 years. She is currently the host of the nationally syndicated radio program, *In the Market with Janet Parshall*. Her broadcast and commentaries are carried on more than 700 stations across the country.

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Sexual sin stains the body, the mind, and the soul. Like the sticky, adhesive residue of tar on a road or rooftop, the residual impact and effects of sinful sexual behavior have repercussions that often last for generations. The initial sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden brought about the dynamic of moving from “naked and unashamed” to “naked and ashamed.” And just as the first man and woman tried to cover their sin and shame with fig leaves generations ago, many today are still trying to use sinful sexual activity to medicate and cover their own trauma, shame, and attachment wounds—still feeling the effects of futile attempts to live life apart from God’s plan for healthy, holy sexuality.



So how is sexual sin any different than the myriad of other types of sin? As an overview, God's Word succinctly addresses sexual sin in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV): *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."* In Hebrews 13:4 (NIV), God's Word warns us: *"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."*

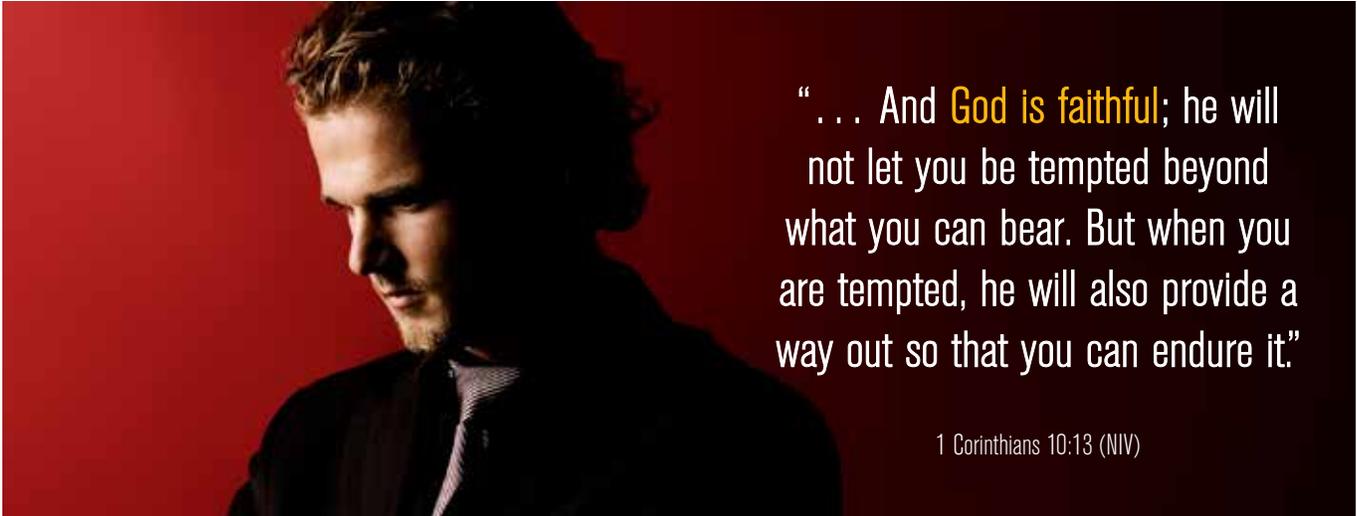
A salient point that must be communicated here is that God takes quite seriously His design for healthy sexuality among humans, especially those who are Christians. Indeed, He knows what is best for us in our sexuality. God invented sex, and throughout the Bible to the present day, humans have attempted to sinfully amend, adapt, and accelerate His original design and plan for this most intimate connection between two people.

We live in a "pornemic" time in our world. Christians are no exception when it comes to the statistics around pornography use. According to Covenant Eyes, one of the leading Internet filtering software providers, more than 28,000 individuals are viewing pornography every second of the day.¹ One out of every five searches on mobile devices is for pornography.² Sixty-four percent of Christian men and 15% of Christian women admit to viewing pornography at least once per month.³ In 2016, Barna Research, an

innovative research and resource company, found that 57% of pastors and 64% of youth pastors admit to a current struggle with pornography.⁴ Obviously, this presents a major problem regarding the secret sins of these Christian men and women. And typically, there is a palpable daily fear of being discovered as a fraud and an ongoing internal terror of losing one's job, marriage, family, or ministry. With the statistics being so high, where is it safe to confess one's sexual sins? I am reminded of the old Alcoholics Anonymous recovery truth that warns us, "You're only as sick as your secrets."

One of the more significant biblical accounts of someone defying God and His commands regarding sexuality and idolatry is found in 1 Kings chapters 9, 10, and 11. King Solomon was declared to be the wisest man on earth. Solomon was privileged to draft the biblical books of Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. Even after all this acclaim, Solomon rebelled and defied God and His commands by marrying 1,000 foreign women. The Bible tells us that these foreign wives turned Solomon's heart away from God, and he even made sacrifices to the corrupt, sexually deviant gods of these women. Solomon may have been wise, but he was clearly vulnerable and foolish enough to practice polygamy and a host of other sins in his defiance of God. His behavior should be a sobering reminder to all of us, as the Apostle Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 (NIV): *"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind..."*

JIM CRESS



“... And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

When I ponder Solomon’s sin, I think of the current day “turning of men’s hearts away from God” with the accessible, anonymous, and accelerated participation of many consumed with pornography and other sexual infidelities. The sexual stain left in and on so many lives is multifaceted. Many people, including Christians, have contracted sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). I have seen marriages destroyed by infidelity and the physical harm that often accompanies sexual sin, including the impact of betrayal trauma. Psychiatrist, author, and researcher, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, reminds us in his book, by the same title, that “the body keeps the score.”

Pornography experientially is what I call “current day polygamy.” The virtual reality of porn allows a man to have the simulated experience of being sexual with literally thousands of women. None of the pornographic images, videos, strip clubs, or “live” Webcam liaisons call a man to be who God created or commanded him to be. Integrity is sacrificed on the altar of sinful sexual idolatry and unfaithfulness. And like King Solomon of old, many people today are enslaved and living in the prison of sexual strongholds. In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NIV), we are warned and reminded: “*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*”

God’s holy design and plan for sexuality contain the powerful mystery of “two becoming one.” And like so many other aspects of God’s pure plan becoming contaminated and corrupted, the Apostle Paul warns his readers of the reality of unholy sexual “oneness.” In 1 Corinthians 6:15-16 (NIV), Paul admonishes and gives this clarion warning regarding the tar-stained aftereffect of sex outside of God’s design: “*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’*”

I tell those I counsel that in Christ, God’s Word, and the many helpful resources available today, “We have more help and hope than you have problems!” God designed and instructed us on what healthy, holy sexuality should resemble. He has also given us a wealth of sexual battlefield strategies and a proven road map to find our way out of the darkness of sexual sin and into the new life, healing, and restoration available in Christ. King David, who knew his own significant sexual sin, proclaimed in Psalm 26:11 (ESV): “*But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me.*”

I see the word “integrity” in that verse as a reference to our “wholeness” in Christ. When my integrity is redeemed, I am back in alignment with God. Throughout the Bible, God saved people who had lost their way in sinful sexual behavior. It does not mean there are no consequences for sexual sin, but God will restore, redeem, and reconcile us to Himself and often others in our lives.

We are not abandoned or alone in this journey of sexual integrity. God has promised and is faithful to show up with an escape path every time we are sexually tempted. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV), we are offered encouragement and a way out: “... And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

One of my favorite passages for fighting the good fight against sexual temptation, Romans 13:11-14 (ESV), is so simple and practical for daily living: “*Besides this you know the time, that the hour has*

come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

No matter how dark the tar-stained residue of our past sexual sin, God will declare us righteous, forgiven, and clean in His sight. The whole first chapter of 1 John, especially verses seven and nine, should be meditated on and memorized by all Christians—as they call us to return to God when we have sinned. The stains and bondage of sexual sins are exposed, cleansed, healed, and forgiven when we come out of the secret shadows of infidelity and walk in holy freedom and fellowship with other believers in the light of Christ’s resurrection power: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (ESV).

I grew up in a church where we sang the old hymn, “There is a Fountain,” by William Cowper. No matter what the sexual stains are, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins; and sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains!” ❖



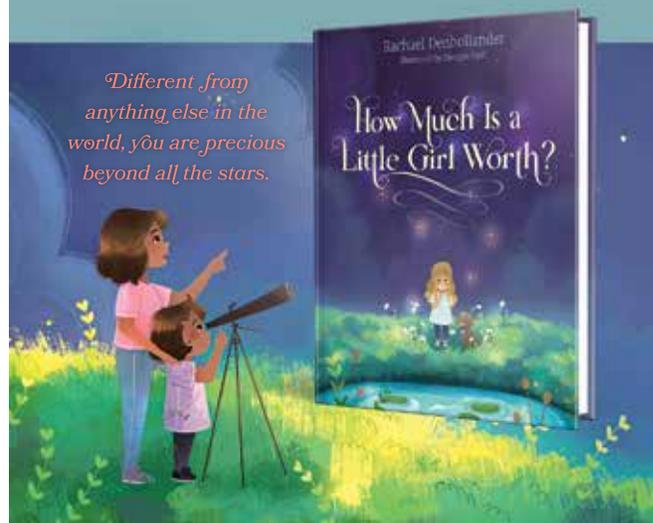
JIM CRESS, M.A., LPC, CSAT, CPTT, specializes in counseling those struggling with sex addiction, partners of sex addicts, trauma, and abuse, and provides marital counseling and experiential group therapy. He has a private practice in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he leads several men’s therapy groups, and is a group leader at Onsite Workshops. Jim is also a broadcaster of nearly 35 years and a regular conference speaker.

Endnotes

- ¹ The most up-to-date pornography statistics. Covenant Eyes. (2018). p. 5. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pomstats/>.
- ² The most up-to-date pornography statistics. p. 11.
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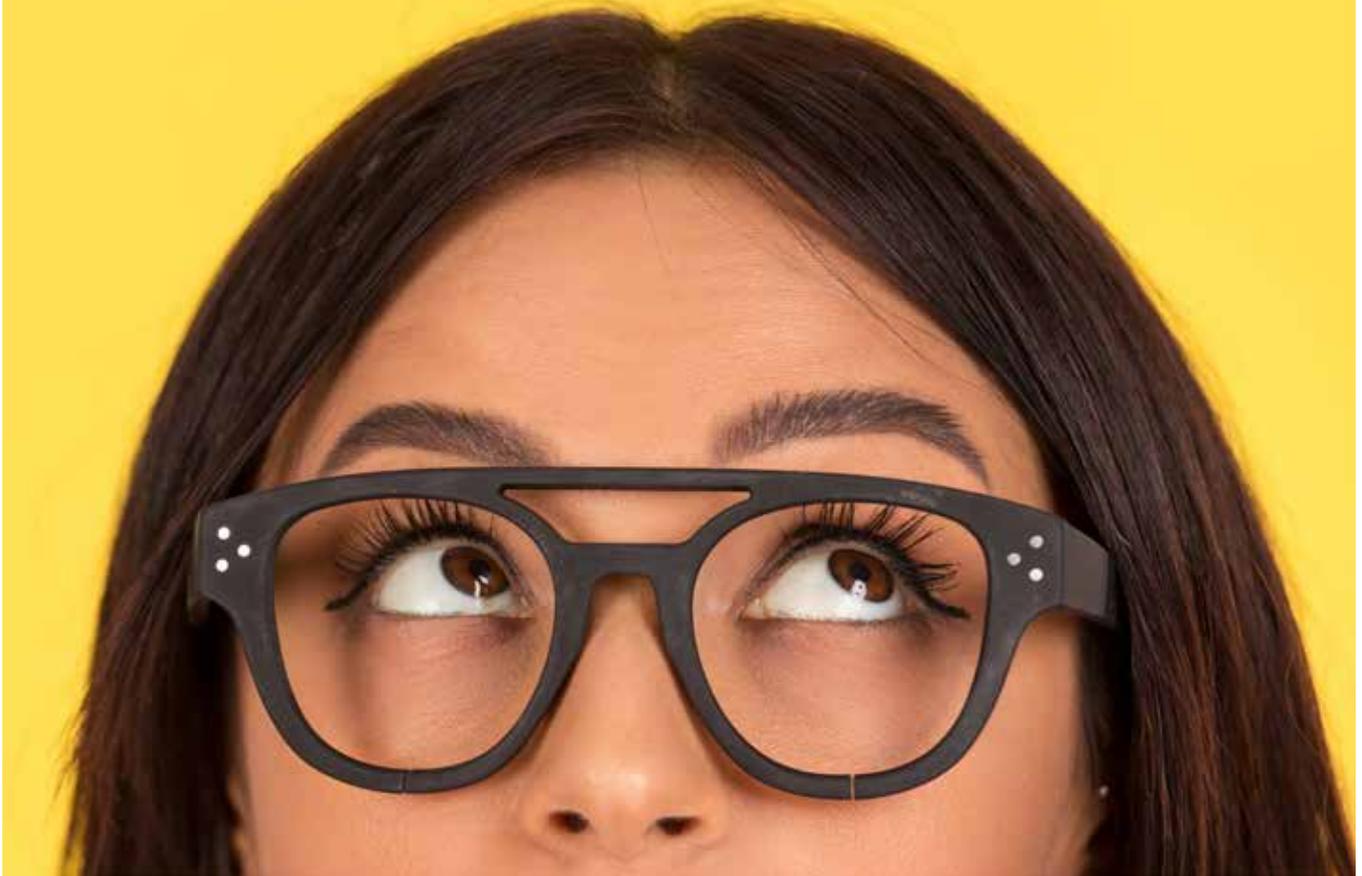
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The VOICES INSIDE OUR HEADS



One of my favorite comedy shows on television was “Whose Line Is It Anyway?” In every episode, stand-up comedians would improvise a scene suggested by an audience member, which Drew Carey, who hosted the show from 1998 to 2006, would pull from a hat. You never knew what hairbrained idea the comedians would be asked for a response. In one episode, the prompt was “odd things to hear from the voices in your head.”

“I am the little voice in your head,” says Colin Mochrie, a regular guest and audience favorite. He waits for the laugh to die and adds, “No, I am the little voice in your head.” More voices start piping the same line, and an argument breaks out between them. Finally, an exasperated Mochrie asks, “Will the real little voice in your head please stand up?”

It is a silly bit of improv, but it reminds me that we have many voices trying to infiltrate our minds and influence our beliefs. Social media has democratized the public forum of ideas. Now everyone has a platform to voice their opinions—regardless of their lack of expertise on a subject. Freedom of expression is a beautiful privilege, but, sadly, the result is often more people speaking, fewer people listening, and minds inundated with chaotic noise.

This consequence is particularly problematic as America wrestles with thorny issues such as race. Daily, social media and the news fill us with competing narratives about race relations problems in America and how we should handle them. Depending on your views on the matter, you can easily find pundits who will confirm your preconceptions. Many so-called experts try to influence—and at times, redefine—our sense of

identity. How do we determine whom we should listen to with so many voices vying for our attention?

The Israelites in the first century found themselves in a similar situation. God would raise prophets, kings, and leaders throughout their history to guide His wayward-prone people. However, following that period of prophets, a heavenly silence fell for 400 years. Some wondered whether the God that performed miracles would show up again to deliver them from Roman oppression. Others concluded it was time to take matters into their human hands and start an uprising, believing God would reward their tenacious faith. The more pious turned to the law and the rabbinic traditions, hoping that God would deem them worthy of saving if they followed every minutia.

God, however, had other plans. Scripture says He sent “... a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’” (Matthew 3:3, NIV). That voice belonged to John the Baptist, and the message He preached was not one of taking arms, obeying rules, or sitting tight until things sorted themselves out. He called the Israelites to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17, NIV).

REV. SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ



Repentance entails a complete turnaround from our current ways because the kingdom of God operates under different rules. In God's kingdom, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first; the self-exalted will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted; the broken are blessed, the lost are found, the sick are healed, and the bound are set free.

Being a part of God's kingdom means we need to stop listening to the voices of anger, confusion, lies, and jealousy. And we need to tune in to the voice of God. How do we know we are listening to His voice? His voice never leads us astray. It convicts and comforts; it does not bring confusion and never contradicts the written word of God. His voice leads us to truth and calls us to a higher standard, which is love.

Martin Luther King, Jr. understood this truth deeply. On November 17, 1957—the same year he became president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—he preached at a church in Montgomery, Alabama. He said, "... love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. That's why Jesus says, 'Love your enemies.' Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption."¹

Many people get hung up here. In conversations about the enduring evils of racism in our country, I often hear this argument: "It happened so long ago. Why don't they get over it?" That is the remark of someone who does not understand that racism and its consequences did not disappear when slavery was abolished or African-Americans won their civil rights. Racism can linger in man-made systems and survive unacknowledged in our everyday lives.

Racism also has the power to define a person's identity—to the point that skin color becomes the most crucial part of who they are. It is easy to let anger—as justified as it may be—fester inside of us and give in to the voices in our heads saying things will never get better... that no one will ever understand how we feel. We also cannot ignore the reality

that racism has a real impact on a person's mental well-being, which makes finding healing more difficult.

I love how King addressed these concerns. He said, "Forgiveness does not mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means, rather, that the evil act no longer remains as a barrier to the relationship."² To paraphrase a popular saying, unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies. It does not lead to life, wholeness, or happiness. Usually, the only person who suffers under the bondage of hate is yourself.

Many people assume that choosing the path of love and forgiveness is to be naïve, but the Apostle Paul and Reverend King saw love as a sign of true spiritual maturity. In 1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV), after laying out the case for the superiority of love, Paul writes, "*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.*" In other words, Paul's measure for manhood was not something concocted by popular culture, which often portrays men as macho womanizers who show no emotion or remorse. For Paul, achieving true manhood required understanding the depth and power of love.

Today the voices of hate often drown out the voices of love. However, God's voice calls us to His upside-down kingdom, where forgiveness and grace triumph over anger and resentment. God speaks in varying volumes. Sometimes His voice bellows loud and clear, but it can also come like a whisper, softly speaking to us amid the din of our world. Will we stop to listen? ✨

Paul's measure for manhood was not something concocted by popular culture, which often portrays men as macho womanizers who show no emotion or remorse. For Paul, achieving true manhood required understanding the depth and power of love.



REV. SAMUEL RODRIGUEZ, M.ED., is the lead pastor of *New Season*, one of America's most influential megachurches, and serves as president of the *National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference*, one of the world's largest Christian organizations. Several news outlets recognize him as America's most influential Latino/Hispanic faith leader. In 2010, Rev. Rodriguez was the recipient of the *Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award* presented by the Congress of Racial Equality. He has advised Presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump and frequently consults with members of Congress to advance life, religious liberty, and biblical justice initiatives, including immigration and criminal justice reform.

Endnotes

¹ King, M.L. (1957, November 17). "Loving your enemies," sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church#:~:text=And%20there%20is%20a%20power,is%20the%20power%20of%20redemption.>

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Leader Wellness and Recovery Intensives:

ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND NEW LIFE

Kelvin is a not-for-profit leader who provides discipleship and mentoring for teens in underserved populations. For multiple reasons, including Kelvin's own giftedness, passion, and ability to network, the not-for-profit has grown quickly, with new chapters being added monthly to cities around the United States. However, during the past few months, Kelvin has been struggling to get enough sleep, is harsh and critical with his wife, family, and co-workers, and has begun drinking more alcohol. Several people have mentioned their concerns for him, but he has either politely denied any problems, made a weak commitment to take better care of himself, or gotten defensive if their suspicions hit too close to home.

Kelvin is aware he is not doing well but does not think he has the time to go somewhere to “figure it out,” nor does he know where to start. Who can help with what he is battling anyway? He rationalizes that this is just a season, and things will get better. Kelvin focuses on the fact that he is successfully filling his leadership responsibilities—the measuring stick is the ministry's growth, so everything must be okay.

Christian leaders have chosen and accepted the role of leading people and organizations—through change, challenges, and discouragement. They are steering the ship and its crew through storms when others may want to jump ship or feel overwhelmed by the waves. These leaders provide direction, encouragement, hope, and wisdom to keep moving forward. Yet, everyone has a breaking point, and there are times when even leaders need to be led.

For example, take pastors who lead their churches. How are they doing? Recent Barna Group research found that 43% of pastors have considered leaving the profession for reasons ranging from feeling unappreciated to being negatively affected by their mental health and relationships.¹ About half of pastors struggle with a fear of failure and blame themselves when they fail.² Fifty-six percent of pastors feel like their spiritual formation takes a backseat to other ministry priorities, while 54% report they are challenged in managing distinct and opposite viewpoints with their congregations.³ Many pastors are experiencing increased stress from ministry changes and the cultural landscape.

Issues

The increase of stress and challenges in Christian leadership has raised many leaders' fear and anxiety levels. This strain has led to numerous issues, including burnout, desire to leave the ministry, and medicating to deal with the increased pressure. Leaders need help in multiple ways. Many feel ill-equipped to handle the challenges they are facing, some are experiencing debilitating anxiety and depression, and others are falling into addiction.

One effective option for Christian leaders is a counseling or wellness intensive—a concentrated time of counseling or care over several days or weeks, typically at a clinic or retreat setting. The focused “intense” approach allows leaders to dig in deep without the distractions of outside responsibilities.

MICHAEL MACKENZIE



Challenges

There are several potential challenges when it comes to working with Christian leaders. First, leaders are typically focused on doing and serving, not themselves. Many do not want to take the time, effort, and expense to work on themselves, especially if they do not see how it relates to being better at leadership.

Second, and related to the first, leaders are extremely busy and the thought of taking a week or weeks off to address their issues causes even more anxiety.

Third, leaders feel the pressure and expectation of having all the answers and often place the most burden on themselves. There can be the temptation to either hide the struggle or figure things out themselves.

As has often been said, our greatest strength can be our greatest weakness. Most leaders have a considerable capacity for persistence and perseverance. Their mentality is, “If I still have a breath in my body, then I can keep going” or “When everyone else is ready to quit, I will soldier on.” This mindset is an admirable and needed quality, but there can also be some downsides. Sometimes the temptation is extraordinarily strong to use unhealthy or destructive and sinful methods to press on. Unhealthy approaches can be robbing needed hours of sleep to work more, grabbing fast food too often to save time, or relying too much on caffeine to move forward. Destructive and sinful methods can include alcohol abuse or viewing pornography to deal with the pressure. If leaders combine the therapeutic effect of stress relief with any history or tendency toward dependence, it can quickly escalate to addiction.

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 - Breathe Life Ministries (breatheliftoday.com)
- Faithful and True Ministries (faithfulandtrue.com)
 - HopeQuest (hopequestgroup.org)
 - Marble Retreat (marbleretreat.org)
 - Potters Inn (pottersinn.com)
- Quiet Waters Ministry (quietwatersministry.org)
 - 10:10 Ministries (1010ministries.org)
- The Center • A Place of Hope (aplaceofhope.com)
 - Timberline Knolls (timberlineknolls.com)

New Life

Thankfully through God and His people, redemption is always available. As previously mentioned, wellness and recovery intensives can be an excellent option for leaders. Leaders need a place they can trust for confidential, effective, efficient, and professional care—a space where they are understood.

Several intensives are available to assist leaders with various issues. Spiritual formation intensives support spiritual health; counseling intensives relieve shame and marital problems; mental health intensives provide care for depression, anxiety, and eating disorders; and recovery intensives comfort those struggling with addiction.

After one particularly grueling day when Kelvin blew up at his most trusted co-worker, he again heard his wife say that something had to change, and he knew she was serious. Although he caught himself wanting to stop at the liquor store and hide in his office, he knew it was time for a change. The following day, Kelvin told management he needed help. He found a recovery center for leaders that allowed him to work through his alcohol issue and discover the personal buttons that

triggered him to buckle under the pressure of expectations. The healing he experienced allowed him to see his role through the lens of his faith in real and practical ways. As a result, Kelvin returned to the ministry he loved and began leading from a different foundation. ✕



MICHAEL MACKENZIE, D.MIN., is the Executive Director of Marble Retreat, an intensive counseling center for Christian leaders. He has specialized in caring for leaders for the past 20 years and is the author of the recently released book, *Don't Blow Up Your Ministry: Defuse the*

Underlying Issues that take Pastors Down.

Endnotes

- 1 Packiam, G., & Strickland, D. (2022, February 15). *Activating resilient leadership for kingdom come: An inside-out journey for pastors.* World Vision and Barna Group.
- 2 Packiam, G., & Strickland, D.
- 3 Packiam, G., & Strickland, D.

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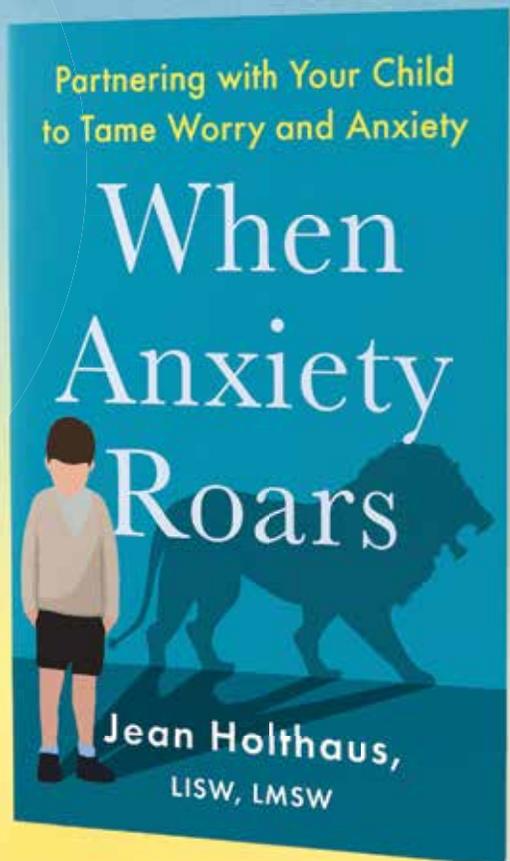
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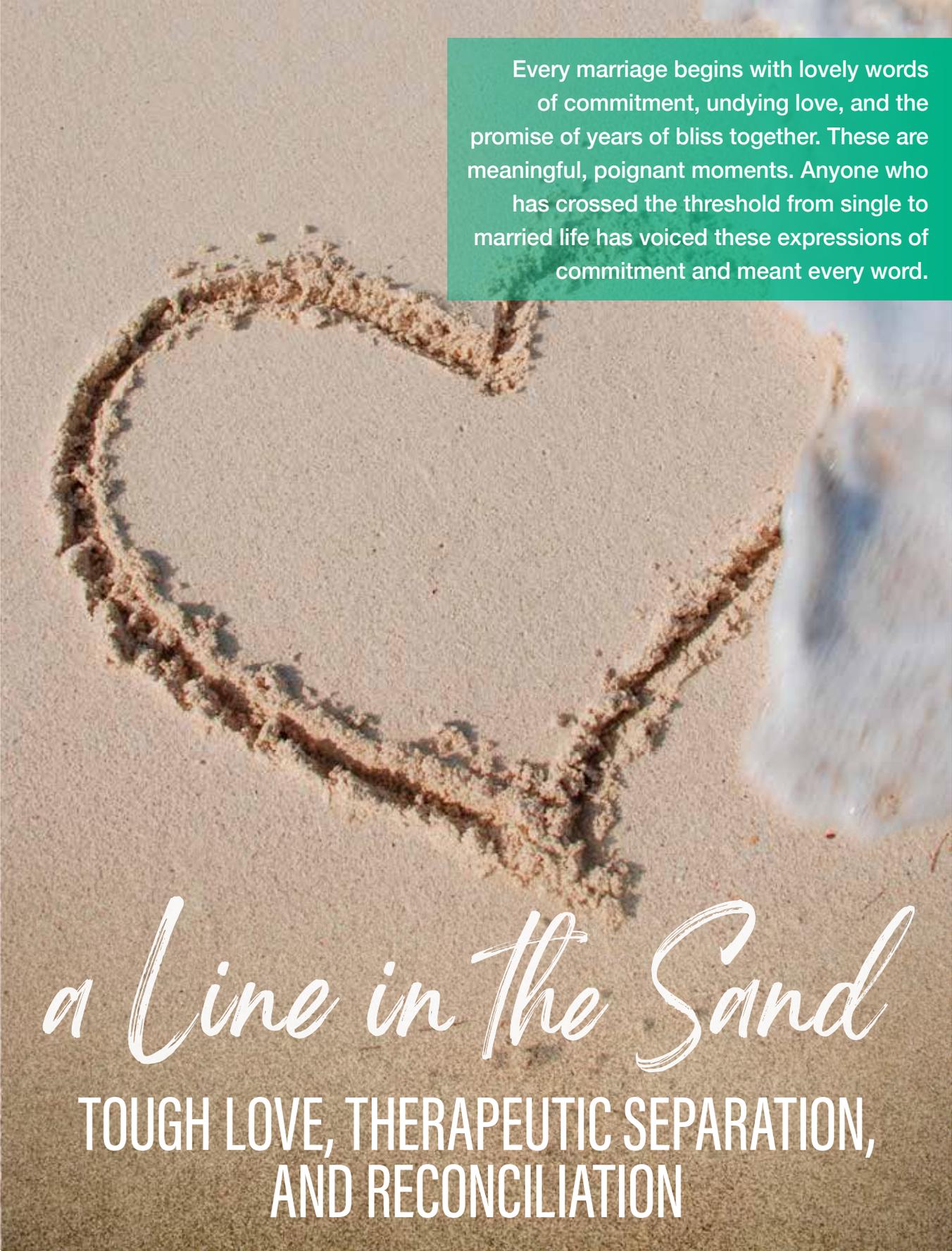


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TOUGH LOVE, THERAPEUTIC SEPARATION,
AND RECONCILIATION

The vows we take at the start of a marriage filled with hope are spoken from a very emotional and heartfelt place. However, little or nothing is mentioned at the altar about the day-to-day issues involved in marriage. Few wedding ceremonies warn of the challenges of two becoming one. These wedding vows and words of commitment are shortsighted and can even be naïve, as there is no mention of the hardships every couple is likely to face. Does anyone honestly know what they are getting into when committing to a lifelong attachment to another human being?

Now, please do not misunderstand... I am happily married. My point is that our initial vows and best intentions may fall apart at some point, as they often fail to consider all the pertinent issues. While we plan to be selfless and give to our mates throughout our marriages, these intentions often give way to the reality of our limitations.

Under enough duress, emotional connection can lead to disconnection and sometimes severe conflict. While the stress may not lead to physical separation, emotional tensions build and frequently lead to other struggles. No one anticipates separation, and we do not plan to be destructive or hurtful. However, we become self-protective when hurt and respond by hurting others, often resulting in separation.

Tough Love

These are the moments when marriage genuinely takes work. During these difficult times, couples, and those who work with them, must consider “tough love” that most likely will require one or both partners to draw a “line in the sand.”

What does “tough love” mean? What might a “line in the sand” look like? Tough love means that we, as counselors, stand face to face with couples and talk about the realities of what they are experiencing. If, as can often be the case, a couple is caught in an endless cycle of conflict where they are exhausted, tough love means invoking boundaries by drawing a line in the sand to break these destructive cycles.

Of course, couples have to put in the work, but it is our responsibility to offer skillful guidance. In certain situations, it may be our role to facilitate separation—a breaking of fellowship for the purpose of reflection, consideration, and creating an opportunity to reset. A temporary break can be a time to regroup, consider what has led to the severe disconnection, and determine what specific changes the couple must make. Under these dire circumstances, counselors may suggest an orchestrated time apart that functions as an intervention.

DAVID HAWKINS

Counselors should encourage couples to allay their fears and convey that sometimes for relationships to come back stronger and healthier, they must first fall apart.



Most couples in intense conflict have considered a separation, but the thought of this level of disruption is terribly frightening. What will happen to the children? Will my partner support such a break? Will there be retaliation? How will we manage finances? Many slip back into the status quo with so many questions and fears. This is where strong, wise counsel comes into play, as a couple in this setting will not likely settle back into the status quo. No, the discord will continue to erode the fabric of the relationship as illustrated by The Four Horsemen of marital conflict—criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling—by world-renowned marriage therapist, Dr. John Gottman.

Again, our short-sighted naiveté about what we hope and wish our marriages will be crashes into harsh reality. Most of us do not rise to the level of the challenge but rather fall to the level of our limited skills. One negative interaction, layered atop a previous wound, leads to an even greater marital slide.

At this point, tough love suggests that the most caring thing one partner can do for the other is create a time apart to offer new insight and hope for change. Counselors should encourage couples to allay their fears and convey that sometimes for relationships to come back stronger and healthier, they must first fall apart.

Therapeutic Separation

Understandably, the word “separation” scares most people. As much as each partner may long for relief from the conflict, they also fear separation. Thus, as counselors and helpers, we often see couples cling to each other, even amid severe discord.

However, what if we could offer guidance and help in a separation by weaving in hope for reconciliation? What if we assured these couples that we have seen advantages from temporarily pulling apart? We have an opportunity to teach and counsel about the benefits of a “therapeutic separation.” Dr. Robert Buchicchio, the author of *Taking Space: How to Use Separation to Explore the Future of Your Relationship*, says, “... temporary separations in a marriage can often be exactly what couples need in order to grow, develop, and renew their commitment to each other and themselves.”¹

What does a therapeutic separation look like, and how does it differ from angrily breaking apart? A therapeutic separation is an opportunity for couples to disconnect for a determined time to ease the marital tension, reflect on what is happening, and make new agreements about how they will do life together. Since most couples lack proper boundaries, this time away from one another is an opportunity to consider values and establish healthy parameters.

Notice that a therapeutic separation has a clear intention and purpose, a determined time apart (to be evaluated), and clear boundaries. (This is quite different from an explosive separation without distinct objectives and limits.) Some of the issues to be considered include:

1. Clarity about the purpose of the therapeutic separation
2. Someone guiding this process (counselor/pastor)
3. Definitive length of separation
4. Strategies to cooperate regarding children
5. Clear expectations regarding how they will/will not communicate
6. Clear expectations of emotional/sexual fidelity
7. Role and purpose of individual/couples counseling (what really must change?)
8. Privacy and the role of extended family/friends
9. Boundaries regarding financial support
10. Boundaries and expectations regarding the living situation

These, of course, are only some of the broad headings for topics to be considered and discussed. Separating is complicated, to be sure. Managing these issues can be a very tall order for couples already in severe conflict, but help is available.

Summary

Again, separations are frightening but can be extremely powerful. As counselors, pastors, and helpers, we have an opportunity to assist distressed couples with stepping back, gently pulling apart, and reflecting. We have a chance to show them that what they are doing is not working... that more of the same leads to more of the same. Relief is needed, so they must draw a line in the sand. A therapeutic separation to reunite in a healthier manner may be required. ✦



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Endnote

- ¹ Buchicchio, R. (2018). *Taking space: How to use separation to explore the future of your relationship*. CharLer Publishing. p. 9.





THE GRACIOUS GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

We live in a wounded and hurting world. Yet, a greater concern and culprit is a broken and divided church! The global pandemic caused medical and economic crises that precipitated conflicts among Christians—to go or not to go to church... to get vaccinated and wear a mask or not? The moral failure of leaders amidst socio-cultural and gender revolutions raised justice issues with which we continue to struggle.¹ Racial abuses led to critical race theo-

ries that reassessed white supremacy and the Black Lives Matter agenda. Our “cancel culture” and “#Me Too” movements are creating woke churches. Personal vindictive agendas have led to public protests and fighting for one’s rights. Consequently, “Christians” carry grudges with a resentful, unforgiving spirit. Our urgent need is to understand who we are, then rightly and gently relate to those who wrong us.²

Forgiven and Unforgiving

Paul greeted the saints at Corinth with “grace,” noting they were “washed, sanctified, and justified” (1 Corinthians 6:11). These terms indicate they were spiritually cleansed, totally transformed, and declared righteous because of what Jesus did for them—that is, God “in Christ” had forgiven their sins. However, they were sinning against fellow believers by suing them in pagan courts. Obviously, they were sinned against and found reasons to develop this disgraceful act of unforgiveness. However, this unforgiveness made them guilty of the same sinfulness they were suing to remedy! In judging others as guilty, they held them captive to their offenses. Paul listed some horrific sins and recollected that “such were some of you.” Yet, all were sinners indeed. Their unforgiving nature evidenced that they were still unsaved, unlike Jesus, and unworthy of His kingdom.

We have all seen the bumper sticker, “Christians are not perfect, just forgiven!” Jesus taught His followers to be perfect as their Father in heaven and ask Him to forgive them of their sins “just as” they had forgiven those who sinned against them (Matthew 5:48; 6:12). However, this command and accompanying condition are impossible if in exact proportion to God’s forgiveness of us! To grasp the meaning, find the motivation, and be able to forgive “just as God,” we must come to terms with the nature of forgiveness and our desperate need for God’s enabling grace.

Biblical Word Pictures

We discover what “forgiveness” looks like by examining its many biblical word pictures. Paul portrayed it as defilement or dirt being washed away. David sinned and asked God to cleanse his sins (Psalm 51:2). Jesus compared sin to a deadly disease that needed a doctor and declared that this was why He had come (Luke 5:29-31). Believers cleansed by His blood confess, “... by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)! In His famous parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son, Jesus revealed our estrangement from God the Father and announced that He came to seek and save lost sinners (Luke 15:1-9; 19:10). A synonym for sin in Aramaic is “debt.” The insufferable guilt linked to sin is depicted as an unbearable burden.³ The resultant legal obligation puts the sinner in bondage. These illustrations of sin—as dirt, disease, sickness, lostness, and the burden of a moral debt—place the guilty one in captivity. They show us someone has been gravely sinned against by another who is in dire need of forgiveness because of God’s mercy and grace.⁴

Jesus told of the servant who owed a king a colossal sum of money (Matthew 18:21-35). Unable to repay, he begged for mercy, and the king canceled his intractable debt. Then, this servant went and demanded from his associate a small amount due. Finding that he could not repay, he threw him in jail. The king was outraged and imprisoned this unmerciful servant for life! The king’s question, “*Shouldn’t you have done what I did to you?*” (v. 33), leads to Jesus’ warning of God’s judgment against such people. Like a burden with unbearable guilt, unforgiven sin creates an unimaginable bondage that cries for freedom from the sinful self (Proverbs 5:22, Psalm 38:4). Forgiving releases our offenders from the bondage of satanic guilt and proves we are children of the God of all grace. Moreover, as renowned Christian author and theologian, Lewis B. Smedes, points out, “When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us.”⁵

To grasp the meaning, find the motivation, and be able to forgive “just as God,” we must come to terms with the nature of forgiveness and our desperate need for God’s enabling grace.

CHRIS GNANAKAN

The Principle of Reciprocity

Forgiveness is painful, humbling, and costly when we want offenders to repay or think they have not learned a lesson. It does not erase the past, quickly heal our wounds, or guarantee repentance! It is not fair since it goes beyond justice to show mercy. With ample reasons why we feel we should not or could not forgive, it is helpful to reevaluate our motives and find adequate motivation. Jesus taught that if we forgive others, our Heavenly Father will forgive us. We may follow the “Golden Rule” only to find the principle does not work both ways. Peter suggested a generous number of times to forgive, but Jesus made it limitless. Technically, God cannot forget the offense, and, usually, we do not want to either. Yet, we must choose not to hold the wrongdoing against another, share it with others, or bring it up again. Forgiveness demands that we separate the sins from the “sinners”—a category we all fall under! The point is that even if offenders do not admit to sin or care to receive forgiveness, we must still be eager and ready to forgive.⁶

Why and How?

Christians must forgive others because God commands it, models it, and “in Christ” has set the standard (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32). It is vital to recognize the basis or grounds of God’s forgiveness—by *grace* alone! Grace is God’s benevolent, extravagant love that freely justifies sinners. It goes beyond God’s mercy and does not give us what we deserve, but what we do not... even what is not fair! As to the *conditions* for forgiveness, it is God’s sheer, unmerited favor. And regarding its *content*, it is entirely gratuitous—God’s free, supernatural gift.⁷

Grace is God’s essential *goodness* by which He has chosen to manifest His glory to sinful humans, and it leads them to repentance (Exodus 33:5-6; Romans 2:4). This gracious gift came embodied in the person of Jesus, who made us partakers of the divine nature by giving us His empowering Spirit (Titus 2:11-12; 2 Peter 1:4). So, forgiveness can be our gift to offenders, and it keeps on forgiving!

If we are unforgiving, on what basis can we claim we are forgiven? We show our self-righteousness, not Christ-likeness! The book, *The Scandal Forgiveness*, by author, Philip Yancey, is aptly subtitled, *Grace Put to the Test*. Yancey posits: “Only by living in the stream of God’s grace will I find the strength to respond with grace toward others.”⁸ Forgiveness is unnatural, impossible, and precisely why supernatural grace is needed to find “more grace” in our time of need. This gift alone forgives us of sin *and* enables us to truly forgive others. Now that is amazing!

Pastoral Care and Counsel

How do we counsel people dealing with unforgiveness? Jesus diagnosed the problem and instructed us to “forgive from the heart.” Grace produces gratitude that is both corrective (i.e., it begins not with us, but “Christ in us”) and destructive (i.e., it shatters our self-righteous pride that makes us judge others). Grace renews our minds and brings every thought captive to obey Christ. We should encourage Scripture memory and let God’s Word dwell in unforgiving hearts so the Spirit can do His deep convicting work that leads to confessing and forsaking sin. Jesus taught us to pray even for our enemies, which can help us forgive and restore others. We must keep confidentiality, not enforce undue penalties, show compassion, and, by grace, break the vengeful chain of unforgiveness.⁹ May His Spirit enable us to offer and receive “the gift of forgiveness.” Above all, its compensation package includes contagious joy and uncontainable blessings!¹⁰ We are never more like the God of all grace than when we forgive! ✕



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Endnotes

- 1 Rust, B. (2018). *Untouchable: Unraveling the myth that you’re too faithful to fall*, Chosen Books.
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- 3 One of the most common words in the New Testament, *aphiemi*, means to release from a legal and moral obligation linked with guilt.
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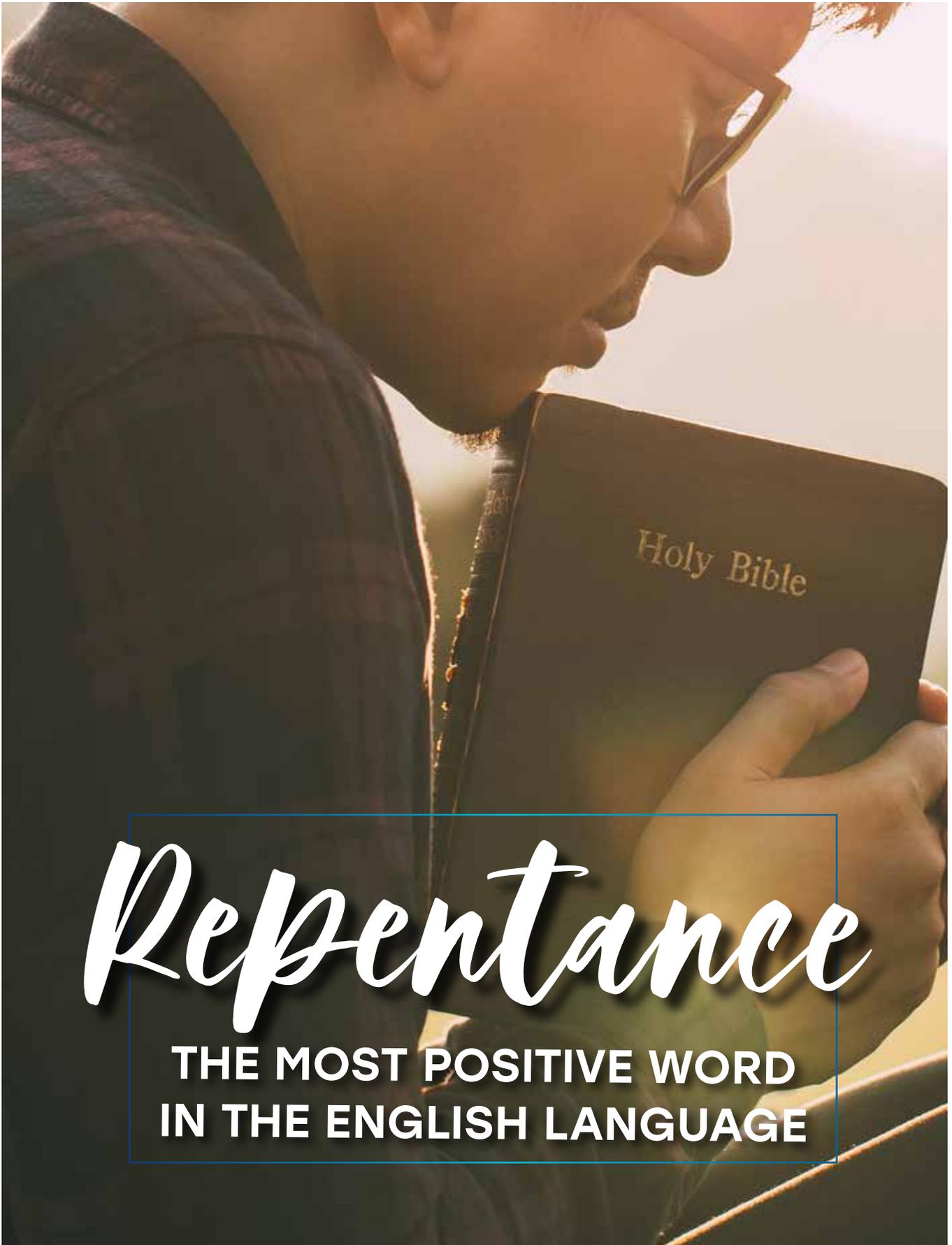
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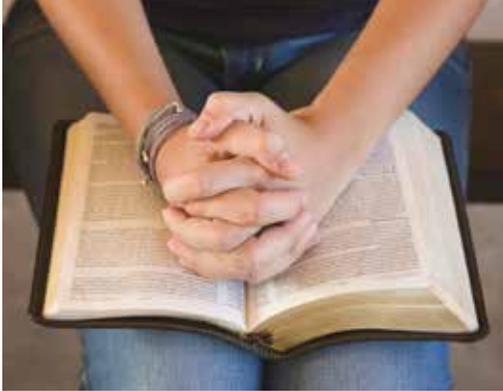
*Healing the Past.
Embracing the Present.
Redeeming the Future.*





Repentance

**THE MOST POSITIVE WORD
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**



When I was first approached about writing for this article on repentance and restoration, I remembered with gratitude those counselors, ministers, and educators who used God's Word to help lead me to a new life. Coming from a dysfunctional past filled with abuse and abandonment, I now walk whole because of those who spent years preparing themselves to be used in such a crucial ministry. I am forever grateful. With mental health issues crippling our younger generations, these roles may be more critical today than at any other time in history.

JAY H. STRACK

Repentance in the Old Testament is defined as “sorrow” and in the New Testament as “a change of mind.” Both are essential to holistic healing. No matter how harsh the struggle or how deep the pit, you can begin again. In his book, *Our Nearest Kinsman*, Roy Hession writes, “But with God our failure is never final! Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of lost men and lost situations, whether the situation has been wrong for half a lifetime or only a day.”¹

When approached wholeheartedly, repentance becomes the most positive word in the English language. Instead of feeling condemned by it, we are given hope. While the masses search for the cure for life's pain, they overlook the opportunity for a fresh start. Remorse, shame, regret, and guilt can be banished as a change of heart and mind lead to the restoration of relationships, both with man and God. Repentance is an over-the-counter, readily available remedy.

No discussion on repentance can be understood without reference to the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The famine in the land mirrored that in the young man's soul. He was sure that “stepping out” would provide the freedom for which his heart yearned. Emancipation from his father, he believed, was the answer. This lie of Satan is being whispered into the ears of our students every day. They long for independence and freedom from being held back but only find bondage. As professor, theologian, and author, Dr. Wayne Grudem, wrote, “Finally, we should note that all sin is ultimately irrational.”²

From personal experience, I share three steps to restoration.

1. Examine Yourself. Not only had the prodigal son squandered his opportunities for the future, but his need for immediate satisfaction shut out the value of the love, discipline, and boundaries set by his father. Finally, in Luke 15:17 (NKJV), he “came to himself” as reality set in, and he longed for the life he once had.

Before repentance can begin to do its healing work, the cry of the Psalmist must be made, “*Search me, O God...*” (Psalm 139:23, KJV). Throughout Scripture, we see that God “called sinners on the carpet,” asking, “What have you done?” and “Why have you done it?” *He* knew, but it was also crucial for the sinner to understand the temptation by which Satan lured him into the sin.

The grace of God is not an allowance to keep sinning; it is the medicine that flows liberally over the soul as a holy God and penitent sinner come together in a renewed relationship.

Satan tempted Eve in the garden. Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. And humankind will face this foe daily in the same arenas: *“For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world”* (1 John 2:16, NIV).

Repentance begins with asking yourself, “why?” Why does this “sin so easily ensnare” me (Hebrews 12:1)? This true wisdom is the key to stopping bad behavior and not repeating it. In his book, *Never Go Back*, clinical psychologist and author, Dr. Henry Cloud, describes repentance as running into a wall³—the pain is so sharp that the mind says, “Don’t go that way again. Use another door.” Some of us need to be knocked in the head before realizing the bigger picture.

2. Godly Sorrow. Feeling bad about sin is worthless guilt, weighing on a soul like overstuffed baggage. Godly sorrow is created through complete humility and acceptance of blame in the decision to sin. It results in presenting ourselves to the Savior as we are—no excuses, the blame game is over, and no more running and hiding. We no longer worship at the altar of the immediate. *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death”* (2 Corinthians 7:10, NIV).

The wonderful news is that we do not come to this on our own. From the moment we sin and stray, the Savior begins to follow us, convicting through the Spirit and leading us to brokenness.

3. Restoration. To be set free from the habits of sin, we must first allow restoration to take us into healing and then into a new course for the future. David, the Shepherd, elegantly penned, *“He restores my soul...”* (Psalm 23:3, NKJV). In the Hebrew picture, there is a refreshment, a repair, a renewing. In the New Testament (Galatians 6:1), the Greek for “restore” is a medical term that speaks of setting a bone back into the socket where it belongs. As one who has had his share of dislocated and broken bones in my wilder teen years, I can relate to this restoration. The pain is gone, and the once useless limb is restored to its original healthy function. Whether mending a net or human character, restoration means returning to wholeness and usefulness.

The grace of God is not an allowance to keep sinning; it is the medicine that flows liberally over the soul as a holy God and penitent sinner come together in a renewed relationship. I have preached for decades in crusades that it “does not matter who you are, where you are, who you have been or been with... there is a new life available to you!”

The prodigal son wanted freedom, but he did not find it until he returned home. David, too, found the power of this reunion as he wrote, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me”* (Psalm 51:12, NIV).

My fascination with the prodigal son is renewed over and over again. At the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, I came face to face with the beauty of Rembrandt’s painting of the Return of the Prodigal Son, portraying a father’s emotional and welcoming embrace of his son. However, it was a tapestry in the Vatican that has stayed with me—somewhat faded and worn in places, its beauty endured in the story it tells of a father shielding his prodigal son from the judgment and stones of the watching neighbors. This beautiful image could be an illustration of the grace of our God, who is waiting, hoping, and calling us back to His love and protection and on to a confident and promised future. ✕



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Reconciling with Apologies that Bring Life



A friend once told me, “There are three very difficult things to say in life: ‘I’m sorry.’ ‘I was wrong,’ and ‘Worcestershire sauce.’”

Reconciling Relationships Requires Giving and Receiving Apologies

Crafting a heartfelt apology takes time and thought. The Bible says, “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24, BSB). “The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Proverbs 12:18, NIV). Strained relationships need words that bring healing, not strife and more destruction.

Why do our mouths get us into so much trouble? James (3:3-6, NIV) tells us that the tongue determines the direction and quality of our lives and relationships: “When we put **bits** into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a **very small rudder** wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a **fire**, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” The tongue is such a small part of the body, but it “has the power of life and death” (Proverbs 18:21, NIV). When I read that Proverb, my eyes go immediately to the word “death.” However, the tongue also has the power to bring “life.” It restores, heals, builds up, soothes, and reconciles.

Apologize, state the offense, and *take ownership* for your part of the conflict.

Pastors and counselors have a unique opportunity with the power of our words. We meet with people every day who have their hearts broken by the destructive words of others. In their relationships, they are experiencing death. However, we speak life, and through our words, we see Jesus breathe hope and healing into those who are hurting. There is great joy in what God has called us to do!

As leaders, speaking life into others starts at home. I want my children to hear me apologize to their mother when I mess up. Also, when I blow it with my kids, they need my apology. Families grow stronger over time when apologies are given and received. The following are a few practical considerations to help us craft life-giving apologies.

First, make sure it is helpful.

Paul exhorts us to “... *not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*” (Ephesians 4:29, NIV). We are all guilty of bad apologies that serve as roadblocks to reconciliation.

When I flippantly say to my wife, Amy, “I’m sorry,” it usually means I just want the misunderstanding or conflict to be over. That is more of a flight response. In our early years of marriage, Amy would follow up with, “For what?” Twenty-five years into marriage, I have learned to tag my “I’m sorry” with the word or action that led to the offense.

The following are a few more examples of unhelpful, insincere apologies.

When I say, “I’m sorry you feel

that way,” I invalidate the other person’s feelings, and the intended meaning is, “You shouldn’t feel that way.” You never need to apologize for the way someone feels. Instead, apologize for your words and actions.

When I say, “If I offended you, I’m sorry,” The message this conveys to the other person is, “You’re too sensitive.”

“I’m sorry you took it that way” is interpreted as, “You read more into that than I intended.” Thus, I blame the listener for poor understanding rather than taking responsibility for my weak delivery.

“I’m sorry I said it that way” could be taken as, “What I told you was true, and you needed to hear it, but maybe I could have said it better.” I learned a long time ago that using “maybe” and “probably” in an apology weakens my personal responsibility.

Second, use fewer words. The Bible tells us that a wise man restrains his words. Do not get historical when apologizing—bringing up the past is not helpful. A well-crafted apology is short and to the point. You do not need to offer a dissertation on the situation. Apologize, state the offense, and *take ownership* for your part of the conflict.

Let the person you offended know you realize they are hurting and matter. The Bible advises, “*Fire goes out for lack of fuel...*” (Proverbs 26:20, TLB). A concise, well-crafted apology does not add fuel to the fire of the dispute. “*Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues*” (Proverbs 10:19, NIV). “*The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever*

has understanding is even-tempered. Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues” (Proverbs 17:27-28, NIV).

Third, if possible, apologize in person. Text messages, e-mails, and phone calls are okay but often lack the understanding that comes from someone else’s non-verbal expressions. When I apologize, I want to be sure my words are landing well on the ears and hearts of the ones I have offended. Texting an apology and waiting and watching for a reply is excruciating. Face-to-face interaction takes place in real time, and your apology cannot be ghosted.

Finally, ask for forgiveness. We often minimize the pain we experience from someone’s words or actions. We say things like, “It’s no big deal,” “I wasn’t offended,” or “Don’t give it a second thought.” However, “I forgive you” needs to be added to my friend’s list of difficult things to say. “I forgive you” can be just as difficult to express as, “I’m sorry.” Although we should not demand forgiveness, it can certainly be requested—but be patient; the person you offended may need some time and space to process their pain and your apology.

Let’s speak life into every one of our relationships. And when death rolls off our tongues, let us seek reconciliation with sincere apologies. ✘



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Dallas Theological Seminary.

Broken Trust



Eleven years ago, Jerry Sandusky was arrested and convicted on 45 counts of child molestation. Previously, he and his wife adopted children, started a sports program for troubled youth, and delivered many other positive actions that led people to see him as an exceptional man with a heart for kids. Once he was convicted, the light was then thrown on those around him in leadership.

It was a jarring, disorienting event. We believe what we see and hear and make assumptions about those spaces in another's life where we cannot see or hear—and we are often wrong. Often, we assume good where there is evil, most frequently when it is about individuals or institutions we love and honor: Larry Nasser, Ravi Zacharias,

Bill Hybels, Jonathan Fletcher, and many others. We believed the individuals to be good and trusted the systems to be safe. However, in these cases and many others, trust has been broken.

I fear we rely on outward appearances and numbers to tell the truth about one's soul and institutions. Often, we protect our preferred institutions and systems rather than the lambs. We serve the systems when they are actually meant to serve the people and shield our favored leaders rather than the little ones. In Matthew 21, Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who bought and sold. He said they had made a refuge meant for the sheep into a robbers den. It had become a safe place for those who steal, a place

for protected exploitation.

In Jeremiah 7, God tells His people not to trust deceptive words while repeating to themselves that this is God's house. They assure themselves that everything is okay because it is a church. Although we expect safety, people and systems are only safe when they manifest God's character in the flesh. That means they look like Him, practice justice, do not oppress the least of these, and do not walk after other gods (e.g., size, fame, riches, power). God says that if His people do not turn to Him and manifest Him, He will do to the place that externally bears His name what He did to Shiloh. God's people trusted in the place rather than God Himself, and Shiloh (which means refuge) was destroyed.

I fear we do not want to see because if we do, we must act... or carry the guilt of not doing so. We do not want to see because it threatens our beliefs in the leaders' virtue and the system's worth. People believe in the systems they are accustomed to—nation, church, family, or institution. It is easy to do so unthinkingly, as the stated goal is wonderful and one in which we believe. Therefore, institutions such as church and family are God-ordained and must be protected at all costs. "The leadership is good. Did you hear what they taught or promised?" Yet, somehow we think external results tell the whole truth. And then, of course, there is the harm of exposure. What will happen if this truth is known? It will ruin the reputation of our important work. The truth will damage God's name!

You and I are not here to build institutions or garner fame, wealth, or power. We are here for the *sole* purpose of manifesting Jesus Christ in the flesh. He came to personify the Father, to make Him clear to us. We are meant to bear His fragrance into this world. As Christians, our highest authority is not the institution under which we serve. Our highest authority is the moral standards of a holy God. He has said we are *never* to cause a little one to stumble—by word, deed, or complicity. We are God's little ones, and His care for us is our standard—and that standard is rooted in the character of the Lord manifested in the flesh by Jesus Christ. It is not found in the regulations, goals, or power of some human institution which, at best, is only a bare glimmer of that beautiful character.

We have broken trust when we protect our institutions, special groups, or organizations. First, we have broken trust with our God. In response to the enemy showing Jesus all the various kingdoms of this world, Jesus replied: "... Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and

serve him only'" (Matthew 4:10, NASB1995). Our duty, our allegiance, is to Him alone. It is not due to a human leader or institution—even one built in God's name.

Also, we have broken trust with those under our care. The One we say we follow said this to us: "... *Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them...*" (Matthew 19:14, ESV). Abuse of any kind hinders. The cover-up of any abuse hinders. Proverbs 24:11 (NIV) tells us to, "*Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter.*" If we say we did not know, turn a blind eye, pretend ignorance, or deny the truth, our rescuing God who guards us will let it turn back on us.

Think of the exposures in the Christian world. They turn the light on, illuminate things our Lord hates and died for, and point to our broken trust with God and His people. We have preserved and protected our work, our system, and our success. Proverbs 24 goes on to say that God returns to us according to our deeds. The harm done to the little ones—those less in age, stature, wealth, and strength—turns back on us. We have seen the destruction of many leaders and systems whose broken trust, lies, and cover-ups have led to their demise. Our God has come and not kept silence (Psalm 50). He calls us not to stay silent in the day of trouble. He will rescue us, and *then we will honor Him*. Our God has not broken trust with us... may we not do so with Him. ✠



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If we say we did not know, turn a blind eye, pretend ignorance, or deny the truth, our rescuing God who guards us will let it turn back on us.

Coach Ganey's Opus: How to Unlock the Extraordinary in Others

I have a warm spot in my heart for the film, *Mr. Holland's Opus*. I've watched it several times, but I saw the final scene play out in real life a few weeks ago.

The occasion was a Hall of Fame induction ceremony at a Christian college in northeast Georgia called Emmanuel. The recipient of the honor was my friend and former coach, Jim Ganey.¹ I know him well, as I've observed his life for more than five decades. Yet, I was totally unprepared for what I saw and heard that night. I think most of the people in that town—a small village built around a Christian college—would have been surprised by the drama experienced that evening.

I grew up in that community. Most folks who lived there during my youth tried very hard to please God through the pursuit of holy thoughts and conduct. There was a palpable fear of falling short of heaven in that town. But, looking back now, perhaps the more credible danger was producing people so holy that they might shoot right past it. And, then, there was coach. No one worried about him shooting past heaven.

Jim marched to a different drummer. He was the type of person who seemed to think there were only two types of jokes, clean and funny. He preferred funny jokes. And his language could be, well, colorful. Very colorful. Loudly and brightly colorful. It did not help that he began to look a lot like the famous basketball coach, Bobby Knight, in his middle years. And Jim could throw chairs even further across a basketball court.

However, if you really got to know Jim, you knew that his love for God



was deep and sincere, even though he had more than a few reasons to be angry with God. Perhaps the most painful one involved his first-born child. Due to a tragic issue of admitted medical malpractice, she was left with significant challenges that would last a lifetime. It wasn't long after that painful event that Jim stepped away from the pulpit and became a teacher... and then a coach.

Coaching came naturally for Jim,

as naturally as his athletic abilities. If you flip through the pages of his high school annuals, you will see that he had it all. He looked like a younger, more athletic, Ricky Nelson. Jim was a natural leader—elected the president of his junior and senior class. He was the captain of each of the three different sports teams he played on: football, baseball, and, his favorite, basketball. Once, he hit 108 free throws in a row after practice just to



back his claim of being able to reach triple digits.

No one was surprised when Jim was offered an opportunity to play basketball at a large university. But most were incredibly stunned when he walked away to play at a small Christian college fielding its first team. Jim made lots of decisions with his heart—and his heart would keep him in that same small town, and at that same college, for all but a few of the next 60 years of his life.

His focus and loyalty paid off in a variety of ways. The induction ceremony was the capstone. And, then, a few minutes into the formalities, it began. One of his former players, Clyde, started talking. He soon had tears in his eyes. Clyde had played for Jim on both his first high school and first college coaching assignments. Clyde told us he first met Jim when he was a short, skinny, ninth-grade student in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. He said that he was part of a “heathen” family that lived way below the poverty line, and he was well on his way to getting into serious trouble with the law.

Clyde remembers when Jim noticed him in an early practice session. He saw Clyde pass the ball between his legs to a guy breaking for the basket. Coach shouted, “Hey, you are my starting point guard next game!” The two became a team. And

the team’s record improved from 3-13 to 22-3. The result was a trip to the state championship semi-finals that season.

Clyde ended up following his mentor to play on a Christian college team in Georgia. At that time, he was still a long way from being a Christian and was shocked that an institution would require you to be in chapel or church six times a week. “I can’t give Jim all the credit for me becoming a Christian,” Clyde confessed. “I met this girl I wanted to marry, and she said she wouldn’t even date me unless I gave myself to Jesus. So, I did. But coach was a big part of that, too. And he was the best man at our wedding.” More than four decades, seven children, and 11 grandchildren later, Clyde is still a Christian. He became a preacher, an evangelist. Through his ministry in more than a dozen countries, he estimates that he has seen thousands and thousands of people respond to altar calls that he has given.

When Clyde finished speaking and sat down, a parade of Jim’s former players followed. There was Gilbert. Gilbert had been attending an all-black school in North Myrtle Beach just before integration happened. When Clyde and Gilbert’s two schools consolidated, they found themselves in the same school. Just like Clyde, he got noticed by Jim.

Gilbert remembered, “Coach walked over to me one day and said, ‘Let me see your hands.’” Then he said, “Son, you’re going to be about six foot four when you stop growing. I think you should come out and play basketball for me.” And Gilbert did. He was Clyde’s teammate for both the state playoff run in South Carolina and, two years later, for their highly successful college team in Georgia. Gilbert also became a gifted pastor, community leader, and six foot four inches tall.

Raymond spoke next. He also played for Jim in college. While his dreams to become a pro player did not materialize, many of his others did. For years he worked developing children at a Christian children’s home. And then, his son fulfilled a couple of Raymond’s few unfulfilled dreams. Raymond saw his son lead his college team to an NCAA championship and later heard his name called, as one of the first, in an NBA draft. A professional career followed.

Phil followed Raymond. He and his brother, James, also played for Jim. James arrived at Emmanuel the year before Jim became the coach. He was the first black player on the team and broke open the closed door. Once Jim was the coach, he helped James and other players he recruited finish kicking the door down. If you go to Memphis, Tennessee, you

can see the high school gymnasium named after Phil. The school wanted to honor him for his 30 years as a coach and community leader.

Many other players followed. I sat there watching Jim and the players cry, wiping tears from my own eyes. I realized I was listening to some of the final notes of a real-life opus project, and I began to ponder... what are the traits that produced such transformation of life and character? That's when I saw that, perhaps, a few of the characteristics that had made Jim such an effective basketball and life coach are the same key traits shown by effective counselors and spiritual directors.

Coach Ganey noticed people and made them feel that they had been seen, that there was something special about them. He was completely transparent and genuine, the opposite of holy plasticity. Coach believed that

miraculous things happen in our lives when enough grace is received and effort applied. And, though he rarely said he "loved" you, he showed it by investing his time and wisdom into your well-being.

As I am typing these words, I sit in a remote desert area. Tomorrow, we will begin a film project about what can be learned from some of the ammas and abbas of desert spirituality. Like a certain coach I know, they were willing to give up easier paths in favor of far more remote and difficult ones. They, too, were life coaches who became willing to get down and dirty as they helped themselves and those who turned to them for advice. Like coach Ganey, they also became experts in assisting others in turning dark vices into glittering virtues.

Good job, coach! Your life has been your opus. ✦



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Endnote

¹ I should explain that Jim's attempt at coaching me was in tennis, not his primary sport, basketball.

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Understanding Pharmacological Treatments of Anxiety



Anxiety may represent a healthy reaction to a life circumstance that leads to an adaptive change in behavior or thought. However, studies have demonstrated that up to 33.7% of the population are affected by anxiety in a problematic, disruptive, and persistent manner during their lifetimes. In fact, anxiety disorders represent the most common of mental disorders.^{1,2}

Problematic anxiety often occurs in the context of many other psychiatric problems, such as mood disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), personality disorders, and substance

use disorders. Some anxiety problems cluster into syndromes, such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and phobias. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are no longer classified as anxiety disorders but have significant impairments from anxiety and fear.

Anxiety can be the harbinger of medical problems, such as hyperthyroidism, adrenal disease, cardiac arrhythmia, and the use of medications like corticosteroids. Excessive anxiety can result from lifestyle variables, such as insomnia, too much caffeine, sugar, or nicotine, or even extreme exercise in vulnerable

individuals. Supplements that promise more energy or cannabidiol (CBD) oil with high tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) levels can also trigger anxiety. Anxiety may also be the clarion call for needed attention to psychological, spiritual, and relational abuse, conflict, and trauma.

Anxiety is, therefore, often a symptom of a broader problem that requires a variety of approaches. While pharmacological approaches can be important, it is rarely appropriate to focus on medications alone to manage these difficulties. It is essential to understand and target appropriate psychotherapy, spiritual, and lifestyle interventions in these situations.

Understanding pharmacological treatments for anxiety requires a basic understanding of anatomy and physiology.³ Several areas of the brain modulate anxiety, worry, and fear. Areas of the frontal lobe (anterior cingulate cortex and orbitofrontal cortex) interact with emotional memory areas (the amygdala) and alerting systems (locus coeruleus). Cortico-striato-thalamo-cortical loops (CSTC) network these systems with each other along with the autonomic nervous system and the limbic areas of the brain. Many neurotransmitters are involved in the management of these systems. Serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) can act as inhibitory factors to turn down the “temperature” of these anxiety systems. On the other hand, too much norepinephrine can turn up the “temperature” of these systems, especially the physical symptoms of anxiety, such as elevated pulse, blood pressure and respiration, sweating, tremors, and flushing. Glutamate, an amino acid, serves as a regulator of multiple



systems, seeking to keep them in proper balance. Pharmacologic agents can be stratified somewhat by the neurotransmitter systems that they affect. The following are snapshots of why these medications are used to treat anxiety.⁴

The enhancement of serotonin systems mediates anxiety and fear, which explains the antianxiety usefulness of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) and serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) antidepressants that promote serotonin activity. Common potential side effects include weight gain, nausea, headache, and sexual dysfunction. They also take several weeks to work but are not addictive.

Benzodiazepines, such as alprazolam, clonazepam, and lorazepam, enhance GABA systems. They work very quickly but are potentially addictive with prolonged use. Also, these medications can have serious drug interactions with alcohol and opioids, affect memory short term, and have a risk of falls. They are common candidates for diversion by patients to friends and relatives.

Beta-blockers inhibit the activity of norepinephrine (adrenaline) in the body. By doing so, they reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety visible to others. They can cause fatigue, reduced blood pressure/pulse, and worsen asthma.

Alpha2-delta ligands work on calcium channels that can modulate glutamate activity. Gabapentin and pregabalin are examples of this strategy. These medications have pain attenuating benefits in patients with neuropathic pain and are also sedative. However, they can also cause

fatigue and cognitive clouding as side effects, as higher dosages are sometimes necessary. There are reports of people attempting to abuse these drugs, though they are not considered addictive.

Buspirone is another serotonin “strategy” that works differently than SSRI or SNRI medications. Those medications work on reuptake or recycling pumps (serotonin transporters). In contrast, buspirone works as a partial agonist (modulator) of the serotonin 1A (5-HT1A) receptor, which acts as a thermostat to control serotonin release and activity. A partial agonist on this receptor works to potentially adjust the activity of the receptor into a most effective range. Two other drugs, vilazodone and vortioxetine, employ partial agonist activity as part of their therapeutic mode of activity.

Antihistamine medications are sometimes used in a limited fashion with anxiety due to their highly sedating properties. Hydroxyzine and diphenhydramine are examples of these, with the latter being available over the counter. These medications “treat” anxiety primarily by making the patient drowsy. They are helpful if someone cannot sleep due to anxiety but can cause a hangover (i.e., next-day impairment) when used in this manner. Additionally, these medications can cause blurred vision, memory problems, dry mouth, and have a high potential for falls.

Cannabis comprises more than 100 alkaloid cannabinoids along with many other chemicals. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is a component that has psychoactive properties and can be mood-altering.

Cannabidiol (CBD) is an isomer of THC that is not psychoactive and does not cause mood alteration. It is used for anxiety and pain management and can be helpful to some patients. The key is finding pure CBD, as some products have considerable amounts of THC, which can worsen anxiety in vulnerable patients. I encourage my patients to use products that promise to pass a drug screening for cannabis in their packaging. ✖



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Guiding Clients through Biblical Resolution of Civil Disputes

Because it is focused on being conciliatory and not adversarial, Christian conciliation may lessen the negative emotional impact clients could otherwise suffer in a secular court system.

An estimated 40 million civil lawsuits are filed in the United States each year. The adult population in America is 258,300,000.¹ If we assume the best-case scenario of only two parties involved (which is often not the case), approximately 31% of all adult Americans would be a party to a lawsuit yearly.

Sadly, every year a significant number of Americans undergo divorce. Over the most recent full decade (2000-2019), 17,043,476 divorces occurred in the U.S.! This remarkably high number excluded significant data of divorces in California, Georgia, Indiana, Hawaii, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Minnesota, and New Mexico—as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2019, there were approximately 750,000 divorces.²

Facing this reality, Christian counselors will surely counsel many people involved in a legal dispute during their careers. Significant information can be found on how to address situations where clients are suing counselors and how to work with clients involved in criminal cases—both victims and perpetrators. Little guidance, however, is available on counseling clients involved in civil lawsuits. Additional complexities arise for Christian clients regarding the biblical directive of resolving civil disputes outside the court system. Fortunately, counselors can encourage religious clients to engage in Christian conciliation.

What is Christian Conciliation?

According to the Christian non-profit organization, Relational Wisdom, Christian conciliation is a process for reconciling people and resolving disputes out of court in a biblical manner. The approach is conciliatory rather than adversarial—that is, it encourages honest communication and reasonable cooperation instead of unnecessary contention and advocacy.³

Christian conciliation typically involves three steps:

1. The parties are counseled individually and encouraged to resolve the dispute privately and independently. If unsuccessful,
2. The parties bring their dispute to a third-party mediator, who will assist them in resolving the dispute. If unsuccessful,
3. The parties submit their dispute to arbitration, in which a mutually agreed-upon arbitrator(s) will render a legally binding judgment outside of a court proceeding.⁴

Parties should sign a Christian conciliation agreement before beginning step 1. Sample agreements can be obtained at one of the Christian conciliation organizations subsequently listed in this article. Usually, they discuss cost-sharing, the right to withdraw from the process, that the results of the process will be legally binding, and require a commitment by the parties.

Because it is focused on being

conciliatory and not adversarial, Christian conciliation may lessen the negative emotional impact clients could otherwise suffer in a secular court system. Additionally, Christian conciliation is often less costly than a court proceeding because mediators typically charge less than their secular counterparts. If clients are already involved in a lawsuit, they can still engage in Christian conciliation.

What Does the Bible Say about Christian Conciliation?

The steps previously noted are derived from Christ's own words. In Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV), Christ provides direct instruction on how Christians should resolve disputes with other Christians: *"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over [step 1 – individual resolution]. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses' [step 2 – mediation]. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" [step 3 – arbitration].*

When is Christian Conciliation Not Appropriate?

Christ's instructions are only for disputes between Christians. Although the process can also work for non-Christian clients, they would not fall under Christ's mandate. Additionally, Christ discusses conflicts between individuals, not crimes or criminal activity. Clients who are victims of crimes should never be discouraged from reporting them to the proper authorities.

Christ does not endorse unsafe or unhealthy conciliation practices.



Before recommending Christian conciliation to a client, counselors should carefully evaluate the situation to ensure future engagement with the other party would benefit and not harm the client, whether physically, spiritually, or emotionally.

Christ also is not addressing legal issues involving liberties, such as lawsuits against the government to protect religious liberty or free speech rights. A good example would be a cake decorator suing to protect his or her right not to design a cake for a same-sex wedding.

Finally, Christian conciliation is often not a legal option for child custody, support, and visitation cases. It can, however, be used in divorce cases where the children have reached adulthood or on specific issues such as property distribution. The Christian conciliation organizations listed in this article should be able to provide more guidance in this area.

Christian Conciliation: The Do's and Don'ts for Christian Counselors

When presenting Christian conciliation to clients, remember these Do's and Don'ts:

Do: Present Christian conciliation as an option, with multiple recommendations of conciliation services. There are several options for clients to consider. The three most well-known are:

- Peacemaker Ministries: <https://www.peacemakerministries.org/>
- Institute for Christian Conciliation: <https://www.aorhope.org/icc>
- Relational Wisdom 360: <https://rw360.org/>

Your clients should also be encouraged to do their own research on these options and others.

Don't: Present only one option or be overly aggressive in your recommendation for Christian conciliation. If your clients feel coerced to choose a particular provider or even engage in Christian conciliation, you can subject yourself to needless liability risk.

Do: Encourage your clients to consult with a licensed and knowledgeable attorney. Even within Christian conciliation, nuances of particular legal situations need to be evaluated by an attorney. Additionally, most Christian conciliation services allow legal representation in mediation and arbitration proceedings. Your clients can benefit from having a legal advocate during this process.

Don't: Provide legal advice. Doing so can subject you to civil liability claims and criminal liability for "practicing law without a license." This can be tricky, especially when clients ask a direct question. A wise counselor will tell clients, "I am not a legal expert, but I recommend that you find an attorney to help you sort through your specific legal questions."

Do: If you are interested, consider becoming a trained or certified conciliation coach for individuals who are not your clients. Christian counselors often make excellent conciliation coaches and even mediators. The organizations previously mentioned can provide you with information on becoming certified.

Don't: Engage in conciliation between your client and the other party in a dispute. Doing so needlessly entangles and complicates your role as the client's therapist, creating a dual relationship. Additionally, coaches and mediators should maintain neutrality between both parties.

Conclusion

By presenting the option of Christian conciliation, counselors can help their clients abide by the biblical directives of peacemaking and provide them an opportunity to avoid the costs of lawsuits, which often bring a high financial and emotional price. ✦

The information contained in this column is provided for educational purposes only. Nothing in this column should be construed as legal advice, and readers should seek advice from a qualified attorney within their jurisdiction for concerns/questions on specific matters. Law varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.



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The Posture of Leadership



When you think of the “posture” of a leader, what comes to mind? Someone on a stage or platform, standing up confidently in front of a group? Someone at a meeting persuasively communicating challenging or inspirational information? When you think of a leader’s posture, is it one that naturally elevates them above those they lead?

What happens, then, when someone falls? Is the leader so elevated that it becomes impossible to bend down and help someone up? How does a leader navigate the path of repentance, grace, and reconciliation within the structure of an organization?

These were questions I had when I thought of the theme of “Repentance, Grace, and Reconciliation” as applied to Christian leadership. I asked myself how much grace a leader should give someone in their organization who “repents?” Seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22, NASB 1995)? That could add up to a great deal of damage. Does reconciliation, as a leader, mean you must continue the working relationship?

When I am confronted with more questions than answers, my fallback is to contemplate, “What would Jesus do?” I know Jesus upends the traditional definition of leadership and says a great leader must take on the posture of a servant (Matthew 20:24-26, NIV). Also, I know Jesus gives the admonition to do to others as we would have others do to us (Matthew 7:12, NIV). Then, there is Luke 6:37 (NIV), where Jesus says we are not to judge or condemn, but to forgive.

I do not believe this means a leader must universally accept every mistake, every error, and every offense in an organization. Also, I do

Sometimes, to be seen and heard, leaders must be elevated; however, as leaders, we must never consider ourselves so high that we forget the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

not think this means a leader must manifest forgiveness to maintain the status quo. There are consequences to mistakes, errors, and offenses, which a leader must factor into the health of an organization. Leaders walk a narrow road with the requirements of the business on one side and the requirements of faith on the other.

The key to walking this road successfully, I believe, lies with repentance. While it is impossible always to be certain someone is truly repentant, a leader should know each follower by “name” (John 10:3, NIV). When a leader knows and understands the person and the situation, they can better discern sincere regret, offer grace appropriate to the circumstances, and watch for a decisive change of direction, which is the definition of repentance. Reconciliation happens at the confluence of sincere regret, demonstrated change, and extended grace.

Does reconciliation mean a leader must automatically continue a working relationship with any person who falls in some way if that individual is genuinely remorseful? No, I do not. I do not believe grace and reconciliation must always translate into retaining a position. A genuinely repentant individual may not be able to remain under your leadership, given the type of failure. There are legal and organizational implications that must be considered factors. Repentance, grace, and reconciliation do not automatically equal job security. That said, a leader should always strive to retain a human connection even when an organizational relationship is no longer possible.

Mistakes, errors, and offenses, though, can go both ways. Someone who falls is not always a subordinate. Sometimes, it is the leader. How does

a leader express sincere repentance while maintaining the posture of leadership? How does a leader accept grace from others without altering the organization’s hierarchy? What does reconciliation look like between a fallen leader and those affected?

From the previously mentioned Matthew 20 passage, Jesus makes it clear that Christian leadership is not to look like worldly leadership (Matthew 20:25-26, NIV). Jesus also says a great deal about the religious leadership of His day. He calls those leaders hypocrites seven times in Matthew 23, along with “brood of vipers,” “blind men,” “blind guides,” “fools,” and “serpents” (Matthew 23:13-36, NASB 1995). Not the usual terms one uses for exemplary leadership. To me, this leadership hypocrisy is summed up in verse 28, when He says these religious leaders “... outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” They persistently failed to line up their outward appearance with their inward reality.

In my struggle with leadership, this has been a challenge at times. My human nature resists aligning my outward/inward appearance—knowing I needed to repent for actions, ask for grace from others, and make decisive changes in direction. I knew I needed to do those things to create the conditions for reconciliation to occur. However, asking for forgiveness and grace is difficult. It is hard when the world says, “You’re a leader; you don’t need to.” It is hard when you are a Christian leader and think it is your job never to fail.

As Christian leaders, we sometimes focus on another verse from Matthew, which says, “*Be perfect,*

therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48, NIV). We think that being perfect is our job and forget the verse from 1 John that says, “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*” (1:8, NIV). Do that, and we wind up in “brood of viper” territory. As a leader, I need to strive to be perfect, like Christ, but also recognize that I am not perfect and in need of Christ—just like those I lead.

The posture of leadership may place us in front of others, speaking confidently before a group. Sometimes, to be seen and heard, leaders must be elevated; however, as leaders, we must never consider ourselves so high that we forget the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are called to be in all sorts of relationships—some where we lead and some where we follow. The parable of the “unforgiving servant” in Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV) is an excellent reminder that relationships are not, really, two-way streets; they are more like three-way streets. I may be a leader, but I am also a servant, and my Master is watching. ❖



GREGORY JANTZ, PH.D., is the founder of The Center • A Place of HOPE (www.aplaceofhope.com), a healthcare facility in Edmonds, Washington, which emphasizes whole-person care, addressing the emotional, relational, physical, and spiritual aspects of recovery. He is the author of multiple books, including his latest, *The Anxiety Reset* and *So Much to Live For*. Dr. Jantz is a sought-after speaker in person, on television, and radio (www.drgregoryjantz.com).

Grace, Repentance, and Collective Trauma



In this Research Digest, we will examine recent research on how Christians live out their understanding of grace. Additionally, what are uninvolved people's views regarding an offense and whether the transgression should be forgiven, and how do repentance and restitution play a part? This determination matters more in our "cancel culture" environment. Finally, we will consider obstacles to forgiveness and reconciliation for groups victimized by genocide and collective past trauma.

Grace

Hall, M.E.L., & McMinn, M.R. (2021, April 29). The lived religion of grace: Exploring diverse Christian narratives. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Advance online publication.

How does grace look when it is lived out in the pew rather than the seminary? Hall and McMinn decided to explore how Christians from various

denominational backgrounds understood and experienced grace more as a lived reality rather than a theological doctrine. To accomplish this ambitious goal, the researchers examined seven qualitative dissertations on different religious groups—evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Quakers, mainline Protestants (one moderate and one liberal denomination), Latter-Day Saints, and Christians who self-identified as sexual minorities. These dissertations were methodologically distinctive in that they all had a standardized set of 10 questions related to grace. This permitted Hall and McMinn to combine them into a secondary analysis utilizing grounded theory to explore their questions. The combined sample contained 35 predominantly European American participants, 19 male and 16 female, ranging from 20 to 82-years-old.

Eight common themes of grace and some debated aspects emerged. The common themes included: 1)

God's love, 2) its unmerited quality, 3) it is derived from God's initiative, 4) it is given as a gift, 5) it is filled with abundance, 6) it is relational, 7) it includes acceptance, and 8) it is incomprehensible. The role of Jesus, sin, and forgiveness varied. Eight espoused universalism in the more liberal subset, and three possibly adopted this position.

Two definitions of "lived" grace emerged. Grace is "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with Godself" (p. 9). A more specific definition was proposed for Christians considering sin and its relationship to grace. Grace is "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with God through the atoning work of Jesus, whose death on the cross allows for forgiveness of sins which separated people from God" (p. 9). Hall and McMinn's findings have implications for clinicians because they highlight how important it is to explore clients' understanding of grace to comprehend how it is expressed in their lives. Denominational doctrine and lived experience may not match.

Repentance

Watanabe, S., & Laurent, S.M. (2020). Feeling bad and doing good: Forgivability through the lens of uninvolved third parties. *Social Psychology*, 51(1), 35-49.

Do repentance and making restitution play a role in forgiveness through the eyes of third parties to an offense? Though not the victim or someone close to the victim, third-party decisions about the merits of forgiveness can have significant consequences for offenders. For example, legal

outcomes (from judges), getting fired by a boss, or being “canceled” by a distraught group can all occur. Watanabe and Laurent performed five studies to examine the previous question. They defined repentance as taking responsibility for the offense and regretting one’s actions. Altogether, 938 adults participated, with women accounting for 47-57% of each sample and whites accounting for 70-79% of each. The quantitative studies involved participants reading vignettes, sometimes given in a sequence, and rating the forgivability of the offender based on what transpired. A variety of statistical analyses was used, contingent on the specifics of each study.

When taken together, the studies demonstrated that repentance and making restitution independently influenced and increased the likelihood that uninvolved third parties would find the offense forgivable. “Post-transgression attitudes and actions are important factors in enhancing the perceived forgivability of offenders in the eyes of uninvolved third parties” (p. 45). The researchers encourage further studies on factors influencing third parties to consider an offense as forgivable. Indeed, understanding such factors is paramount in today’s cultural context. Also, the researchers recognized the limitations of hypothetical vignettes in making more conclusive statements.

Collective Trauma

Uluğ, Ö.M., Bilali, R., Karasu, M., & Malo, L. (2021). Obstacles to reconciliation and forgiveness among victim groups of unacknowledged past trauma and genocide. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2740>.

Groups that have experienced violence and atrocities often staunchly resist forgiving and reconciling with the offending group. In one example, the Armenians are still experiencing

the aftermath of the genocide of their people by Turkey (1915-1923), while Turkey denies this ever occurred.

Uluğ and colleagues wanted to understand factors that fuel resentment and impede the ability to reconcile and forgive under such harsh circumstances. They performed two survey studies, one with 350 Armenians living in their homeland and another with 119 Armenians living in the United States. The researchers wanted to explore the roles of ingroup identification (the degree of attachment to the ingroup and motivation to contribute to it) and ingroup glorification (feeling superior to other groups and submitting to authorities of one’s own group) in influencing one’s willingness to forgive and reconcile.

In both studies, ingroup Armenian glorification predicted less forgiveness, increased resentment, and less willingness to reconcile with the Turks, while ingroup identification did not. The researchers hypothesized that resentment in the context of unacknowledged genocide “might protect victims from superficial reconciliation... and continued injustice” (p. 321). According to the researchers, the problem lies more in the situation than the individual. The findings are consistent with individual forgiveness research highlighting the challenges of forgiving an offender who denies the offense. ✖



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multicultural issues, and evaluating psychologist/counselor education practices in spirituality. Dr. Garzon’s professional experiences include private practice as a clinical psychologist, serving as an associate pastor for a Latino church, and fulfilling a role in pastoral care ministry.

Groups that have experienced violence and atrocities often staunchly resist forgiving and reconciling with the offending group.

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A Line in the Sand: Tough Love, Therapeutic Separation...

– David Hawkins

- Therapeutic separation or time away in marriage is
 - a. preparation for the possibility of permanent separation
 - b. an opportunity to consider values and set healthy parameters
 - c. usually understood as an indefinite length of time
 - d. all of the above

Boundaries and Restoration: Sin, Safety, and Healing

– W. Jesse Gill

- When someone harms me
 - a. I must take responsibility for my own self-care
 - b. I need to define myself as separate from what happened to me
 - c. I must forgive and release the right to “get back”
 - d. all of the above

Leader Wellness and Recovery Intensives: Issues, Challenges...

– Michael MacKenzie

- Recent Barna Group research found that 43% of pastors
 - a. struggle with alcohol abuse
 - b. have pornography issues
 - c. are on psychotropic medication
 - d. have considered leaving the ministry

The Posture of Leadership – Gregory L. Jantz

- A genuinely repentant individual
 - a. may not always be able to remain under your leadership
 - b. should be forgiven and restored to their former position
 - c. does not necessarily show remorse
 - d. is not entitled to your forgiveness

Broken Trust – Diane Langberg

- This city was destroyed because God's people trusted in the place rather than in God Himself
 - a. Babylon
 - b. Shiloh
 - c. Bethel
 - d. Capernaum

Repentance: The Most Positive Word in the... – Jay H. Strack

- The author notes that the understanding of repentance is illustrated clearly in reference to
 - a. Solomon feeling bad about sin
 - b. the story of the prodigal son
 - c. Peter weeping about his betrayal
 - d. David's personal experience and failure

Repentance, Reconciliation, and Restoration...

– Edward E. Hindson

- The unrepentant mind continues to
 - a. make excuses
 - b. resist the grace of God
 - c. refuse responsibility for choices and behaviors
 - d. all of the above

Understanding Pharmacological Treatments... – Michael R. Lyles

- Anxiety
 - a. generally requires psychotropic medication
 - b. can be the harbinger of other medical problems
 - c. is modulated by one specific area of the brain
 - d. is not exacerbated by THC

The Tar of Sexual Sin and Recovery – Jim Cress

- King Solomon should be a sobering reminder that
 - a. sexual sin will turn you away from God
 - b. when you think you are standing firm, you are in danger of falling
 - c. you are only as sick as your secrets
 - d. a and b

The Voices Inside Our Heads – Samuel Rodriguez

- The author notes that for the Apostle Paul, achieving true manhood required
 - a. having faith that is fearless
 - b. understanding the depth and power of love
 - c. running the race with patience
 - d. fighting the good fight

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- Increase awareness and content expertise on current trends in mental health practice.
- Be able to articulate a more comprehensive understanding of this issue's core theme.
- Be able to integrate spirituality and faith-based constructs into the delivery of care.

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- _____ This issue of CCT is relevant to my practice as a mental health professional.
- _____ The articles in this issue are comprehensive and well written.
- _____ I would recommend this home-study program to other professionals.

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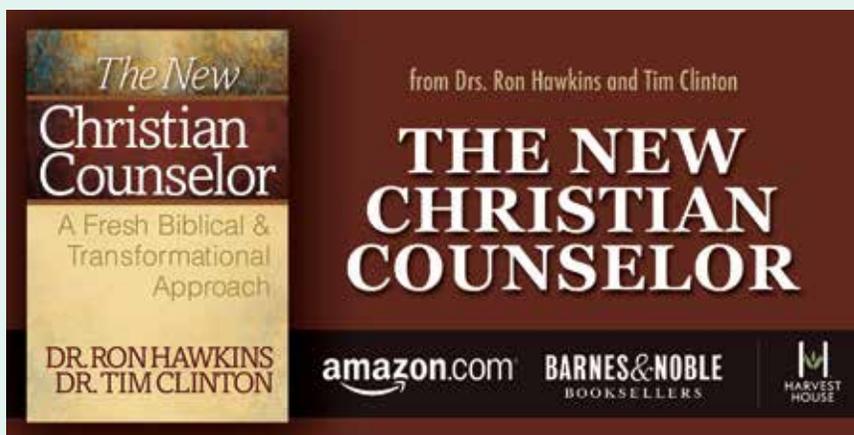
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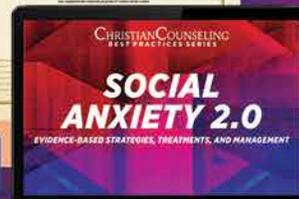
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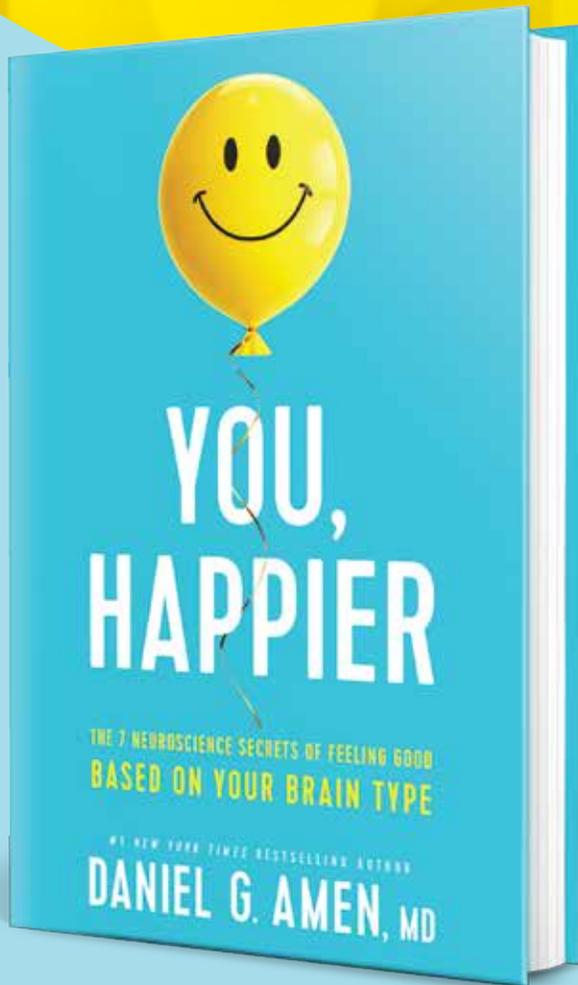


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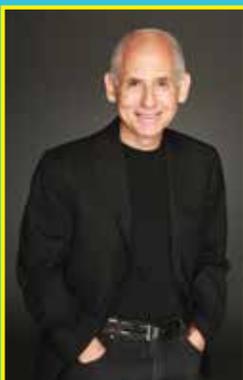


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