



**Educating Christians on How to Handle
Difficult Personalities Within the
Church**



By Judith Barrett

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Abstract

Educating Christians on How to Handle Difficult Personalities Within the Church is a Bible Study that aims to help both pastors and laypeople to understand how to identify and deal with problem personalities within the Christian church. Among these 'problems' are: the lazy, the busybody, strife, the divisive, the angry, and the fool. The work also seeks to teach Christians how to set boundaries, avoid lies, confront problems, and have close godly relationships with their spouses, relatives, children and friends. This work seeks to solve problems, not by avoiding them, but by teaching people how to confront and deal with them. It is set up in the form of a Bible Study, though it may be read by an individual with ease as well.

Colorado
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To my husband: Timothy Barrett

Without him I would never have even tried this!

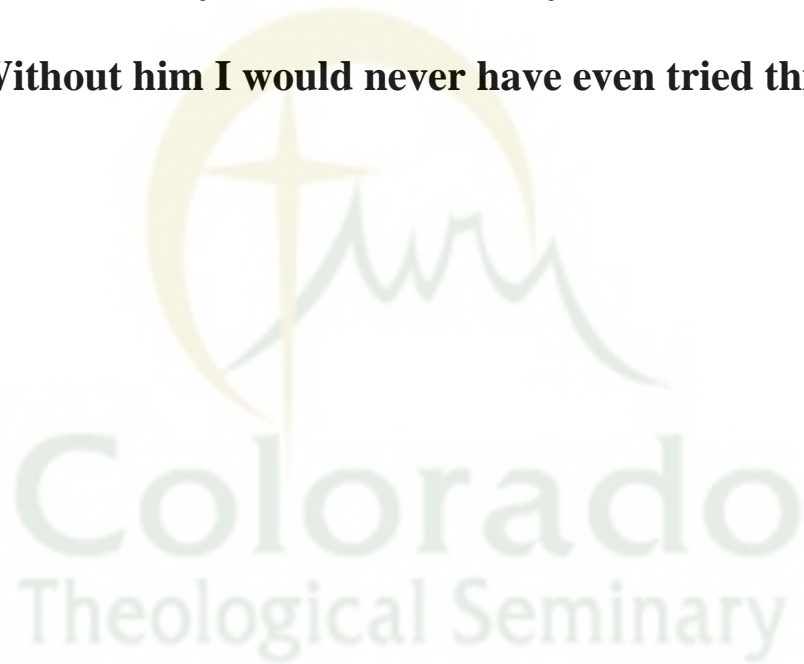


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Introduction

This book is not designed to be the last word on any of these subjects. Rather it is a tool for pastors and laymen to use to identify bad behavior and biblical, as well as unbiblical methods, of dealing with it. My hope is that pastors will be encouraged to do the right things, by being able to identify problems more easily, and that laymen will support the pastor in doing the right thing as they will understand that it is Biblical to do so.

Above all, we must remember that everything we do is to be done out of love and concern for the person. We are to hate their behavior, but love the person. Even when we remove a person from the congregation, we must do so in the hope that it will lead to repentance and that they will someday return. Upon their return we must comfort them and ‘reaffirm our love for them.’¹ In 1 Corinthians 5 we find a man who was put out of the church because he was sleeping with his step mother and calling it ‘right.’ In 2 Corinthians 2 we find that a man who was punished has now returned. From Paul’s opening lines in this chapter we can assume it is the same man. Regardless, Paul admonishes us to forgive, comfort and reaffirm our love for him, lest he be overcome with sorrow.

We must never forget that love and the desire to see godly repentance motivate all that we do. Any feelings of vengeance, or giving the person what they deserve, need to be dealt with before justice is administered.

¹ 2 Corinthians 2:6-8

May God use this book, to give you the wisdom you need to serve Him well.

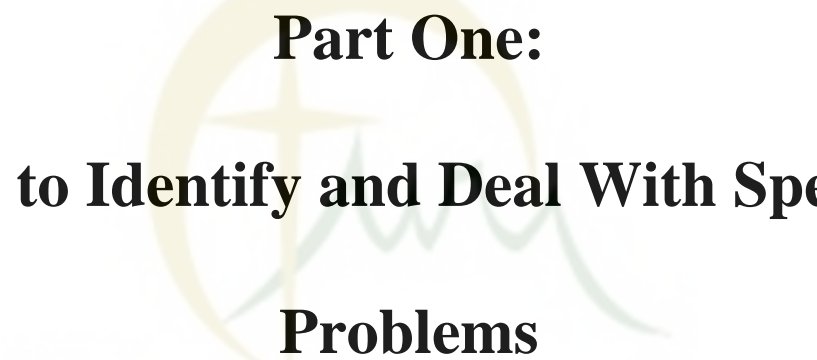
How to Use This Book

While this book may be read from cover to cover by an individual, it was meant as a Bible Study to be done in a group. For this reason there are ‘scenarios for group discussion’ at the end of every chapter. Ideally a group would go over the scenarios provided, then come up with problems of their own for the group to discuss. This is ideal because the information in this text is intended to be applied to real life.

Additionally there are footnotes in every section. These footnotes provide scriptural references for the text and should be used to help understand, or check the validity, of each point. Never take anyone’s word for something without making sure it lines up with the Word of God. For further study on each topic grab a concordance and look up the key words in each section. For example, in chapter one you may want to look up the verses containing the words lazy and rest. It is best to also read the text around each verse in the Bible as it will give you a more accurate view of what the Bible is talking about. When in doubt, consult your pastor. He is there to help you draw closer to God and should be willing to help. Enjoy!

P.S. If you are a group leader make sure that you check the ‘scenario for group discussion’ at the end of chapter 12 well ahead of time!

(Author’s Note: The use of the pronouns he and she is random. Do not assume that an example only applies to men, or women, because of this. In most cases, either gender could have been used.)

The background features a large, faint watermark of the Colorado Theological Seminary logo. It consists of a yellow sun with rays, a green cross, and the text "Colorado Theological Seminary" in a light green font.

Part One:
How to Identify and Deal With Specific
Problems

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Chapter 1: Laziness

What is Lazy?

The best way to define a Biblically lazy person is to identify what 'lazy' is not. We must remember that God is a God who believes in rest and blessings for His followers. It is a poor witness if Christians go around overworked, feeling guilty about resting and enjoying ourselves.

First is it not lazy to rest. God proclaimed one day a week to take off from all labor. Since we are children of God, and not slaves of men¹, we should not expect to work outside our home more than six days a week. (Of course a slave took care of his family responsibilities after working for his master!) (Hint: Your pastor is not a slave either. Find a method to measure his average workweek. If it is over the average workweek in your area, find other people to do some of the tasks he is currently assigned.)

It is also not lazy to take time to make sure you are physically fit.² Your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit.³ It must be cared for as well. Most successful people work out three days a week for thirty minutes each day. This is why you see many presidents jogging. They know that if they do not take care of themselves they will not be good at what they do.

¹ 1 Corinthians 7:23, Galatians 4:7

² Proverbs 31:17, Eccl.12:12

³ 2 Corinthians 6:16

It is also not lazy to take time each day to be alone and pray. Jesus woke up early and sought God in out of the way places.⁴ Our time with God is precious and necessary.

So what is lazy? If a person is allowed to rest, exercise and pray, what are they not allowed to do? Truthfully, it is not a matter of what you cannot do, but rather whether, or not you are using it to avoid doing what you should do. I will give you an example. Do you know that you can be 'lazy' by reading your Bible? (This is one of my unsaved father's pet- peeves.) If you are reading your Bible on the job when you are being paid to work (i.e. it is not break time) then you are be lazy by avoiding work and doing something else. In doing this you are in essence stealing from the company! Additionally, others will have to work harder as they have to do the work you are not doing at this time. This is not a good Christian witness. Any time we do something else, when we should be working, is time we are lazy.

Being lazy has consequences. The lazy (or idle in the King James Version) shall find themselves hungry⁵. The lazy also tend to become gossips and busybodies, having much time on their hands to go from house to house⁶. People who are lazy also tend to have homes that are not kept up: their rafters may sag, and their roof may leak⁷. So while God did not call you to be overworked, ⁸He did call you to take care of your home (this includes your spouse and children), to do an honest days work, and to serve in His church. He also called you to be available when your neighbor is in need of help (whether

⁴ Mark 1:35

⁵ Proverbs 19:15

⁶ 1 Timothy 5:13

⁷ Ecclesiastes 10:18

⁸ Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

it be pulling his ox (car?) out of a ditch,⁹ or giving him bread for guests at midnight¹⁰). If you are not taking care of your home, family, neighbor, job or church responsibilities you may be lazy. If you are having trouble buying food, or find yourself becoming a gossip, or with much extra time on your hands: you may be lazy. Here is a simple way to check yourself:

1. Do you turn down work, even though you need money and have the time?
2. Do you find yourself standing around watching other people work? (Ignore this question if you are a prison guard in charge of a work crew or something similar.)
3. Do you become angry when someone asks you to do something that you don't feel is your responsibility? (For example: If your first reaction to the question: 'Could you clean that mess up?' is thinking 'It's not my mess' you are probably lazy.)
4. Do you know everything, about everyone's business in the church?
5. Do you do personal tasks on work time? (This includes reading your Bible, writing Bible studies, and intense prayer time. It also includes long, or frequent personal phone calls, text messaging, computer games, doing your nails etc. This is for break time only.)
6. Do other people frequently need to take care of your responsibilities? (For example: Do people need to pick up your, or your children's, messes? Do you find others finishing your work, or taking care of things for you?)
7. Do necessary repairs remain undone in your home?

⁹ Deuteronomy 22:4

¹⁰ Luke 11:5-8

8. Do you, and/or your children, frequently not have everything you need for work, or school?

If you answer yes to any of these questions you may need to work harder in this area of your life. Talk to your pastor to help you decide whether or not you actually have a problem, and to device a reasonable plan for fixing it.

Of course the other extreme is to be hypercritical of ourself, and/or others, and to do too much. God does not want us to be lazy, but He also does not want us to be overworked. In overworking ourselves we are not trusting God to supply our needs, but instead relying on our own plans.¹¹ While we should not use the excuse: ‘God will supply all my needs’ to justify laziness, we can also not use the excuse ‘God does not condone laziness’ to justify doing more then He has called us to do. Instead we must seek the Lord, take care of our responsibilities to our family, neighbor and church, as outlined in scripture, and trust the Lord for the rest. There are people, however, that are chronic work avoiders. Let me give you some examples.

The first person I will introduce you to is Larry. Larry goes from church to church seeking help. He is not your normal ‘beggar’ though. Larry impresses people with his willingness to work –at the church. What you will find however, is that Larry will only do the tasks that Larry wants to do. Larry will also not work in jobs that will actually pay him in, or outside, of the church. Although Larry does many good things, they are

¹¹ Luke 12:23-32

not necessary things. They are instead things that get Larry noticed. Larry then manipulates people into feeling sorry for him because he is such a great guy who has so many needs. He also manipulates the pastor, and elders, into feeling that they should give him money for the work he has volunteered to do, because he works so hard, and has so little. The truth is that real work involves doing things that you do not want to do at times. Larry is unwilling to truly do this, so he avoids anything that will pay him and take care of his needs as it places him under authority of another and causes him to do things he would rather not do. He is not unable to hold down a 'real' job, just unwilling. No matter how many good things Larry does in the church, his unwillingness to do paid labor, with a boss and prearranged salary agreements, means that Larry is lazy.

The next person I would like you to meet is Lucy. Lucy is involved in everything and loves being in charge. Unfortunately, when asked to do anything other than boss people around, Lucy needs to 'pray about it.' Lucy is unable to do anything that she does not feel that the Lord has specifically called her to do. Lucy is also so spiritual, that the Lord has seemingly revealed everyone's faults to her. Many of these people are therefore (in Lucy's opinion) not worthy to work in the church. Lucy is not only lazy; she is a busybody. She wants to be at the center of attention, but shuns any work that does not fit into her specific agenda. Her method of making herself look good is to put down others who are working, by labeling them as less 'spiritual' than her.

Caution: Lazy people will also try to be pastors or missionaries to avoid work. These jobs give them the respect they crave, a steady salary and an excuse to know

everyone else's business. This is why scripture contains criteria for these jobs.

Therefore be careful in who you choose to fill these roles in your church. Remember, the lazy people do only what they wish to do. This does not mean that they do nothing. It merely means that their wishes often do not include all that needs to be done.

Lazy people however, often have been lazy long enough to discover strategies to avoid appearing lazy. These strategies help them to avoid the negative consequences of being lazy. Fortunately most parents have seen these strategies in simpler form in their living room while raising their children. With a little effort, you should be able to see beyond the more mature version of this deception.

The first 'smoke screen' is to leave the situation whenever actual work is going on. Later you can claim that you had an unavoidable, or project related, reason for not being present. My children try this by claiming, 'I was putting something away upstairs,' or 'I had to go to the bathroom,' whenever the living room needs to be picked up. Adults tend to vary their excuses more, but the fact is, the lazy person repeatedly has these types of excuses. (The non-lazy person may have excuses for not being there, but does not try to claim credit for working at the same time. They are instead apologetic. This is the key difference.)

The next smoke screen is to blame everyone else for being lazy. In their opinion no one but themselves does any real, or productive, work. Phrases such as 'she is dropping the ball,' or 'I am not sure how committed he is to the church,' are frequently heard from this person. These phrases are designed to make others, especially those who are not close to the project, believe that this person cares deeply for the project

while others are not so involved. Pastors are often the targets of these conversations, although some lazy people will merely let the mis-information be disseminated through the congregation for him to hear.

A variation on the ‘everyone else is lazy but me’ smoke screen, is ‘everyone else is incompetent and that is why the work is not going well.’ This person will have labeled more than one person as being the reason why things are not going smoothly, when in reality the problem is that the lazy person is not doing the job they were assigned to do.

The last smoke screen is to appear to be doing everything. The lazy person may become involved in doing a lot of little tasks, some which do not need to be done. These tasks are high profile in that they make the lazy person look like they are doing a lot, when in reality they are merely avoiding what they are suppose to be doing. (Some people work very hard at being lazy. Think about how much time and energy a child may spend avoiding a homework assignment that in reality would take merely five minutes to actually do.)

A variation of this is the lazy person who will stand by people who are actually working and talk to them, then take credit for helping with that portion of the project. In church it is difficult for people to turn around and say, ‘you did nothing!’ so they get away with it. Unfortunately their share of the work remains undone, and good people, who worked hard, are frustrated because of it. Here is an example:

I was recently told a story in which several people went on missions trip to build a church. It was hot, intense work that required constant effort from the team in order to finish before they were scheduled to leave. After the first day, one member of the team

decided that there needed to be Christian art behind the altar. This person excused himself from the work to paint a small mural on plywood for the rest of the trip, despite the protests of others. (This was not a task that was recognized as a God-ordained project, and confirmed as such, by other Christians.) At the end, the building was completed and the person received praise for their art. Unfortunately, in truth, this was a pattern for the person. The person could have done the hard work at the time, and mailed a mural to the people later. Instead, the person found the work of construction to be distasteful and chose to do something else during the time. Since art is ‘high profile’ the end result was praise for the ‘artist’ as well, even though the rest of the group had to work overtime to cover for the work he was expected to do.

How Should We Handle the Lazy?

Now that we have a better view of what lazy is, how do we handle the lazy? The Bible warns us that lazy people cause trouble in the church. They become gossips and busy bodies and can drain resources from the church, or its members, that were meant for other purposes.¹² Laziness is also catchy.¹³ This was one of the problems with communism. Most people will not work significantly harder than someone else for the same pay or reward. People will also resent doing more than they agreed to because someone else is not doing their part. One lazy person can therefore significantly decrease overall enthusiasm for a project.

¹² 2 Thessalonians 3:11, 1 Timothy 5:13

¹³ Hebrews 6:11-12

Let us first look at the scriptures that teach us about how we are to handle someone who has decided to be lazy, and is unwilling to repent of it.

2 Thessalonians 3:10-15 “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” (NASB)

There are a few important points contained in this passage of scripture. The first is that able-bodied people are not to be fed if they do not work. We are therefore not responsible for providing charity to people who choose not to do profitable work. Natural consequences of not working, such as an empty belly, will help them to turn from this sin. Keeping people from experiencing the consequences of their actions while they are still unrepentant is not mercy. It is called ‘enabling’ because it enables the person to continue in their sin! On a spiritual level you are helping the person to remain far from God and potentially on a path to hell. Is this truly what you want to do? If not, obey the scripture even when it calls for some ‘tough love.’

Next this passage tells us that they do ‘no work,’ but act like busybodies. This means that they are doing something (acting like busybodies), but that God does not

consider this work. In a later chapter we will discuss the actions of ‘busybodies.’ For now it is enough to know that a ‘busybody’ produces no good fruit. He may appear to be deeply concerned about others, but his intervention in their lives causes others ungodly feelings such as: depression, anger, hopelessness, frustration, anxiety, low self-esteem etc. A busybody’s ‘ministry’ does not lift another up. The lazy person however may appear to be active as they spend a lot of time unconstructively meddling in others lives.

The next point is that we are admonished in this passage to not grow weary of ‘doing good.’ The fact is that lazy people often cause those around them to grow weary of doing good. Their busybody behavior causes people to feel negatively about themselves or others, while their unwillingness to work sets an example that it is okay to do less, or nothing. If the laziness is not addressed, the church will suffer.

The last point however is an important one. We are not to treat this person as our enemy. He is a sinner, as we all are. He is unwilling to repent despite multiple, and increasingly public warnings (see Matthew 18:15-17). Our goal however, is not to punish him, but to show him the seriousness of his offense and encourage him to change. He will not be happy about being asked to leave, but it may make him think about his actions and repent.¹⁴ If you go behind your pastor’s back and agree with him (unBiblically) that the pastor was too harsh then you are not helping him at all.¹⁵ You are an ‘enabler,’ which is not a good thing to be as you are helping to keep him from being in a right relationship with God. Unwillingness to repent of obvious wrongs is a

¹⁴ 2 Samuel 14:14 tells us that God plans ways so that the banished person will not be eternally cast out from God.

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 19:13 tells us not to pity the person who was punished

sign that a person does not truly have faith in God's Word. 1 Timothy 5: 8 states, 'But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.'

Proverbs 19:15 states 'Laziness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle man will suffer hunger.' Proverbs 20:13 advises, 'Do not love sleep, or you will become poor.'

Being lazy, or idle, causes one to suffer. This is a scriptural truth. In helping the lazy by fulfilling their needs we are preventing godly consequences from occurring. We are however, called to help our brother when he is in sin.¹⁶ If we are not to feed him, which includes giving him money for other things as well, what are we to do for him? (Since food is a basic necessity, if we are not to provide it, we most certainly are not to provide for less necessary expenses.)

Helping Those Who Are Lazy

The scriptural admonitions to put the lazy person out of fellowship are to be put into effect only when the person has been warned and is unrepentant. A person cannot repent from a problem that he does not know about. For this reason a person must be warned once in private, then in the company of two or three *mature* believers, then in front of the entire church. If he continues in his ways then he is to be put out of the church. (Matthew 18: 15-17)

¹⁶ Galatians 6:1-2

Our goal then, since we love our brother and wish to see him repent, is to make these encounters as fruitful as possible. It is important to look around and try to determine what factors may be keeping this person from repenting. Removing the benefits of laziness, educating the person as to the effect he has on himself and others, and/ or showing him the possibility of a better life, may also help him to adhere to a more godly lifestyle. These warnings should include the offer of counseling, or accountability partners. They should also seek to understand why the person behaves in this manner so that the pastor and other mature believers in the church may help effectively. Ultimately, though, it is the person's responsibility to change. Do not confuse your attempts at help, with his compliance. When it becomes obvious the only person working towards the goal is you (the person trying to help), the next step to Matthew 18 is needed.

Laziness in the Home: Wives With Lazy Husbands

First, before we overwork the men in the name of godly intervention, let us examine what a man is to do. Specifically, in the Bible, a man is to love his wife as if she is part of his own body.¹⁷ This implies taking very good care of her. Proverbs 31: 10 states that she is worth more to you than jewels. This implies that she is to be treasured and protected.

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:28

A man is also to teach his children the Word of God,¹⁸ punish them when necessary¹⁹, praise them when it is earned²⁰, and provide for their needs²¹. He is also to train them up in the way they should go²². This implies practical teaching as well as spiritual.

A man is also to work. Providing for the family and portioning out the resources are ultimately the man's responsibility. In Biblical times we find the man giving his wife a double portion of the food to show that he honors her²³. Although the man may not have made the food, he is responsible for distributing it. In this way he sees that everyone gets enough to eat. He is served last. If there is not enough, he is the one who will do without. A man should therefore make it his business to know whether or not there is enough in the house, and who is using what. When there is a true lack, he, as the head of the house, should be the first to make sacrifices. With authority comes responsibility. As the head of the house, a man is not a self-centered rule maker, but is instead he is the person who must answer to God regarding the spiritual state and physical well being of every member of the family. How he runs the home should reflect this.

A man's job therefore does not end when he walks into the home. He has responsibilities to his wife and children that are yet unfulfilled. There is no specific prescription in scripture on how to fulfill them. Every woman has different needs. In order to show his love to her, he must first figure out what it is that assures her that she

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 11:19

¹⁹ Proverbs 23:13-14

²⁰ Hebrews 3:13

²¹ Matthew 7:9

²² Proverbs 22:6

²³ 1 Samuel 1:4-5

is loved. This involves paying attention to her. For some wives, showing love may involve doing things around the house. One of my friends has a 'honey-do' list. She is never happier than when her husband has completed all of her 'honey-do' projects before he goes off to do what he wanted to do (in this case, hunting). As he loves serving his wife in this way, it is a good match. It is also one that I would hate. I want my husband to spend time with me, giving me his undivided attention. I have the ability to make a very nice salary, and know I can hire a complete stranger to do things around the home. Doing household repairs therefore does not say, 'I love you' to me. Taking me out to dinner, and staying after the meal is over so that we may talk is how I feel loved and appreciated. Children too each have different needs. Teaching them may not involve bookwork. For your family, music may instill scriptural truths far better than any devotional you can buy. It is therefore important that a father knows his children. It is only then that he can properly provide for their needs.

A father also needs time to rest, pray, and if his job does not provide it, a time to exercise as well. While a household full of people can be a lot to handle, he is not called to sacrifice his health, and/or sanity in order to do it.

So what does a lazy father look like? Primarily, he is a person who does not take care of his household's physical and emotional needs. This does not include unreasonable expectations. Not every child needs a cell phone, nor does every wife need a fur coat. Here are some examples of a lazy father, and the situations that led to the problem:

Example 1: Two very young people fall in love. They have no job, and no money, and perhaps a baby already on the way. They decide to marry, believing that their love

is all that matters. The husband gets a job, but, being young and not very educated, it does not pay well. A baby arrives and the wife wishes to stay home. Bad financial decisions due to inexperience, and low income lead to financial hardship. The wife nags the husband. He becomes discouraged. In his discouragement he becomes less motivated to work, rather than more motivated. He refuses to get a second job, or go back to school. The wife, frustrated, goes back to school, or gets a job, while her mother watches the baby. As maternal instincts motivate her to do well she out performs her husband and earns more than he does. This further decreases his motivation. He loses all motivation to work. As he has lost respect for himself, he becomes more distant at home and is even less involved. Eventually the wife is functioning as a single mother and is in danger of becoming one. The husband is now a 'lazy' man.

There are many problems that led to this situation. Marrying without the resources to provide for a family is one of them. Laziness often begins with the desire to have something without doing the work it takes to get it. When we are able to have what we have not worked for, we have no motivation to work for it after we have it. (This goes for sex before marriage as well.) Unfortunately, many times mistakes have already been made and we must now find a way out. In this scenario, the man must regain his self-respect. While he should do the right thing, his main problem is that he does not see how this will change anything. The woman therefore must also give up the things, which inhibit him. She must not nag. (Nagging is telling the person repeatedly that what they do wrong without providing any advice as to how to fix it.) Instead she must present options for them to explore together. Now that she is earning more he may be willing to be a stay-at-home father, taking care of the household chores, as long as she

is willing to do the laundry. (Unfortunately, this is not a viable option for most men. They would truly hate it, because it is not the societal norm, and Biblically is not the function of any male in the Bible. Most men want respect above all else. Ask any stay-at-home mother; this is not a role that gets respect. So while there is no admonition against it, it is not recommended unless the husband is truly excited about the idea.)

More reasonable solutions involve the man being encouraged to do more productive work. The wife must support and encourage his efforts. This may mean that she works less and the family lives on a lower income. So what? Tailor your lifestyle to fit your budget and learn to be happy with less. A happy marriage brings more happiness than any amount of material things.

Example 2: The husband and wife are mature. Both have careers when they are married. A baby is conceived. The wife quits her job to stay home. She takes care of her home wonderfully until the baby is a toddler. The husband attempts to help out. Every time he tries his tired wife tells him in some way that he is 'doing it wrong.' He becomes frustrated and not only quits trying to help but also becomes distant in his role as husband and father.

The problems here are more complex. The wife feels like the house is her responsibility now that she is not working. The husband feels like he can do nothing right, even though the wife may only be offering advice in order to save herself more work in the future. As the wife's self worth is now wrapped up in how well she keeps her home (her main task) she is now pickier about how things are done than before. In this scenario the husband must learn to acknowledge that his toddler is wearing his wife

out. Helping may involve playing with the toddler so the wife can clean the way she wants, or letting her take a bath and go to bed early. He must also understand that his wife used to be a working woman who received praise and a pay check on the job. Now all she hears all day is 'no' from a toddler as he runs away. Her friends are not helping as they inadvertently comment on the mess that her home has become. (We do to do this to each other!) The husband needs to understand that his wife's world has changed. He needs to understand her need to be a better homemaker than she was in the past, (even if she is seemingly failing at it) while reminding her that the most important job she is doing is not the housework, but raising their child. He also needs to find a way to give her a break that she perceives as a break. In this scenario the husband is lazy at home because he truly does not know what to do, and does not wish to be yelled at for trying.

The best way to avoid 'lazy husband syndrome' is through respectful communication. Telling a husband he is doing it wrong is the surest way to hurt him. Instead, discuss the problems you, as a wife, are having. Then allow him to participate in a discussion on how to solve them. If the problems are severe, you may want to include a pastor, or a counselor that he respects in the process. Do not force him to go to someone he does not like even if you (the wife) loves the person. It is his problem and he should be comfortable with the person. Then love and serve your husband the best way you know how, paying attention to what truly makes him happy.

That is not to say that all lazy husband problems involve the actions of the wife. There are some truly lazy men out there, that were lazy from birth. It is best not to

marry one of these. If you have, then counseling and help is in order. Wives support your husband in his efforts, even if they are baby steps. It is amazing what a man will do for a woman that he loves, who shows her appreciation!

Laziness in the Home: Husbands With Lazy Wives

Again, before we beat up on the wives, we must first look at what a wife is suppose to do. God, in His wisdom, has made this easy, as He has given us Proverbs 31, a nice, concise summary of what a godly wife looks like. As he did not do that for husbands, I fear that being a godly woman is incredibly important! (If you look at the life of David you will see this is true. Of the first four sons mentioned in scripture, only godly Abigail's son did not cause hardship to others. David, the father was the same, but the influence of the mother made a difference. Mothers are especially important in the development of godly children as they traditionally spend the most time with the child.)

A wife, according to Proverbs 31, does good for her husband, not evil. She works happily with her hands, and shops for the best prices. She cares for her servants. (Wouldn't that be nice?!) She is also able to earn money and manage it wisely. She takes care of herself physically, helps the needy, and makes sure her family is properly clothed. She also teaches kindness, presumably to her children. In other scripture passages we find that she is to be taught by the older women how to be a good wife. This means she must be able to receive correction. She is also to submit to her husband. This submission is not a blind following. It involves her providing godly counsel with

respect and when the husband decides on a course of action to trust his judgment, even when she disagrees. A man and wife must ultimately work towards the same goals for the family if the marriage is to thrive. (The two become one!)

One area of misconception that we must clarify here is that the saying, ‘Cleanliness is next to godliness’ is not only not in the Bible, it is unbiblical. Proverbs 14:4 states, ‘Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much revenue comes by the strength of the ox.’ This means that where work is done, it will be messy! In the home teaching children, cooking, sorting laundry etc. leave messes that need to be cleaned up. A house that works is never truly clean for long! This does not mean that it is okay to be slovenly, but a household that is productive will be in varying states of clutter at any given time. To expect a perfectly kept house will only frustrate your wife and decrease her productivity, because, under the pressure of having to have a perfect home, she will be unable to start a task unless she can immediately clean it up. (i.e. Husbands: If you want a gourmet meal, learn to deal with the dishes in the sink when you get home!)

There are however women who are truly lazy. The Bible tends to emphasize what they tend to do when they are lazy, more than what a lazy wife actually looks like. The best way then to identify a lazy woman will be by the fruit of her actions. In the Bible we see young widows encouraged to remarry²⁴. Why? So they do not become gossips and busybodies. According to scripture, the fruit of not having enough to do is becoming negatively involved in other people’s lives. Let me give you an example:

Example 1: Lily had a husband who had little authority in the home. She was a strong personality and her children were now grown. Because she did not follow

²⁴ 1 Timothy 5:14

through on most of what she started she was unable to keep a job in the private sector. (This included volunteer positions.) For this reason she had much time to become involved in the church. Although she held no position, she was always there. She especially enjoyed telling new people in the church how things were done. Unfortunately, she had no authority to make those decisions, and did not actually know how things were done. Many people left because they did not wish to go to a church that was run that way. Lily also knew everything anyone had ever done wrong since she was always around. She loved being a shoulder to cry on, but would use the information later to make herself look important. If you didn't tell Lily your secrets, it was not a problem for her. She had no trouble filling in the blanks herself, and did not bother to make sure she was right.

I knew a Lily well. At the end of my stay at her church, a teen on my staff use to joke about the frequent rumors that we were fighting again. (I loved this girl, and never fought with her. I was actually sad when my son and her lost interest in each other!) We also had a rule in the Sunday school that if you did not hear it from me, then it wasn't true. There was that much misinformation going on, and no one, except me, was willing to talk to Lily about it. Needless to say Lily did not stop (in fact she was given a position of trust during this time in an attempt to help/appease her, which she has since failed at) and many others have left the church because of the confusion she caused. The main problem in this scenario probably stems from the passivity of the men in the situation. The husband in particular had given up his authority in the home. The inability for a husband to lovingly correct his wife is a prescription for laziness.

Because busybodies and gossips are formed when the husband is absent, this behavior in a married woman is a sign that the husband has quit trying as the head of the home.

Husbands, if you love your wife, you will help her to behave in a godly manner. You will do it lovingly and gently, but you will do it. If you do not she will ruin her relationships with other women, and face expulsion from every organization she enjoys, including the church. You may have to work beside her for a time, and check up on her frequently, to ensure she not only finishes her work, but also behaves while she is doing it. She has picked up some very bad habits along the way. This will also be a tough time for her, as she will not enjoy it. Encourage her as much as you possibly can when she does well. Never give empty praise, or she will not be able to trust you to tell her the truth and all your praise, and concerns, will be meaningless. Wives who truly wish to change must therefore become accountable to their husbands, and learn to submit²⁵. Accountability to another mature Christian woman²⁶ may help as well, since men often miss some of the more passive-aggressive behaviors that women use to injure other women emotionally.

Notice how the cure for a lazy husband heavily involves the wife, while a cure for a lazy wife relies heavily on the husband. The Bible says that a husband and wife are one. When one falls, they need the other to pick them up²⁷. Conversely, when one misbehaves, the other becomes injured. There are times when the problems of one spouse are enabled by the actions of the other spouse. Regardless of how it happened, do not assign blame! Look to see what is in your power to help fix the problems and do

²⁵ Colossians 3:18

²⁶ Titus 2:3-4

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:11

it, even if it seems unfair. Never say, 'I am not the one with the problem.' Remember, you are in this together. When one person falls, the other gets hurt as well. It is only when both people are emotionally well, can a marriage be truly happy.

Laziness in the Home: How to Avoid Lazy Children

Again the first thing we must ask ourselves is: what is the child's role in the home? In the Bible we see that children are suppose to be taught, which supposes that their job is to learn. We also see that they are to honor and obey their parents as well as be a blessing to the household²⁸. They are not however, to be driven to wrath, by a parent that expects too much²⁹. As children grow, however, more should be expected.

Each child will mature differently, and those differences must be taken into account. (I have seven children, all distinctly different from the others.) Where you live must also be taken into account. Living in the country, some of their friends are expected to work on the family farm. This amount of work would look like abuse to a child in suburbia whose friends have the latest video games and televisions in their bedrooms. Both children however, will learn to be productive adults as long as the work expected is reasonable to their situation. To make a city child haul manure would be ridiculous and the child would recognize it as such. (And where would you get that much manure in the city without upsetting your neighbors?) To let a country child stay inside while the rest of the family works the farm would also send the wrong message.

²⁸ Psalms 127:3-5

²⁹ Ephesians 6:4

For this reason there are no cut and dry answers. Even in the same home, my experience is that different children require different expectations. Let me give you some examples:

Example 1: My oldest son is known for his ability to work hard. He helps a local beekeeper move beehives, and is frequently called by neighbors to help with manual labor. My third son loves books. I have no problem getting him to do his schoolwork. As a home schooler he does more work than many college age children. Much of what he does is self-motivated. Over the summer he kept track of his reading for a summer reading program. He had read over seventy books. (No kidding, and they were not easy readers!) Neither son is lazy, but if you give my oldest son a book report to do, or send my third son to clean the barn, you may get the impression that they are. Laziness must then be judged as an overall tendency. If your child is a hard worker in some areas, but less inclined in others, then he is a normal human being. (It is when he refuses to do a task at all that you have problems! A child may not be motivated in a certain area, but he should be willing to do a minimal amount of help in any area when needed.)

Children must then be judged according to their abilities, giftings and environment. The Bible makes it clear that they are a blessing. My question to you is: How is a person who eats your food, messes up your house, uses your money for clothes and entertainment and does nothing in return a blessing? He isn't. As soon as they are able, children should have responsibilities. It is part of training them in the way they should go. If they do not learn to be productive young, they will have a hard time being productive as adults. If you do not care about your child's life, think about their

future spouse, and your grandchildren as they live with a person who does not think it is their responsibility to even pick up their own socks.

At first children should be responsible for cleaning up their own messes, and then they can progress to helping around the home. Before they leave home they should know how to cook, clean, do laundry etc. They learn these skills by doing them at home. Many of my friends not only miss their children's company when they leave the home, but miss the help that they received from them. The children themselves also find it easier to live on their own, as they know how to take care of themselves. Chores are then not for the benefit of the parent, but the child. The benefit for the parent does come, but in the beginning of teaching a child to do any chore it is truly easier to do it yourself.

How we do chores: In our home we assign each child one chore, which they do after supper along with picking up the living room (a group task). They receive a certain amount of money each week for this to purchase what they would like. (We do not buy them 'extras.' If they want a CD, candy, a toy etc. they use their money.) If they wish to earn extra money, they may ask to do extra chores. (They must ask to do the chore first. Doing something, then demanding payment is a no-no.) We will offer chores, like cleaning the van, for extra money. We will also warn them that if no one volunteers for certain chores, like cleaning the van, at some point everyone will be doing it for free! They may choose to work together, or alone, as long as they talk to us about it. (We do not pay for things that we did not agree to pay for before they did it. We also inspect the job after they do it to make sure it is reasonably well done. This is a good rule in life

too. If someone does a job for you that you did not ask them to do, or does not finish it, then you are not under any obligation to pay them.)

In our home we get much done with little arguing. (Notice I did not say no arguing.) The children know that if I have to remind them repeatedly, they still have to do it, and I don't pay for it. I believe this system works because we do what we say we will do. If they do not do their chores, they do not get paid. If they do more chores, or do them well, they make more money. While every child has a chore, it is not necessary to do more. Some children choose to increase their chores based on what they need. Chores like cleaning the basement are perfect for children who want a one-time big purchase, but are otherwise comfortable with a lower allowance. Other children enjoy saving their money and doing a little more on a regular basis. These children help with the dishes and the laundry. Two of my children also have their own business. My oldest son has a beehive. He takes care of the bees, but is shy, so he has hired his brother to do the selling. Together they make a reasonable amount of pocket money.

The lesson I want you to learn from this is:

1. All children are different, and therefore they should not be judged the same, as long as they work hard at something AND are willing to do the minimum in every situation. (No refusals of reasonable requests are allowed!)
2. You are training them to be adults. Chores are the things they need to know how to do to be independent. If you ever want them off your couch, train them to take care of themselves!

3. Children are supposed to be a blessing. Do not feel guilty about having them help at home. It is not your job to do all the housework, just to make sure it gets done. It is your job to teach your children how to be godly adults, and that means how not to be selfish and lazy. Let them help!
4. Do not pay (reward) what they did not do. If the chore was done poorly, or you had to nag (more than a little) then it was not done satisfactorily. It is okay to expect things to be done right. (Read God's response to Cain's sacrifice³⁰-God was right, even though Cain's response to correction was not. Your child's first response to correction will probably not be all that appropriate either... Know that your child will not like it when you tell him that the chore was not done correctly, and will let you know it. Luckily they are younger, and hopefully less violent, than Cain.)
5. Inspect whatever you expect! If you repeatedly ask your child to clean their room, yet you never check it, before long they will begin to tell you that they cleaned it when they did not. Do not drop the ball by forgetting to check up on them; otherwise they receive more reward for lying (allowance plus free time) than for doing well!
6. Whatever you do, do not give empty praise. Empty praise is when you tell a child that he did a good job when he did not. Most of the time children know whether or not they did well. If you lie to them your praise, and your word, will be meaningless in the future. Real praise for good work brings results. Most children go through times where you may have to search hard to find something to praise, but only

³⁰ Genesis 4: 1-16

giving them bad reports will not motivate. True praise shows them that they can succeed if they try.

7. Allow them to face the consequences of their actions. If they stole money from the teacher, they have to face her, apologize and replace what they took. An extra gift bought with their allowance may also be in order. (When we caught one of our children stealing snacks from other children's lunches we had him apologize to the class and provide snack for the entire class that day. The snack was bought out of his allowance money. This was, of course, before we began home schooling the children!) Do not shelter them because they are young. If they are old enough to knowingly do something wrong, then they are old enough to face some sort of consequences for it.
8. In general, believe other adults when they give you a bad report about your child. Very few adults want to tell you negative things. When they do, it is probably a significant problem. Get the facts, talk to other adults to see if your child is misbehaving under their care as well, and deal with your child.

Caution: One of the surprising trends I see today is that parents believe their children over other, responsible, adults. (If the adult would lie to you about your child, they are not someone you should allow to care for your child.) Believe it or not your child is capable of lying to you! In my experience as a church school teacher I have had a parent approach me on the first day of class and warn me that if I had a problem with her child, I would be sitting down with both parents and the child present because she

was tired of adults lying about her kid. Now who do you think was the problem child in my class?

I also had the unpleasant responsibility of having to tell a parent that their child was caught stealing from the offering while under my care. There were two adult witnesses. The parent called me multiple times to explain why their child could not have possibly done it. The truth is that every child will make mistakes. The question that matters is: Will the parent teach them right from wrong when it happens, or merely ignore it?

To avoid raising lazy children you must succeed in making them accountable for their actions. If they did not study for the test, do not agree with them when they claim it was unfair. If they did not clean their room, then they do not watch T.V. until it is finished. In the grown up world laziness has consequences. They will either learn to do what is expected of them in your home, or they will learn it the hard way when they are grown, or maybe not at all and have a truly miserable life. Long-term habits are hard to break. Teach them well, while they are young, and when they are grown they will not depart from it!

When It is Okay To Help And Help Abundantly!

There are situations where the person may appear lazy, but is not. They need help and it is Biblical to give it to them. People may be depressed, or suffering from another mental illness that needs to be addressed. They may also be in need of medical help for a physical ailment like hypothyroidism. They may have severe pain that limits them. They may also feel hopeless, or lonely and need our encouragement. They may also be

in a position where they do not have the resources to help themselves. They may be mentally slow and unable to do everything they need to succeed.

There are also people that scripture tells us to help. Orphans and widows are specifically listed in scripture as people that we are to help³¹. (Though young widows are encouraged to remarry. God's perfect will is for a godly man and woman to be present in the home.) In the New Testament we also see the church in Jerusalem sharing so that no one had any need³². There is a big difference however between wants and needs. While able-bodied people are to be working, those who are not able to work are to receive help.

Further, those who experience extreme situations, such as unexpected catastrophes are also to receive our assistance. In cases of house fires, illness, accident, etc. pour out the blessings!

There are also times when past mistakes cannot be repaired. The person is no longer making the same mistakes, but is having a hard time recovering from the messes they have made. Here too, we may help them along.

Knowing what to do in every situation is hard. This is why we must also pray for wisdom. While many non-Christians use Biblical principles with good results, it is better to seek the Lord as well.

³¹ James 1:27

³² Acts 2:45

Situations That Promote Laziness And How To Avoid Them

While we are ultimately responsible for our own actions, there are situations that encourage people to be lazy. As we do not want to lead anyone into sin, we would do well to avoid these situations within the church.

1. Avoid empty praise.

Praise and reward those who deserve it, and only those people.

The first problem that promotes laziness is praising everyone equally. You must make sure that your church rewards the people who do the work that is needed, more than those who do not. It is Biblical to receive for what you have done, even if it is done for God³³. It does not have to be much, but work should be recognized.

Praise is also Biblical. God praised Jesus, in public, during His ministry³⁴. If Jesus received praise for His work, then it is okay for us to receive praise as well. The praise not only helps the person who receives it, it also testifies to what deeds are worthy and acceptable in the church and encourages others to do likewise.

If you praise and reward everyone equally, regardless of what they have actually done, then no one will feel appreciated and morale will plummet. People who work hard deserve to be acknowledged. (Caution: There are a few people who would quit if they knew the job meant public recognition. They are that shy. Reward them in more private ways.)

2. Do not treat everyone as if they were equal.

Instead use people, as they are able.

³³ 1 Corinthians 11:2; Romans 13:3; Proverbs 31:28

³⁴ 2 Peter 1:17-18, Mark 1:11

One of the lies of the devil is that everyone needs to be given equal treatment.³⁵ The fact is: Life is not fair. God did not make everyone equal. People, who can do more, should do more. People who are unable to do more are then given less responsibility. An artist should not be put in charge of the Sunday school, while an administrator should not be put in charge of choreographing the church play. Use people where they are suitable. People in roles they are not suited for only frustrate themselves and others.

3. Do not use leadership positions as rewards for good work.

Do not use positions as a reward period. Some people are great workers, but cannot lead. People who are frustrated because they are in roles that they cannot handle become discouraged and do progressively less. Unfortunately society today teaches that leadership is a reward. It is not.³⁶ Leaders have certain abilities. While these abilities may be taught, they are not inherently present in every individual. Further people under bad leadership also become frustrated. This lowers their motivation, and may cause them to quit altogether. Good leadership is essential to any project. For this reason leadership should not be given lightly.

4. Do not expect everyone to volunteer

Many people want to work, but lack the confidence to volunteer. Ask people to do the jobs you need. If they say no, ask why in a caring manner. It may be that they have other abilities, or are overwhelmed and need help themselves. You may not find a new nursery worker, due to her recurrent back problems, but may have a new choir member by the end of the conversation.

5. Remind people of their obligations

³⁵ Matthew 25:15

³⁶ Romans 12:6-8

Life is busy. Most people do not mean to forget what they have promised to do. If any amount of time has passed between volunteering and the event they volunteered to do it is helpful to remind the person who has volunteered. If they forget, they may feel guilty and not want to volunteer again, or even face you, in the future due to embarrassment. If they forget repeatedly they may come to believe that they are really not needed, or that it is okay to not fulfill their obligations. Either way, they are developing lazy habits that could be avoided with simple reminders.³⁷

6. There are consequences for not working

People who do not show up when they have volunteered to work require a phone call to see if there is something the matter. While this should be done with the assumption that they meant to be there, and with concern that something may be wrong, if nothing is wrong they are then reminded that they did not fulfill their obligation. People, who do not work, also do not get the rewards that go along with working.³⁸ Teachers who do not prepare for their class do not keep their position. Musicians who repeatedly miss practice are not part of the music team on Sunday mornings. While they are to be warned, if they do not fulfill the obligations of the position they do not receive the rewards inherent in the position. (If you do not warn them, you cannot take anything away. A person is entitled to more than one chance to repent.³⁹)

7. Keep things in proper perspective

³⁷ Romans 14:13

³⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:10

³⁹ Matthew 18:15-17

Any time we think that we are more important than we are, we are in danger of thinking that we are too good to do certain things⁴⁰. Any time we think that we are less capable than we are, we are unlikely to do all that we should⁴¹. In either situation, we are doing less than God has called us to do. This is why self-esteem matters. People with high self-esteem suffer from pride. People with low self-esteem are burdened with depression. For this reason we must be honest with people. Building people up by telling them they are better than we know they are, and never discussing their shortcomings, will leave them feeling like they are better than they are, and frustrated when their life does not reflect it⁴². On the other hand, the absence of praise when earned, and the emphasis on the things that they do wrong will cause a person to stop trying. The answer is then to be truthful. Praise what is praiseworthy and correct what requires correction.

8. Avoid conflicting messages

People who are confused tend to do less. Additionally people who thought they were showing up to do one thing, are unlikely to get excited when they find they are going to be doing something else. Instead they are likely to feel tricked. Even if they were likely to show up to do anyways if they knew the truth, they will be upset. One example of this is Christmas break from school. Some schools tell children they have a week off from school, and then ask them to do multiple assignments over the break. This is not a 'week off.' This is a week of schoolwork that you do not have to go to the school building to do! Children are not 'lazy' in regard to not doing these assignments

⁴⁰ Proverbs 18:12

⁴¹ 1 Timothy 4:12-14

⁴² Proverbs 29:5

well. Instead they are unmotivated because they feel betrayed, and want the promised break.

How to Repent From Laziness

So what happens when you realize that you are lazy? Do you just get up and decide to change? Well of course that is part of it, but chances are you have some wrong ideas, and ingrained habits that got you where you are. Without help it is much harder to succeed in changing. This is why God gave you other Christians. They can help you, if you ask, preferably nicely. The Holy Spirit is another gift from God. Ask Him as well to help you along the way and pray, pray, pray!

The first thing you may need is an accountability partner. Do not choose a person similar to you. Instead choose a person whom you respect and look up to, and, most importantly, is not lazy too. Then outline what your goals are. 'Not being lazy' is too broad a goal. Start small, with something important to you, like: 'I will remember to pick up my child on time every day this week.' Have a plan as to how you are going to do it. Afterwards, call your accountability partner to discuss how you did.

Support is the next thing you require. Explain to those around you what you are trying to do. They will then be sensitive to your needs and help you along. (Do not tell people who have a history of being insensitive. You do not need unproductive criticism at this time.)⁴³

⁴³ Proverbs 12:15, 12:26

Acknowledge when you mess up. Do not get mad at those you love for pointing it out⁴⁴. They are trying to help. Go to them and apologize. Make an effort to fix the relationships that your laziness has broken. Go above and beyond. You have hurt people by not doing what you were suppose to do, by not being there for them, and perhaps by the busybody tendencies and gossip that also accompany laziness. Do not expect immediate trust just because you are trying to change. Trust must be earned⁴⁵. Work to show yourself improved!

Be careful not to go over board. An addiction to work (becoming a workaholic) is also not good. Make sure you are balancing your work with your family responsibilities well. Remember, you do not have much practice with this. Allow your spouse to help guide you⁴⁶.

Proper self-esteem is also important. A good counselor may be helpful. Knowing the Word of God is extremely helpful. If you were lazy, you were looking through a mirror tainted with lies about what you deserved in life. You may need help to see your positive points, as well as your flaws, in correct perspective. Just remember that no one is perfect, we are all merely trying to do our best. Do what you can, the best that you are able to do it, and God will take care of the rest.

Practice Scenarios for Group Discussion

1. You have recently fired a teacher at the end of the school year from your church's Christian school for not following through on her responsibilities. She now wishes to be a church schoolteacher. You have gifted teens also willing to

⁴⁴ James 5:16, 20, Proverbs 28:13

⁴⁵ Proverbs 20:6

⁴⁶ Proverbs 31:11-12, Ephesians 5:22

help. (They are younger, but have no negatives.) You delay your decision and she lets members of the congregation know that she was not immediately given the job, while indicating that she chose not to teach at the school next year and you, the pastor, are mad at her for it. What do you do?

My thoughts: In firing her at the end of the school year you attempted to keep her from embarrassment. You have a right to take your time making a decision. If you know whom she has spoken to, you may call them into your office, with her and perhaps an elder, and clarify the situation. As she included these people, you are not violating her privacy; the lie should be corrected. If you do not know everyone she spoke to you may ask her for the names. If the story is widespread, and people are taking it seriously, she may have forced you to address it in front of the entire church. Do not feel guilty about this. It was her choice to make this a public issue. Next time she may be more cautious.

2. You have a person who criticizes the way the church is being maintained. In an effort to rectify the situation you make him one of the men responsible for maintenance. Instead of fixing things, he points them out to the other men for them to fix. What do you do?

My thoughts: If you did not do this before, check with others to see if this man actually knows how to fix anything before you force him into a situation where he has to do something; you do not want your church destroyed. If he has talent, then discuss the situation with him, with an elder or two present, explaining that you expect him to come to you with a problem, then do the work he is assigned. Tell him that he is not to relegate his work to others; they have their own work to do. If he

does not comply, warn him in front of the other maintenance men so that they will not allow him to pass off his work to them. If he continues, he is no longer a maintenance man and the church will be advised of the change and why it occurred. (You warned him once about being a busybody when you gave him the job, the second time with an elder, and a third in front of the maintenance portion of the congregation. He is still in the church, after being dismissed from the job, but the church now knows the problem. If he complains that he was unfairly treated and causes division, he may be asked to leave the church.)

3. You have a woman's ministry that does no work. You do not mind fellowship, but are hearing that some of the women leave crying and only a small group consistently meets every month. What do you do?

My thoughts: Your woman's ministry needs a man over it. While the man may not go to every meeting, the possibility that he will show up exists. He is also available to handle complaints. Merely having him in this position may be enough to stop any unacceptable behavior in the group. Your woman's ministry may also need a mission statement and a purpose to keep the women from falling into gossip to fill the time. If mature women are not a part of the group, you may also ask them to become involved.

Chapter 2: The Busybody

What is a busybody?

A busybody is a person who has too much time on their hands. They use this time to bother other people. The busybody does not help; they interfere⁴⁷. They take control where they have no authority, and advise where they have no wisdom. Closely associated in scripture with the 'busybody' is gossip⁴⁸. The busybody may think she is helping, but in truth she is making the situation worse. Let me give you an example:

Betty is an older woman, who has been in the church for most of her life. Unfortunately, Betty is not a mature believer, despite her many years as a Christian. Because of her many years in the church Betty had developed a sense of 'ownership' towards various ministries in the church and takes it upon herself to interfere, even when she has no reason to be there. Children's Sunday school was one of the ministries that Betty felt she had a right to interfere with. Betty would tell teachers what they could, and could not, do as if these were rules everyone should know. (For example she forbade the teachers to put posters up in their rooms.) She would tell people that other people had problems with them, when nothing had been said and would move furniture around the church without permission. She would also show up in a teacher's classroom, listen for a while, and then begin to teach. Unfortunately what she had to 'teach' was not always part of the lesson the teacher had planned, making some of the activities the children had done less applicable.

Betty is an extreme example. (Truthfully, I have left out some of her more daring moves, as I was not sure you would believe that they actually happened!) If you talk

⁴⁷ 2 Thessalonians 3:11

⁴⁸ 1 Timothy 5:13

with Betty you will realize that she honestly believes that she is helping. She has the opinion that she knows what is best for the church, and is determined to do what she sees as right, no matter what the people in charge say or do. In her mind she is saving the church.

Betty's motives are somewhat good, though misdirected. She believes that she is doing what is best for the church, and she will not let anything, or anyone, get in her way. She works hard to accomplish what she thinks is right. Unfortunately, Betty is only right in her own eyes. She refuses to be under authority, as they are (in her opinion) younger and less experienced. She honestly believes that she knows God's will and is doing it.

Other busybodies are not so altruistic. They 'help' with ulterior motives. They may want rewards, or specific favors in return for their generous offer of 'help.' Unfortunately, you did not ask for the 'help,' may not have wanted it, and certainly did not agree to do anything in return for it. This is 'help' with a hidden price.

For example: Bill was assigned the job of painting the stall doors in the boy's bathroom. Bill did not like the color of paint that the church had provided so he went out and bought new paint. He then decided that the paint he bought did not match the rest of the bathroom and bought another color to paint the walls with as well. Of course the fixtures were old, so Bill thought he would replace these too. He purchased all of these things, returned to the church and began a part of all the projects, but finished nothing. When the pastor saw what was done, it was too late. Now all the projects had to be done, or the church bathroom would look ridiculous. Bill took his time, and after a month of inconsistent work, he was done. That is when he presented the pastor a bill for

his services and the supplies he used. (This was not part of the agreement.) The pastor paid the bill, and made a silent vow never to ask Bill to do anything else around the church. Unfortunately Bill had already found a new project and had already begun to work!

Some busybodies are not as productive as Bill. They merely show up at the pastor's office regularly to let him know what is wrong with the church. Others form small groups to discuss church 'issues,' sowing seeds of discontent. A pastor I spoke to had a wonderful suggestion for these people. He said that whenever a regular complainer shows up he gives him a job. His favorite complainer currently mows the grass. When he arrives, again, with a list of grievances, the pastor replies, 'You know, I think the grass would look better if it were just a little bit shorter. Could you take care of that for me?' This pastor claims that his 'work incentives,' plus some well-placed teaching, has actually helped to change some of his complainers into positive, productive members of the congregation.

Sometimes busybodies do more than complain. Busybodies like Bill need some firm boundaries. It is obvious that Bill believes he is behaving appropriately, and probably has scriptures to back it up. With Bill, firm limits and boundaries are needed. Another pastor, and friend, says that she does not have anything done by a church member without a written contract. Everything is written down and signed including the date the project is to be completed. If money is involved, half of the money is then paid up front, with the other half to be given when the project is done. Financial losses are also included in the contract in case the work is not done, or done late. This saves needless arguments as the contract can be referred to when questions arise. If you do more than

she has asked for, she will thank you for the gift, and explain that she is under no obligation to pay for what she did not ask you to do.

Situations that Promote Busybody Behavior

1. Lack of Boundaries

The pastor who had people sign a contract had the right idea. Busybodies insert themselves into places they do not belong. Clear boundaries and confrontation are therefore essential. While this can involve work related situations, this also includes people that pry into our lives. While we are to be concerned with one another, learn from one another, rebuke and confess our sins to one another, we are under no obligation to receive this from people who truly behave inappropriately⁴⁹. These admonitions are to provide help to younger believers from mature believers and for mature believers to mutually strengthen one another. They are not so that you are at the emotional mercy of everyone in the church. People, who have not shown themselves to be worthy of your trust, do not belong in your private life.⁵⁰ Let me give you an example of a ‘personal’ busybody.

Beverly has inherited a large sum of money and has no real need to work. She enjoys dropping by the neighbors’ homes for a cup of coffee and a chat. While visiting, Beverly is quick to point out areas where each person could improve their lives. Jane, for example, really should show more patience towards her children, while Patty should spend more time on the appearance of her front lawn.

Beverly has the resources, time and money, to be a blessing to these women, but she is not. Instead she devotes her energy to finding areas of their lives to belittle them

⁴⁹ Matthew 7:6

⁵⁰ Proverbs 11:13

in. Offering to baby-sit Jane's children, so Jane could refresh herself, and her marriage, is not something she would even think to do. Helping Patty with her 'landscaping,' or making a present of a pretty planter of annuals also does not occur to her. Nor would she do it if you suggested it. In her mind, these are Patty and Jane's responsibilities.

The truth is that God has given us all resources of time and energy and He expects us to use them wisely. When we have extra, we can be a blessing to others. When my family moved into our current home we had a neighbor that helped us immensely. There was no real way to repay all the favors they did for us at the time. Then they took in two difficult foster children and the tables were turned. We were now able to return the favor. Then we took in three additional children and the cycle reversed itself. (Then they moved to Alaska, but I don't think that had anything to do with it...) Helping people when you see a need is what the Christian community is all about. With seven children I never lacked for a babysitter, my church family volunteered to help. One of my first experiences as a Christian was people I did not know bringing me meals after I had a baby. (No one warned us this was going to happen, and we did not know the older members of our congregation well, so this was a little strange for us. I told my husband, 'Strangers keep bringing us food, and they say they are from the church. I don't know when they are going to stop either, so I don't know if I am suppose to cook today or what?') It was strange, but wonderful, and no one put down my house keeping while they were there!

Regarding boundaries, the 'Beverlys' in our lives need to have their access limited. They should be told, kindly, but firmly, when they have crossed a line. You don't need to make excuses for your behavior. Do not make excuses for anything you

are accused of either. (It may be an area you are working on.) You do not need to listen to the devil accuse you of being less than you should be⁵¹. (Godly intervention comes beside you and lifts you up. While it may involve painful confrontation, it does not point out your faults and go, it stays and helps.) Merely tell your Beverly that it is none of her business, or that her comments are hurtful and unappreciated. If she does not express true repentance then you are too busy to have her in the next time she shows up. And in truth you are too busy trying to do what God has called you to do to allow her to destroy your self-esteem⁵². Even rest is more productive than listening to someone's unconstructive criticism of your life!

2. Having Little to Do

Beverly is one of those people who has little to do. In scripture (1 Timothy 5:11-15) we find Paul advising Timothy not to put young widows on the list for receiving help, as it will encourage them to be idle, gossips and busybodies, 'talking about things not proper to mention.' Instead Timothy is to encourage the young widows to remarry so that they may be busy with children and the keeping of the home. Work is good for us. God gave Adam the job of tending the garden before sin entered the world⁵³. Work is therefore godly. It also keeps us from sin, as we are too busy for it. The pastor who assigned his 'busybodies' menial tasks in the church to occupy them was using this principle. He also educated them, but his main focus was putting them to work (but not in charge, a complainer in leadership is a recipe for disaster).

3. Tolerating Gossip

⁵¹ Proverbs 9:7-8

⁵² Proverbs 21:19, 22:10

⁵³ Genesis 2:15

Gossip and busybody are frequently coupled in scripture. This is because they are similar in nature. Both are unproductive wastes of time. Gossiping merely puts people down. It is not designed to help, and does not produce fruit. If it is tolerated it will produce people like Beverly, who feel the need to go on search and destroy missions. One minute of conversation with them can ruin your whole week. They get into areas they do not belong, and do not have the skills to help with. Unlike Bill and Betty, Beverly's arena is emotional. Her actions are passive, but her words wound deeply. Her words merely point out flaws that the person already knows are there and rub salt in the wound. Gossip encourages this. By listening to someone unconstructively berate another, and especially when we encourage it, we are making Beverly's actions seem right and proper, even noble, for she believes the person must be informed that they are doing wrong. Unfortunately the person with a problem needs help, and all these people have is accusations. If a pastor does not teach against gossip, and stop it when he sees it, he will breed busybodies.

Women love to help; they also love to talk. Constructive conversation focuses on how we are to help a person who is having problems. You can talk about a person for quite a while and if help is your goal not be in error. Of course, the conversation should result in tangible actions to support the person, like bringing them meals, or buying them a day at a spa to relax etc. (Of course the action should be something that they want. Going into a person's home and doing something that they do not wish done is not helping.) You may also talk to help a person resolve a problem with another person.

Sharing people's problems with no real thought of helping is merely gossip. Going to them and merely sharing their faults with them, or doing things for them they do not want done, is being a busybody. Both are pointless and mean.

Here is an example of an active busybody: Babs went to visit her niece. While there she decided that her niece needed help with her household skills. Babs rearranged cupboards and furniture, and even cleaned between the slats on her niece's front porch. At first her niece did not mind. If it made her aunt happy to feel helpful, she would let her, but then it became obvious that her aunt was doing these unnecessary chores because she felt her niece was not keeping her home the way it 'should be kept.' In helping, the aunt was belittling her niece by showing her all the areas where she had fallen short. The truth was however, that these areas were not areas of fault, but merely things that her aunt had decided 'should be this way.' Candid conversation with the aunt about how cabinets could be arranged differently and still be okay, as well as limits on what her aunt was allowed to change in her home helped to improve their relationship. (Caution: The initial conversation did not go smoothly. No one who has crossed into 'busybody land' likes to be confronted with the truth, but the confrontation saved a relationship that was already being destroyed by the aunt's actions. The niece did not hurt the relationship by bringing up the problem. The aunt hurt the relationship by not wanting to hear that there was a problem.)

4. Lack of Empowerment

Many godly people wish to do the right thing and turn gossips away. Unfortunately, many do not feel that it is their place to do so because of misinformation about what it means to be nice to someone. Encouraging mature people in a

congregation to say the hard things to a gossip, or busybody, and enabling them to teach others how to set boundaries will help to alleviate problems. Not everything needs to be dealt with in the pastor's office. A congregation that knows what a busybody is, and understands how to set boundaries, will not tolerate that sort of behavior. Busybodies need people willing to let them take advantage in order to cause serious trouble. If you teach your congregation to say 'no,' and teach them to support others who are saying 'no,' then you will have less problems in this area. (Caution: It is hard to set good boundaries if the people around you mistakenly believe that boundaries are mean.)

How to Repent of Being a Busybody

Let us suppose you have read these examples and the Holy Spirit is now screaming in your soul that this is you. You are now praying and seeking God for wisdom in this area of your life. What more does scripture tell us to do that will help us keep from this sin?

1. Get involved in meaningful work. Full lives do not have time for pestering people. (1 Timothy 5: 13-14)
2. Place yourself under a firm authority figure that knows how to enforce boundaries when you do work. You need help knowing what is helpful, and what is wasteful, to others. (Heb. 13:17)
3. Place yourself spiritually under the authority of a mature believer you admire, who is not a busybody. Ask them to be your accountability partner. Set up regular times to talk and be open and honest with them even when it hurts. (James 5:16)

4. Go to the people you know you have hurt and apologize. Explain that you are trying to do better and give them permission to tell you when you are out of line in their lives. (Jer. 8:6) Then accept the boundaries they set graciously. Everyone has the right to limit what he or she will and will not accept in his or her life. It is not being mean, it is merely exercising a God-given authority over their own life. (Heb.12:5-15)

Practice Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. A woman in your church is unhappy that teenagers are being used to teach in the children's wing. She has gone to parents of the children and exaggerated situations so that it looks like there are problems that the teens are causing back there. You ask her to stop and speak with the parents of the children. She does stop talking to the children's parents, but begins to express her concern to the parents of the teens implying that the pastor is not thrilled with their teen's performance as a teacher. She is also actively sharing each teen's faults with the rest of the congregation so that everyone will know exactly what type of people are teaching our children. How do you handle this?

My thoughts: Of course you talk to the woman repeatedly as it says to do in Matthew 18. You also wish to put her in a situation where it is not easy for her to cause trouble. This may involve removing her from areas where she has access to spread gossip. She should not be involved in the church school, nor should she be involved in things like the prayer chain, or any other phone tree, that gives her an excuse to call people she would not normally have access to. She should also be

made busy, especially before and after church, but in a non-social setting. Setting up chairs, putting overhead sheets, or music, away etc. may keep her too busy to cause trouble. You also need to bolster the teens and restore others confidence in them. Public praise for the teens is indicated. The people in the church should also be encouraged to tell anyone who puts people down and spreads gossip that they are out of line. If they have a question about what is going on, they should go to the pastor rather than spreading more rumors.

2. A church member has a habit of showing up at other people's homes, doing work as if it were a favor and then charging for it. What do you do?

My opinion: Of course you, as a pastor, confront the person. While the actions are not occurring in the church building, this person is using your church to take advantage of people. It may be helpful to have the people he has taken advantage of present if a second meeting is needed and the elders should be aware of his problem. Teaching from the pulpit on what is proper, and what is not, in business also needs to occur. Contractors, and lawyers in your congregation may give you insight on how to best explain this.

Chapter 3: Strife

What is Strife?

Since the word ‘strife’ is not commonly used today let us take some time looking at the scriptures that define it. Often, overly broad definitions cause us to misapply scriptures to situations where they are not applicable. Other times we fail to apply the scriptural advice at all because it seems too harsh, missing the fact that it only appears harsh when lesser ‘crimes’ are included in the definition that were not intended to be by the author (God). Other times Christians go on a ‘witch hunt,’ attempting to punish all infractions and we, as a community, look ridiculous.

So let us define ‘strife’ accurately, lest those of us who enjoy ferreting out the truth of the Word (like the Bereans) suffer needlessly. (I also wish to protect those cantankerous older men I love verbally sparring with!) As you will see, while these people may not be your favorite company, they are not the people scripture is dealing with.

1 Timothy 6:4-5 gives us a clue as to how ‘strife’ is defined in the Bible. It says: ‘He is conceited and understands nothing; but has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.’

2 Timothy 2:23 further illuminates the scriptural definition of strife by telling us, ‘But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels (strife

in the KJV⁵⁴).’ Other areas in scripture show that strife is the result of being wrathful⁵⁵, tale bearing and meddling⁵⁶, pride⁵⁷, and anger⁵⁸.

1 Timothy 6:11 tells us to flee from a long list of things, which includes the useless arguments that stir up strife. Proverbs 26:17 describes getting involved with a strifeful person as ‘one who takes a dog by the ears.’ (I am assuming that this is not a particularly tame dog!)

Strife is caused by people who choose to argue about useless things. They become passionate about minute details, and areas where they have no authority. They draw others into their arguments, and are quite passionate about their stance. These are not people who will ‘agree to disagree.’ While they may have times of happiness, usually after they are appeased, they will soon be upset about something new. Strife is a way of behaving. It does not matter whether they have a valid point, or not, they will argue about anything. The fact that they now have a ‘valid point’ merely means that they were lucky enough to latch on to something worth fighting for this time!

In scripture there are a number of examples about how strife manifests itself. In the New Testament we find Paul warning Titus to avoid arguments about genealogies⁵⁹. You see in the time of the early church your genealogy proved your ‘Jewishness.’ Your ‘status’ in the church, according to the ‘strifeful people,’ depended on who your ancestors were.

⁵⁴ strife= mache in Greek, the same root is used in both verses

⁵⁵ Proverbs 15:18

⁵⁶ Proverbs 26:17,20

⁵⁷ Proverbs 28:25

⁵⁸ Proverbs 29:22

⁵⁹ Titus 3:9

In this New Testament example we see Christians arguing about who is a ‘better’ Jew using genealogies⁶⁰. Christian hierarchies, which are used to determine who is more ‘Christian,’ or spiritual, are not to exist. Today we see this behavior also. Examples of this type of behavior are: If you are a pastor’s child, you are looked upon differently. If you are called to be a missionary, you are more holy. If you deny your children television, you are more spiritual. If you speak in tongues, or fast often, you get bonus points in the eyes of others. Get the point? This is not to be!

We are all struggling to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. When we ‘learn’ something, and become more mature, we are to teach others, not lord it over them. Further, we are to follow the path the Lord has set for our lives. An intercessor prays more than an administrator, and is right to do so. Further, our life circumstances demand different strategies. If your children are to become apologists (ones who explain why Christianity is correct to others) they need to know what the world teaches. If your children are followers, and prone fall for ungodly influences, you may need to shelter them as they become strong. (We did not watch T.V. or listen to secular radio for three years after adopting older children because we were trying to teach them a different life style, one which the T.V. and radio were not reinforcing. Now we watch T.V., perhaps too much, but with teaching on why we agree or disagree with what they see and hear. Some of my children are about to leave our home and enter a world that will not always agree with us. We are now arming them with knowledge. Each choice was right for the situation we were in at the time.) In scripture we find differing laws

⁶⁰ Titus 3:9

regarding female hair, and the meat of idols, for the same reason. The circumstances surrounding each situation were different and thus different behavior was indicated.

In scripture we also find examples of arguments over whether or not Jewish traditions are to be celebrated, or abandoned⁶¹. The Bible teaches clearly that it does not matter, and that we are not to judge people based on whether or not they participate in ‘non-idolatrous’ activities, even if they are a part of their worship. This means that if someone chooses to celebrate Passover with his family, it is okay. It also means that just because you choose to celebrate Passover with your family, you are not superior to the person that does not. God has made us all to be unique and to follow the call He placed on your life.

In the New Testament, Paul also warns Titus about useless arguments about the Law. Today we see this in what we refer to as ‘legalism.’ There are many areas in scripture where people do not agree. An extreme example would be comparing Pentacostals to the Amish. While both are modest, there is a big difference in the interpretation of what modest means. It is arguments over these types of points that we are not to have. Style of dress, choice of literature, television consumption, etc. should not keep us from behaving as ‘brethren.’

Let me give you an example: I am a ‘study geek’, so my children receive education on many Old Testament activities. A friend of mine is a worshipper. While she does not do many organized activities, her house may at any time resonate with impromptu worship, including singing and prayer. Both of us look at each other and say, ‘Wow, I wish I could do that.’ But, in truth, both our houses are exactly the way

⁶¹ Col. 2:16-18

God wants them to be. In trying to be too much like the other, we leave God's plan for our lives and attempt to live out God's plan for someone else's life. So while my friend is in the center of God's will when she is focusing on singing and praising, I would not be. And the beauty of the church is that I taught her children church school, while she was in charge of my children for children's choir, and performed skits for them and organized the youth praise team etc. (Then she moved to Florida...)

A strifeful person could not be happy with this. They would insist that one method of raising children was better than the other, and make up extra-biblical rules about it. These rules might sound like this: 'Every family should have a nightly time for devotions.' 'A good family wakes up in the morning praising God in song.' 'No one who is a true Christian would forget to pray before meals.' While these are all good ideas, they are not hard and fast rules. Some of us have a regular schedule, others fly by the seat of our pants. So while God appreciates regular Bible study, He also rejoices in impromptu bursts of praise! All of us will be stronger in one area, or the other because God made us different. You get the idea. Now lets look at another example:

Sally believes that every family should have morning devotions. She also believes that everyone should tithe with their time as well as with their money. This means that 2.4 hours of the day should be spent in worship and/or Bible study (according to Sally). She has split this up into segments, one hour before work/school, one hour when the children get home from school and thirty minutes before bed. Unfortunately Sally is also disorganized and frequently wakes up late. Since she will not 'cheat' God, her children are late for school on a regular basis, with the excuse, 'we had to pray.' Sally believes that this is a good Christian witness. (It is not. The teachers merely roll their

eyes and vow never to go to a church that would make you do that, and her children have learned that it is okay to disobey the school rules. Since mom doesn't care if she upsets the teachers, and considers the teachers to be 'pagans who don't understand,' why should the children want to obey?) Further, in church Sally lectures the other women on how to run their home, and looks down upon their 'feeble' (in her opinion) attempts to teach their children. Recognizing this as something that causes strife in his congregation, the pastor talked to Sally, but she continues, as she feels that he is too soft on people because he is afraid of losing his flock. Many women, especially those who were not raised in the church, become worried that they are not doing enough, and try desperately to do better, like Sally. While they may not be as extreme, a generation of legalists is emerging. This group will have no time for the things God has truly called them to do, because they are too busy trying to follow Sally's unbiblical rule book. (Remember the Bible says not to add, or subtract from God's Word⁶².)

If it is not in the Bible, why would we want to add it? Do we really want to be like the Pharisees? I don't remember Jesus being overly pleased with them about their rules (that were based on scripture) so I don't think He will enjoy it when we do the same.

The next example is a little less extreme. While gambling is not in the Bible as being sinful, many teach that it is. (In their defense there are many scriptural teachings that can be applied that teach that gambling is indeed unwise as our trust should be in the Lord, that our provision should be from hard work and that we should not be careless with our resources.) Like modesty, and the meat of idols, wisdom must then be

⁶² Deut. 4:2, 12:32; **Proverbs 30:6**, Rev. 22:18

used when dealing with this issue. Here is an example where wisdom took a back seat to legalism.

Sara was out with her unsaved father at his community service club. They were having dinner and a friend of her father's asked if she wanted to buy a raffle ticket. Not wanting to offend, and considering it a donation to a good cause, Sara handed the man a dollar (which she could easily afford to give). Sara's name was drawn and Sara won \$3,000. That night in youth group Sara's children, when asked if anyone had a 'praise' to report, told the leader about the money. The leader's reply: 'I know where she got that money. It was from gambling.' And the rest of the lesson time was spent on teaching the children about the 'sin' of gambling.

This is legalism. The results were that the children were crushed. Trying to defend their mother only resulted in their friends pulling away from them, as their friends did not want to be viewed as 'less spiritual' by the youth leaders they loved and respected. Sara was crushed too. She approached the pastor, but in this case the pastor could do nothing because he did not clearly see where the youth leader went wrong. (Though he had a feeling something that something was not quite right...)

The problem is that we forget that Jesus did not pay His traveling tax until asked (and then He had his disciples get it from the mouths of fish)⁶³. He picked grain on the Sabbath even though He knew the Pharisees considered it work⁶⁴. (He healed on the Sabbath too⁶⁵.) He did not wash His hands in the Pharisee's home, even though He

⁶³ Matthew 17:27

⁶⁴ Matthew 12:1-2, Luke 6:1-2

⁶⁵ Matthew 12:10-15, Mark 1:29-32, Luke 13:10-16;14:3-4, John 5:7-9,16

knew it violated the Pharisees' laws on Biblical cleanliness⁶⁶, and would drive them nuts. He also did not have His disciples fast⁶⁷ on the days the Pharisees had prescribed as days for fasting. He went to parties and ate with sinners and prostitutes⁶⁸ as well. We know that Jesus did not sin in any of this. We also know that there are times when God would consider all of these things a sin because of our heart attitude when we do them.

For example: Going to a party with sinners, not to be a person who loves them and hopes they come to Christ through your example, but because you want to be one of them since they are so much cooler than your Christian friends, is not good. Not washing our hands to prove that we are better than someone else and not fasting with someone because we don't believe we have any need to get closer to God, as we are already there are also not good motives.

By teaching legalism, we forget that in scripture motives matter⁶⁹. David danced naked in front of the ark. Of course he was removing royal robes and thus humbling himself by doing so⁷⁰. The pastor on Sunday doing the same thing probably does not have the same motive, and would be in error. (Plus, given how many naked, or almost naked, Biblical figures there were, it does not seem to be as strong a taboo as it is today⁷¹.) *This footnote will probably get some attention... and that's okay. It is in there!*

(While motives matter, there are still things that are clearly wrong, (like adultery) no matter what your intention is!)

⁶⁶ Matthew 15:2-3, Luke 11:37-38

⁶⁷ Matthew 9:14

⁶⁸ Luke 5:29-32, Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19

⁶⁹ Jeremiah 17:10

⁷⁰ 2 Samuel 6: 12-23

⁷¹ Job 22:6, Isaiah 20:2-3, Ezekiel 16:37, Micah 1:8, 2 Corinthians 11:27 (KJV), Romans 8:35, 2 Kings 1:8, 2 Samuel 6:14,20, John 21:7, Numbers 20:27-28

Many times strife occurs with seemingly good motives, because the person believes he is doing the right thing. Like Sally the person is convinced that they are working for God. The problem is that she is in error and pride prevents her from heeding correction and submitting to authority. In these cases the person must be clearly taught why they are in error, as well as told to stop the behavior that is causing trouble. Sally may continue to pray with her children 2 and a half hours a day. (She adds the additional.1 as an offering!) But, she must realize that her yes is to be a yes and her no a no, and if she chooses to send her children to school, she has agreed to get them there on time. Further, she must also realize that it is not necessary to pray this often, but rather it is her preference. Thus she may do it, but must realize that it is in error to impose it on others. She must also be careful that she is not overdoing it and driving her children to wrath with her extreme expectations⁷².

All strife however, does not come from legalism. Some people are merely going to argue over everything if they are not stopped. Others believe they know how to do things better and will therefore not let anyone get in their way of doing what (in their minds) is best for the church. I had one of these people in my life. (The Lord not only birthed this project in my heart three years ago, He allowed me to live through it⁷³!)

Example: Sandy was convinced that she was the only logical choice for Sunday School Director. She had worked hard on the new wing, had taught in a Christian school, had worked in Christian education before, and had plenty of time to do the job as she was currently unemployed and her children were grown. Unfortunately Sandy had a reputation as being difficult to work with and was not chosen to be the director. As she

⁷² Luke 11:46, Eph. 6:4

⁷³ Romans 8:28

did not believe the person chosen was God's choice for the job (and she had her reasons to support this) she decided she would make sure that things were done right in the Sunday School wing no matter who was in charge. Sandy's method of getting things done her way was to insinuate that the people in authority (not her) really wanted things done in her way to the Sunday School staff. When confronted about this, she lied. She also snuck into the church every week to remove the pillows in the skit room and replace them with benches from the craft room as she believed that little girls should not be sitting on the floor in dresses. She also did not believe certain people should be working in the Sunday School, as their walk was not 'good enough,' or she doubted their salvation. (This included people making costumes, acting etc. as well as teachers.) She would then sow discord, implying to them that they were not doing their jobs well, or that others on the staff did not like them, in order to get them to leave. (Since I would not remove them from the staff as she requested.) Sandy was a problem. Her attempts to perfect the Sunday School wing outside of the current authority structure led to chaos, confusion and bickering that needed to be dealt with. Fortunately many of the people working had experience with Sandy and recognized her ways. Unfortunately the pastoral staff refused to step in as they had past experience with Sandy that was painful, and they would rather appease her than remove her.

Sandy, like Sally, had good intentions. She honestly believed that she was working in the best interests of the church. Unfortunately she believed that the end results justified the means, so she did not care if the way she got what she thought was right violated scriptures regarding authority and false witness. Sandy stirred up strife because she thought she was right, and that her 'right' needed to be done or the church would suffer.

People who feel this way start arguments over the color of the carpet (in my experiences it was not the color of the carpet, but because the swirls were really pagan symbols, that needed to be removed from the church –no kidding), the type of music, the style of dress the pastor’s wife wears, etc. They also believe things like: a person’s commitment to God can be measured by how many church services they attend in a week (or how often they have read their Bible etc.) and whether or not they allow their children to play with Pokemon cards or watch the Power Rangers etc. They are also the ones who regularly argue at church meetings over small details. Or, they argue against anyone who would dare question the pastor. These people argue, and cause others to argue. They are therefore a problem that must be dealt with, or discord and chaos will follow.

So now that we have explored what strife looks like, we must figure out what we are to do about it. The first step in that is to explore the hidden benefits⁷⁴ of strife and the situations that lead people to strife.

The Hidden Benefits of Strife

Attention

One of the hidden benefits of strife is attention. We are made, by God, to be social people. Unfortunately not everyone understands how to get their social needs met in a godly manner. They find that arguing with people gives them the attention that they crave. This is because most people do not like to leave an argument. Most people, when argued with, either wish to fix the problem, or win the argument, depending on their

⁷⁴ Proverbs 9:17

nature. Unfortunately, with a strifeful person there is no way to ‘fix’ the problem. Continuing to argue with them only serves to fuel their desire to argue as it fills their need for fellowship⁷⁵. In truth, people need to discourage this behavior by walking away.

Authority

Strifeful people often get their way because people do not like to argue. It is easier to give in to a person, especially on little points, than to take a stand. Unfortunately this is not godly. Righteous behavior involves doing what is right, not what is easiest. While some decisions have no ‘right’ answer (like what color the carpet should be), under no circumstance should we ever veer from ‘right’ to make someone ‘happy.’⁷⁶ (In truth this personality will only be happy for a short time before they choose to argue again so you are accomplishing nothing positive by giving in. Instead you are merely reinforcing and prolonging your problem.) The point here is: it accomplishes nothing to appease people⁷⁷. If there is a problem, giving in merely prolongs it.

Payback

Some people focus on the bad in their lives. Strife is a way to ‘right the wrongs.’ They create strife in order to get someone back, or make something the way that they feel it should be. If they are not corrected, they will view their behavior as an effective way of making things ‘right.’⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Proverbs 17:14

⁷⁶ Proverbs 18:5

⁷⁷ Proverbs 17:15

⁷⁸ Proverbs 24:29; 30:33

Situations that Create Strife

Lack of input/ autocratic leadership

There are times where people who are not prone to strife will become strifeful. When people feel that they lack input, they are tempted to try to influence things in other ways. (No one likes to feel like they are at the mercy of another, and that their opinions do not matter.) Earlier, we discussed people who erroneously perceive their situation to be unfairly powerless. Now we will see that without the ability to give input, people will be tempted to seek places to influence their environment. Since it is biblical to have input in the church (we are to function as a body), a church that has a pastor who will behaves as a dictator will breed behaviors in his congregation that cause strife.

Lack of Justice

People are also born with an innate sense of justice. Even a two year old knows that it is wrong for another child to take a toy away from them. When justice is lacking, people become frustrated⁷⁹. In order to relieve their frustration, people are tempted to take matters into their own hands. They also mumber and complain. This leads to strife in the congregation. Though justice is not pleasant to administer, it is the only role of the pastor that is not duplicated by other gifts of the Spirit. The administration of justice is therefore, the primary function of the pastorate. When it is lacking, strife is the result.

Lack of Attention/ Fellowship

⁷⁹ Proverbs 18: 5, Micah 6:8

People wish to be noticed. They also wish to have relationships with other people. It is the way God intended us to be. (Remember in Genesis when He said that it was not good for man to be alone⁸⁰.) In a church that does not promote fellowship, and does not praise those deserving of praise⁸¹, people will look elsewhere to get these needs met. Those who have little social interaction outside the church (like stay at home moms) are now the most prone to seek attention within the church in ungodly ways⁸². Strife is then the result.

Lack of Control

While some people erroneously believe that they should have more control than they do, there are situations in which people are justified in feeling helpless.

For example: I was part of a Christian Education system that bought new curriculum every year because the old one ‘wasn’t working.’ The problem was that they never asked their teachers what they wanted. The teachers felt that as soon as they got use to a curriculum it was taken from them. When they protested, they were told that they were not ‘committed enough’ to teaching and did not want to do the work that it took to be good since they were not committed to learning to use the new materials. The teachers lost motivation, and the church staff made comments like, ‘I wish we could fire volunteers,’ (which, by the way, you can) in front of them. Many teachers quit. Some left the church entirely. The lack of control that the teacher’s that stayed felt led to strife

⁸⁰ Genesis 2:18

⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Peter 2:14 *It is Biblical to praise those who do right. It is merely unbiblical to seek the praise of men over the praise of God. (John 12:43)*

⁸² Proverbs 18:1

between the teachers and the church staff as evidenced by derogatory, and unconstructive, comments made by those on both sides of the issue.

Unreasonable Expectations

Unreasonable expectations actually promote strife in two ways. When a layperson has them, strife occurs as they attempt to impose their unreasonable expectations on others⁸³. When it is a leader who has unreasonable expectations, strife occurs as the congregation becomes frustrated because they cannot please the leader. When this occurs people often attempt to deal with the situation in other, often ungodly, ways.

How to Handle Strife

What we then see is that strife is the result of unmet needs, and/or unreasonable expectations. When these situations can be rectified through teaching, life is good. When the person is unwilling to change, Matthew 18⁸⁴ (warn them 3 times, then tell them to leave) must be put into effect.

The first thing that we must do with strife is to not enter into it. Even though the other person is misbehaving, we cannot allow ourselves to behave badly in response. (This is easier said than done!) It is therefore wise to imagine, and discuss with your staff if you are a leader, how you will handle certain situations before they occur so you react logically, rather than emotionally⁸⁵. It is also wise to be rested, and have good friends who provide you with emotional support because you will need it. Strife is taxing and confrontation difficult. While it is truly better for all involved to confront

⁸³ Ecclesiastes 4:3

⁸⁴ Proverbs 22:10

⁸⁵ Proverbs 12:18

these situations, the strifeful person will not make it appear to be so. Chances are they will get worse before they get better. For this reason it is important to be firm, under control and calm when dealing with these issues.

Under no circumstance should you allow yourself to be dragged into pointless arguments. Pointless arguments are at the root of 'strife.' If the person refuses to cease arguing, you will need to walk away, even if the person perceives you to be rude. Giving attention to pointless arguments only causes them to continue. Tell the person you do not wish to continue discussing the matter, warn them again, and then leave if they persist. If everyone in the congregation would treat those who stir up discontent this way there would be a lot less trouble in the church⁸⁶.

Training Children

You also need to train people as to what strife is and how to avoid it. This includes your children. Allowing your child to continue in pointless arguments over limits you have set only encourages argumentative behavior. Instead, warn them that there is no more discussion regarding the point (i.e. bedtime) and insist that there will be consequences if they continue to argue (i.e. an earlier bedtime tomorrow). Instead of answering their whining, merely say, 'Okay, you have chosen to be in bed by ten tomorrow. Do you want to make it any earlier?' If they continue to argue it become nine, any more arguing and they are not going out with their friends at all.

Additionally there are times when your children need to learn to 'get over it.' Life is unfair. Do not let your children focus on their disappointments for an unreasonable

⁸⁶ Proverbs 9:8

amount of time⁸⁷. Also, discourage them from keeping track of past ‘wrongs.’⁸⁸ They also need to learn to lose, and/or be happy for other’s successes⁸⁹.

Training Adults

For adults the advice is similar. If someone begins arguing needlessly in a meeting⁹⁰, one could say, ‘The discussion on that point is closed. If you continue, you will not be called on again.’ If they speak without permission, warn them that they will be asked to leave if they continue. If they continue, they may then be escorted out of the meeting. You may follow up with them at a later time, with an elder present to discuss their disobedience. Do not focus on the point they were arguing. Focus on the fact that they disobeyed when told to cease arguing⁹¹.

If you are not in a situation where the person can be removed, you may have to remove yourself from the situation instead⁹².

Helping a Strifeful Spouse

Unfortunately, it maybe a spouse who is strifeful. This is difficult, as strife is not a reason for divorce⁹³. Again, carefully avoid fueling the arguments by participating⁹⁴. Do not retaliate in any other way⁹⁵. Respond to all other positive actions by your spouse. The silent treatment is vengeful, and is not what is being recommended. Explain how the arguments make you feel. Seek counseling and be the best spouse you can be.

⁸⁷ Proverbs 25:28

⁸⁸ Luke 17:3

⁸⁹ Romans 12:15

⁹⁰ Proverbs 17:14

⁹¹ Romans 13:2

⁹² Romans 16:17

⁹³ Matthew 5:32

⁹⁴ Proverbs 9:7; 17:14

⁹⁵ Romans 12:14, 17-20; 1 Corinthians 7:5

Your spouse must see that it is only the strife that you hate. Make sure you respond positively to the behaviors you enjoy, so that they see the difference.

If the spouse is causing trouble with others, explain that to them, then show them that you love everything else about them⁹⁶. You may also ask others to talk to your spouse as well. (My husband's best friend and I once did this with my husband in explaining why another friend was right to be mad at him. Now he did not have a habit of causing strife, he also knew that we loved him. He appreciated our efforts, but it was hard to do!) With a strifeful person your first attempts may not be successful⁹⁷. Pick your battles. Do not attempt to cure everything at once. Instead, choose an area that is important to you, and focus only on that. Show your love as well. Assume that your spouse is unaware of the trouble they are causing and try to help them figure out other ways to solve their perceived problems. Also encourage them to become involved in positive activities that provide fellowship, but are not likely to frustrate them. This will help them to fill their need for attention, and avoid triggering their need for control. If their job is unfulfilling, volunteer work may be in order. Counseling is also recommended.

Short Term Strife

Everyone at one time or another will behave in a strifeful manner. There are times in our lives when we are overly stressed, or so passionate for a cause we do not think straight. With loving counsel and support, especially from the leadership of the church, these issues should resolve. People in these situations also obey correction. They are not the people who need 'tough love.' Instead they are hurting and need our help in

⁹⁶ Ephesians 5:22-33, Proverbs 31:11, 26

⁹⁷ Proverbs 9:7

whatever situation is causing them to be overly stressed, or sensitive. It is then, not those who repent, but those who choose to remain strifeful despite your best interventions that must be dealt firmly with. If three warnings, done as prescribed in Matthew 18:15-17 (warn them once alone, once with two or three present, then once in front of the church, then remove them from the church) do not result in repentance, removal is indicated.

How to Repent of Strife

First, are you strifeful? Lets look:

1. Have you been told that you cause trouble?
2. Do you know that you argue frequently?
3. You have never found a church that you like.
4. You cannot sit through a church meeting without talking (and you are not the pastor who runs it).
5. You have no long term relationships.

If you answered yes to any of these you are probably strifeful. So what do you do?

First, examine what you do that causes problems. You may have to ask people to help you with this. Pick people who are mature and loving. Most people will not want to tell you as they are afraid to hurt your feelings. You will have to find people who understand that it is better for you to know, but are loving enough to understand that this will hurt you to hear. A pastor can help, and can point you to others who may also be beneficial to you.

After you figure out what you do that causes trouble, you must examine yourself to find out why you are doing it. Are you insecure? Do you lack friendships? Do you need

more to do in life? Do you feel unimportant? Do you get easily upset? Are you taking care of yourself, or are you over-committing and becoming stressed? Do you think that only you know what is right? By examining why you act the way you do, you are on the path to repenting of it. If there is an unmet need in your life, fill it in a godly manner.

Find a good counselor, and/or accountability partner to help.

Some positive ways to fill your emotional needs include any type of volunteer work where you are a true servant. (If you go in and take control you will only reinforce your bad behavior.) Cleaning is a good place to start. Also, practice taking orders without arguing. One component to strife is an inappropriate desire to be in control where you should not be. Give the people you volunteer for an idea of how you struggle and ask them to tell you if you are being inappropriate. Explain to them how important it is for you to know, and how much it will benefit you so that they are more likely to do it. Then take their advice seriously. It is very hard for most people to confront others, so if someone you trust is telling you that you are behaving poorly you are most likely behaving very poorly. Get over being upset and change it. Then thank them for doing the hard thing by telling you.

You must also accept that your relationships have been strained by your behavior. You may have even trained people to become defensive in your presence. As a result their first instinct may be to argue with you! You will need to practice doing the opposite of what you have been doing in many areas. Here are some suggestions:

1. Realize that people have a right to have an opinion that differs from yours. Do not argue with them over it. Allow them to express their opinion and be happy that they feel comfortable enough with you to share what is on their mind.

2. Rejoice in others victories. Watch that you do not become jealous when someone has something you do not. Remember, we are not to covet. This includes praise and positions. We instead need to be happy for the person who is currently receiving blessings.
3. Realize that you do not have to be the center of attention. Allow other people to talk more than you.
4. Understand that your rules, for your life do not apply to everyone else's life. If they do something differently, it is okay. You do not have to convince them that your way is best. In their life situation, your way may not work. Your way also may not be appropriate for a person with their personality and giftings. Keep this in mind and don't pressure them to be like you.
5. Understand that advice is merely advice. It does not mean that they did not listen, or that they do not like you if they do not take your advice. As an adult it is our privilege to weigh everything and decide what is best for us. You do not want anyone in control of your life, so allow them the choice of what they wish to do without pressure from you.
6. Know when you have authority in a situation and when you do not. If you are not in leadership, you must obey those who are. You may express your opinion, once, and if they do not do it, it is their choice. God is in control and He has allowed them to lead. It is not up to you to go behind the leaders back and change things.
7. Avoid arguing. If you find yourself getting upset, stop. Remove yourself from the situation if necessary and apologize. Explain that you are working on this

area of your life and ask for help. Most people will be gracious. Those that aren't are not the ones who will be healthy for you at this point in your life.

8. Choose your friends wisely. If your friends have the same problems you do, this is a time to put some distance between you and them. You do not need other people around to reinforce your bad behavior.
9. Pick role models and mimic how they handle situations you have problems with. If possible talk to them about how they handle life. You may even want to set up a disciple style relationship with them. A calm, firm, happy person may be able to help you view life in a healthier manner.
10. When in doubt, laugh at yourself. Avoid getting mad. If you don't know how to handle something, or feel yourself getting upset keep your mouth closed.

Strife is tough to handle. Argumentative behavior scares people. No one likes confrontation. For this reason it is best to deal with strife early, and often, if necessary. Whenever possible, scripture says to avoid strife. This does not mean that we are to avoid all arguments, only the pointless ones. Positive confrontation, even when it is charged with emotion, is good, and healthy for a relationship. It is only when people argue, or start arguments, for other, ungodly, reasons that there is a problem. Otherwise we are to meet together and ask God for wisdom in solving our disputes.

Practice Scenarios for Group Discussion

1. You are told that a person under your authority has been explaining to the congregation why he disagrees with many of your decisions. You ask your elders and find that this is true. What do you do?

My thoughts: This is not to be done for petty, small things. Ecclesiastes 7:21 instructs us to 'not take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you.' It is normal for people to talk about decisions that effect them. It is also normal for them to occasionally express dissatisfaction. In this situation, it is more than slight dissatisfaction. This person is on a crusade to let everyone know they are upset. Confront the person alone. Explain to them that if they have a problem with your decisions that they are to come to you instead of talking to others. If, after talking to you, they are not satisfied then they may speak to you with the elders present. If it remains a problem, then, and only then, is it to be a discussion that involves the whole church. Show them Matthew 18:15-17. Ask that they meet with the people they have talked to and apologize for putting them in an awkward situation. Laypeople: When confronted by this person direct them to share their concerns with the pastor and refuse to listen to more. (In cases where the person is not strifeful, but seeking help, allow them to confess their frustrations to you, offer wisdom if you have it. If they are still upset, direct them to the pastor as well. Many times a person merely needs to explore their emotions to find that they are over reacting and you need to do little but be there. If you do not allow them to do this they will bottle things up and react even worse over time! If you become upset as well and cannot get over it, you too need to go to the pastor and clear the air.)

2. You have a child who says black if you say it is white, and white if you say it is black. What do you do? (*Don't laugh, I have had one of these!*) Do not get drawn into the argument. Explain why their behavior is inappropriate. Send

them to their room for a short period of time if they continue. Often children go through periods where they need everything to be incredibly accurate. (My daughter did and this worked.) Explain to them why this is not practical, as it turns everything into an hour-long conversation. Sometimes, it is okay to generalize. Other times children want to show that they know things that you do not. They mistakenly view maturity as being 'better than Mom or Dad.' (This was my son.) Explain to them that it is not a contest. Explain that honoring Mom and Dad is important until the day you die and obedience is required as long as you live with them. Remember that you are going to have to remind them of this more than once! (In my journal I have an entry that says: 'A good kid is one that does what you want after only two or three reminders!' They do learn to do better, but it takes time.) Then praise them for their achievements, as they occur, as this may be what they are really looking for.

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Chapter Four: Divisiveness

What is Divisiveness?

Divisive people cause division, which usually results in argument. Where strifeful people are straight forward (for the most part), the divisive person works behind the scenes. Many times they appear to be the only one not arguing! They manipulate, and instigate⁹⁸.

I was related to a master at this. Family dinners on that side of the family frequently erupted into argument. This person knew exactly what bothered the people close to them most, then subtly brought it up to their adult sibling in a way that inspired competition. Tempers flared, sparks flew, and grandkids fled to the basement. This person then sat back as if they were innocent and watched everyone feud. As the family aged, the grandchildren grew up and the adults grew wise to what was happening. This person began to try to work their wiles on the now adult grandchildren. Fortunately the grandchildren had bonded well in the basement and refused to take the bait. Instead our game plan was to complement the person who was currently the target. (It is easier to handle unearned criticism when you know the people around you do not agree.) It worked, even though the 'older' person was unhappy with it.

The tools of the divisive are slant, spin, half-truths, turning the tables and gossip. There is usually a kernel of truth in what they say so they do not appear to be a liar⁹⁹. As most people will not confront a person like they should¹⁰⁰, they investigate and find enough truth to believe the story and get mad. Once you are mad for too long, it

⁹⁸ Romans 16:18

⁹⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, 2 Timothy 2:23, John 8:44

¹⁰⁰ Titus 1:10-16

becomes harder to fix the relationship¹⁰¹, even if you do nothing to the other person in your anger. Usually however, you do convey your negative feelings whether you are aware of it or not and a friendship is ruined. Let me give you examples:

Half truth: The music leader shared with me that someone had asked her to play more hymns, and then the person left in a huff. Now this person was refusing to worship because a hymn was not playing. Instead, she stood with her arms crossed looking mad. The music leader said that this was affecting her worship as she would see the woman's behavior while she sang. I watched the woman, and sure enough, her arms were crossed and she looked mad, so I believed that this woman was upset that she did not get her way in regard to the music and was pouting about it. I felt bad for the music leader and consoled her. As time passed another person asked to hear a hymn or two now and then. The music leader erupted like someone had slapped her hard. I would never had guessed she could behave like this. I then realized that I had been missing part of the story. The woman with her arms crossed was upset over the way she had been treated by the music leader and was having a hard time worshipping after it. She was not mad about the hymns as I was led to believe!

Spin: Spin is when someone takes something that is really bad, and makes it look good, so that no one can fault them for it. Here's an example:

Man: 'I met this woman whose husband was abusing her and let her stay with me. He won't bother her as long as there is a man around, so it is alright for us to be living together even though we are dating. My friends just don't understand that I am really saving this woman's life.'

¹⁰¹ Proverbs 18:19

Did you catch the spin? This person is trying to make his sin (living with, and dating, a married woman) and make it seem righteous. He is then insinuating that his friends are narrow minded in their lack of support. (Remember the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was sleeping with his step mother...)

Slant: Slant is when we emphasize the bad the other person did, and de-emphasize what we did. Here's an example: 'You can't talk to those people about anything. I merely went over and offered a suggestion about how they might parent better and they got all upset. I was only trying to tell them to show love more often to their kids.' All this is true, except the person worded their advice a little differently at the time. 'Show love more often' actually came out as 'Do you hate your kids, or what? I never see you hug them.' While the meanings are similar, with the slant removed you can now see why a parent might become upset.

Gossip is also a tool of the divisive. Usually it involves half-truths, slant and spin as well¹⁰². It does not have to. Let me give you an example:

Debbie and Dana worked together in the kitchen. Debbie was a new Christian and Dana was a woman of few words. One day Doris decided to share something with Dana about Debbie's past. Dana did not care, but did not know that Debbie had overheard. As Dana had not responded to Doris, Debbie assumed that she agreed with Doris' apparent condemnation of her. After all, why else would she bring it up? Further Dana's quiet behavior was misconstrued as dislike by Debbie. Debbie felt awful, and after time, quit working in the kitchen with no explanation.

¹⁰² Proverbs 20:19

Gossip is hurtful because it assumes judgment. There is a big difference between gossip and concern. The intent of gossip is unconstructive. It is to spread tales, enjoy someone's misfortune, or make oneself look better in comparison. Concern aims to help. There is compassion present and people are looking for ways to aid the person. Concern results in constructive behavior. It brings people closer together. Gossip sows discord and drives people apart¹⁰³.

Example: Take the statement: 'Do you know she used to be an alcoholic?' If you are telling a pastor this who is organizing a missions trip to minister to the local bar crowd, this is concern. If you are telling your friend this, because you don't think the person should be in music ministry, as her walk is not pure enough to be on the altar, it is gossip. Get it?

One place where Christians get into trouble is when they try to disguise gossip as concern by stating that they will 'pray about it.' This may even occur on the prayer chain. Information gotten through the prayer chain need not be repeated. If you are truly concerned you will combine actions with your prayers and help the person.

Example: Delia was having trouble in the church. A few women were seemingly 'out to get her' and she felt abused and alone. When she left, many women responded in shock. Their response was incredulous, because they had prayed so hard for her. Unfortunately, these women did not realize that scripture calls us to do more than pray. No one had rebuked those that were causing her trouble. Additionally, no one called Delia to encourage her either. While we need to pray, God also asks us to be 'Jesus in the flesh' to people as well.

¹⁰³ Proverbs 16:28

Turning the Tables: This strategy involves getting the other person to misbehave by bothering them until they do something. In children you may see something like this: a little girl is sitting on a step looking angelic. A little boy is playing near by. When no one is looking the girl makes a face at the boy, then smiles as the adults look back. This continues until the little boy comes over and hits her. She cries yelling, 'He hit me.' The boy just stands there not knowing what to do and receives his punishment as his mother cannot understand how she raised such an awful child.

With adult women this behavior usually involves ignoring the other woman. The women will pass in the hall, the 'target' will say 'hi.' The divisive woman will pointedly ignore her. This will continue over time until the 'target' gets the point that she is not liked. (If the target confronts the divisive woman, she will merely claim that nothing is wrong, that she merely did not see the woman, or that she did too say 'hi.')

When the 'target' stops saying 'hi' in return, or slights the divisive woman in any other way, the divisive woman goes to the people around and says, 'Do you see how she treats me?' She may even go to the pastor in concern. As she is the first one to the pastor's office, she appears to be the true victim. (Pastors, take note, this is a very common thing women do to each other!)

How to Recognize Some of the More Typical Divisive Personalities

Now that we have looked at some of the tools of divisiveness, let us look at some typical manifestations of divisive personalities. A divisive person is usually quiet and often not easy to spot. They often dislike those with skills that they view as greater than

their own. Divisive people influence others and thus cause division in a ministry. They work undercover and often are difficult to spot as others become affected by their actions. Some scenarios are common and a leader should be made aware of them so that he may rightly discern who is actually the issue.

The first divisive personality I would like to discuss is the Queen Bee.

The Queen Bee, like many divisive people, likes to be a leader. She will always travel with a 'best friend.' This type of divisive person will feed the 'best friend' information designed to inflame him or her. The 'best friend' will then act on it. As it is wrong, or exaggerated information, a situation will result involving the best friend that needs to be dealt with. Again, it will be another who takes the fall. The 'best friend' will receive discipline for the action while the divisive person walks away. Because the divisive person gets their 'facts' from many sources, it may not be clear who is giving false information when the friend is questioned. Divisive people often change 'best friends' as the situation suits them and will leave their 'best friend' when they are in trouble. Because the 'best friend' is in trouble they will look justified for doing so.

Another example of a divisive person is the Princess. The princess frequently appears to be very popular. This is because women are afraid to upset her. She plays a childhood game called: 'I don't want to be your friend.' While others grew out of this type of behavior, she got better at it. When people do not do what she wants, she pulls away from them emotionally. Often the 'almost' silent treatment is involved, where only the briefest of response are given. This will occur until the woman receiving the 'treatment' complies. Those who do not comply are her enemy. If you associate with an

‘enemy’ of the princess you will receive the ‘almost’ silent treatment until you pull away from the woman she does not like. This leads to clicks, and disunity.

Divisive people may also work alone. Among these are the information carriers. They are friends with everyone and love to be the shoulder people cry on. While this is normally a good trait, the divisive person has used their gift for evil. In reality they are gathering information to use against people when it best suits them. If they want a job, they let certain people know what the other person struggled with last summer. If they are upset with leadership, they let it slip that there were problems in the finance department last year, but never mention that it was over a misunderstanding, or dealt with appropriately. Because people like to talk, it becomes difficult to pin down where the information is coming from as it is not coming from anyone who was there. The divisive person is not even a regular friend to those who were present when things happened, but rather someone who shows up and appears to be friend when one is needed. Given the sweet nature of the person who is the ‘shoulder to cry on’ it seems inconceivable that they would do this. A leader may avoid falling prey to this type of person by keeping a steady group good friends and thus avoiding the need for this person’s services. Unfortunately not everyone will be so prepared. Further it is godly to offer comfort and advice when it is needed even to those who are not close so this is not a red flag, and may be done with godly motives, thus making it difficult to ascertain if the person is truly compassionate or a problem in disguise.

The next person we will discuss is the martyr. The martyr is always working for people. Their work is the type people notice. Unfortunately, the people they work for are always unappreciative. The martyr has many examples about how they were slighted.

Unfortunately, they leave out facts that show that they were too compensated, or thanked. They also have examples about how others were slighted as well. People then take up their cause and seek to right the 'unappreciative' attitude in the church.

Divisive people can also be passive-aggressive. They appear to be sweet, while in fact they are withholding information, or services, in order to hurt others. They conveniently announce play practice times when their target is not in the room, then forget to tell their target when they return. They promise to bring the cake, then show up without it and claim that they never agreed to any such thing. They know exactly where the sheet music is, but let the leader search endlessly in the wrong place. They make the people they dislike look incompetent to others.

Divisive people often work to make people view talented people as arrogant and not 'team players.' Doubts planted about the person as well as the divisive person's example will cause the talented person to be avoided by others. This will hurt the feelings of the person who has the talent. By the time it reaches the leader's desk it will be difficult to see what the problem is. Because the divisive person has gained others to her side through doubt planting, and the talented person has most likely reacted to the snubs and withdrawn, or worse retaliated, it will look like a problem with the talented person. Leadership will rebuke the talented person. The divisive person will remain while the talented person either learns that it is not good to use her talents, or leaves. If the divisive person is not dealt with, the ministry will lose those whose talents exceed or threaten hers.

How to Handle the Divisive

Divisive people are difficult, but with proper attention, and prayers for discernment they too can be addressed. They may deny their actions, as they are not overt. Godly counsel with those who have closer contact to the situation is advisable. People with frequent contact will be best to ascertain whether or not this is a pattern, or merely a coincidence.

There are skills that a congregation should learn that will thwart the divisive. First, we must learn that it is godly to confront someone that we have an issue with¹⁰⁴. It is much better to rectify the situation, then to let it fester.

Next we must train ourselves not to make assumptions¹⁰⁵. This is difficult because many times we do not see that we have assumed anything as we only see one possible way to fill in the blanks in the story.

We must also be open to, and look for, alternate explanations. When we hear a bad report we must assume that there may be a better explanation. Never assume the worst. Go to the person in love, and listen well.

When people quit something you oversee, press them for an explanation. Even after they explain, wait. Often people will not tell you the truth, at first, as they do not wish to get anyone in trouble. If you extend the conversation, and show that you care, you may find that there is more to the story than the person was willing to say at first. Frequent, comfortable, silence on your part will help the person to open up as no one likes gaps in the conversation.

¹⁰⁴ Proverbs 25:9

¹⁰⁵ Proverbs 18:17

As many people believe that punishment is negative, they view telling the truth about someone's wrong doing as 'getting that person in trouble.' While we are not to be a 'tale-bearer' this merely means that we are not to bring every mistake to authority with the intention of causing a person hurt. When we report a situation that is causing serious problems in the church, and thus bring the truth to light, we are not doing this. If the pastor has to ask you, then you are probably not a 'tale-bearer.' (Unless you practically forced him to ask...) He needs to know what is going on in his church in order to be a good shepherd to his congregation. Trust him to use wisdom in your situation. Pastors must therefore teach the congregation what is proper to bring to them and what is not.

Male pastors should also consult their wives when the divisive person is female. Often there are unspoken things done that women pick up on, but men overlook. This is because women tend to be more relational. Some of these things, like being ignored (snubbed) in the hall, would not be readily noticed by a man, but are devastating to a woman.

Once you are certain that you have identified a divisive person you may now confront them as it says in Matthew 18. Detailed explanations on how their behavior affects others will be in order. Often, they will deny what they have done, and offer alternative explanations. Double check everything they say with trusted others who were there. If they are divisive, they have practice at what they do. Pray for wisdom and that the facts be brought clearly into the light.

Situations that Promote Divisiveness

Low self esteem:

The root of much of this type of divisive behavior is the belief that ‘no one would like me if they really knew me.’ Most divisive behavior causes people to choose sides. The person who is divisive wants to know who is on his side, and who is not. They want people on their side so badly that they will use manipulation and emotional blackmail¹⁰⁶ to get them there. Not agreeing with them, in their minds, means you do not like them. They do not have the confidence in their own self worth to weather even the slightest offense, and may see offense where none was ever intended.

Example: The church was growing. The pastor had split some of his responsibilities among the elders. One elder was in charge of the prayer ministry. The head of this ministry asked him if it would be okay if they scheduled a luncheon for their group on the same day as the children’s crusade as none of her members were planning on attending the children’s event. As the church calendar was full, finding a day with nothing on it seemed impossible so the elder said ‘yes.’ The woman organizing the children’s program went bizerk. She called the head of the prayer ministry and accused her of undermining her event. She could not see how this was not a direct attack on her, and how it was not related to the fact that the woman’s best friend did not like her either. They were obviously plotting against her, and trying to make her event fail.

You would love to hear that the pastor in this situation recognized how ridiculous it sounded and explained that with a larger church things were going to overlap from now on. He didn’t. Instead he ‘saw the children ministry’s point.’ They had never had anything that overlapped before, and he saw how she could see it that way. The prayer ministry luncheon had to be moved.

¹⁰⁶ Any behavior that seems to say: ‘If you don’t do what I want I won’t be your friend anymore.’

Fear of Upsetting Volatile People

Fear of upsetting people¹⁰⁷ is a problem with leadership, and the congregation, that aids the divisive person. People want peace. When presented with a person who is easily upset, and someone who will ‘understand,’ most people choose to not upset the more volatile person, and count on the other person getting over it, or being ‘adult’ about it. It is easier this way, and most of the time it works, that is until the more reasonable person has ‘had enough’ and leaves.

This method of dealing with problems is wrong. It favors a person because they have a history of not behaving¹⁰⁸. This merely reinforces their behavior. While you are correct, they will make life miserable if you seemingly side against them, you are not helping them, or you (in the long term) by doing so. Further you are perverting justice. By giving in you deny righteous people their rights in favor of people who are behaving immaturely.

Example: There was a woman, in a leadership role, who was known for her biting comments. She had caused many people to leave, and others were threatening to go as well if nothing was done. At the end of an event the person in charge asked, ‘How was she tonight?’ The answer was, ‘Same as usual. She did this, this and this.’ The response, ‘I don’t know why you people can’t just be ‘adult’ and ignore her.’ The answer from the person asked about her behavior, ‘There is a difference between ‘being an adult’ and putting up with her garbage¹⁰⁹.’

¹⁰⁷ 1 Peter 3:17; James 4:4

¹⁰⁸ Romans 1:32

¹⁰⁹ 2 Thessalonians 3:14

While the person in charge was aware of the problem, he did not actually want to deal with it. The woman was obviously going beyond what most people are willing to tolerate. She was hard to deal with, and the person in charge would rather ignore it, than face the consequences of confronting her. What he did not understand was that he was choosing the volatile person, over the people who behaved, and that he would soon have a congregation of only those who have such low self worth that they are willing to put up with her on a regular basis.

Lack of relationship skills:

Many divisive people did not learn how to make friends in a healthy productive manner. If you look closely you will find that they are stuck in childish behavioral patterns that are usually corrected by parents in childhood. Some of these 'games' include: 'You are not my friend anymore,' 'Mom, he hit me!' (getting people in trouble when they react to something you started to make yourself look good), 'drama queen' (common in teenagers, where everything is perceived through an overly emotional lens, out of context and exaggerated), and 'No body likes me.' People who commonly face these challenges are those who were 'popular' in high school since they received much positive reinforcement during a time when these behaviors were common and more acceptable. People who began dating the person they married early in high school are also susceptible as they focused on one person and stopped socializing. As others grew out of childish stages, they did not because they had no social pressure to do so. People who had limited parental interaction also may suffer because the parent was not there to teach the person that you do not treat your friends this way. People with dysfunctional families also suffer because there is no one to model good behavior at home. Sadly,

people who have been severely hurt by others are also at risk. Either they become disproportionately scared of getting hurt again, or they learn that this behavior gets rewards.

Need for control:

Some divisive people have an overactive need for control. They need things to be the way that they want them, or they feel lost. They do not like to be in any position other than leader. If a person comes in that has good ideas, this person will perceive him as a threat. They are slow to change, and do not like it when they do not know what is going on. They cause division out of fear of the unknown.

Example: A new woman came to the church. She was skilled in teaching and administration. After a few years the pastor asked her to reorganize their children's church. Unfortunately the woman was not well known to a single mother who had small children. This woman had made many relationship mistakes in the past and was scared that her children would leave the faith as she had as a young adult. She guarded her children fiercely and did not want an unknown entity in charge of something so important to her. When the pastor would not give what she considered 'proper concern' for her complaints she began to spread rumors that the woman had been inappropriate when teaching the children in the past.

Jealousy:

Jealousy also breeds divisive behavior. When a person has been in charge and another begins to organize things and do well, a divisive person will see this as a threat. They will not be able to see how two talented people in a church are better than one. They will instead think: 'Now she will be in charge of everything and what will I do?'

They may also believe that the praises they receive for their work will decrease as the new person does things so much better.

Fear of losing relationships:

Some people see people agreeing with them as people liking them. They do not understand that you can disagree and still be friends. They also do not understand that their friend can have more than one good friend, or a friend who is not also their friend. They become very territorial and controlling because of this. Cliques will form and there will be pressure for the women to be alike.

Promotion above your abilities:

This is one I see frequently. Many times in a church you will find someone who has a wonderfully strong gift of helps. They are always there, and always helping, appropriately. They know just how to come up beside someone and get the job done. Unfortunately, they are so good at helping that someone promotes them believing that they should be in charge. Leadership is an entirely different role. Many people who enjoy helping, hate leading. The person does not want to disappoint people so she takes the job, or she is honored and believes erroneously that she deserves the position. Unfortunately she does not have the skills to lead. She knows this on some level and is scared to death that others will see her inadequacy and think poorly of her. She does not want to be looked down on, so she becomes defensive. She does not understand that leading does not involve unconditional agreement from those under you, so she cannot tolerate any type of disagreement. Divisive behaviors result.

Anecdote: I began teaching and working on projects with one of my best friends. At any time I found that I always ended up in charge. I felt that I was in some way being

pushy, and needed to give her a chance to lead as well. What I found was that leading was the last thing she wished to do! She was excellent at anticipating my needs, and loved that she could follow my plans easily as she knew me well. When I tried to give her a turn being 'in charge' she felt lost and vulnerable. I could never minister to someone the way she ministered to me, and she could not feel comfortable in the lead position, because it was not what God meant us to be. When we talked, and accepted this, we were both very happy. (Yes, this is the same woman who moved to Florida in chapter three...)

Example: Now lets look at a mistake that was made. A Christian school lost their administrator. They had a wonderful art teacher who was also a skilled musician. She had spent much of her free time working after school with children that needed encouragement. They decided that she would therefore be perfect for the job. (After all aren't the qualifications for administrator art, music, helps and encouragement? No.) While she was a hard worker, it was soon discovered that she was extremely disorganized. (Many artists tend to be as they look at the world from a different perspective than most, which makes them good at art and bad at organization. The painfully neat art studio is a rare exception!) Unfortunately her job as art teacher had been filled. If she admitted defeat she would be out of work. To cover for her inadequacies she began yelling at others and blaming them for her mistakes. She also expected her staff to be 'mind readers.' The problems were not hers because they should have known to do it. The school became divided between the people who were able to anticipate her needs and please her (gift of helps people do this well), and those who could never figure out what she wanted and felt her wrath (everyone else).

False beliefs about how God works:

Divisive people often feel that they have a direct line to God, and that they are never deceived. Therefore they attempt to rule the church from a non-leadership position. In their minds it is really God who is leading, and everyone else who is in error. They do not understand how there can be so many immature, or unspiritual, people in the church. In their minds, if you were praying like you should you would never disagree with them. Commonly these people believe that God told them what to do, sometimes even what to wear, and that everyone wearing a different color must not have heard the message. Their evidence is that today in church they see a lot of people wearing that color too. (Don't laugh, I lived through this!-and I tend to wear greens and browns in an area where most people prefer black, red and blues! I apparently never got the message, so obviously I do not pray enough....according to them.)

There is a part of me that thinks that these people actually do hear from someone, except it is not God. I imagine the devil whispering interesting things in their ear to deceive them like, 'I want you to wear brown shoes and sit in the front row today' just to mess with them. Don't get me wrong, there are times when God tells you to do something. At those times in my life (when I obeyed) I have found someone who needed encouragement, or an opportunity to witness resulted. I was never told to do something to prove to someone else that I was more in touch with God than they were¹¹⁰!

¹¹⁰ Philippians 1:17

How to Deal With Divisive Behavior

No Appeasing: Do What is Right, Not What is Easy

If you let divisive people get their way they will rule your church. Check yourself and make sure that you are not making decisions in order to avoid an argument, or to avoid making someone mad¹¹¹.

Pay Attention and Know Your Congregation

Often men will stick with men and leave the women alone. This is bad. Extreme rules that prohibit women, especially those in leadership, from meeting with men in leadership comfortably often contribute to this. While windows in a pastor's office, or a secretary that has permission to interrupt at any times is recommended, having to pull an extra person into the office with you whenever a man talks with a woman stifles conversation. While you need to protect yourself, you also need to know the person you have placed in charge, how they are really doing, and what support they are likely to need. If the person is female, and you are male, then you have to come up with a way to engender trust and honesty, without promoting sin. Many pastors do this well. If you (the pastor) are not handling this well, talk with other pastors to see how they handle the social taboos in your area or you will not know half of your congregation at all. (There are differences in different areas. Where I live, rurally, a woman could not easily go to lunch alone with a man without talk. In an area where business lunches are common, this is acceptable and a restaurant is considered a public place, good for meetings with women who are not your wife, -as long as you do not ask for the secluded spot in the corner!)

¹¹¹ 1 Peter 3:17

If you do not know the women, you are unlikely to determine which one is actually causing the problem when it shows up in your office. The problem with divisive behavior is that it frequently appears that the divisive person is the innocent person.

Teach Against Lies

Three important things to teach your congregation are:

1. We are all unique. Differences are to be celebrated. We are also to celebrate other's successes, not wish they were our own (This is coveting.)!
2. We all have different calls. The person who cleans the toilet is as important to God's plan as the preacher. (Think about it. A person will go to a church for years even if the pastor is boring, but let the bathrooms become disgusting and over time you will lose every family that has a woman in it.) Also, God only expects us to do our best, not be better than another.
3. God will confirm His will in others as well¹¹². If you are getting messages that do not line up with leaderships' tell them, but it may be that you are in error. It may also be that you are a front-runner. This does not mean that the message is false, just that it is not time yet. One pastor said that he does not move until at least seventy-five percent of his congregation is on board. While the pastor may be sure that a project is God's will, it may not be God's timing. As He knows God will confirm the project in the hearts of those involved, he waits for his congregation to be 'in unity.' (He is also aware that not everyone is called to do everything, and that some people are currently having problems in their walk, so he does not wait

¹¹² Romans 15: 8; 1 Corinthians 1: 10; Ephesians 4: 3, 13; Acts 1: 14; 15: 22

for 100% agreement, and he watches over those that are not in agreement to see if there is an area where they need help.)

Teach Relationship Skills

Many divisive people lack the relationship skills needed to get their needs met so they have developed different ways to get what they want. While you may not be able to teach the divisive person what they need to learn in a group situation, you will teach those around them to recognize their behavior as problematic. Less of your congregation will then fall for the divisive person's schemes and you will have less problems with 'cliques' and 'hen parties.'

Put Leaders in Leadership and Do Not Treat Them as Superior People

While leaders should be mature Christians, they are not 'superior' to the rest of the congregation. Leadership requires a combination of gifts and abilities that some people do not possess¹¹³. These gifts are needed, but so are the other gifts. If leaders are considered to be better than everyone else, and leadership is seen as a reward for hard work, you will have people striving to be leaders who should not be. This will breed problems. While leaders need public support from their pastor because their position places them in positions of public attention, and therefore more vulnerable to attack, they should not be the only ones to receive public praise. The importance of every gift, and member of the body, working well together, should be taught¹¹⁴ and reinforced.

Divisive people are difficult, but with proper attention, and prayers for discernment they too can be addressed. They may deny their actions, as their actions are

¹¹³ James 2:2-4

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 12: 14-19

not overt, you will be tempted to believe them. Godly counsel with those who have closer contact to the situation is advisable. People with frequent contact will be best able to ascertain whether or not this is a pattern, or merely a coincidence. If it is determined that the person is divisive Matthew 18 comes into effect. To help the person be successful in repentance give them specific things that they promise not to do. It may be that they are off of prayer chain and not allowed to talk about other people's problems with others. It may be that they are to go to counseling. Whatever it is, see that they stick to it. If they are not taking positive steps to repent of their behavior, warn them again in front of the elders, then in front of the church. If they continue, they must then leave until they are ready to change.

How to Repent of Divisive Behavior

First ask God to show you whether or not you are divisive. Your pastor may help you decide if you need help in this area as well. Here are some clues that will help you decide if this might be you:

1. You are frequently in the middle of arguments where everyone but you is upset.
2. Your 'best friends' seem to have a habit of over reacting and getting into trouble.
3. You are very popular and everyone agrees with you, except those who don't like you.
4. You frequently believe that people are just trying to hurt you and no one else see it.
5. You help everyone, but no one helps you.
6. You are only friends with people when they are emotionally vulnerable and need to 'share.'

7. You are sneaky. You hate confrontation so you smile to their face while you never intend to do what they are asking of you.
8. You withhold information, or things, others need.
9. You lie frequently, but they are only little white ones.
10. You wonder why everyone else is so messed up. (i.e. not like you.)

If you said 'yes, this is me' to any of this, talk to your pastor and those you love.

Divisive behavior often hides itself. This is because divisive behavior is usually the result of a lie that you believe. Counseling may be in order to fully understand why you choose to control your environment in ways that are destructive to others in order to benefit yourself. Remember that healthy relationships are ultimately better than ones that involve manipulation, but they are harder. They require confidence that the other person will not betray you¹¹⁵. You will get hurt, as not everyone will wish to be as close as you want them to be. Know that this is normal and find a few people who you fit well with.

You also need to give up your right to be right. It is not important to win every argument, nor does everyone have to agree with you to like you. True friends disagree, and continue to enjoy each other's company.

Do not lie, spin, slant or in any other way twist the truth! This will be hard if you are not use to doing it. The truth often puts us in vulnerable positions. No one is perfect. Everyone messes up. The test comes after you mess up. What do you do? Denying you were wrong, blaming someone else, trying to hide or ignore it and/or lying are not godly ways of dealing with mistakes. Pray that God will give you the strength to do the right

¹¹⁵ 1 John 4:18

things, and that He will place compassionate people in your life as you learn and grow stronger.

Do not gossip. If you have this problem it may be good, at first, to take time off from talking about anyone else's business lest you deceive yourself into believing you were talking about them for the right reasons. As you lose your need for gossip, constantly check your motives. Are you really trying to help? Or are you secretly enjoying knowing all the 'dirt?' If it is the latter, shut up. We are social creatures, and called by God to help others. This frequently involves discussing their needs. At some point you are going to have to learn the difference. After your 'gossip free time' (think of it as a fast) find a mature woman who you know does not gossip and ask her for help.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. You discover that your once popular choir has declined to only ten members.

Everyone has a different reason for leaving, but none of the reasons seem strong enough to cause women to love singing to suddenly give it up. What do you do?

My thoughts: When many people leave a ministry over a short period of time there is likely a problem. If no one will share it with you it is likely with someone they think you are close to, or admire. The first step would be to ask the elders to talk with their wives to see if they know of anything unusual going on. If this reveals nothing then re-interview those that left, expressing your concern and willingness to help correct anything that may be a problem. If it is truly a busy time for your congregation (sick relatives, family difficulties etc.) you may want to decrease church activities until things settle down and encourage your members to use the extra time to support each other.

2. 'Cliques' are beginning to form in your church. It has become clear that some women in the church refuse to participate with others without pressure to do so.

What do you do?

My thoughts: Obviously there is a reason for division if there was none before. It is important to figure out what it is. It may be a teaching that has gone awry. (One church I was at had women claiming to have caught demons from other women while they were praying for them.) It may also be a woman who has become popular and caused people to take sides by subtly withdrawing when her friends associate with people she does not like. This may cause women, who fear rejection, to 'huddle-up' with those they are close to for protection from rejection.



Chapter Five: Angry People

In scripture we find that not all anger is wrong. God becomes angry, and Jesus overturned tables¹¹⁶. He also called the Pharisees names¹¹⁷ and became frustrated with His disciples when they were slow to learn, making comments about their lack of faith¹¹⁸. Additionally, we see Jesus teasing the brothers James and John, by calling them Sons of Thunder¹¹⁹, due to their tendency to argue with each other. We can therefore assume that ‘anger,’ when described as a sin, does not include: sarcasm and teasing as in the case of James and John, the expression of understandable frustration, calling ‘bad’ people ‘bad’ and using strong language to do it with, or strong anger accompanied by strong actions in response to very real wrongs in this world. Things that make God angry (and therefore are okay to be angry about) include everything that is sin. This includes murmuring and complaining, lying, fighting against God’s will etc.

Other people becoming offended also does not necessarily indicate that we have done wrong. Jesus offended many, especially the Pharisees, during His ministry and did not sin.

So what is ‘anger’ that is sin? Proverbs 22:24 associates the angry man with one who is ‘hot-tempered.’ Proverbs 29:22 tells us that the angry stir up strife. Ungodly anger therefore is not based on a reaction to an ungodly event, nor is it in proportion to what

¹¹⁶ John 2:15, Mark 11:15

¹¹⁷ Luke 11:40 (foolish), Matthew 12:34 (brood of vipers=devils), Matthew 15:7 (hypocrites), Matthew 23:27 (white washed tombs)

¹¹⁸ Mark 9:19; Matthew 16:23

¹¹⁹ Mark 3:17

has occurred. Further, its fruit is ungodly, stirring up strife, instead of repentance and/or justice.

(My definition) Angry people become angry often and when no offense is intended. They do not calm down easily and do not accept reasonable explanations or apologies. They often hurt people emotionally and/or physically. Their words are unconstructive. Rather than pointing out the problem, the angry person 'name-calls,' and brings up past, previously resolved, offenses. Where Jesus told the Pharisees correctly that they were hypocrites and acting like the devil, an angry person calls people names that have little, or nothing to do with their supposed crime.

Angry people usually fall into three categories: those who express their anger physically, those who yell, and those who 'stuff.' Those who express their anger physically are the easiest to identify. They beat their wives, abuse their children and get into bar fights. My husband sees them nightly at the E.R. where he works as a physician. He cannot understand how an adult man can go home, get a baseball bat, and return to beat someone's head in. For him, this would mean losing his job, his family, his reputation and his freedom. In his opinion, people who resort to this type of behavior must truly believe that they have nothing in life worth losing.

Other people express their anger verbally. While they do not have to be loud, they frequently are. These are the 'yellers,' and while not all yell, they do use their words to viciously tear other people apart. Name calling, listing of past bad behavior, and accentuating the 'victim's' weaknesses are their method of operation. When they become angry, they vent their frustration onto the other person and do not think about the consequences.

There is another type of angry person that is harder to identify. They are the ‘stuffers.’ They get mad just as easily, but keep it bottled up inside. They hurt others as well, but are more secretive about it, planning and skulking. These types of people go out into the parking lot and slash your tires, or start nasty rumors. They are just as angry, but have learned to hide it, if only a little. Unfortunately, because they become just as unreasonably angry but do not express it immediately, their reactions are often worse as they have been suppressed for a time. Often the victim is not even the one who made them mad, but the one that got in the way when they could contain themselves no longer. We have a relative like this. When he blew up in my home, my brother called and said this: ‘You know that whatever he was yelling about was not what made him mad. Whatever he is mad about probably happened months ago, and may not have even been your fault.’ This sums up the behavior of a ‘stuffer.’

How to Handle the Angry

The main thing that keeps people angry is that people fear their anger. (With good reason!) Unfortunately this fear causes people to give the angry man what he wants. It also causes people to be ‘nice’ to him, so they do not stir up his anger. Anger then gets the man (or woman) everything he wants. His wife won’t leave him, because she is afraid he would hurt her. His coworkers won’t tell on him because they fear his revenge. His paperboy won’t confront him when he doesn’t pay because he fears getting yelled at or hurt etc., etc.

Unfortunately appeasing, rewarding or in any other way allowing the angry man to get what he should not have merely makes him worse in the long term and does nothing to solve the problem. This is called ‘enabling.’ The Bible clearly says that we are

not to reward anger¹²⁰. If a person has a habit of anger, has been confronted with the problem¹²¹ (preferably with strong men present) and will not repent, we are to avoid him¹²². The need to avoid an angry man is obvious. What is less obvious is that scripture states that if we do not avoid him, and continue in his company, we will become like him¹²³. Angry behavior is contagious!

Anger in Marriage

An Angry Husband

While anger in the church, and outside the home can be avoided, anger in the home is a more difficult issue. Anger is not listed as grounds for divorce, though many pastors claim that murder is wrong too and by staying you are potentially killing yourself. As the Bible says to avoid anger, you are definitely not to stay with an angry man. This is what I have put together from studying scriptural examples and the Jewish traditions that surround them.¹²⁴ If the husband is abusive, the wife is to separate herself from him and return to the care of her father, and/or brothers, with her children¹²⁵. Her father, and/or brothers are the ones who will determine when her husband has truly repented and she may return to him. This is wise as men know men and how men think better than women do, and the woman's mind is clouded with emotions like: love, fear, shame, dependency etc. If he does not repent, and divorces the woman she is free to remarry. She has been

¹²⁰ Proverbs 19:19

¹²¹ Matthew 18:15-17

¹²² Proverbs 27:12; 22:24

¹²³ Proverbs 22:25

¹²⁴ As with everything, do not follow this advice blindly. It is loosely based on scripture, not clearly defined. You are going to have to use your own judgment.

¹²⁵ Genesis 38:11; 34:26

divorced by an unbeliever¹²⁶. The Bible does not consider the angry to be believers¹²⁷. Further, she has given him the opportunity to repent and remain in the marriage. He is married to a Christian, and Christian marriage involves love, not daily beatings¹²⁸. If he does repent, and she returns, and he begins to abuse her, again, she leaves again.

An Angry Wife

An angry woman is usually less of a physical threat and while Solomon complains often and mightily about contentious and nagging women, there is no indication that he left them, or put them away. How then is a man to 'avoid' anger, while still providing for his wife's well-being? The Bible seems to imply that the corner of your roof is your best option¹²⁹. (The Jews used their roof the way we use a deck, or patio.) Many men do this by spending much time in a garage or workshop. Notice that the roof is still attached to the house! I would also suggest counseling, and to enlist the aid of mature, godly women who have the type of marriage you would like to have. They may help to teach your wife¹³⁰. Remind your wife that she is to submit to you in this¹³¹. Go to your pastor for support and advice.

Angry Children

The Bible clearly states that we are not to drive our children to wrath.¹³² Wrath is not an inborn nature. It is either learned, or the result of environmental pressures. Too harsh punishments, and unrealistic expectations can cause a child to become frustrated

¹²⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:15

¹²⁷ Galatians 5: 19-22

¹²⁸ Ephesians 5: 25-29

¹²⁹ Proverbs 21:9

¹³⁰ Titus 2: 3-4

¹³¹ Ephesians 5: 22

¹³² Ephesians 6:4

and lash out. So can problems outside the home if he feels that he has no control over them. School bullies, learning disabilities that make school frustrating and problems with a manipulative 'love' interest are among things that may make a child angry. No rules, or expectations may also frustrate the child as he does not know what he is to do, and feels lost, or unloved. Lack of supervision also scares a child who is not ready to be alone. If your child is expressing anger disproportionate to what is normal look around for the cause, and seek help.

Example: I adopted a ten-year-old boy. Although he soon learned our rules, he twice lashed out at me unexpectedly. Each time we talked it was discovered that something from his past had come up, usually through youth group trying to teach them what not to do, and he was having troubles dealing with his feelings. While bad behavior must be dealt with, it is better to deal with the root than the symptoms! Talk to your children and know what they are currently going through, before you discipline, so that you may discipline appropriately.

Situations that Promote Anger

Frustration

Before you treat someone as an angry person, you must first determine whether or not they have reason to be angry. There are some situations that will anger a person. They are not always angry; they just have trouble when they are under certain stresses, or frustrations¹³³. While they may need help in handling these areas of their life, they are not 'angry' people, and are not to be treated as such. Let me give you an example:

¹³³ Proverbs 30: 33

Example: I have a relative that would classify me as an angry person. Every time he sees my I am noticeably upset, and short tempered. That is because this man drives me nuts! (How's that for honesty?) He puts down the things I value most: my husband, my parenting, my religion and my friends. When I talk to him about it he merely tells me that I can't take a joke, and berates me for it in front of my children. (Yes, he is emotionally angry and a 'stuffer.')

(After three serious conversations with both me, and my husband, present, as well as his spouse, we no longer have much contact with this relative. He knows he is welcome back, as long as he behaves. So far he has not chosen to behave and is now telling slanted stories about us to the rest of the family. Isn't life fun?)

Back to the point, sometimes the person appears angry due to a problem they perceive to be intolerable, but are unable to see a way out. My problem was that until recently I did not believe I could ask this man to leave and not come back until he decided to behave in my home. This feeling of being 'trapped' led me to be extremely tense and behave worse than I wished. Further, the pressure of having three new children, who were older, that I wanted to respect me present when he put me down added to my frustration. Where I may have handled his disrespect somewhat before, it was now intolerable.

Self-Esteem Problems

People who do not feel good about themselves do not handle much well. The worse they feel about themselves the less they are going to be able to handle. Short term anger may be the result of a blow to the person's self-esteem. Losing a job, being told your spouse wants a divorce, failing an entrance exam etc. may cause a person to react badly to small offenses.

In a truly angry person low self-esteem may also be a problem. The reverse, however, may also be true. The person may have an unrealistically high perception of

themselves (pride) and expect people to treat them accordingly. When people do not, they retaliate. Their angry response then gets them the additional ‘respect’ and ‘honors’ that they feel they deserve. (Remember that we live in a society where Donald Trump, and Paula Abdul are treated much differently than your average housewife when they go to the store. If you expect Donald Trump treatment when you are Joe Shmoe, you are going to be continually frustrated.)

Positive Reinforcement

Any time you give in to anger you are teaching the person that anger works¹³⁴. This is called ‘positive reinforcement’ and it happens whenever you give someone a positive response after a behavior. In animals, it ensures that the behavior will happen again. It works that way in humans too. If you give in, or appease, an angry person just to make them happy, then you have just taught them that being angry gets them their way. You are now their slave, because they know how to make you jump through their hoops. Further, you have also taught those around them how to get what they want from you¹³⁵. If you do not want to be at the mercy of angry people learn to say ‘no’ when people are behaving inappropriately.

How to Handle the Angry

Many pastors and authors have given advice on how to approach the angry while determining whether they are a chronically angry person, and subject to removal, or merely a person going through a rough spot in need of help. Since anger is the means the person uses to gain control of their environment, here is what they recommend. It is the exact opposite of what you would normally do, as you are overtly expressing the fact that anger will not gain you any control over this situation, and that you are indeed in charge. Here’s what they say:

1. Make them wait for you after they arrive, no matter how agitated they become. If they are a threat to your staff, have them removed. They may come back another

¹³⁴ Proverbs 18:5

¹³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15: 33, Proverbs 22: 24-25

day when they are calm. Angry behavior never buys anyone quicker entrance into your office!

2. Have an agenda. You are only there to talk about their behavior. Do not allow them to veer from it. Do not listen to accusations, or lists of grievances. Only discuss how they are going to behave in the future. Other problems can wait until the next meeting if it seems advisable to you to have one. (If the person is truly repentant, calm, worried, anxious and/or sorrowful, throw this out the window and discuss their situation. They are not angry; they are hurting!)
3. Sit behind your desk. Stand when they enter, and do not sit until they do. Offer them a seat. Shake hands. Make it clear whom God has put in charge. While normally your servant's heart forbids you to act like a business manager, this is a situation that requires you to exercise the authority God gave you.
4. Wear a suit and tie, (or business dress if you are female) even if you do not usually. Keep the meeting formal. This conveys that you expect respect. If they ask why you are dressed that way, simply reply that it was appropriate for today's business and refuse to answer further. They do not need to know that you do not have a funeral or formal dinner with your spouse later that day. (In fact you are going to have such a tough time with this person that you may want to schedule some time out with your spouse after work!)
5. Call the person by his first name, while he calls you pastor. Again you are establishing authority.
6. Do not offer comfort items like food or coffee. This makes the meeting seem like a visit. During a visit the guest takes some amount of precedence. With an angry person you do not want to convey that they have any special rights or privileges. The biggest reinforcer of anger is control. To remove that 'carrot' from this situation, do not convey that the person is due any extras.
7. Have the secretary interrupt once or twice. This lets him know he is not the center of attention.
8. Limit the time of the meeting. Make it clear that you have other things to do. Have someone, like a strong male elder, arrive at the time you have set the meeting to end. Dismiss the person at this time. If you appear to be making

headway, schedule another meeting for later in the week. Angry people are emotional and you want a long-term solution. Even if it is going well it may be that you got them on a good day. If the second meeting goes well, you are succeeding. If it does not, it was merely their choice to not erupt as much at the time of the first meeting. Usually a poor second meeting will begin with a list of failings that you committed during the first meeting. For example: I cannot believe how rude, and insensitive you are. Be prepared for this and do not respond with anything more than, 'I am sorry you feel that way.' This is manipulation to get you to begin apologizing to them and places them in charge again. Do not fall for it.

9. Have an elder outside the office, unseen, who can be called in if things go very poorly. Set up a pre-arranged signal so that he does not have to judge for himself when he is to 'burst in.'

With angry people you must take away all the benefits they receive from their anger. You are trying to help them overcome their anger. In doing this you must refuse to do anything that makes it seem like their anger got them something, or that they have 'rights' to things they do not have. They are learning the truth of the situation, which is that God placed you in charge, and not them.

This is not because you do not want to be nice, or solve their problems. You do want to do this, eventually, but first you want to firmly let them know that no matter how big they perceive their problem to be, they do not act like they did. The person who shows up remorseful already understands this and does not require this treatment.

How to Repent From Anger

Are you angry? Let's see.

1. Ask people in your life you love and trust if you are angry. (You may get a more truthful answer if you do it from a distance, like over the phone!)
2. Do you think you are angry?
3. Have you ever hurt someone physically because you lost your temper as an adult?
4. Do people change their behavior when you enter the room? (i.e. Does it get quiet when you show up?)

5. Do you yell at people, use profanity or call them names?
6. Do the people around you yell at you, use profanity, call you names or become upset (cry)? (Your anger may be the cause.)
7. Do you not get invited to things that ‘everyone’ seems to be going to?

If you answer ‘yes’ to any of these you may have an anger issue. Seek help. Even if you do not have an anger problem, exploring who you are, and why you do what you do with a mature, caring believer is never a bad thing! It is how we grow.

There are many professional counselors and programs designed to help people anger issues. Because anger hurts others, even in small doses, it is important to get professional, Christian help. Many of the things you will need to do, like be accountable to others, have the potential to make you angry. Apologizing will not be easy either, as anger has always made people accept less from you than others are expected to do, you probably do not have much practice at it. This is because they are scared of you. This is what you are striving to change. Respect should be the result of healthy relationships, not fear and intimidation.

One of the first steps in repenting from anger is to separate yourself early from situations that make you angry. Learn to walk away. This will be hard because your pride will tell you to fight. Ignore it and walk away anyways before you do something wrong. In time a professional counselor will help you face these situations. Stick with the counseling. Do not get angry and stop going. Your problem is anger. Do not let anger stop you from getting help.

Things you will need to remember:

1. It is unreasonable to expect that people will not anger you. They will, especially those who love you. It is okay and normal. Learn to get over it.
2. People are allowed to say ‘no’ to you. It does not mean that they do not like you. It just means ‘no.’
3. Other people have rights too. Sometimes you get your way, and sometimes you don’t and are still expected to participate happily. This is life. Get use to it!

4. Life is not fair. Sometimes you will get the short end of the deal. It happens.
Learn to get over it. Be happy for the other person.
5. It is not only your life that stinks. Other people have problems too; they just do not always show it. Learn that one problem in your life should not overwhelm you emotionally.

Repenting from anger is hard. Ask others to help and pray for you. Share your struggles. You need your family and church community now more than ever. They will help you succeed. Don't get mad, give up and leave. (The angry response.) Fight this problem and win. When you finally get to the point where the people you love are relaxed in your presence you will discover what wonderful company they can be. Life without anger is so much better!

Scenarios for Group Discussion

1. A woman comes to church with a handprint on her face. Her husband admits to hitting her, but he is 'sorry' and everything is okay now. What do you do?
My thoughts: Everything is not 'okay.' The majority of married women never get hit by their husbands, ever! This couple needs help. Talk to them as soon as possible. Make sure they are both committed to counseling and support groups and follow up with them. Express your love and concern. Explain how counseling helps even the best marriages be better. If finances are an issue, see what the church can do, but don't pay all. Services that cost people something mean more to them.
2. One of the women frequently becomes upset and storms out of women's ministry meetings. The other women rush after her, and 'make everything better,' but it happens so often they are tiring of it. You know the women in the meeting. They are mature, supportive women, and not the cause of this much offense. What do you do?
My thoughts: The women need to stop running after her. If she wishes to leave, they are to let her go. Afterward the pastor may set up a meeting to discuss what happened with her. Focus on how regularly running out of the meeting is not the way to handle the problem. Discuss the problems, and explain where she may be seeing things different than they are. If she leaves again, repeat with the leaders of women's ministry present. If she does it again, talk to all of the women during a women's

ministry meeting with her there about how to handle, and not handle, being upset in the meeting. If she does it again, she does not get to return to the meetings for a set period of time, and then only if she promises she will behave.



Chapter Six: The Fool

What is a Fool?

Scripture (and my interpretation)

Proverbs 1: 22 ... fools hate knowledge

(They are not looking to learn, or be taught, and will resent your trying.)

Proverbs 10:1 ... a foolish son is grief to his mother

(Especially when he moves back in with her!)

Proverbs 13:20 ... the companion of fools will suffer harm.

(If you hang around with them, you will get hurt.)

Proverbs 14:7 Leave the presence of a fool, or you will not discern words of knowledge.

(Foolishness is catchy.)

Proverbs 14:8... the foolishness of fools is deceit.

(They believe lies.)

Proverbs 14:9 Fools mock at sin...

(They think sin is funny.)

Proverbs 14:16... a fool is arrogant and careless.

(They think they know it all and don't care about the consequences of their actions.)

Proverbs 23:9 Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words.

(It is useless to talk to them.)

Proverbs 24:7 Wisdom is too exalted for a fool....

(Wisdom is too good to waste on them. Go teach someone who will listen.)

Proverbs 26:11 Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

(They will do the same dumb thing again and again.)

Proverbs 27:2 Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his foolishness will not depart from him.

(They will get hurt, or punished, and run back to do it again.)

A fool is someone who has been told what is wise, understood what was said (i.e. is not learning disabled), and chose to do differently anyways. A fool is not someone who

is unable to learn. It is someone who either refuses to learn, or knows what is right and chooses to do wrong anyways.

Example: I adopted my daughter when she was in the end of her third grade year. She did not know how to read and did not want to learn. She had the ability to learn, and eventually did, but at the time she chose to thwart every effort to teach her. (I am not proud to say we finally solved the problem by finding a program that bribed her with candy. This was not the best way to deal with it, but we will discuss choosing your battles wisely later.) Her behavior was like that of a Biblical fool. If she had not been able to learn, she would have been disabled, not foolish.

Adult fools are much like my daughter was. They could learn to do better, but why? Learning looks like work. Doing the right thing doesn't seem like as much fun. So they continue doing what they want and ignore, or choose not to see, how it affects their lives.

Example: A man is facing bankruptcy. An accountant looks at his finances and tells him he has more money due in bills each month than he makes at his job. He has two choices: He can either sell some of his stuff, or he can get a second job. The man does neither, and buys a new car instead. This man is a fool.

Now let's look at the Bible: Nabal is a man whose name means 'fool.' David and his mighty men have come through and have provided a service for him by protecting his sheep from raiders. As armies frequently traveled through the land (Kings went to war each spring at this time.) this was a normal situation. The custom of the time was for Nabal to feed the men who had protected his sheep. Nabal chose not to do this. Instead he had a feast for his friends. He had the food to give, he merely chose not to. After all, the services had already been provided, so what was David going to do? David was going to kill him. Abigail, Nabal's wife, realized her husband had put them in mortal danger and met David with food, begging for her husband's life. David relented, but the Lord caused Nabal to die of natural causes. Abigail then became David's wife.

Nabal was a fool. He knew what the right thing to do was, and had the resources to do it, but chose not to. He was counting on David to not meet out the consequences. Fools often rely on other's not wanting to 'do justice.' Your kindness helps them remain 'foolish.' It is what they count on to get what they want.

Raca. Matthew 5:22 in the King James Version tells us not to call our brother 'Raca.' Many other translations translate this word as 'fool.' The truth is that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, calls many people a 'fool.' This is not a sin. What is a sin is to decide that someone is 'worthless,' or 'good for nothing' and decide that they are unworthy of your help, especially if that 'help' is teaching: telling them the gospel message. It is for this reason that deciding someone is 'raca,' or 'not worth anything,' is worthy of hell. Everyone has worth. Some may need our help by being excluded, showing that their behavior is not acceptable, but even in exclusion our goal must be to draw them closer to Christ.¹³⁶ By deciding 'that's just the way she is' and putting up with bad behavior, we have labeled someone 'raca:' not worth trying to help.

How to Deal With a Fool

Of course you are to warn a fool that his behavior is in error and that he needs to change. No one loses his 'Matthew 18' rights. Unfortunately the definition of a 'fool' tells us that he will not listen. A true fool will get himself kicked out of the church eventually, if he bothers going regularly at all. Church is not a place fools are comfortable in. We don't preach their core beliefs. A fool does what he wants and ignores the fact that there may be consequences. The best thing you can do with a fool is to allow the consequences of his actions to occur. The main reason why people can remain fools is because other people do not want to see them suffer and help them out. The Bible specifically says that a fool with a full belly is a bad thing¹³⁷. People who realize that they are in a bad place are more ready to learn than those who are comfortable and happy where they are.

How Not to Raise Foolish Children

1. Natural consequences: Allow them to have some.

Sometimes we shelter children too much. In doing so they never learn that bad things happen when they do not do the right things. This does not mean that we should let them get hit by a car to teach them not to run into the road. We still need to keep them safe. What it does mean is that we let the cat scratch them if they refuse to stop pulling on her

¹³⁶ 2 Samuel 14:14

¹³⁷ Proverbs 30: 21-22

tail, so that they won't pull the dog's tail next and really get hurt¹³⁸. After they get scratched we tell them why it is their own fault and how they were warned. We do not blame the cat. If we do that as a rule they will grow up blaming everyone else for their problems and will never fix anything.

2. *Teach, teach, teach*

You need to teach your children right from wrong¹³⁹. Nightly devotions is a good time for this. So is dinner, and/or car conversation. When they make a mistake, explain to them how they could have done it differently. When they do well, explain to them why it was good and that you are proud of them. This does not have to be structured, but it is best when you make sure it actually occurs.

3. *Use others as a model*

Other people in your life provide examples that you can use to teach your children. Some are good examples; others are bad. This is not gossip as your children already know about it. By using compassion, and explaining that something was a mistake, and not saying the person is a bad person, you will also teach them that they can still like a person even if they mess up occasionally. They will also understand that everyone makes mistakes¹⁴⁰, but that mistakes need to be fixed, not hidden. Your 'good behavior' as well as your 'mistakes' should also be discussed. By discussing your faults (within reason, there are things children are too young to handle) you may even help yourself do better.

4. *Bond them with godly adults*

This is the best thing I ever accidentally did in my children's life. There will always be times when a child is not happy with the parent. It is during these times the child is more likely to receive advice from another adult, or will go to another adult when he is scared to tell Mom and Dad. The other adult's example will also help to encourage the child to stay on the right path. Let your mature, godly friends get to know your children¹⁴¹. They can help reinforce the things you teach at home, and even add to your child's life. (One of my children now has his own beehive as a result!)

5. *Set limits on their exposure to bad influences:*

¹³⁸ Proverbs 20:31

¹³⁹ Proverbs 1:8; 22:6

¹⁴⁰ Proverbs 24:16

¹⁴¹ Proverbs 10:14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 15:33, 2 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Thessalonians 2: 6

Repeated exposure to fools does not produce wise men

Scripture says that if you hang around fools, you will learn to be a fool. You are the parent. It is proper for you to set limits on who your children hang around with when there is a problem.

Example: One of my friend's children got into just about every type of trouble you would want your teenage son to avoid. I asked her what she thought she should have done differently, if anything, as my children were much younger. She said she would have limited who he played with. She knew his friends were a bad influence, but she thought that she and her family would be a good influence on them, so she encouraged the friendships. She realizes now that she had made a mistake. A group of 'bad' children will rarely turn because of the example of one 'good' kid¹⁴². Usually it is the other way around.

6. Threats verses promises

The Bible says that a master is not to threaten his servant¹⁴³. Since there are consequences to not doing your work as a servant, the promise of punishment is not a threat. A threat is something then that is too harsh for the 'crime' and/or something that you do not actually intend to carry out. If you promise a consequence, and they do what you told them not to do, you need to follow through with the consequences¹⁴⁴. (If you have made a serious mistake, please don't follow through, but as a rule only promise consequences you are going to carry out, and then carry them out if necessary.)

7. Encourage godly behavior

Suggest good things for your children to do and encourage them to do it. For example, encourage them to talk to the child who is sitting alone at church. You can also volunteer them for work at the church¹⁴⁵. My children have stapled papers, picked up sticks, cleaned tables, set up chairs, made coffee etc.

8. Model godly behavior

If you do not behave it is unlikely that your children ever will. If you want your children to make wise choices, you must make them first. Let your children see you pray,

¹⁴² Proverbs 13:20

¹⁴³ Ephesians 6: 9

¹⁴⁴ Ecclesiastes 5:2-6

¹⁴⁵ Proverbs 22:6

return money when someone gave you too much change, apologize (especially to your spouse) and help others.

9. Discuss goals for their lives

Children with goals for the future are less likely to ‘mess up’ as they realize it will interfere with their plans. They also will have more self worth, as they are confident that they can do something in the future. Even if they are three and their goal is to go on the potty and not their pants, they need to know they are responsible for becoming a mature adult. Potty training is a part of that process. Let them know that if they are potty trained they can go to pre-school where the big boys go, and make it sound exciting.

10. Education

Emphasize learning¹⁴⁶. Encourage your children to do the best that they can, and find things they enjoy learning. Educated children, as a rule, behave better than peers with the same I.Q. whose parents did not care about their schooling.

Example: One of the best stories I heard on this subject was from a very successful (and wealthy) man whose mother was a cleaning woman. She was a single mom, and poor. The one thing she noticed was that the people in rich houses she cleaned had many books, while the poor people did not. She decided to take her boys on the train every month to go to the rich people’s public library. She also required that her sons write a book report on what they had read. Her boys loved reading so much that they snuck on the train while she was at work to get more books. It was not until years later, when both of her sons had graduated with doctorates, that they learned that their mother never read any of their reports because she could not read. Instead of getting involved with the bad influences in their section of town while their mother was not home, these boys were still sneaking, as unsupervised children tend to do, but they were sneaking to read, a much more productive option.

Situations That Encourage Fools

Lack of Consequences

People learn through consequences¹⁴⁷. For whatever reason, most people do not trust the warnings of others and need to try things themselves. If the consequences do not

¹⁴⁶ Ecclesiastes 4:13

¹⁴⁷ Proverbs 13:1,18; 20:30

occur, the person will see no reason not to do it again, especially if there were benefits to doing it that they did receive. For example, doing homework helps you learn. Not doing homework usually results in getting behind in school, but so what? The consequences to not doing well in school will be realized in adulthood, a long time from now, whereas today the child gets to play video games and enjoy T.V. they would have missed had they been working on the schoolwork. If the parent, withholds consequences the child will have no motivation to do well in life, a problem that will follow him into adulthood as well.

The same is true for adults. If a person scams people out of money, and you will not tell others in the congregation to be careful because you do not want to ‘hurt’ the person’s reputation, you are leaving him with only benefits to his ungodly activity. Christians are the easiest to ‘scam’ because they want to help others. Some people who grew up Christian do not even fully realize that others are taking advantage of others.

Empty Threats

Making threats (saying that you are going to do something you are not) is never a good policy. If you have rules with consequences, you need to carry out those consequences when the rule is broken or get rid of the rule. Having rules that you do not enforce only encourages people to ignore the rules. Having rules that are silly does the same thing.

Example 1: A silly rule: I am currently in a hotel. The sign in the hotel room says: ‘Do not remove towels from the room. There are towels in the pool area for your use.’ A sign in the pool area, above the pool towels, says: ‘Do not remove towels from the pool area.’ So far, so good, except: A sign on the door of the pool area states: ‘You must wear a towel over your bathing suit when exiting the pool.’ How are you to do this, when you may not remove towels from either the pool, or the room areas? If you did not bring your towel from home, you are stuck and must disobey at least one of the rules. (Or the secret third option: You could yell from the pool door to the front desk for the ‘special hall towels’ they have not yet provided. But that would be silly.)

Example 2: Youth group begins in September, after you have entered the seventh grade. If you ask, you are told that you may not participate in youth group activities until September during the summer between sixth and seventh grades. If you do not ask, and

have your parents drop you off at the activities, you are allowed to stay. This rule merely punishes the conscientious children who ask first. The rule must be (and after much debate was) changed. Otherwise children will learn that it is better not to ask, and/or better to play on people's sympathies when you show up anyways. (Not good. We are now training our children to be fools who do what they want, not what is right, because no one will enforce the rules anyway. The world will teach that this is smart, as it gets you what you want. We must not teach that 'rule breaking' is a good thing.)

False Beliefs:

1. Every Opinion is Equally Valuable: It is Not.

Unfortunately we are not all equally gifted in all areas. This makes some opinions more valuable than others. I am a physical therapist. If you want to know whether or not the church bathroom is handicap accessible you can ask me. If you want to know the best way to fix the plumbing in the bathroom, you will want to ask a plumber instead. Unfortunately, not everyone recognizes that they are not experts in plumbing when they are not. They will be offended when their advice is not taken. Sometimes they will even be offended that you did not ask them. This is not your fault. They are fools. Do not apologize, just explain to them why they are not the appropriate person to go to for this advice. If they do not understand, this is not your fault. They need to learn the important concept that they are not experts on everything. Even if they are a plumber, they need to learn that you, as an adult, have a right to not ask every plumber in the church for his opinion before starting a job, even if he really could have done it better.

2. Everyone is Equally Good at Everything: They are not.

Unfortunately, we are also not all equally skilled.¹⁴⁸ Even if we have knowledge in an area, we may not be the person for the job. People need to understand that they will not always be used. Someone may be better suited for the job, or a job may not need as much skill, and can be done by someone with lesser talent, who has more time to do it, or needs a chance to be more involved. There are times to use people who are less skilled. These times include: giving them an opportunity to learn and become better, doing easy projects so the more talented people do not become 'burnt out,' or allowing them to do what they

¹⁴⁸ Matthew 25:15

can so that you can evaluate their skills and will know how to use them in the future. Talented people need to understand that they are not the only ones who will be used in that area. Less talented people need to understand that there are times they will be asked to listen to and help the more talented people. Both people need to learn what they can, and help the other. Anything else is foolishness. 'Territories' should not be established in a church. (This happens often in the church kitchen, where a certain woman decides she is the only one who knows how to run things correctly.) Neither should less skilled people be threatened by those with more skill and quit doing anything, or try to push the more skilled person out to keep their place in the church. A good pastor must recognize the following:

1. Not everyone is equally skilled in something (like art).
2. There are projects you should use your best person for, and the other people need to understand.
3. Everyone needs to contribute what they are able. There are projects that do not require as much skill and can be done by less talented people. Your more talented people need to understand that they do not need to do it all, and not be insulted when they are not asked to do it.
4. Not everything needs to be 'perfect.' There are times when 'less perfect' is just fine. These times enable other people to learn new skills, or improve the ones they already have. These are also times to give your really skilled people a break. (For example, there are times in our church when we let the men run the kitchen!)

If you allow those that are less skilled to believe that they do not have to use their skill because someone is better than them, you have encouraged them to justify their laziness, which is foolish thinking. If you let talented people believe it is an insult when others get to do things that they would do better at, you have also encouraged foolishness.

3. Telling Someone That They Are Wrong is Mean: It is not.

Another problem in our society today is that people do not like to be told that they are wrong. They have not learned that knowing when you are wrong allows you to learn so

that you will be better next time¹⁴⁹. Instead they just get mad and fix nothing. This is foolish behavior. If the fear of ‘offending’ someone keeps you from correcting them in love, then you are enabling people to be ‘foolish.’

4. *Equal Rewards for Unequal Work: Communism in the church?*

There are rewards for hard work. There are also more rewards for people who work happily without causing problems. One of the problems today is that we want to treat everyone equally. This theory contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union, and does not do much for a church either. I was in a church that believed everyone should receive equal treatment, no matter what. Here are some problems we encountered.

Problem #1: Because we could not possibly acknowledge everyone that worked in the church we could not acknowledge anyone. When someone went above and beyond, and the congregation recognized her, the pastor felt the need to do a ‘group recognition.’ The person did not understand that they were being thanked as almost everyone in the church was being called up to the altar at the same time. As the person had put in perhaps too much time on the project and was worn out, she felt unappreciated and eventually left the church.

It is okay to recognize hard work¹⁵⁰. It encourages the person doing it, and encourages others to do the same. As we saw before, God praised Jesus during His ministry. To praise everyone equally only encourages people to do the least amount since the response will be the same. It also encourages people who have worked hard to do less as they feel unappreciated. These are not proper attitudes, but the thoughts of a foolish person. It would be nice if we could all work without reward, but that is not the way God said it should be. Not recognizing people, or rewarding them for hard work, is not godly, and discourages people from doing anything else for you.

Problem #2: Titles were considered honor. For this reason we had none. When problems occurred, and authority was needed, the problem person did not recognize the authority of the person without a title. When the pastor was asked to say something, even if it was from the altar rather than face to face, to indicate that this person had authority

¹⁴⁹ Proverbs 11:14; 12:26; 15:22

¹⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 2 Timothy 2:6

he said 'no.' His reason was if he did it for one person he would have to do it for everyone.

Leaders need to be called leaders or problem people will not feel the need to listen to them, because 'who do they think they are?' They also need back up. If a person will not respect the leadership of someone in charge the pastor must step in and support his leader, otherwise the person has no power to make a decision and is useless. People who do not respect authority are 'fools.' By not supporting your leaders, you are saying that it is okay to not listen to the authority that has been put in place in your church. Since we know that God is ultimately in charge, He considers not obeying the authority He put in place to be a serious thing.

Repenting From Foolishness

First, are you a fool?

1. Does everything seem to go wrong for you?
2. Is it usually someone else's fault that things go wrong in your life? (If it is always the same person you may be hanging around a fool, which is, well... foolish!)
3. Do other people seem to have 'all the luck' while you have none?
4. Do you think that rules are 'optional' and usually not for you?
5. Do the same bad things keep happening to you over, and over again?
6. Do people *seem* to want to make your life miserable for no good reason?
7. Do some people seem to always want to have long, boring talks with you about your behavior?
8. Do you frequently roll your eyes at people when they talk, or at least want to?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions then you may be a 'fool.' Ask people you trust, like a pastor, or your mother, and see what they say.

Since the problem of foolishness is the inability to utilize wisdom, it would be easy to tell you to start listening to others, and do the right thing. Unfortunately scripture says that a fool is unlikely to do this. For this reason, the first step in repentance comes from the book of James, which tells us to pray for wisdom. With wisdom, one also needs that ability to see the reality, or truth, of the situation. Since a fool shuns wisdom, and fails to recognize it as such, prayer is going to be important in turning this around.

It will also be important to study the Bible, and learn from mature Christians about its principles. The Bible is the source of all wisdom. If your ideas conflict with its teachings, and mature, godly people agree that you are understanding the teaching correctly, work to change your ways in this area.

Discipleship is also a good idea. In a discipleship relationship you pick a mature Christian who helps you to learn how to live. They share their life story, including their mistakes and how they 'fixed' them, and they help you to live your life by discussing your decisions with you. Your pastor can help you to find an appropriate person for this, but you must be committed to learning from them.

Counseling is always appropriate. Counselors are people who are trained to help others who are in trouble in life, and they love doing it, so don't be afraid to go.

Scenarios for Group Discussion

1. A friend of yours buys a new car. It begins to have problems. You advise that he take it to the dealer as it must be under warranty. He decides to do the repairs at home. This includes using a blowtorch. Needless to say the repairs are unsuccessful. Your friend then takes it to the local mechanic (not the dealer, though the warranty is most likely void by now, unless the corporate lawyers truly could not imagine anyone doing this...). The mechanic says that the repairs will be over \$1,000. Your friend does not have this kind of money so he has the car towed home. He buys a motorcycle, because he needs to get around, except it is winter in Buffalo, New York. It snows. It snows again. He needs a ride to work or they are going to fire him. What do you do?

My thoughts: If you give him a ride you will be giving him a ride all winter long. The ride must therefore come with some 'strings' attached. Financial counseling, and perhaps selling some 'assets' so that he soon has a functional vehicle are a start. If he says 'no,' then the rides stop. You are not a free taxi, and if he doesn't see the wisdom in your advice he needs to learn the hard way.

2. A very talented dancer joins the congregation. Everyone is thrilled. She has agreed to help with the Christmas program. The current director of the program has agreed to help her as she has not been in the church long, and does not know the people. The dancer says 'no.' She works alone, or not at all. What do you do?

My thoughts: First you try to explain that church is a group effort and show her scripture about the 'body of Christ.' If this does not work, she does not work. She cannot handle other people's input, and therefore is not ready to be a leader in a church. Try to put her in a group of strong women who work well together, who do anything but dance, to help her understand group dynamics and pray for her. She has a lot to learn, and thinks she already knows it all.



PART TWO:

How to Live In A World Full of Problem People

The logo for Colorado Theological Seminary features a stylized cross with a circular arc above it, all in a light green color. Below this graphic, the words "Colorado" and "Theological Seminary" are written in a light green, sans-serif font, stacked vertically.

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Chapter Seven: Boundaries

What Are Boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits we place on other people that limit the impact they may have in certain areas of our lives. Here are some examples of boundaries many people use:

1. Do not step on the grass.
2. Take your shoes off before you walk on the carpet.
3. No smoking in my home.
4. No profanity around my children.

While people may break these rules, there are consequences, such as not being invited back, if they continue to ignore your requests. This is Biblical. Let me explain.

Matthew 18:15-8 says, 'If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.'

I often wondered why the verse on binding and loosing occurred at the end of this teaching for I had been taught that it was the devil I was 'binding' and 'loosing.' When I looked further into scripture, I realized that the devil, or more correctly, his demons always gets 'cast out.'¹ The devil does not get bound until after Jesus returns², so I cannot bind him before then. The demons too, know that it is not their time to be tormented by Jesus³, but instead that they have rights, given by God, to roam the earth, as long as they obey the limits God has placed on them (four did not, and are now bound by the River Euphrates to be released during the tribulation⁴). It was then that I discovered that placing 'bounds' on something is a form of 'binding.' Bounds, also known as

¹ Mark 16:17, Matthew 10:1

² Revelation 20:2

³ Matthew 8:29

⁴ Jude 6

boundaries, are usually spoken of as property lines. Here though, they are the things that we may choose to allow, or not allow, in the areas of our lives that we have authority over. This includes who walks, or does not walk, on our grass. While we may not get two or three people to consider this an important enough offense to do anything about, there are other things, which are that important.

We are then allowed to decide whether, or not, we allow others to interfere in certain areas of our lives. If we say 'no,' and warn a person appropriately, and the person continues to disrespect the limit we have set, God will see the person's disrespect of that limit as sin. If we do not care, and do not set a limit on the activity, God will not see someone who, for example: walks all over your grass, as committing a sin, since it is not bound by a rule, and thus is 'loosed' from any consequences.

In Matthew 18:27 (the parable after this teaching) we see that 'the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.' (KJV) In 'loosing', the lord of the servant let the man out of his punishment (slavery for debt) because he asked for mercy. Confused? Let me give you an example:

Example: My neighbor and I are completely different. He is older, and enjoys his lawn. I have seven children, and consider my lawn a place for children to play. Let's say that he has just planted Kentucky Blue Grass seed, and does not want anyone walking on his grass (which abuts mine, the poor man...). He has set a boundary: No walking on the grass. This is now bound in heaven. If you walk on my neighbor's grass and know that he does not want you to, you are sinning because he has the right to tell you 'no,' and heaven respects that right. I, on the other hand, do not care what you do on my lawn. If you drive a four-wheeler on it and put massive ruts in the yard, who cares? (Maybe my neighbor, but he does not have the authority to make rules for my lawn, and before anyone talks about zoning laws etc. you should know that we live in the country. I own a 256+ acre farm.) The rule about yard care in my yard does not exist. It is 'loosed.' I could make a rule, but I chose not to, and leave that area of my life 'loose.' Get it? (I hope so, because unless you are in my Bible study, I will not hear you when you say 'no.')

Matthew 18: 15-18 then protects a believer. It is our 'bill of rights' as a Christian. It means that we can set limits on other people's behavior as it pertains to our lives, and, as long as those limits are deemed reasonable by our community (two or three, and then the

church), they will be enforced. It also means that we cannot be punished for things that we did not know are wrong. Instead, we are to receive three warnings before we are removed from fellowship. People who dismiss friends after one mistake are not following these rules. People who do not confront a friend, but stay secretly mad, are also not following these rules. Additionally, people who repeatedly walk all over others, disobeying obvious boundaries, need to be held to these rules. If the rules are used, 'bullies' of all varieties will not prosper in your area. If you choose not to enforce Matthew 18, then you have 'loosed' everything, and have no recourse in heaven. You are now a 'doormat,' and the less moral among us will take advantage of you.

Jesus frequently set boundaries in His life. Frequently He walked away from the crowds and took time to pray⁵. At other times, He 'loosed' this area of His life, had compassion on the people, and gave up His private prayer time to help and teach the people⁶. Boundaries therefore do not have to be constant. You can, and should, change them depending on the situation. For example: My neighbor with the 'blue grass lawn' would gladly overlook the damage to his lawn had the person who ruined it been a single mother who skidded off the road during icy weather. Because of the circumstances he chooses to 'loose' his right to enforce his rule regarding not destroying his lawn. Even if he did not he would have a hard time, in our area, finding even two or three people who would stand with him in demanding the mother pay for the damage to grass.

Boundaries are set everyday, for very many things. For example: I had a pastor who did not want any of the men to kiss him on the cheek no matter how 'Italian' they were, and also did not wish the men to hug his wife. He let the congregation know that these were not things he was comfortable with and most complied. I then had a pastor who was very 'Italian.' His entire family frequently hugged, and kissed on the cheek. Same job, different boundaries, and that's okay. But know that in the first church, if a man insisted on hugging the pastor's wife, and would not stop when asked by the pastor, and then the pastor and the elders, he could be taken in front of the church for it. After all, he knows the pastor does not wish his wife touched so what is he doing touching her?!?! In the second church this would not be a problem since everyone hugs and no one thinks much

⁵ Luke 5:16

⁶ Luke 9:10-11, Mark 6:31-34

about it. (I personally like the second way better, though I have a ‘no kissing on the mouth’ boundary that my in-laws think is nuts!)

So now that we understand that we have a right to set boundaries, or not set them, we should probably look at the things that God decided were, or were not to be, Biblical boundaries. I am going to label these things: needs and rights. Regardless of what you do, you should not be deprived of them. We are also going to look at who is responsible for what: you or God. First let us look at our needs.

Needs:

Air ⁷(God provides)

Water⁸ (God also provides, though we have to work to get to it)

Food⁹ (God provides, IF we work)

Prayer¹⁰ (We are to open this line of communication)

Rest¹¹ (God gives it but, we need to make sure we get it)

Rights: (Boundaries that God set that we may not ever ‘loose’)

Not to be murdered

Not to have our things stolen

Not to have our spouse sleep with someone else

Not to be lied to

To be honored by our children always, and obeyed by them while they are young

Etc. (think ‘commandments and laws’)¹²

We may allow someone to violate our ‘rights,’ but God still sees it as sin, even if we do not punish it ourselves. We may also forgive someone for violating our ‘rights,’ but God may do the same, whether or not you forgive them. (If they ‘get saved,’ they are

⁷ Gen. 2:7, Isaiah 42:5

⁸ Isaiah 44:3

⁹ 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Psalm 136:25, Proverbs 28:19; 13:23

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:18

¹¹ Exodus 23:12, Matthew 11:28

¹² Deuteronomy 5

covered by His blood, which covers everything!) The point about 'rights' is that they stand in God's eyes, and therefore in the church, whether or not you set them. They are not boundaries, in the sense that you may not 'loose' them and choose to allow someone to do this against you without it being a sin. God's way is different than a court of law where you must 'press charges' for some of these crimes. Violating 'rights' is a sin even if you ask someone to do it. For example: Murder is murder even if the person asked to be killed. The only time it is not murder is if it self defense, or war. Boundaries however, must be set and enforced by the person.

Here are some examples of 'boundaries' in scripture that we are to set:

1. Proverbs 14:7 'Leave the presence of a fool...'
2. Proverbs 16:6 '...And by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil.'
3. Proverbs 22:10 'Drive out the scoffer...'
4. Proverbs 22:24 'Do not associate with a man given to anger...'
5. Proverbs 23:6 'Do not eat the bread of a selfish man...'
6. Proverbs 23:9 'Do not speak in the hearing of a fool...'

Etc.

From these scriptures we see that we not only have a right to limit other's negative influences from our lives, we are expected to! Next time you do not want to invite your 'angry' relative over, or feel bad because you did not want to listen to your friend talk about the tenth abusive man in her life, and how she 'loves' him too much to leave (a fool), know that God expects you to not have to deal with these things. His answer is, after it is clear that they have been warned and will not listen/repent, LEAVE THEM ALONE. This is not mean. It is your protection from the insanity they bring into your life. It is also for their benefit, as it helps them to realize that they have a problem, and motivates them to seek help. Repeat after me: Setting these boundaries is not mean; it is right. Boundaries are godly; therefore, boundaries are good.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. You have a relative who drinks. Relatives buy him groceries, lie to his boss, and help him pay his bills. You know this is not good. What do you do? *My thoughts: Talk to your pastor about the help that is available for him in your area, then get*

you relatives together. Explain to them that by helping him they are actually keeping him from seeing the problems his drinking is causing. Formulate a plan to confront the person who drinks, to help him get help, and to support each other in no longer helping him if he does not comply. Some of the organizations for alcoholics may help you do this.

2. This is funny, but common. Your husband will not put his clothes in the hamper. You have complained, but he still insists on putting them on the floor. You hate treating him like a baby, nagging, and picking up his stuff. What do you do? *My thoughts: Explain to him that this is about how you view him, not the two minutes it takes you to clean the floor of his stuff. His leaving his laundry around makes you see him as a child who needs a mother to clean up after him. Let him know that this does not help you see him as a man who you respect and want to be romantic with. You know it is silly, but you want to view him as the man of the house, not an extra child.*
3. Your children will not put the laundry in the hamper. What do you do? *My thoughts: You only do the laundry that makes it into the hamper. When they do not have their favorite outfit they will learn.*

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Chapter Eight: The Lie of ‘Nice’

This advice is for dealing with people who have been ‘helped’ in the past, by you, or others, and refuse to change. This is not meant to be applied to people who are truly hurting, and need help. These are people whose own behavior is causing their problems, and they refuse to change. They may be lazy: not wanting to do anything that does not please them at the moment, they may be strifeful: arguing over every little thing making it impossible to work with them, they may be divisive: stirring up trouble amongst those around them, they may be fools: knowing what is right, but wanting to do things their own way instead, or they may be involved in things such as: drugs, alcohol, or sexual immorality that is ruining their life, but they are currently unwilling to try to give up. This advice is meant to be applied only when the person has been warned adequately that their behavior is a problem, and they are unwilling to change. The following is a list of things that people do that help keep these ‘problem people’ from making necessary changes in their lives. These things make their situation more comfortable than it should be because they keep the person from seeing the full consequences of his actions. Consequences that might actually make them see the need to do something about their problem.

Enabling

Lie #1: ‘But I don’t want to hurt his feelings...’

Many of the things that we think of as being ‘nice’ are not. In the long term they hurt us, and the people we are being ‘nice’ to because we are enabling them to continue doing things that hurt themselves and others. Enabling works in many different ways. One lie that enables people to remain in sin is that we don’t want to hurt their feelings. So we don’t tell them that they are too drinking too much, or that their relationship with a coworker seems to be leading towards adultery. Instead we smile and when they ask we say something like, ‘I could see how others might think that, but I am sure you are fine.’ Lying in order to save someone’s feelings only keeps them from confronting the truth and becoming better. Since sinful behavior tends to lead to more sinful behavior, if you are not confronting it, you are encouraging it. The Bible says that by condoning sin you are

equally guilty of the sin¹³. Ouch! Enabling someone to remain in sin is a big deal in God's eyes.

Of course you don't want to go overboard and become a legalist, or cruel. Remember, some things are just choices. Here is an example I have told my children to help them choose when to say what.

Example: Your best friend is getting married. You see her dress. The front is lovely, but the back emphasizes figure flaws you don't even think she has. What do you say?

The answer: It depends on when you see the dress. If you see it before she buys it, say something, but kindly, and have her look in a mirror too. If it is the day of the wedding, you say nothing, and perhaps try to steer the cameraman away from any 'rear view' shots.

In the case of the bride you are not enabling. It is not a sin to wear an ugly dress. Here are a few examples of true enabling.

Example #1: Your friend's two-year-old child is limping. She says, 'I don't know what to do with that kid. I spanked him as hard as I could last night at bedtime and he still wouldn't stay in his room.'

My thoughts: This is a serious situation. Your friend does not know how to discipline and is hurting her child badly. If you say anything that makes it sound like this is normal parenting you are enabling this child to get hurt. She needs to know that she is out of line, and that this is not what it means to 'spare the rod and spoil the child.' Call your pastor for help immediately. He will know what services are available. This problem is too big for just one person to 'help.'

Example #2: Your friend is deep in debt. He wants to buy a new car. He has a car that runs already. The bank will actually give him a loan with a 25% interest rate. He sees this as God blessing his life. What do you do?

My thoughts: You need to be honest. Explain how God's Word does not encourage a Christian to borrow, and also does not look favorably on interest on a loan. Explain the reality of his situation and how much 25% interest increases the price. See if you can get him into some good Christian financial counseling, and perhaps go with him to help him

¹³ Romans 1:32

understand. Do not agree that God is in any way blessing this, or that you are happy for him.

Example #3: (This one is silly, but since I did it just the way it is written (more or less) you might as well hear it! Hopefully you will see that we all make some pretty good mistakes at times. The important thing is to repent of them, and not do it again.)

A woman is upset with you because you did not agree with her interpretation of 'speaking life/ speaking death.' She has been hostile for months and you would like to see it end. Since you don't want to reopen the debate, have apologized and are willing to admit that it could have been the way you said it to her, you say, 'Thank you for putting up with me over the last months. I may have been more stressed lately then I had realized.' She hugs you and replies, 'That's okay. It's not you. It is a spirit from South Africa that has a hold of you and is affecting our church.' Not wanting to ruin the reconciliation, I said, (wrongly) 'Well I guess that makes sense,' and left thinking, 'Did I just agree that I was demon possessed?' My enabling worked too. Next time I saw her she hated me even more than before, and she continued to spread her 'theories' about who was affected by demons around the church! (Hopefully, I will never do this again!)

Some things are not so big, but still need to be said. If your friend asks you if you thought she was rude, you may need to tell her that she could have chosen her words better. If a pastor asks you why you left the choir, don't say, 'Life got too busy' when the truth is that you cannot stand the way the director talks to you. Either the director has an issue, or you are overly sensitive. For one of you, knowing the truth and changing it will make you better, especially if it is a pattern, and not an isolated problem. If it is the director's problem, your informing the pastor will help keep the rest of the choir from quitting too. You need to trust your pastor's judgment. Your job is to let the pastor know what is going on with you. You have the right to remove yourself from a bad situation, but after that it is his job to 'fix' the problems in the choir, not yours.

Lie #2: We have to 'fix' everything

1. When it is not ours to fix

There are times when we see a problem and run, headstrong, to be a part of 'fixing' it. Unfortunately it is not our problem to solve, but rather someone else's. In 'butting in' we

ignore the authority that is already in place. While God calls us to be our brother's keeper; He also calls us to respect the authority He has allowed to be in place over a situation. Let me give you some examples:

Example #1: Frank did not like the way his son was raising his grandchild. Time outs and 'talks' seemed like such a waste of time when, in his opinion, a 'good spanking was what the kid needed.' He talked to his son, but his son insisted that he was going to do things differently than his father had done with him. Frank was frustrated. His grandson was not the perfect child he wanted him to be, so Frank took time to be with his grandson and raise him 'right.' When his son found out that Frank was spanking his son behind his back he was furious, and with good reason. Frank had ignored his son's God given right to be the authority over his child.

Example #2: There had been a disagreement in the Sunday School between two teachers, although no one knew what had occurred, everyone knew it had happened. The current Sunday School director had stepped in and made a decision, and the problem was over. EXCEPT, the youth pastor's wife knew that the teacher had a history of problems when she was in the youth group and felt that she needed to step in and talk to the former- youth as well.

The problem: The youth pastor's wife had not talked to the Sunday School Director. She assumed that the young teacher was at fault. She was not. In 'talking' to the young teacher she confused her. The young teacher had been trying hard to repent of her wilder younger years. The young teacher became frustrated and wanted to quit; her love for her job was now diminished. Why? Because the youth pastor's wife did not understand how authority worked. She should have spoken to the Sunday School Director first, and then, if there actually was a problem, offer to help by speaking to the teacher. Going behind the director's back to help solve his problem was inappropriate and created a stumbling block for a young teacher, who was trying to do better.

2. When staying to 'fix it' becomes enabling,
Even if you are saying all of the right things!

There is a time to leave a situation. The Bible implies that if the person is not willing to change after three warnings by the people closest to him, he is probably not

going to change and should be left alone¹⁴. Unfortunately, many people cannot bear to leave a situation unfixed and remain far past this point to ‘help.’ Unfortunately, at this point your ‘help’ may be exactly what is keeping the person from getting better. Attention sometimes feeds the problem as the person enjoys your company. You may also be keeping the person from consequences that may make him notice that all is not well with this current lifestyle. There is also a third scenario where the person is hearing you agree with him, when in fact you are not.

Example #1: Person with an addiction: ‘I am so glad you came over. I love your cooking. Thank you so much for the meal. No one else comes to see me anymore.’
You: ‘You know I don’t mind. This is just what Christians do for each other. You know you really need to go back to your counselor to deal with your problem. Here, let me help you clean up these beer cans.’

In this example everyone else has left for a reason. This person cares more about the alcohol than they do about the people in their life. As long as someone continues to visit and feed them, they will have no other pressure to change. Christians do not help people remain in sin. You are not witnessing; you are enabling them. They will not come to Christ this way; they will remain drunk, with your help. And, you are taking time, and food, that could be given to someone working hard for the Lord to ease their burdens. Instead you are giving it to an unrepentant sinner in order to make it easier for him to stay drunk! Think about it.

Example #2: Paul has been talking to Phil about trying to save his marriage. Phil is currently separated from his wife, and has been dating. Paul is against this, and has told him to stop multiple times with no success. Others have told him not to be dating as well.

Phil: ‘There is a woman I know whose husband is abusing her. Should I help?’

Paul: ‘Of course.’

(A few days later...)

Phil: ‘I don’t see why everyone is upset with me? I just let her move in with me to help her get away from her abusive husband, and by the way, we are getting married when her divorce is final. Paul said it was the right thing to do.’

¹⁴ Matthew 18:15-17

Phil isn't listening, to anyone. He is hearing only what he wants to hear. If you really want to help Phil, walk away. It may be that his wife is the one who needs the help. Tell your wife to look in on her.

Lie #3: But I am all he has

You may be 'all he has' because he has wreaked such havoc in so many other people's lives that they will not let him close anymore. One thing I look at in a situation is whether, or not the person's family is helping. If the person's family is a good, Christian family with resources to spare, and they are not helping there is probably a good reason for it that you do not see. Let them handle the problem; it is their responsibility to do so¹⁵.

Lie #4: But I know I can help him, if I only give it more time

For people who want to change, this is true. Help as much and as long as you can! For people who do not want to change, all you are doing is keeping them from hitting rock bottom. While this may seem like a 'nice' thing to do for people, it is not. Rock bottom is where most people decide to 'turn from their wicked ways' and seek help.

Lie #5: I am here to make sure he doesn't destroy everything he worked so hard for

The Lord has promised that if we turn from our wicked ways He will return what the devil has stolen from us¹⁶. You do not need to worry about saving the person's 'stuff' for them. God knows what He is doing. Further, it is after losing all that 'stuff' that people come to realize that they are on a very bad path.

Lie #6: I am sure that she didn't mean to do it.

This is a very common thought. It is common because good people tend to believe that other people have good motives too¹⁷. What we accuse other people of thinking or doing when we don't have all the facts often tells us a lot about ourselves. Good people think that everyone 'just made a mistake,' or 'didn't realize what they were doing'

¹⁵ Proverbs 26:17

¹⁶ Joel 3:25-27

¹⁷ Titus 1:15

because they would never have thought to be that cruel. (Sneaky people tend to think that other people are hiding something. Mean people tend to think that other people are doing things just to be mean, etc.) Unfortunately, some of us hold onto this belief long after the facts have proven otherwise. In believing that the person did not mean to do it, you let them get away without any warning, or reprimand. If they did it on purpose the first time, they are sure to do it again now that they know they can get away with it.

Lie #7: It's better if no one knows about it.

This is a lie straight from the devil. Sin needs to be addressed. God wants honesty and openness. It is only if a person repents that we do not bring it up again. This lie keeps most people from actually doing what Matthew 18:15-17 says to do since no one wants to bring serious personal sins in front of the church. I have seen really awful things happen, and because the person would not repent when talked to by the pastor and the elders, they were left alone. Why? Because no one wanted to bring them before the church, and there were no other options. It is better when things are done the right way. By doing things the right way, problems are dealt with, and resolved. By not letting the congregation know how a serious problem, that is affecting the church, is being handled, the congregation is likely to unwittingly work against what the pastor is trying to do. There are times when the entire congregation needs to know what is happening. One of these times is when a person is on the verge of being removed from the congregation. **It is unbiblical to remove someone from the church without the congregation being aware of it!**

Example #1: Kathy was causing a lot of trouble in the church. She had a problem with gossip, and used it cruelly. The pastor warned her on multiple occasions to stop, to no avail. He then told her that due to her actions, she was not allowed in church for four weeks. During those weeks people noticed Kathy was missing. They called her home and told her how much she was missed. Their calls made her feel like no one was upset over the trouble she caused and that pastor was just being mean. They did not mean to do this, but they did not know that she had been asked to leave. They thought they were ministering to someone who obviously needed the Lord.

By not doing things correctly the pastor and the congregation were not on the same page. The congregation was trying to love Kathy into heaven, while at the same time pastor was trying to discipline her. This sent mixed messages. Most people, when they receive mixed messages, believe the message that they most want to hear and ignore the other. Because of this Kathy got more love and attention during her four weeks of punishment than she would have ever gotten otherwise. In her mind, the congregation would side with her if the pastor tried to kick her out again, because they loved her so much! To her this meant that she was obviously not doing anything wrong if so many people loved her.

I have also seen people kicked out of the church without being warned in front of the church. This also violates Matthew 18:15-17. No one should have to fear getting a letter in the mail telling them not to come to church anymore! Nor should they have to fear a 'secret' meeting telling them not to return either.

Example #2: Ken had a history of causing trouble in the church, but was never talked to about it. One day Ken decides to get up during church and tell everyone that God has revealed to him that pastor is doing things wrong and that the pastor needs to repent. The service disintegrated from there and Ken was sent a letter telling him not to come to this church anymore. This pastor also visited a family who use to go to the church that week to tell them that they should probably not think about coming back either, at least not without a public apology and a few other conditions met. News of pastor's actions spread. The result, people who had left the church for other reasons were now afraid to come back because they did not know what would happen to them.

No matter how bad we are, we deserve proper warnings and a chance to repent. No one should be surprised by a letter, or visit, telling them that they cannot go to church. That type of behavior breeds fear, and keeps people from having the courage to speak up when it is the right thing to do. Sowing fear gives the people who misbehave even more power, not less, as they do not have as much fear of authority as godly people do.

The Doormat

I would not be lying if I told you that I once had a Ph.D. in 'doormat.' Someone called for pies; I made pies. Someone called for babysitting; I babysat. I was proud of the

fact that everyone liked me (a sure sign of a doormat- lazy people get mad when you say no, and don't get over it until they need the next favor!). I was also proud that I could get along with even the toughest personalities. (This is because I never said anything they didn't like to hear!) Did I tell you that this was the year I had a newborn baby, three children ages four, three, and one AND three newly adopted children ages six, eight and ten- none of which behaved in a way that made living with them, let's say, 'joyful'? Did I also forget to tell you that one of my children was potty training at the time?

During this time I also watched an elderly woman with Alzheimer's for the weekend (twice), in her house, with my children and without my husband (who had to work) because the caregiver was a relative who needed a break. I also did costumes for the church Christmas program, which I did make an attempt to say 'no' to, unsuccessfully. The list could go on, but you get the idea. I never thought of myself, and the fact that I have a need for rest too. I was not always like that, and am not now, but I was then because I had become a Christian, and Christians are supposed to be nice.

The truth is that if you burn yourself out, you will be no good to anyone. If the Lord has called you to do it, He will give you the strength. If you pile up things for yourself to do because you are unable to say 'no' you will wear out¹⁸, and you will teach people that it is okay to take advantage of you. They will not respect you¹⁹, so you ruin your 'Christian witness.' They will also never see that they are being inappropriate if you never say anything about it and always manage to do what they desire. In the church the lazy, angry, strifeful, divisive etc. will all count on you to not do anything about their behavior, and to give them what they want. They have learned that these 'bad' behaviors work because 'nice' people are too scared of confrontation to ever do anything to stop them. And, that nice people will go out of their way to do things just to keep them happy! 'Nice' people will also talk other people out of holding these people accountable, or giving them proper consequences for their actions. In essence the problem people have some very 'nice' slaves that help them to get what they want.

How being a 'doormat' actually hurts those you love

1. You are teaching others, by your example, to be a doormat too.

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 2:4, 1 Corinthians 7:23, Philipians 2:30,

¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:16

'Doormats' suffer because they will not set boundaries that keep others from taking advantage of them. Because of this they do not get enough rest. They have less money, because it is given to someone who did not really need it. (God does not bless foolishness. He blesses good steward.) They do not make 'good' friends because they are too busy doing things that other people are meant to do to invest time in godly relationships. (Or they are doing things that no one is meant to do, but the angry person insisted that it should be done anyways!) Do you want your children, and godly friend, to learn, by your example, to be taken advantage of just because you were unable to say 'no?'

2. You hurt others, because those who love you do not enjoy seeing you suffer.

I use to teach karate and spent time talking to my students. More than one man has confided in me that the reason he does not go to church with his family is because he hates the way the women in the church take advantage of his wife, and show her no real friendship in return. He could not convince her that these were not her 'friends' and that she needed to say 'no.' Watching the woman he loves, and wants to protect, be taken advantage of, and not feeling like he can do anything about it (at least not without making her mad at him) is very hard on a man. So he gives up church and gets further from God as a result.

Example: I had a person in my life who frequently manipulated me into babysitting for her. She would say, 'Could you watch my children on Wednesday? Don't answer me now, talk it over with your husband and let me know,' and hang up. I would try to call back, repeatedly and often, to say no, but she screened her calls and would not pick up, or put on the answering machine. Wednesday would come and she would show up and say, 'Oh, I thought you said you would do it. What am I going to do now?' And I, being the doormat, watched the children. Until one day my husband grabs the phone out of my hands and says, 'Your children are going to have wonderful memories of their childhood with my wife,' and hangs up. That was the end of the 'friendship,' but it was never a friendship, because friends do not treat each other that way! (I should have said no to her and explained that I will not be watching the children again until she learns to ask without manipulating me.)

3. You hurt others by teaching them that it is okay to hurt people.

When we allow others to hurt us repeatedly without saying anything we are teaching them that it is okay to hurt people, or at least that they can do it without any consequences. You may be able to handle someone unfairly criticizing everything you do, but can the new Christian? You may also be able to do every little unnecessary task an angry person devises, but can the single mother? If you let someone bully you into doing things that you are not meant to do, they will do it to others and believe that it is okay to do so because you did nothing about it!

Example: I adopted a daughter who got angry over everything. For this reason we try to 'pick our battles,' which is usually good advice. After not doing all her schoolwork for the third day in a row, I decided to intervene. She answered, 'I don't see why you are upset about it today when you have been fine with me all week.' Even at a young age, she saw inconsistency and took my not saying something to her about her work as me believing it was okay not to do all of it. Adults will do the same thing. If you do not tell them that it is wrong, or that it hurts you, they will assume that they are okay in what they are doing and continue to do it! Not many people stop bad behavior without outside help, especially when it gets them things that they want.

How Being a Doormat Hurts You

1. Decreased self-esteem

Let's face it; it is hard to feel good about yourself when you know that you are being taken advantage of. It is also hard to feel good when you are doing so much, and no one is doing for you because you have not taken time to make good friends but have instead surrounded yourself with people who use you²⁰. Even if you have not figured out that you are being taken advantage of, and are still believing that you are just so much nicer than other people (and that this is why you are killing yourself when no one else is), you cannot feel good about yourself when you are run down and exhausted and the things you have been called to do, and thus love to do, are not getting done. (By the way, a sure sign that you are a doormat is believing that you are better than others who you know to be good Christians because you do so much more than they do. Or you are proud that you can put up with so much more garbage from

²⁰ Proverbs 18:5, 24; 23:6

mean people and still be 'nice.' Chances are you are not the 'best' Christian around, merely one who cannot say 'enough is enough.' Sorry, someone had to say it...but remember, I have been there! It is better on the other side!!! Stop being a doormat and find some good friends!)

2. You ruin 'good' relationships in your life.

People who take advantage of you wear you out. This is a problem, and keeps you from having better relationships because they take up all of your time, they make you crazy, they make you tired and thus irritable and people who love you do not want to watch you get hurt. Godly people also do not respect someone who can't manage their own life, so they will not see you as an equal that they wish to get close to²¹. If you are lucky, one of them may lend you a hand and try to teach you to say 'no.' Chances are some have already tried to say something to you and you would not listen to them, because you thought they were 'mean,' and 'cold hearted.' Look at what godly, stable, happy people say 'no' to in life and learn from them.

3. Desensitization allows you to do the same things to others.

Desensitization means that you are not sensitive to something anymore. When you allow someone to yell at you unnecessarily all of the time, you begin to believe that it is not so bad, and then start doing it to others without realizing it. This is the same for other things as well. When you tolerate sin against you, you begin to copy it and do it to others. One thing that I was always amazed at is that the people, who get picked on, often turn around and pick on others. For example: There was a woman I knew who, over the years, was persecuted severely by two other women. They were awful to her. One of her particularly painful memories was of one of the women telling her, 'Get behind me, Satan!' The irony was that more than one woman had shared with me that this woman had said exactly the same words to them! Why do we do that which hurts us the most to others? I don't know, but it is a Biblical truth²². If we do not deal with a problem, we tend to try to believe that it really isn't so bad. In doing so we make it easier for us to do it as well.

4. You will not be productive.

²¹ Proverbs 13:20

²² Proverbs 22:24-25

When you are running around doing things that others should be doing, then you are not doing what you should be doing!!! (Do I need to say more?)

5. Fear

Being a 'doormat' involves letting others hurt you without you saying anything to effectively change the situation. You are then going to get hurt repeatedly. It may only be hurt feelings, or being overworked, but it still hurts. No one likes being hurt. The more you hurt (even if you will not admit you are being hurt) the weaker you are. The weaker you are, the less you can handle being hurt, and the more afraid of being hurt you will become. You will not want to go to church or other events where people are for fear they will hurt you because you have no defenses! You will do nothing if they try to hurt you, so you get to the point where you cannot go anywhere so that no one can hurt you! Avoiding life is not good. Avoiding specific people and learning to say 'no' even if they get mad allows you the freedom to meet new people, and do new things, because they don't have to be 'safe' since you have the skills to say 'no' to problems and walk away. If you cannot say 'no' and walk away you will be at every mean person's mercy. Over time the number of mean people will add up, since mean people do not leave people who give them everything that they want²³! By learning to say 'no' you do not have to live in fear that you new friend will want more than you can give her²⁴. You will just say 'no.' If she cannot handle you saying 'no' than she is not a true friend, and never was. Move on. You have lost nothing- she never was a true friend!

By giving into people you are also feeding fear into your life because you are acting out of fear! When we do things that we really do not want to, we do them because we fear what the other person will do if we do not do those things. We are afraid that they will get mad; or that they will not like us; or that they will say things about us behind our backs and make us look bad. While they will probably do these things, we are not to do what they want. Instead we are to confront them when they misbehave again. If you do not have a church that encourages confrontation, then the church has a problem. Confrontation is good. It is how we, as Christians, fix our

²³ Proverbs 19:6

²⁴ 1 John 4:18

problems. We are not to let the sun go down on our anger²⁵, and if our brother sins against us, we are to go to him²⁶. Nowhere is scripture does it say to ignore a serious problem and hope it goes away!

How to Repent of Being a Doormat

1. Learn what God has called you to do, and what He has not. Here are a few hints:

- Hint #1: The Good Samaritan²⁷ did not stay with the injured man (he paid for his care and left) and did not take a stranger into his home (he put him up at an inn). We are thus allowed to go ONLY the extra mile, and not the whole journey with someone.

Example: I had a roommate who would go out and get drunk with her 'friends.' As I was frequently sick this year, I was often in bed early. Her friends would drop her off, and go back to their rooms, leaving me with a puking, tired person. I would take her to the bathroom and sit with her while she hugged the toilet. While she was moaning and waiting for the next wave of nausea, I would get some studying done. (She was in no condition for conversation.) Her 'friends' found out that I studied while she was 'sick' and berated me for being so insensitive. These were the same people who left her!

Sitting with her and making sure she did not die was enough. As this was a frequent occurrence, and she was in no condition to converse, there was no need to try to make this experience 'fun' too. Puking is your body's way of saying that it is not good to have this much alcohol in here! This was a lesson she needed to learn. (Plus she was enjoying the coolness of the porcelain toilet more than anything I could have said.) (This was not a case of being a doormat, as she was in serious danger at the moment, five foot one and a lot of alcohol is not something you can ignore. Her parents knew and eventually did not let her return to college.)

²⁵ Ephesians 4:26

²⁶ Luke 17:3

²⁷ Luke 10: 30-37

- Hint #2: We are called, by God, to do specific things. We are not the entire body of Christ²⁸!

While it is good to help occasionally when needed, no one (including the pastor, or his wife) should be doing everything. We all have specific talents and gifts. We also do not have certain talents and gifts. When we find ourselves doing ‘everything’ we are either being doormats, or our pride is telling us that we are indispensable supermen. Either way, it's bad.

- Hint #3: We enjoy what we are called to do, and do not enjoy what we are not called to do.

Here's an example: I love looking up and putting in footnotes (no kidding). I am actually trying to limit the number I use, but I really enjoy knowing that every point has a scriptural reference and finding it. I am using my gifting, and loving doing something that most people find tedious. I am also sitting here at 1:12 a.m., not because I have to, but because I am enjoying myself too much to go to bed! This is how you know you are doing what God called you to do!

Example #2: I may have seven children, but I hate working in the church nursery. I love cuddling babies. I don't mind diapers, and even used cloth on my own, but for some reason I cannot stand nursery duty. This is obviously not where God wants me, so I volunteer my teenage daughter, who loves it, when people ask!

Example #3: I am a good cook. I bake pies for my family and neighbors. I have not gotten a pie to turn out right for a church event in seven years! My husband finally told me that if I absolutely have to bring a pie we are buying one! Obviously I am not the church pie maker either!

Hating things, and not being good at them are good signs that this is not what God intends for you to do at this moment. And that is okay!

2. Remember that true friends, and godly people, will not punish you for saying ‘no.’ Good people understand that you cannot do everything. They have a right to

²⁸ Romans 12:4-8

ask, but you also have a right to say ‘no.’ (The only time this is void is if they are in serious danger if you do not help.) People who get mad when they don’t get everything that they want are immature and manipulative. Set boundaries and avoid these people when possible.

3. Remember that you have needs that must be met too²⁹!

While God provides for all of our needs, you can turn down the gift of God’s provision. God provides rest, but we can choose not to accept it by staying up too late (like 1:26 a.m.). God provides money, but we can give it away to people that He did not intend to have it, and leave none for ourselves. Here’s an example of someone who would not let God meet her needs:

Example: Lily worked at the church as a volunteer in her spare time. She loved it and did good work. Lily lost her secular job and the church decided to hire her as a paid employee. Lily continued to clean, and mend and putter productively as she had before. When she saw a need in the church, she used her money to pay for what was needed rather than going to the pastor. You see Lily’s ‘friends’ had made her feel guilty about being paid to clean the church, and this was her way of easing that undeserved guilt. Unfortunately, by the time the church’s ‘needs’ were met, Lily had no money for food or bills, and since she was now a full time church employee, she had no time for another job either³⁰.

4. Find godly people who are not ‘doormats’ and learn from them!

As Christians we are not in this alone. Where you are weak, find a person, or people, who are more mature in this area than you are, and talk to them. Copy how they deal with problems you do not wish to have anymore³¹.

Do not however, find other people who are just as bad as you in this area and commiserate³². This only keeps you in the situation as your friendships are based on sharing your woes. Once you no longer have woes, you have no friends to talk to.

²⁹ Galatians 6:5

³⁰ Ecclesiastes 5:19

³¹ 1 Corinthians 4:16, Hebrews 6:12, 13:7; 3 John 1:11

³² 3 John 1:11

This is not good. Support groups (like AA) work because they pair people up with people who are successful at overcoming the problem, not because they all sit around and complain that they can't seem to be successful either.

Example: I once watched a woman who was having serious trouble in her marriage. Many godly women, who had good marriages, tried to help her, but she did not like what they were saying as they sometimes told her that she was wrong, and that it was not all his fault. Instead she gravitated towards two women who had gone through messy divorces and hated men. Do you think her marriage improved? Of course not! But she had great 'friends' to talk to, who never told her that she was wrong. These are not good friends. Good friends tell you the truth, especially when you don't want to hear it because that is when you need it the most! –But they do it in love.

5. Learn to confront problems rather than ignore them³³. I was watching the movie Ant Bully with my children and the child bully in the beginning asks his victim, 'So what are you going to do about it? Nothing! Ha, ha, ha.' This is part of the reason 'doormats' have such a miserable life. The 'bullies' of the world know that they will do nothing. They have learned what type of people they can walk all over and have no problem doing so. While this is wrong; this is what happens.

Example: I was in a hotel. We had missed room service and asked the cleaning person to do our room. She said, 'yes' to my husband. He walked on. I then engaged in what I thought was pleasant conversation with her, as I wanted to be nice and thank her for doing this. Her reply changed to 'no.' Why? Because she had me correctly pegged as someone who would never do anything about her refusing to clean our room. I thought about what I should have done, and realized that a simple, 'Oh, well then I will talk to the front desk and see if anyone else can do it,' would probably work. You don't have to do much, but you do have to do something.

Learn to confront injustice as soon as it happens. While we correctly turn the other cheek, we do not stand there and take serious, or repeated abuse³⁴. If we allow the abuse to continue, the person who has hurt you has two choices: 1. To apologize on his own without any pressure from you to do so, (Which is why you turn the other

³³ Matthew 18:15

³⁴ Luke 22:36

cheek. By not retaliating you give him a chance to repent.) or 2. To justify his actions, and thus make it easier for him to do it again, because now he thinks he was somehow 'right' to do it. Let me make this easy for you: Not many repeat offenders suddenly change and choose option number one. Although on some level repeat offenders know when they have done wrong, their pride often gets in the way. If left to themselves, they would rather figure out why you deserved it, or how your actions forced them to behave that way, then to admit that they were wrong. If you let this happen, they will likely feel the need to repeat the injustice to you, just to prove to themselves that you deserve this treatment. Let me give you some examples of common justifications:

- 'I can't help it. She just makes me so mad.'
- 'If she would just learn how to dress properly, I wouldn't have any problem with her.'
- 'Why doesn't she just leave me alone when she knows I am angry?'
- 'I just know he doesn't like me.'
- 'She never said anything, but I know she thinks I shouldn't be in charge.'
- 'She thinks she is so great.'
- 'She isn't really that good, she is just trying to show off and make me look bad.'
- 'I know he was talking about me when he said that.' (Pastors frequently get this after a sermon! The people who confront the pastor usually aren't looking to repent- even though they are clearly convicted by his message. Instead they are hurt because they erroneously think he was mean to point out their flaws, especially in front of the whole church. Unless he mentioned the person's name specifically, this is probably wrong thinking!)

Yes. It is usually jealous, insecure people who set out to hurt you. They don't feel good about themselves, so when you succeed where they feel that they have failed they lash out, and then justify why they do it by blaming you for some perceived slight. Sometimes you do not even have to succeed. They could be just having a bad day and do not possess the emotional control to not take it out on an easy target -you. If you do not confront them, and make apology and repentance the easiest option, then you leave them with 'justification' and continued abuse as the easier choice.

Most people take the easiest route, so by saying nothing you set yourself up for further abuse, and make it easy for them to continue in sin.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. Your daughter is dating a man who is always late. You are unsure of his regard for her. He either does not know he is being rude, or he is toying with her emotions and does not care if she has to wait. In either case he does not respect her time. What do you do? *My thoughts: Tell your daughter that she is to wait thirty minutes, no more. This gives the man time to call. After thirty minutes she is to leave the house and do something else. If he asks why she wasn't there, she may respond, 'My parents have taught me that when someone is more than thirty minutes late and has not called you may assume that they are not coming. At that point it is no longer impolite if I leave, so I decided to go out with friends.' He will either start to arrive on time, or get mad and leave. A man who truly loves and respects a woman will fix the problem.*
2. You have been promised a promotion at work. When the time comes a co-worker gets the job. How do you respond? *My thoughts: You need to talk to the person who promised you the job. They may have forgotten, in which case they are likely to try to make it up to you in the future. It may also be that your performance was lacking and did not measure up to his superior's standards. In this case you need to know what you are doing wrong so that you can fix it and advance in the future. In any case remain calm and professional throughout the conversation.*

Chapter Nine: Mercy, Love and Forgiveness

As Christians we are suppose to forgive those who sin against us no matter how many times they do it³⁵. The problem is: How do we do it? I don't know about you, but I have a hard time forgiving someone who has really hurt me. What I discovered in scripture was that the root of my 'hard time' was that I had some misconceptions about what it meant to forgive someone. I also had some misconceptions about love, and what it is according to God. I also did not understand when to show mercy and when not to. So, the following chapter is intended to clarify some of the things that Christians say all the time, but may not really understand what they mean. Hopefully, in understanding them better, you will not fall victim to Satan's accusations³⁶ that you are not 'forgiving,' 'loving,' or 'merciful' when in reality you are all of these and more! (If you are not forgiving, loving or merciful Satan will not be trying to tell you this. It will be God. Learn to tell the difference, by learning God's Word. Satan will keep you very busy working on a failing you don't have if you allow him to.)

Forgiveness

So what does it mean to forgive someone? Not surprisingly the verses after Matthew 18: 15-17 (which deal with how to confront problems in the church) are about forgiveness. A parable is told about a 'lord' (or in some translations: a king) who is settling his accounts. A man owes the lord ten thousand talents. When the lord sets the punishment, slavery, the man begs for mercy. The lord forgives the debt and lets the man go. When the man demands payment from the people who owe him money however, the lord changes his mind and hands the man over to be tortured.

In this parable we see that forgiveness is a release from the punishment that went along with your sin. We also find that actions that show the person has not learned from the experience can lead to future punishment. This is obviously not 'forgive and forget' as some teach, but forgive, and watch. You do not hold the person accountable for the action forever. He is only accountable if it is obvious that he has not learned his lesson. If he has not learned, then a harder punishment may be given!

³⁵ Matthew 18:22,35

³⁶ Revelation 12:10

Why Do We Punish People?

In scripture we find that punishment is designed to teach the person who is sinning to stop sinning³⁷. Once they stop the sin, the punishment should be over and we should welcome them back with great love and compassion³⁸. Punishment is not the natural consequences of an action. Those fall under God's laws, and it is up to Him to decide when to restore the person's wealth, health, or other parts of their lives that were harmed by their sin. Punishment is the penalty we placed on the person when they refused to behave. In the church it is kicking them out of the fellowship. This 'punishment' should only be in effect until the person shows that they are repentant. Might the person repeat the sin? Sure. When they do, they are warned three times and kicked out again! How many times do we go through this process before the person has no more chances? Jesus says that he gets as many chances as he needs (seventy times seven)! We are never to say 'raca'³⁹, and call our brother worthless (unable to be helped).

Punishment is the way that we help people in serious sin to see that they are in sin, and thus in danger of falling away from God and going to hell. It is a loving thing to do, if we do it right and don't abuse it. It also means that as a Christian we don't have to be anxious about whether, or not, we are doing the right things. If we have hurt someone enough that they wish to break fellowship with us, they are required to go to us and allow us to make it right, or they must 'get over it.' If we refuse to make it right, then they may come to us with others, but they are not to 'cold shoulder' us, gossip, or use other types of passive-aggressive punishment instead! We get three warnings. Others also have to see the 'offense' as valid. If other (mature and godly) people do not see anything wrong with what we did, the person is obligated to 'get over it.' (If the group is made up of the person's close friends only it does not count! Confrontation with two or three 'witnesses' means confrontation with mature, unbiased people.)

We, as Christians, have a right to know what we have done wrong so that we may repent. God considers the problems in His fellowship so important that if you have been told that you offended your brother, and have done nothing about it, you are to leave the

³⁷ Proverbs 20:30; 21:11

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 2:6-7

³⁹ Matthew 5:22

altar and go fix it! God is saying that problems between Christians take precedence over the worship of Him. This means that our relationships with others are very important to God!

When Consequences Are No Longer Necessary And Should Be Abandoned

Let us look at First and Second Corinthians at the man who slept with his stepmother. (And you thought your church had issues...) In 1 Corinthians 5 we see Paul, who has warned them previously, ordering the church at Corinth to remove this man from their congregation, which they do. In 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 we see that the man has repented and returned to church. Here Paul tells the church that they need to comfort him and reaffirm their love for him lest he be overcome with sorrow. When someone truly repents we are to take him back and show him much love! While 'natural consequences' may remain, church punishment ends when someone repents!

Trust Versus Forgiveness

Punishment is done out of love. The people who are punished have serious problems that are ruining their lives and keeping them far from God. The purpose of punishment is to cause them to see their problem and change (repent). When they repent they need to be assured of our love. This does not mean that we trust them. They have known weaknesses. To put them in a place where they can easily repeat their sin is crazy. You are only making it easier for them to stumble and fail. It is not that you do not trust them, per se; it is that you do not want to see them fail, so you keep them away from their area of weakness. For example: A man who steals, then repents, is not put in charge of the church finance committee. A woman who is divisive is not put in charge of woman's ministry. A man who is 'foolish' does not become an elder. In time, trust may grow and it may become reasonable to use them in these ministries again. Someone with a recent problem, however well they are doing, does not need this type of temptation in their life.

The Lie of 'Forgive and Forget'

We never punish someone because we hate them. To hate them would be to not care what they do even though it is ruining their lives. Instead we punish them out of love. Since we never stop loving them, and praying that they repent, there is no need to 'forget' anything. In forgiving, we remove the punishment. Part of the 'repentance' for this person will be dealing with those he hurt and trying to make things better between them.

In doing so both sides must acknowledge their feelings and work through them. It is impossible to 'forget' a grievous injury. It is possible however to 'get over it.' In getting over it we work through our feelings, examine them honestly and replace the bad thoughts we are dwelling on with more positive ones. It is a process. This process is always faster when the person who has hurt us is sorry and the relationship is restored, otherwise we mourn the loss of a relationship as well as the hurt it inflicted. This is why going to the person you hurt and apologizing is so important. It is not only for the sinner that this is done, but also to help heal the one who was hurt. Emotional pain is real, and takes time to 'get over.' While we must 'get over it' eventually, the 'sinner' repenting can be a big help in the processes.

Pretending that nothing happened is not Biblical. Fixing your mistakes is. Further, testifying about what you were, compared to what you are now, is a powerful witness. Paul never claimed that he was 'perfect' because he was 'under the blood.' Instead he called himself the chief sinner, and told people he had once been a murderer. While this is not the kind of thing that society tells us to share, it is exactly what God wants us to share. What power is there in our testimony if we pretend that we have always been perfect?

We therefore do not 'forget' when we forgive for three reasons:

1. We are to keep the person from areas where he will easily stumble back into sin.
2. Repentance involves working through problems with those you love rather than ignoring them.
3. We have no testimony of God's grace in our lives if we can't admit we ever messed up.

Correct Thinking

While we should not pretend that the past never happened, neither should we dwell on it. Once we have dealt with the issue, we need to stop thinking about it, and move on to more positive things. We only have one life to live. We cannot change the past, and sometimes that past really stinks! We can however, determine that we are not going to let the past ruin our future. By dwelling on negative things that happened we are deciding to be miserable today. The Bible tells us to put the past behind us,

and look ahead. It also tells us to think about things that are lovely and good. Past hurts can either cripple us, or make us stronger. It is our choice.

Moving Forward

While it is necessary to talk things out after someone has seriously hurt you and wants to re-enter your life, it is not good to drag this process out. Effort must be made to rebuild the relationship in a timely manner. This does not mean that you can work through everything in one meeting. It does mean that the process should not take years. Reconciliation is best when both parties want to restore the relationship, and are willing to listen to what the other one is feeling. When this happens, the hurts can be put in the past, because the people involved begin to understand that neither party wishes to hurt the other one again. Once trust is restored it is not productive to keep bringing the past problem up.

Mercy

The Bible definitely teaches that mercy is good. In the Old Testament we see the deserved punishment for crimes, such as an 'eye for an eye' (Hamarabi's code). What we see in the Old Testament accounts however, was that the 'deserved' punishment was almost never carried out. Instead a lesser punishment was given. For example: David deserved to die for what he did with Bathsheba and her husband. God knew about it (of course) and sent Nathan, a prophet, to confront him. While Samuel, a prophet of the time, had killed by God's command, Nathan was not told to do so. Why? Probably because David repented. Were there still consequences? Yes, Bathsheba's baby died. But God had mercy on David and He did not give him the punishment that God, Himself, said he deserved.

God expects us to have mercy on others as well. The question is: When do we show mercy, and when is mercy not appropriate? According to biblical accounts, and parables, mercy is shown to people who appear to have learned their lesson. Since the purpose of punishment is to teach, if they have learned, what is more punishment going to accomplish? Once it is clear that the person has learned so that he won't easily repeat his sin, then the punishment is no longer necessary.

Mercy can also be revoked. If it is clear that the person was only repentant under punishment, the punishment can, and should, be restored. Many times people do

right, not because they wish to, but because they wish to avoid being punished. This is not true repentance. With true repentance the person understands that they did wrong, and does not wish to do it again. If a person returns to the sin as soon as it looks like no one is looking, then he is not repentant. Mercy is not indicated.

Mercy should also not be given because the person is hard to handle. Although it seems easier to give in, and lessen the punishment rather than face the person's wrath, it is not. First, the person will not learn, and will repeat his sin. If the sin was serious enough for the church to get involved, this is not what you want. Second, the person will learn that angry, manipulative behavior will get you things. This will make it harder to teach the person not to be angry and/or manipulative. Yelling, abusive behavior, and/or manipulation never get anything- not one little bit! (This is also a good rule for children. Throwing a fit should get you no benefits!)

Love

The Bible also tells us that when someone repents we are to show him much love. The question is: What is love? In 1 Corinthians 13 we see that love is patient, love is kind etc., etc. I think we can all understand that. What is hard to understand is what that looks like. Is it the mushy type of touchy feely love that some people (mainly in movies) seem to enjoy? Is it the stoic father, whose love for his son is evident even though the man's expression never changes? Or is it something entirely different?

Let's look in the Bible to see how people showed love. Mary Magdalene was definitely mushy, and touchy feely, and Jesus was okay with that. He did not condemn it as 'sexual,' or 'too much.' Martha showed love by serving. Levi threw a party to show how excited he was about Jesus and invited everyone, and Jesus was okay with that too, even though the Pharisees were not. John the disciple leaned on Jesus' chest when they ate. This was okay too.

Obviously our outward show of love will differ depending on our personalities. Love is therefore not dependant on how we show our affection, but just a matter of actually showing it in a way the other person can understand is you loving them. If the other person does not realize that you love them, then you have not successfully shown love.

Love is also not about always making the other person happy. Many times people who love you will say and do things you do not like. This is because:

1. They are human and mess up.
2. You have unrealistic expectations.
3. They are working in your best interests, even when you are not.

Love means looking out for each other's best interests. This does not mean always making them happy. When someone always says what you want to hear, chances are they are not 'loving' you, because you are not right all of the time! Love is also honest and open. When someone loves you they share themselves with you. This involves telling you what they think. These thoughts will not always be your thoughts. Love is then not a warm gushy feeling, but an open, honest relationship that works towards the best interests of each person.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. Your child storms up the stairs, banging doors and yelling at everyone who gets in her way. You know that it is 'that time of the month.' What do you do? *My thoughts: This is a problem that often gets teenage girls mercy, but should not. She will have this problem every month. If she does not learn to deal with it, she, and everyone she has a relationship with, will suffer for most of her life. Buy her some Midol, talk to her and then punish her behavior as you would on a normal day, explaining that she cannot let her hormones override her common sense.*
2. A man in your church has parked a valuable car at the far end of the church parking lot out of harms way. A teen purposely goes over to the car and damages the paint job. He is the son of a single mother with no money. When the man discovers who is at fault he wants to ignore it as she has so much to deal with. What do you do? *My thoughts: I would advise the man to confront the issue. The teen can work off the money for the repairs himself. It does not help the mother to teach her son that he can do whatever he wants without consequences. Further, it is obvious that this mother needs help raising her son. The man with the car, or another mature believer, should be encouraged to take a positive role in the boy's life that encourages him to work, or teaches him a skill. My adopted son had a pastor that he helped with bee keeping. He learned bee keeping, and has his own*

hive. It is good to have positive adult role models in your children's lives even if they have both a mother and a father at home. I strongly suggest allowing your children to form relationships by working (cutting wood, babysitting, being tutored) with your adult friends!



Chapter Ten: Godly Relationships

What is a Friend?

The first thing we need to figure out is: What is a friend? In our society today we call people that we barely know ‘friend.’ This is not God’s definition of a friend. A friend is someone who sticks closer than a brother⁴⁰. They are a part of your life. They give you good counsel⁴¹, help you when you need it, and tell you when you are doing wrong⁴². And, you do this for them as well. Friendship is not one-sided. Both people work towards each other’s best interests.

In the Bible there are two relationships that are frequently referred to when people speak about godly friendships. They are Jonathan and David⁴³, and Naomi and Ruth.

In the case of Jonathan and David, Jonathan saved David’s life and gave up any claim to the throne of Israel, while David took care of Jonathan’s crippled son, keeping him in the palace, after Jonathan’s death. While David’s actions may not seem as significant as Jonathan’s, we must take into consideration the culture in which they lived. At this time in history the kingship normally went to the closest relative of the king. David was not related to King Saul, and at the time he took the throne, Michal, Saul’s daughter and David’s wife, was living as another man’s wife, whom he later ‘rescued’ and then ‘put away.’ David thus had no claim to the throne other than the dead prophet Samuel’s anointing, which was done in secret. Further David was from the tribe of Judah, a large tribe. No one minded a king from tiny Benjamin (Saul), but since the tribes fought each other, the thought of a king from a large tribe scared people who did not want to concede to being ruled by Judah. For this reason David spent the first seven and a half years reigning over Hebron alone. Jonathan’s son was therefore a threat to David’s monarchy. Many kings of the time killed even their own family members so that they did not fight them for the throne. David took the dead king’s closest heir and treated him like royalty within the

⁴⁰ Proverbs 18:24

⁴¹ Proverbs 27:9

⁴² Proverbs 27:6

⁴³ 1 Samuel

palace⁴⁴. This was a selfless act of friendship. David took care of that which was precious to Jonathan, even after his death, instead of being worried about his own position.

Ruth and Naomi are another example of Biblical friendship. Ruth gleaned and provided for Naomi, while Naomi found Ruth a husband who would care for her. One thing we should notice here is that friendship does not mean giving up what you need. In the account of Ruth and Naomi we find Ruth eating what she needs, then bringing the rest to Naomi. Friends do not expect you to care for them before your needs are met. They also do not expect you to do what they are responsible for doing for themselves.

Unfortunately in life there are many people who use the title friend in order to impose on other people. Friendship is a mutual thing. While it will not always be equal, there should be giving from both people involved.

Example #1: When we moved to our current home we had neighbors who helped with everything. As we bought an old farmhouse that needed much work, there was a lot to help with. It was hard to return the favors, because they did not have the same amount of need. In time however, we were able to provide babysitting, free medical care etc. to these people. While in the beginning they were doing much more than we were, it was not because we were unwilling, and when the opportunities to help presented themselves, we were more than willing to do so. This give and take is what friendship is all about.

Example #2: Franny was a young mother who needed help. The children were overwhelming and her husband was working two jobs. Her friend, Flora, was more than willing to help. She did housework with her, watched her children and gave them rides to activities. After awhile the family was doing much better, and Flora needed a favor. One of her children needed a ride, and Franny would be taking her children too. She called her friend and asked for her help. The answer was 'no,' Franny did not want to drive that much out of her way. Other requests for help met with similar answers. Flora did not know what to do. Franny expected her to understand that she just couldn't do these things, as they were inconvenient. But these were things that

⁴⁴ 2 Samuel 9

Flora had readily done for her. Flora felt used. This was not a friendship. Franny took what Flora happily gave, but was not willing to give back. While Flora was right to help when needed, she had done charity work only. She had not made a friend, because Franny did not yet know how to be one. Flora now has a choice. She can work with Franny and teach her what friendship is, or she can acknowledge that she helped when she was needed and move on. Both choices are hard and in reality the choice is up to Franny. If Franny is not ready to be in a closer relationship, there is little that Flora will be able to do.

If we are going to have close relationships we need to learn to acknowledge when we do not have one, and either work to get closer or move on. This does not mean that we never interact with the person. It just means that they are ‘acquaintances’ and that the majority of our energy goes into other relationships. The Bible recommends that we have two or three close friends, and warns us not to have too many. The truth is that it is hard to become truly close to many, many people. While there will be a lot of people we enjoy in our lives, only a few will we be able to give the type of time and attention that it takes to become truly close.

Since Biblical friendship is a very close relationship, we must remember that Biblical admonishments about not being friends with certain people are for these types of close relationships. The Bible then does not forbid us to be acquaintances with the ungodly. If that were so we would have a hard time being a witness to them. Instead it is only our close friends, spouses and business partners that are to be Christians. This makes sense, for how does a non-Christian give godly counsel? For although there are many non-Christians who follow biblical principles and lead very moral lives, they are not godly. They have merely figured out that God’s way leads to a better life. When God’s way does not seem to work for them, they will quickly abandon it. They are moral for their own reasons, and only as long as those reasons seem valid to them will they use them. When things get rough, you could be in too deep to avoid being tossed into whatever new path they choose. ‘It’s not biblical’ will not be a valid argument to this person, as they do not have that type of relationship with Christ. For this reason the Bible tells us not to make non-Christians our best friends, business partners or spouses, no matter how ‘good’ they are.

How to Have a Friend

Openness

A true friend is one who we are open and honest with. We tell them the whole truth, not just the parts we want them to hear. We do not pretend around them. When they walk into the room we do not feel the need to change how we behave. They can come over to our house when it is messy, and see us when we are stressed out, or sad. Of course they also have a place in our lives when we are happy, and we honor them with good hospitality as well. A good friend knows our faults and our shortcomings. They are who we tell our secrets to⁴⁵, and who we rejoice with as well. Since friends take time to make, we know that we can trust them because they have been there for us before⁴⁶. In my life I have had two sets of truly good friends. Here is how we acted.

Example #1: A small group of us at karate were saved together and stuck together until life led us all in different directions. This was a place where I could go in and announce that I was in a bad mood and did not feel like changing. When I had an abused wife staying with me, and her husband threatened to come over while my husband worked nights, at my husband's insistence, we called one of the men to stay with us. When we adopted and things were rough, with my permission, they talked to my children about their behavior. I also helped by teaching classes, and taking care of their children. We talked about everything, and many people came to the Lord from just overhearing us talk about God in our lives, and seeing how we treated each other. While I still see some of them, the closeness we shared is lessened by distance and lack of time. I know that God has moved us all into places where we can be more effective, but I do miss the closeness we shared.

Example #2: I was part of a group in college called the 'scumpuppies.' (Long story) This was not a Christian group, but I was not a Christian. Fortunately, the group knew more about Christian friendship principles than many Christians do today, so I will use them to explain. I was dating a boy for two and half years. My friends found out that he was dating other people, and going to bars to flirt etc. One

⁴⁵ James 5:16

⁴⁶ Proverbs 17:17

winter night they decided I had to go out. They knew where he was, and braved cold snowy roads to take me there, without telling me what I was going to see. After I realized what was going on they did not take me home. They rented funny movies and spent the rest of the night making sure I was okay. This is what friends do. An acquaintance calls you up and tells you that your boyfriend is cheating on you. A true friend gets into the ditch with you and makes sure you come out okay.

Honesty

Real friends don't lie for you, and they don't lie to you⁴⁷. They do not change the story, or the past to fit their mood, and they do not say things just to hurt you. Neither do they say things just to make you feel good.

Example #1: One of my husband's best friends came over after the birth of our second baby. My husband fixed dinner (potatoes, lentils and onions) and we all ate. Part way through the meal Randy asks everyone, 'Do you really like this? I mean be honest, is this really what you guys want to eat?' only a true friend can get away with a question like that. He was not being mean. He just knew that we moved to Maine and, under the influence of a very health conscious environment, were trying to eat healthier. His inquiry was honest. Growing up on meat, and more meat, he could not see vegetarian fare as being palatable to anyone, and wanted to know if we were eating it out of obligation to our new-found life style (which went away under the influence of Buffalo wings and McDonald's once we moved) or, whether we had found food that we enjoyed, but he did not. This information would become part of his decision as to whether or not he should try to be healthier as well. He chose not, and is somehow in better shape than we are today anyways.

Example #2: I had a friend for years that I went out with every Tuesday morning. When I was going to adopt, she was kind and supportive. It was not until the social worker needed non-relative references fast that I found out she did not believe that anyone should have more than two children, and that my husband and I should not adopt. Her feeling was that she was having a hard time with her children, so no one else could possibly do it well. (She was taking medication for the stress.) I did not know any of this.

⁴⁷ Proverbs 27:6

Our entire friendship consisted of her telling me what she thought I wanted to hear, rather than how she actually felt. She also could not see how anyone could be different from her. If she could not handle it, then no one could. I felt betrayed. I felt like I never really knew her, because she always looked like a wonderful mother with no stress, and I felt like she never really knew me, because I loved being a mother and was happy doing it. Although we spent much time together, and did a lot for each other, we were never really friends because the lack of honesty kept us from actually getting to know each other.

Time

Real friendships take time. That involves living close to each other, or making the effort to see and talk to each other. While I love my friends who have moved away, and talk to them like we never left each other when I am able, they are not the friends the Bible talks about. Biblical friends interact frequently. They share each other's lives. This is why a person has so few of them. Friendship is a commitment⁴⁸.

Example: I recently met a group of friends that exemplify this type of commitment. This group was well over seventy and had been going to dinner once a week, at the same restaurant, since they graduated from high school. Now those are friends! (They were also loud, happy and hard to miss. After all of those years they were still having a good time!)

F.Y.I. My husband takes me out on a 'date' once a week. The children know that this is our 'date-night' and look forward to cooking, having a soda, and watching movies at home. When they were little we had baby sitters, whom they still love, and who are another positive influence in their lives. The children bond with each other, while my husband and I spend time relaxing and reviewing what is going on in our household. (No chores/ errands allowed!) I would highly recommend this to every couple!

True Love

While I explained earlier that true love is working in the best interests of the other person, rather than yourself, it is probably time to go over 1 Corinthians 13. This is not just for romantic love; it is a recipe for loving others. Remember that this list is in a section of scripture about the body of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is therefore

⁴⁸ Proverbs 17:17

about how we are to act around each other, and not exclusively about how to behave towards your spouse. (Though it is a very good idea to treat your spouse better than any friend!)

This list of 'loving requirements' is not just about how you are to love others, but it also gives us a clue as to whether, or not, they love you. Actions tell a lot about what is in a person's heart. Unfortunately there are people in the world who love you only as long as you please them. For some of us, this is an easy trap to fall into as we were taught to please others in exchange for approval. While it is not wrong to be nice to people whenever possible, it is not a true relationship if one person pulls away whenever they do not get exactly what they want. 1 Corinthians 13 therefore not only gives us a list about 'how to love,' but also lets us know what love looks like so that we may know whether, or not, a person truly 'loves' us. (This would be extremely good to know before you marry!)

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

1. *Love is patient.* People who love you do not expect you to change over night. They allow you time to grow and repent. They work with you towards this goal, but remember, patience does not mean they will wait forever.
2. *Love is kind.* People who love you are not in the habit of being mean to you. Angry, vengeful, manipulative people are not 'kind.'
3. *Love is not jealous.* People who love you are happy when you succeed, even when they do not. They do not compare themselves to you, or compete with you. They are comfortable being them, and they are also comfortable with you being different from them. People who need all of their friends to think the same as they do, do not understand the beauty of godly love.
4. *Love does not brag.* While people who love each other share their good news, they do not do so in a way that puts the other person down. 'I bought a new car, come and see it,' is acceptable. 'I bought a new car, say when are you going to get rid of your hunk of junk?' is not so good.
5. *Love is not arrogant.* To truly love someone you cannot be thinking that you are better than they are. If you think that your friend is below you, and lucky to have you, you are being arrogant. I had a friend that used to say, 'It was wonderful for

- you to have seen me.’ He was joking, but many people actually see themselves as better than those they love. In an episode of Mad About You, the characters say something to the effect, ‘Why do we hang out with them? I think they need us. They look up to us socially.’ This is not true love.
6. *Love does not act unbecomingly.* Love is not rude. People who love us do not try to embarrass us for fun. Further, if they know something bothers us, they actually try to avoid doing it to us!
 7. *Love does not seek its own.* People who love can tolerate it when the other person is different than they are. They do not need you to be just like them. Seeking to make everyone like you is the last thing God wants. That is why God made us all different, and gave us different gifts and abilities. He likes variety, and so should we! I have had people not want to be my friend because they thought they were not good enough. I was ‘educated,’ or a ‘doctor’s wife.’ These things may be true, but that does not mean that I want to be lonely! I have often heard speakers say that they are lonely on the road because, while people worship them to a point, they have no one behaving like a friend to them the entire time they are gone. They wish that people would realize that they are people just like them, and enjoy going to dinner, and talking about nothing much, just like everyone else. People who love do not need their friends to be ‘just like them.’
 8. *Love is not provoked.* Love does not get mad easily. If your friend stops talking to you on a regular basis, and you have to keep chasing after her to find out ‘why’ she is not your friend. She is easily ‘provoked’ and not afraid to use the relationship as a tool to manipulate you into running after her. A friend talks to you about hurts, and does not get ‘hurt’ over every little thing. A friend also assumes that you did not mean to do it, giving you the benefit of the doubt when talking about it to you.
 9. *Love does not take into account a wrong suffered.* Love does not keep track of past sins like we are supposed to record transaction for a bank account. Repented sins are gone. They are not a laundry list to be brought back up on any random occasion. If someone you love has a problem with you, they do not lash out by bringing up everything you ever did to them in the past. While they may show

- you a trend in your behavior towards them, they stay on topic, discussing the problem at hand that they are seeking a solution for. A friend does not bring up the time in fourth grade when you kicked her under the desk, every time she gets mad at you!
10. *Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.* People who love you are not going to be happy when you sin. If you have done wrong, they are not going to slap you on the back and say, 'Good one!' People who love you want to see you do your best. They are not people-pleasers who tell you everything you do is wonderful. Instead they tell you what they actually think. When you do wrong, they will seek you out, and will assume that you wish to make it better. They will also not rejoice when someone hurts you.
 11. *Love rejoices with the truth.* True friendship is based on truth. A true friend wants to know who you are, not what you want people to think you are. There is no room for pretending in a true friendship. Open and honest is the only way to be. True friendship is not based on lies, half-truths, or hidden motives.
 12. *Love bears all things.* This line is frequently used to manipulate people into staying in an abusive relationship. God says to avoid the angry, lazy, foolish, strife-ful etc. so that is not what it means. If your friend is in serious sin, knows it, and will not repent then you are to leave. If your friend is seriously hurting, a true friend will stay with them through it all. This is what it means when it says, 'Love bears all things.' There is no pain too great for a true friend. True friends are there for the good, as well as the bad. (Even more so when it is bad!)
 13. *Loves believes all things.* People who love you do not assume you are lying, or really meant something else other than what they said. In a true friendship we do not play these types of games. First, everyone tries their best to be honest. Second, no one assumes that another is secretly being mean to them, or harboring bad thoughts regarding them. Friendship means that we trust each other to be honest, and believe that what we say is what we mean. Since true friends try hard not to blow up and say a whole bunch of stuff they don't mean just to hurt the other person, this should be easy. Right?

14. *Love hopes all things.* Even when things look bad, love hopes. When your friend learns that there are rumors going around and the only one who knew about it was you, she still hopes that you have a reasonable explanation and did not mean to hurt her. She does not first assume the worst; she assumes the best and then talks to you about it. Love also hopes that you will do well. I really learned this lesson when I adopted three children that did not behave, as I might have liked. In adopting I chose to love them. In loving them, I had to hope that they would want to do better, and work to do it. They did. (For the most part, they are still human.)
15. *Love endures all things.* There is nothing that a person who loves you will not go through with you. If you are repentant, they will get over your past sins against them. If you are sick, they will hold your hand. If your husband leaves, they will help as much as they are able. Love stays no matter what life brings. (Job's friends, for all of their faults, stayed a week in silence with him before they began their fault-finding mission. They endured; they just did not 'hope' or, 'believe' very well.) This does not mean that love stays while you abuse them. When you choose to abuse your friend, you have terminated the relationship. They leave because there is no relationship. The relationship therefore did not end with them physically leaving, it ended when you chose to repeatedly abuse them through anger, strife, manipulation etc. God says we are not to put up with this.
16. *Love never fails.* People do fail, but God's love does not. A friendship grounded in God, and that follows His rules, will last. Depart from His plan, and you do not have the same chances of success. Friends will therefore be good to each other, like the world, but they will also confront, share, be truthful etc. The greatest gift God gave us is love⁴⁹. Let us then learn how to use this gift well!

Real Help

Since loving people involves action, and that action is usually known as help, I thought it would be a good idea to discuss what real 'help' looks like⁵⁰. I have been

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:13

⁵⁰ James 2:14-26

'helped' many times in life when, although I appreciated the thought, the 'help' actually left me in worse shape than before the person came!

Help involves looking around and figuring out what the person truly needs. Some people have the attitude that if they are going to 'help' then the person is going to just have to accept what they do. This is a wrong attitude and makes me question the person's motives in helping. A person who truly wishes to help, will want the person helped to be happier and in better shape when they are done. In my experiences this is where people go wrong:

1. To be helpful you need to do the things that the person least wants to do. Help is not when people do the things you enjoy for you and leave you with only the things you hate to do. When you are tired from having a baby this is the last thing you want to have happen. Instead of getting to put away all of the 'oh so cute' baby outfits, you get to clean your toilet! This is not helpful; it steals your joy and leaves you with the junk!
2. To be helpful you need to finish the job. Sometimes, helping to do half the job actually leaves the person with more work to do! (My sister yelled at me for this.) I stripped the beds after we had visited her and left the sheets in the laundry room. Now, if she wanted to do any other laundry, she had to deal with the sheets. If I had left the sheets alone, she could have waited until she had the energy to tackle the sheets herself. Putting in a load of laundry means someone has to take it out and put it in the dryer, then fold it and put it away. Laundry in the laundry basket however, can keep until another day. If you cannot finish the task, it may be more helpful not to start it!
3. To be helpful you must respect the person's way that they like things. My in-laws are tall. I am not as tall. They like to put things on the top shelves. I keep nothing I remember owning on the top shelves because I cannot reach them. When they put things on the top shelves, it means that I am going to have to get a chair to retrieve them! It would be easier to merely take them out of the dishwasher for me. When you are nine months pregnant this is an issue.
4. Respect the person's right to have different standards than you do. Some people come over and insist on 'fixing' things in my home that I do not feel need to be

‘fixed.’ The irony is that they expect thanks after they do what I told them not to do! For example: When we were fixing up our old farmhouse we had a spare room that we piled everything that we needed, but was in the way, into. This included tools, carpets for other rooms that were yet to be painted etc. The room was a mess, but since it could be closed off from the children, I did not care. It was one less thing I had to keep clean, and it kept us from having to go to the basement for everything. You got it. Someone came over, and after being told not to, cleaned the room and laid carpet while we were at church. It is hard to put dirty tools on good carpet. Now we had to keep this room clean as well, or undo the work she had done and insult her.

Now I do not want you to be ungrateful to people who are really trying to bless you, but are in truth failing miserably at it. What I want you to learn is how to be truly helpful to others, so that you are indeed a blessing to them. In order to do this you must talk to them and get to know what they want. A woman with seven children may look at the casserole you brought over for her and think, ‘Oh great, now I have to clean the dish, make sure it doesn’t get broken, and remember to return it before someone does a science experiment in it.’ Instead she may need something easier than a home cooked meal, like an adult to talk to! Before you help, look around and see what the person truly needs. When many people are helping, creativity helps. One of my friends had her church doing meals after she had surgery. Her husband ran a dairy farm and would have a hard time getting out to do the shopping, so we bought her shampoo, toilet paper, paper plates, napkins etc., all the things you might run out of with a large family, but no one thinks to bring over. Even if you do not run out, they never go to waste. (Hopefully she will not read this and confide in me that it really was not helpful! That is the joy of being human, sometimes when we think we are so right and good, we may be very off base! This is why we need good friends, to tell us when we are seriously off the mark.)

What Makes a Godly Marriage

My husband and I liken a marriage to a corporation. He is the owner of the company and I am the president, or administrator. While he sets the vision for the family, and thinks more in terms of long-term goals, I deal with more of the day-to-day grunt work of getting it done. We talk, a lot. We believe that communication is the key to

having a good marriage. He is the head of the house, but this does not mean that I do not get to make decisions. He trusts me not to go against what he wants for the family. He assumes that my decisions during the day were made with the best of intentions. If he does not like what I have decided he respects me enough to talk to me without the children present. If we do decide that something that I decided should change, he allows me to change it. He does not go to the children and tell them, 'I don't care what your mother said, I am the head of this house.'

On the other hand, I do not do things that I know he dislikes. I also do not stop him from punishing the children, even though I would have done it differently. While I may be with the children longer each day, they are his children too. Here are some things I have seen that you should never do.

Example #1: Do not ever do this! I was once talking to a woman on the phone who considered herself more spiritually mature than her husband. She usually did the children's bedtime routine, but since she was on the phone, he decided to put them to bed. She had to get off the phone a short time later, because he was 'doing it all wrong.' Children will survive if prayers are not done the same way every night, but a marriage, in which the man receives no respect, and where he cannot be the priest in the home, will not.

Example #2: Do not do this either! This is a common complaint from the men in karate. The man tries to help load the dishwasher, or do the laundry. The woman comes in and yells at him because he is doing it all wrong, and proceeds to fix what he has done. He goes away upset, determined never to help again.

If your husband offers to help, let him. If it is merely a difference of opinion, let him do it his way; it is his house too. If it is truly inconvenient, explain it to him in a way that makes you look helpless, instead of making him look incompetent. Tell him why it will be harder for you, or that the dishwasher doesn't clean well, so you have to do things just so. (You may just end up with a new dishwasher!) Whatever you do, do not imply that he does not know how to do dishes! He is your knight in shining armor, who is trying to be good to you. Never treat him like a child that you are frustrated with and needs to be scolded. His position in the family makes this inappropriate, even if he did use axle grease to shine your fine china!

Example #3: This is a common misconception in a Christian marriage. The husband comes home, and the child says, 'Mom told me I couldn't have supper until my homework is done.' The man says, 'We'll see about that.' He does not want to punish children with food, but instead of finding out why his wife has said this, he immediately contradicts her because he is the 'head of the house.' Unfortunately, by doing this he undermines her authority over the child. He also does not assume the best about his wife's decisions. This conversation should happen when they are alone, and the punishment stands until the conversation occurs. If the punishment needs to be changed, the wife, who gave it, is allowed to change it, so that the child knows that she has authority in this matter. A husband cannot micromanage. The wife needs to be able to make decisions while he is not there. He must understand that these decisions must be made by her on the spur of the moment, and are not always as well thought-out as she might like. He has the advantage of not being in the middle of the problem while trying to make decisions. It is always easier to make decisions when there is time to think, and you are looking at it from the outside.

A Wife's Role

To understand what a godly wife is to be, we must look to Proverbs 31. While we are never going to achieve this perfection, like everything else in the Bible, we are to be striving towards it!

1. An excellent wife is worth far above jewels. If we are better than jewels (riches) we had better act like it. A wife who puts her husband down, or refuses to shower, is not behaving in a way that makes him feel like he has something better than riches at home. A wife who shows her love, and respects her man, makes him feel like he has a better life than even a richer man.
2. Her husband trusts her. In order to have trust you must be trustworthy. Do not play games, or be sneaky. Open and honest is the only way to be.
3. She does him good, not evil. One of the most common ways a wife does a man evil is by setting up situations where he can only fail.

Example: One of my relatives was an expert at this. As a child I thought her husband was awful, because he refused to do the things she wanted. As I grew

older, I realized that he was trying hard to please her, but she refused to tell him what she wanted! Her excuse, if I tell him what I want then it won't mean as much.

Men are not mind readers, and they think differently than women do. Most of them will not be able to figure out what you want unless you tell them. This does not mean that they love you less, or do not really know you; it simply means that they look at life differently than you do. Many men would be happy with tools for every holiday. When he buys you 'tools' such as a microwave oven, he thinks he is doing well, since he wanted the band saw. The truth is that you bought him a sweater, and wanted a saw. He bought you a microwave and you wanted jewelry. Neither one of you talked about what you actually wanted. The difference is that the man is less likely to pout about it.

4. She looks for wool and flax. She shops! But she shops for the best price, not to fill her closet with more shoes than she can ever wear.
5. She works with her hands in delight. She does manual labor, happily. This includes scrubbing the toilet, and the place beside the toilet that gets grungy when he misses...
6. She brings her food from afar. Someone once said that a man's heart is through his stomach. It is generally true that men like good food. Make sure he has things that he likes.
7. She rises while it is still night, and gives portions to her maidens. She may have servants, but she is not lazy. She does not stay in bed all day. Instead she cares for everyone in her household, no matter how low status they are.
8. She considers a field and buys it. She manages money. She makes good financial decisions, and her husband can trust her to make big purchases wisely.
9. From her earnings she plants a vineyard. She works and earns money. While a couple may decide that it is better for the wife to stay home, it is not ungodly for her to work and manage money.
10. She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She is physically fit!

11. Her lamp does not go out at night. In Biblical times a lamp was left burning so that the other lamps could be lit easily in the morning. A good wife made sure there was enough oil in the lamp, so that it would still be burning come morning. Today, this would mean that a good wife makes sure there is enough oil in the tank, milk in the fridge, or bread in the cupboard for lunches.
12. She stretched out her hand to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. Here she is making clothes. Today we buy them, but the message is the same, a good wife makes sure that her family has what it needs: clothes, sheets, boots etc.
13. She is not afraid of the snow. This is because her family has the clothes they need.
14. She extends her hand to the poor. She is generous and giving to those who are in need.
15. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. She dresses in a way that shows others that her husband provides well for her. This is not a woman who runs out of the house in curlers and a housecoat!
16. Strength and dignity are her clothing. She walks with confidence. This is not a timid mouse, but a woman who knows her husband loves her, and considers that to be enough for her self-esteem. She has dignity, and does not need to stoop to flirting, or rude behavior to get attention in order to boost her self-esteem.
17. She opens her mouth in wisdom and teaches others. She knows how to behave and is able to teach others. She does not 'play dumb,' or say foolish things, like gossip.
18. She looks well to the ways of her household. She actually knows what is going on in her home. One of the worst things I have seen is the tendency for children, who have committed horrendous crimes, to leave a ton of evidence regarding what they had been doing in their bedroom, or in the basement. God obviously means for us to know what our children are doing. This woman looks well at what goes on in her house. Obviously she is not respecting her children's imagined right to privacy!

19. She does not eat the bread of idleness. She is not lazy!!!! (This does not mean that she does not rest. Rest is Biblical!)

20. Her children rise up and bless her. This is the Biblical test of good parenting. What do your children say about you? A good mother has children who say, and do, things to bless her. (Children are human too. This will not be an everyday thing, but it should occur often.)

21. Her husband also praises her. Let's look at what he is to say about a godly wife:

- She excels above all other women. (If every woman is called to be a godly wife, how can we make sure our husband believes we are the best? It is because we get to know him, and work hard to please. We will then be the perfect wife for him!)
- 'Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.' Her husband realizes that she will age, and lose her physical beauty, but he does not care, because his wife fears the Lord, and he sees how much better his life is because of it!
- 'Give her the product of her hands and let her works be praised in the gates.' Her husband loves the fact that she does valuable work, and enjoys hearing other 'mature' men (who hung out at the city gates) praise her for her deeds.

A godly wife works in her husband's best interests, and submits to his wishes for the household. No house can have two heads, or it will be divided. She gives him godly counsel, but in the end concedes to his plan if hers differs. (Unless it is ungodly, or puts her family in moral danger!)

A godly wife may even have more power and authority outside the home than her husband. Deborah was a judge in Israel and led an army, while married to a man named Lapidoth. He was not a timid man either for his name means 'Fire.'

A Husband's Role

1. Head of the Household⁵¹. This is NOT a dictatorship. Being head of the house means that a husband has a lot of responsibility. It is his job to determine the future plans of the family. It is also his job to make sure that everyone is provided

⁵¹ Ephesians 5:23

- for. He portions out the resources⁵², and if they are short, he does without. While a wife's first priority is to the people in the home; his first priority is to providing for the home. This usually means his first priority is having a good job. If more is needed, he may need to get a second job. If his wife makes more than he does, he may fulfill this obligation by deciding that she will work, while he cares for the children. In this case by laying aside his pride, he is seeing that his family is fed.
2. Teacher⁵³. The man is in charge of the spiritual, as well as the practical well being of his household. He is even supposed to ensure that his wife is as well versed in scripture as he is⁵⁴!
 3. Lover⁵⁵. He is to love his wife as if she was his own flesh, and as Christ loved the church. This means that he is to look out for her best interests even if it means his loss, even his death. He is never to hurt her, or cause her harm.
 4. Father. A man is to raise his children in a way that results in godly behavior, and respect towards him and his wife. He is to teach them the ways of the Lord constantly, and prepare them for life⁵⁶.

Relative's Role

One of the saddest things is problems with the in-laws. These problems are so common we have sitcoms about them. They are not considered failures, but rather something that everyone has to deal with. This is unfortunate. In our family, we have had many problems with both sides of our family. For this reason I have spent much time observing and talking to families who do not have these problems. Here is what I have found that works.

1. A man must leave his father and mother.⁵⁷ This means that if there are problems between his wife, and his mother, (that are not sin, but differences in opinion) he must side with his wife and not his mother. He must also not allow his mother to criticize his wife. She is a precious jewel, and does not have to put up with

⁵² 1 Samuel 1:5

⁵³ Deuteronomy 4:9; 11:19; Ephesians 6:4

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:35

⁵⁵ Ephesians 5:25-31

⁵⁶ 1 Timothy 3:4

⁵⁷ Genesis 2:24

unproductive criticism. The man must therefore speak to his parents firmly if they are giving his wife a hard time about how she does things. How she runs the home, cares for the children, dresses etc. is under his authority, not theirs. If he does not have a problem with it, neither should they. (He should also not decide to have a problem with it just to please them!) Similarly a wife must not allow her husband to be criticized by her family either, nor should she change her mind just to please them.

2. Parents must stop trying to raise their children once they are grown. In the Bible children are told to honor and obey their parents, but adults are only told to honor them. After children marry, they are done being raised. While advice may be offered, it must be offered as if one is talking to another mature adult, with the understanding that they do not have to follow the advice. Adults get to make their own mistakes. If it is not a sin, but merely a poor choice, life consequences will teach them well.
3. Parents must realize that their children are not going to do everything the way that they did it. This is not an insult. There are two people in the marriage, both of whom were raised differently. They need to decide what will work best for them.
4. Parents of grown children must remember that God gave the grandchildren to this set of parents, not to them. They were allowed to parent their children, and now it is the children's turn to parent a new generation. While advice is welcome, commands and criticism are not. Advice must again be given with the understanding that the parents do not have to do what you say. It should also be given with the assumption that the grown children are mature, capable adults.
5. Children must learn to set boundaries with parents. It is hard to say 'no' to your parents, but it is a good thing to learn to do early. Many couples mess this up. In a marriage the needs of your spouse and children come first, then you may choose to please your parents. Too many adult children still jump when their parents call, giving up things that their spouse and children wanted them to do. This is wrong, and gives the parents the impression that you are still their child, under their authority, when in fact you are not.

Example #1: Cindy and her husband had decided to buy the blue loveseat. On her way to the store, Cindy's mother calls. Cindy shares her excitement over the upcoming purchase. Cindy's mother explains that blue will show stains, and that what she really wants is a print. Cindy takes her mother's advice and buys a floral print. Her husband really does not care what the loveseat looks like. What he is upset about is the fact that every time they make a decision that Cindy's mother does not agree with, Cindy follows her mother's advice without thinking about him. Unfortunately this pattern includes Cindy doing what mom wants in regard to raising the children as well. Cindy is placing her mother's advice above that of her husband. This shows no respect for her husband, and in fact, negates his role in the family. Cindy must remember that her husband is the authority in the home and submit to him, not her mother.

My husband and I messed up 'big time' in this area of our marriage. We wanted everyone to be happy, so we let them do whatever they wanted, took their criticism with a smile, and rushed home for every event, even though we lived eight hours away and had an infant (and a psycho cat, that luckily like the car).

While you would think trying to please people beyond what is remotely reasonable, and ignoring every criticism with a smile would work well, we learned that it doesn't. The situation only gets worse until you cannot humanly tolerate it. The irony is that I have a sister-in-law who is wonderful at setting boundaries, who we thought we were better than because we were so relaxed to be around and didn't impose our rules on anyone.

When we did try to set boundaries for our house, and children everything went south. While the same people gladly, and somewhat fearfully, respected my sister-in-law's rules, ours were not to be tolerated. This is because we had never set one before, so why were we starting now? This was seen as a criticism of them, and in a way it was. There were definitely things we did not like them to do in our home, but since we had never said anything before it was not seen as our preference, but that we did not love them anymore.

When you let people walk all over you it only gets worse. If you don't like something, be up front about it. Waiting years to tell them not to do it only hurts their

feelings. It should hurt because it shows that you did not trust them to do the right thing and respect your feelings in the beginning. In reality most people react poorly because they see it as a personal attack against who they are. They have established a role in your life, and now you are saying that you do not like the role they have been playing for ages. This means that when they thought they were in a good relationship with you, you secretly hated what they were doing. No one likes this.

Fortunately if you have not set good boundaries it is still healthy to do so. Just apologize, explain that you are working on strengthening your relationship with your spouse, and pray that they understand. Chances are there will be misunderstandings. If you haven't been able to set boundaries, you haven't had a relationship that trusts. With us there were rumors that we were getting a divorce, and people never wanting to talk to us again, but you will get through that as well! In the end you should have a stronger, healthier, relationship. This is what happened on my husband's side. As my parents lived far away until recently, we only recently started setting boundaries. They are currently not taking it well at all. Currently my house is a 'prison,' according to my parents, and I secretly hate my two oldest children. We will see how it goes. I am trusting that God's way is best, and I know that I could no longer live like we were and be happy.

Children's Role

I recently thought about a phrase my husband and I believed in 'you are not your child's best friend.' While it is true that we, as parents, have authority over our children that their friends should not have (but often do), I have found that this is not an entirely true statement. While we should not be friends as the world sees friends (that is: people who never tell you that you are wrong) we are to do everything a Biblical friend does. We are to encourage, rebuke, comfort etc. We are to be with them in the hard times, and rejoice with them when things are going well. We are the models by which they will compare all future relationships. If we do not teach them how to confront a problem by encouraging them to come to us, we have done them wrong. If we never apologize, they will learn not to expect this from others. In short, the disservices we do to them, they will readily tolerate from others. In addition, they will also learn to do them to others. Let us look at what a child is to be:

1. Children are a blessing⁵⁸. No one who sits on my couch, eats my food, and does nothing more productive than give me back talk is a blessing. If this is your child, then you have some work to do. Children who are a blessing behave in a reasonable manner most of the time. They also help around the house. Do not feel guilty about giving them chores. This is how they bless your home, and how they learn to do the things that they will need to do as adults in their own home.
2. They are to honor and obey you⁵⁹. This means obedience without attitude.
3. They are to respect you⁶⁰. They do not have to always agree with you, but they do need to give you respect by listening and considering your advice.

What children are not to be:

1. Children are not your confidants. You should not tell them your secrets, and fears because they are too young to handle it.
2. Children are not tools to use to get back at your spouse, or other adult. Children should never be placed in the middle of adult fighting. They should also never be grilled for information about other adults you are mad at.
3. Children are not to be raised to be what you want them to be, but rather you are to figure out what God made them to be, and help them in that direction. Too many family fights occur because the parent has different dreams for the future than the child does. Just because you always wanted your son to be a doctor does not mean he is meant to be that!

Adult Children

Once a child moves out of your home, and especially after they are married, they are no longer under your authority. (The instruction to obey is for children only.) They merely have to honor you. This means that they do not disrespect you. It does not mean that they obey you. Their first obligation is now to their spouse. When you and the spouse disagree, the spouse's opinion wins.

This brings up the question of: What is respect?

⁵⁸ Psalms 127:3

⁵⁹ Ephesians 6:1; Exodus 20:12

⁶⁰ Proverbs 31:28; Ephesians 5:25-31

If a person respects you they are honest with you. They listen to your opinion, and consider it, even if they do not take it. They assume that you are mature enough to accept different opinions with grace. If you prove that you are not capable of hearing opinions that differ from yours, you will lose the privilege of sharing the details of your children's lives.

This does not mean that you do not share your opinions. It merely means that there are no consequences for them when their opinions differ from yours. Common consequences that parents wrongly impose on adult children are: guilt trips, the silent treatment, gossip with other relatives, subverting relationships with other siblings etc. This is wrong, and while the adult children may run back to you at first, it will not work in the long run. By punishing your adult children when you don't like the decisions they have a God given right to make you will only prove that a relationship with you is painful, and make them wonder why they would even want one with you.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. Your wife is upset. Your mother just came over and told her that she was doing 'everything wrong.' What do you do? *My thoughts: Calm your wife and assure her that she is doing everything the way you want it done and that is all that matters. Once she is calm find out exactly what was said, so that you know what you are dealing with. Talk to your mother and explain to her that you are pleased with your wife's performance and that is all that matters. If she has any concerns she may discuss them with you, but you would suggest that she only do this if it is a serious problem. How your wife folds laundry, or burps the baby does not count.*
2. Your husband is home. The children are fighting and he has punished only one of them. You believe that the other one is actually at fault. What do you do? *My thoughts: You do, and say, nothing. (Unless he frequently seems to favor one child. Then you may bring it to his attention, in love.) He has the right to make a decision. He was on the scene and his judgment is as good as your (faulty at best!). They are his children too. You do not have the right to come in and undermine his authority by arguing for the other child, or punishing the child he*

did not. If you want him to be an active parent, you must let him make decisions too.



Chapter Eleven: Matthew 18 in Practice

While it is easy to quote Matthew 18:15-17 it is harder to put it into practice, especially if your church does not have a history of following this teaching. Let us then examine some of the problems people often encounter in dealing with Biblical confrontation.

Problem #1: Public Problems

While Matthew 18 ideally has the first warning that a person is given occurring in private, there are many times that the problem occurs in public and must be dealt with at the time. This is because the person either will not stop, or the problem is severe, and people are in danger. It may also be that accusations were leveled that must be addressed before rumors start.

In these cases, those around it already know the problem. You are not violating a person's right to privacy because the 'audience' already knows what is going on. It is thus better if you deal with it when and where it occurred so that everyone may know and learn. While some may criticize you for not dealing with it in private, this is not your fault. By not ceasing the behavior, or by making their issues known in public, the person chose the setting for the confrontation; you did not. You merely dealt with the situation when, and where it occurred.

A follow up interview, in private, probably needs to occur as well, but in many cases it would have been inappropriate not to address the situation where it occurred. This is for two reasons:

1. The person's behavior made it necessary. Either they did not stop when they were told to, or they leveled public accusations at someone that needed to be cleared up.
2. The people surrounding the incident needed to realize that this is not behavior that will be tolerated in this setting. Even if you do deal with the person in private, it is harmful if others believe that sinful behavior is regularly overlooked. The 'good' people will feel trapped, as they don't want to be hurt, and the people prone to sinful behavior will see no reason not to do it themselves.

Remember, it was the person who decided to behave this way in public, and not desist, who picked the setting; you did not. It is not your fault that there are witnesses; it is their fault. Further, you are not making it public. This would require bringing in people who were not involved. By doing whatever they did in public, they involved a whole bunch of people, who are now, whether they like it or not, a part of the problem.

People also make the problem more involved than it should be by talking to other people about it. When this happens, everyone that they talked to is now involved. Warning them in private now involves dealing with more than just the person misbehaving, because the other people are already involved. Sometimes this necessitates speaking of the problem in front of the entire church to clear up rumors⁶¹. This is not the same as being warned in front of the entire church as it is still the person's first warning, but it does not violate their Matthew 18 rights. You are dragging no new people into the situation. The reason that the people are involved is because the person who sinned invited them into the situation through their own actions. The people who know about the problem should not be left in the dark as to what is going on. For their own good, and the good of the church, they need to know what is true, what is right, and that justice is being done. No one wants to be chasing down smaller fires that result, when you could have handled the whole situation at one time.

Jesus handled the Pharisees publicly. They were teaching in public, and he rebukes them in front of the people they were teaching. Jesus did the same to the moneychangers. He also corrected His disciples in front of the other disciples present when an argument occurred. To correct them first in private, therefore does not mean that no one else is involved. It merely means that no new people are involved. If the sin is a private one, that you discover, such as cheating on his wife with an unbeliever, then the first confrontation should probably be the pastor and the person alone. (If he cheats with a believer, then she needs to be talked to as well, though this conversation may occur separately. It is up to your best judgment how to proceed. The wife does not need to be there as there may be details that she does not need to know. Marriage counseling for both is definitely in order.)

Problem #2: Name Calling

⁶¹ Proverbs 18:17, Ecclesiastes 7:1; 10:20

One of the most difficult things to do when handling an upset person is to not sink to their level. If you are handling a confrontation, it is important that you do not get so upset that you begin to utilize unproductive, and/or hurtful methods of conflict resolution. One of the more common of these is ‘name-calling.’ ‘Name calling’ is when you refer to the person as ‘loser,’ ‘waste of life,’ ‘witch,’ ‘no good,’ and many other phrases that you probably know, but I would rather not print. These things are labels that do not address the problem; they just hurt. They are therefore not allowed.

On the other hand telling someone that they are ‘lazy’ is not name calling, as long as you explain. You may also tell them that they are acting like a ‘fool.’ As long as there is explanation, and you are working towards resolving the problem, this is okay. The difference here is that the term is specific, it applies to the person and it is for the purpose of showing them what they are doing wrong. On the other hand, if you just yell at them and tell them that they are ‘lazy’ and leave it at that, you are merely being mean.

‘Name calling’ involves saying things merely to hurt the other person. It also occurs when the person confronting is too scared to explain themselves. Either way, it is not productive as it gives the person with the problem no indication of what the problem is, or how he could fix it. The point of confrontation is to begin the person on a path that solves the problem, not to get him back for what he has done to us.

You can also not allow the person being confronted to continue when they begin to berate you with ‘name calling.’ If you do, the person will be placed in an uncomfortable position when they leave. Ranting on and on about how awful someone is not productive, but hurtful. When the person has been allowed to hurt you, they have two choices: they can either repent and feel horrible about it (like David did when confronted by Nathan⁶²), or they can come up with excuses (like Saul when confronted by Samuel⁶³). Unfortunately most people choose to be more like Saul than David when placed in a moral dilemma. Instead of feeling bad for hurting you, they will justify why it was right for them to do so. This keeps the person farther from acknowledging the real problem, and puts them in a position to blame it all on you. Their guilty conscience drives them to justify and cover up their mistake. This usually means further abuse to you. By

⁶² 2 Samuel 12

⁶³ 1 Samuel 13:12; 15: 20-21

stopping them from misbehaving by setting boundaries, you break this cycle. People hate to be in a position where they 'lose face' and need to apologize. Therefore it is in both of your best interests not to allow them to repeatedly sin against you.

Problem #3: Fight versus Confrontation

The difference between a fight, and confrontation is that the person confronting is working towards solving the problem. Their motives are for a restored relationship and repentance of sin. In a fight both people are out to hurt each other.

Often when a person is confronted, she will see it as a 'fight.' This is because, on her side, it was a 'fight.' She was not looking out for anyone's best interests, and has yet to see that the other person was trying to do anything different than she was. It is for this reason that we must work hard to get her to listen rather than do all of the talking. If you do not want a fight, you cannot allow the person who is fighting to do all of the talking. If you do, you will have a fight whether you like it or not. By staying on topic, being calm, and cutting the person off when they resort to unfair tactics such as name calling, or when they bring up issues that have nothing to do with the topic you are addressing, you will keep the fighting to a minimum.

If you want to stay out of a fight, you must:

1. Keep control of yourself. If you let yourself get upset, you will behave poorly as well.
2. Stop the person from saying, or doing, things that hurt you. Set boundaries. If the boundaries are not respected, they are not listening anyways, get up and leave.
3. Stay on topic. The person being confronted will want to discuss how you hurt them instead of how they hurt you. Do not let them. While you may need to have this conversation at a later date, it is not productive to resolving your current issue. It just shifts all the focus off them, and puts the blame on you.

Problem #4: Lists of Sins

It is not appropriate to bring up everything the person has ever done wrong every time you fight. It is not appropriate to fight. Ideally every conversation should strive for resolution of a problem. Trying to hurt the other person, get back at them, make them feel

bad for what they have done etc. are wrong motives. Vengeance is for God to distribute. Our role is to encourage the resolution of problems and repentance of sins. Listing sins of the past that have almost nothing to do with the present problem (other than they hurt you too) is unproductive and extremely hurtful. Unfortunately it is a common thing to do, because the injured party wants to show the person how many times they have been hurt by them in the past. If the person has not repeated the hurtful behavior of the past, but is instead onto a new hurtful behavior, it does him no good to bring up his past. Instead it makes him feel like a failure, and decreases his will to try better for two reasons:

1. He feels like he will never succeed.
2. He believes that you will just keep bring it up anyways so what's the point of trying to do better. He will always be the 'insensitive jerk' no matter what he does.

Instead you need to show him how well he handled problems that you brought to him in the past and praise him for his successes. Tell him, in your own way, that you are confident that he will handle this one as well as he handled those others, but that it is a big issue to you. And make sure that you don't have 'issues' with every little thing that the man (or woman) does!

It is also not appropriate to list sins when you confront the person either. Unless the list shows a pattern of one type of unrepentant sin, throw it away. Your goal is not to convince the person that they are the worst person on the face of the earth, and thus in need of much help. Your goal is to resolve a specific problem. Never should a human being have to face every single failing in his life all at once. No one could handle that without being overwhelmed. Instead, we need to focus on only the problem at hand. Putting the other person into deep depression is not our goal!

Problem #5: Going Off Topic

The last thing a person being confronted wants to do is stay on topic. Unless the person is like David, and sees his sin and the need to repent immediately, you are going to have to deal with a person who is not enjoying the conversation. For this reason, the person will try to change the topic of conversation to one that is more pleasing to them. Here is a list of some of the ways people avoid confrontation:

1. They bring up the sins of the person confronting them to show that they are just as bad, or worse, then they are.

This accomplishes nothing, because a sin is a sin even if the person next to you has done it more times than you have, but it does make the person feel better. They may even bring up the scripture about removing the plank in your own eye first.

Unfortunately, even if the person confronting truly should have handled his own sin in this area first, it does not mean that you did not sin and does not negate the need to deal with it. They may also bring up sins that have no resemblance to their sin. It is an avoidance technique. Stop it and get back on topic.

2. They try to show how you hurt them first.

If you did hurt them first the proper course of action was for them to go to you about it, not to hurt you back. Even if they were hurt, they still sinned. The conversation is still on the same topic: their behavior after the perceived hurt. While you may want to apologize, this is often an untruth that they devised in retrospect to justify their bad behavior. Examine your own behavior but do not give it too much consideration.

Their motive in bringing it to you was to excuse their behavior, not fix a relationship. The motive may have caused them to exaggerate, or lie. If you take too much heed to accusations leveled against you in these types of situations you will be walking on eggshells for the rest of your life.

3. They try to show how you have really just misunderstood everything that they did.

If you are in doubt, this is a time to let them talk. The more details that they have to give, the more opportunity they will have to contradict themselves and prove that they are changing the facts of the case to fit what they want the past to look like.

If you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is no misunderstanding, confront them with the facts instead. Letting them continue to lie, only puts them in a position where they feel the need to justify the lies as well. The deeper they dig the pit, the harder it will be to get out of it. Since our goal is not to hang them, but to help them get out of the pit in a proper manner, we need to stop lies as soon as we are sure that is what they are.

4. **They may try to appear repentant when they are not.** They will start the, ‘I know I am so bad at everything. I really do try my best.’ They are playing on your sympathies, and counting on mercy to get them out of the conversation. Instead of comfort, this is a time to bring up how the two of you can work on identifying the specific problem and work together to resolve it. If a person is truly repentant, this is what they would want to do. If they are playing on your sympathies, they will continue the helpless martyr act, and you will get nothing done. Call them on it. Tell them that you are more than willing to work with them, but their ‘I can’t do anything right’ attitude needs to go away. Give them a small, simple homework assignment related to their problem and see what happens. People who wish to change will try the assignment, and if they fail, will at least explain to you what happened in a way that asks for help.

5. **Excuses.**

People who do not want to be confronted will make excuses for their behavior. The truth is that there is no excuse for sin. We are not to do it. If it really was just the pressure of the situation that caused us to fail then we will not repeat the sin. If the situation is continuous, then the person needs to learn how to handle it so that they will not sin. This may mean avoiding the situation altogether. A person who has a drinking problem does not go to a bar. A person with a pornography addiction puts blocks on his computer. A person, who beats his wife after she overspends, needs to learn to leave the room and calm down. There is no excuse for bad behavior. The person needs to learn to handle things better, even if the pressure was intense. This is an opportunity for maturity.

Problem #6: Accusations versus the ‘truth in love’

Satan is an accuser⁶⁴. He likes nothing better than to have Christians feeling trapped under the pressure of their past sins. The problem is that his accusations look a lot like conviction and confrontation, so how do we tell the difference?

Accusations:

1. An accusation is not intended to bring someone to repentance⁶⁵.

⁶⁴ Revelation 12:10

⁶⁵ Luke 6:44

An accusation is designed to be mean, and to make a person feel bad. If this is your motive, you are not confronting, you are accusing.

2. An accusation keeps you busy working on impossible stuff.

Accusations generally fall into two categories: past sins that you have repented of, but still have the power to make you feel bad, and thing that you believe to be shortcomings that really are not.

Past sins: If you have already repented of a sin, and see no evidence of it in your life tell Satan to go away. This is not of God. It is the devil trying to keep you busy working on something you have already conquered.

False sins: This is when you try to repent of something that is not even a sin, but somehow you believe it is. Usually it is a perceived shortcoming.

Example #1: Your friend prays for three hours every day and is radiant afterwards. You pray for fifteen minutes. You feel guilty and try to be more like your friend. The fact is there may be nothing wrong with you. Your friend is obviously an intercessor; you are not. You are working hard in your gifting. God does not want you working hard in her gifting too! The devil however would love for all of God's teachers to try to pray like intercessors. It keeps the teachers from teaching! Do not let Satan make you feel bad for things that are not sin.

Example #2: If you hurt someone, you have sinned. Confrontation is not pleasant. One of the lies that people use to keep people from confronting others is, 'If it were true, I would know it. You are just being mean.' Just because the other person does not want to face the problem does not mean that you sinned in bringing it up. It also does not mean that you could have been 'nicer.'

Two of the ways Satan accuses you of false sins are then: You are not doing enough, and you should have done it better (nicer). Examine it to see whether it is godly, and once you have decided it is not, tell Satan to go away!

3. Accusations do not lead to repentance.

Accusations are designed to make you feel hopeless. This is why we offer help whenever we confront. Accusations do not contain any information that would help someone identify the specific problem and do better. Instead they put the person down and leave them with nothing to do better. Examples of this would be: 'You are

a worthless jerk and I never want to see you again.’ It hurts, but the person still does not know anything more than you are really mad at them.

The ‘truth in love:⁶⁶

1. The ‘truth in love’ works to improve a situation not destroy a person.

The ‘truth in love’ has motives that include: wanting to see a person do better, keeping a person from sin, helping a person get out of sin, keeping a person from harm etc.

2. The ‘truth in love’ works to improve a relationship.

The ultimate goal is to have this person in your life in a closer relationship than before. If the problem affects you, you are addressing it because their actions are causing you to choose between a painful relationship and never seeing them again. If the problem negatively affects only them, you choose to tell them the ‘truth in love’ because you are working in their best interests and wish them to succeed. Knowing that you are looking out for them, should bring you into a closer, more mature relationship if it is done ‘in love.’

3. The ‘truth in love’ helps to bring a person to repentance.

This means that the person confronting the problem is willing to help the other person fix the problem. They do not just accuse and leave. God works the same way. If He is convicting you, He will provide you with opportunities to do what He has called you to do. If you are sincerely praying, and still walking around lost, then it may not be the ‘truth in love,’ but may instead be an accusation of Satan. Talk to your pastor, or other truly mature Christian, for help in sorting this out.

The way you know the difference between true confrontation and malice is the person’s motives. They may seem pure at first but their actions will show that they are not willing to actually help the person; they just want to get revenge for perceived wrongs. A person who is confronting is not looking to put down the other person, but to help them up. While this may involve telling them things that they do not want to hear, it will not be primarily unproductive talk, and when asked to help in the situation, the confronter will be willing to provide real help.

⁶⁶ Ephesians 4:15

The way you know the difference between conviction and accusations is by the fruit. Conviction leads to repentance. It gives you real things to work on, that get you closer to your goals. Accusations leave you frustrated and bewildered. They are about past sins, or non-sins that keep you busy accomplishing nothing good. They also take you off the path that God has set in your life by getting you to do things that you are not called to do, or by making you feel so depressed that you do not believe you can do anything productive.

While you need to examine everything to be sure you are not just calling it an accusation so that you do not have to deal with it, once you are sure that it is an accusation, and not a true problem, tell the devil to get lost, and continue doing what you know to be right. The devil whispers into a lot of believer's lives. Make sure you know who you are listening to⁶⁷! If it does not line up with God's Word, throw it out, no matter who said it.

Problem #8: Assuming Guilt

As Christians we are to assume someone is innocent until it is proven otherwise. We are to go to a person first with the idea that there may be a reasonable explanation that we have not thought about. Conversely, we cannot become upset if a person confronts you and has the story wrong. He is bringing it to you so you and he can resolve it. This is a good thing.

Problem #9: People, Who Pretend to Be Mature, But Are Not

Since the resolution of a long-term problem generally involves help from other mature believers, these people just get in the way. Unfortunately, they are usually the first people who volunteer to help. Mature people set boundaries in their lives, and check carefully to ensure that they have the time to do what you are asking them to do. They understand the importance of discipleship, but also understand that it takes time and a serious commitment, especially if the person has significant issues. They do not want to be mean, and honestly wish to help, but also do not want to let a vulnerable person down.

People who think they are mature do not think like this. They readily come up beside a person who is hurting and fill their ears with their form of the Bible. They

⁶⁷ Matthew 24:5

are not always right, but they enjoy being the expert. Mature people will say, 'I don't know. Let me find out for you.' People pretending to be mature have all of the answers, all of the time. They must not be allowed to be the major support of a person trying to repent, as they will cause him to fail. It is therefore important to help a person going through major problems to find a truly mature Christian rather than look for one on his own. If left to his own devices, he may pick the less mature person merely because they tend to be 'yes-men' and that always makes people feel good. What he needs in a mature believer who can tell him the 'truth-in-love.'

Problem #10: People Who Hate Confrontation

There are people who hate confrontation so much that they will try to stop you from doing it even when they are not involved. Comedians frequently joke that people would rather be in the coffin than giving the eulogy. People who hate drawing attention to themselves see confrontation as cruel. They will advise you not to do it, because they hate be put on the spot and see you confronting someone else as the same thing. Do not let these people convince you that you are being mean. Here is some common advice that erroneously keeps confrontation from occurring:

1. 'I am sure she didn't mean it.'

If she did not mean it then the confrontation will be short. She will apologize and clear up any misunderstandings you may have had. You will apologize for your role in misunderstanding and all will be well. If she did mean it then you and she have a problem that needs to be resolved, the sooner the better, so that all is well again.

2. 'He was just having a bad day.'

If this is how he treats his friends on a bad day, how does he handle his family? If this is true he needs to know that it is not acceptable, and that there are better ways to deal with problems that work. He also needs help, and/or comfort. Without confrontation he will not receive the help he needs to resolve his problems.

3. 'Give her time, she will get over it.'

This rarely works. With time people, especially women, dwell on the problem and let it fester. It is best to work out the problem as soon as it happens so that it does not grow bigger in the person's mind.

4. 'It's not that big a deal.'

While we do not want to be nit-picky it is best to straighten out problems so that they do not become a 'big deal.' I had to learn this with my children. If you let things go the person gets the impression that it is okay to do this. It gives him freedom to do even more. Eventually, when it is too big to ignore, you will be faced with the question, 'I have been doing this for months. Why didn't you come to me before?' It is best to solve problems when they are small. If they are let to go on the person will feel like a fool that he has been messing up for so long without knowing it. It will hurt his pride and leave him wanting to defend his behavior more than if it was just something he had done once.

5. 'Mature people learn to put up with things, and not get upset over them.'
Confronting someone is the mature response. Ignoring the problem is childish. Toughening yourself up so that you can take more abuse from this person is stupid. Setting boundaries is smart. Mature people do not 'learn to put up with it.' Mature people look for a solution to the problem that potentially benefits everyone involved. Only people with really low self-esteem allow themselves to be hurt repeatedly and act happy about how well they handle the abuse!

6. 'It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict their hearts, not yours.'
This is not Biblical. Repeatedly in scripture we see that we are to rebuke, exhort, encourage, comfort and teach. We are also told to confront. We can do none of these things if we do nothing and rely on the Holy Spirit alone. God gave us rules, and He expects us to follow them. Those rules involve us talking to people about the problems in their life, and helping them to fix the problems. The Holy Spirit will work in a person's life to convict them, but there are times that a person will not listen to the Holy Spirit, or are confused by Satan. During these times it is our job to help him, the Bible says so!

7. 'The timing is not right.'
The right time to confront a problem is when it happens, or as soon as you have cooled off and can do it 'in love.' If the problem has already occurred and has not been addressed then the timing is right. (Rare exceptions include: the person is at a funeral, and now you want to discuss them not saying 'hi' to you in the hall five years

ago. Wisdom does need to be applied, but in many cases this is just an excuse to avoid confrontation.)

8. 'If it really is a problem, it will happen again, then we will deal with it.'

This is true for minor problems. Look at the situation, and decide whether it is a minor offense, that has occurred once and falls under the 'turn the other cheek' rule. If it is a repeated offense, or is major, it needs to be dealt with now. Do not use this as an excuse to avoid confronting a problem. Don't use any excuses to avoid confronting the problem. Problems only grow when they are left in the dark.

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. You are having problems with a woman in the church. Your friend advises you to ignore it. She says, 'You know how it is. You and your husband fight. You go shopping, he goes bowling and when you get home everything is okay again.' You think, 'Wow, that's not going to work long term.' What do you do? *My thoughts: As a friend you need to say something 'in love' about why this is a bad way to handle problems. Use mistakes, as well as positive examples from your own marriage to illustrate the point. Do not treat her like you are perfect and she is not, but do help! You should, however, correct her impression on how to handle problems.*
2. The woman in church is still a problem. You have warned her more than once that her behavior is an issue in your life and she still misbehaves. Currently she is telling people in the church that you have had an abortion as a teen, which is untrue, but hard to bring up in conversation. What do you do? *My thoughts: It is time to go to the pastor. He needs to confront her with you present (unless he feels that you will not remain calm). It is also time for a group discussion of all of the people involved since rumors are involved. This does not mean the whole church, but it may mean that he will address the small group you encounter her in, or the entire woman's ministry.*

Chapter 12: Conclusion

Hopefully you have learned the importance of confrontation through the course of this study. In this chapter, we will sum up the method of effectively dealing with problems. Dealing with problems in the church effectively involves three steps:

1. **Identify:** Learn to correctly identify problems.
2. **Confront:** Confront the problem using Matthew 18:15-17 as a guide, with an emphasis on resolution.
3. **Teach:** Teach your congregation these things:
 - What problem behavior looks like and how to repent of them.
 - How problems should be handled.
 - How problems should not be handled.
 - That confrontation is good.
 - That you are open to dealing with small problems early rather than waiting.
 - That they should not feel that they have to bring every problem to you.

Confrontation is something every Christian is called to do when a problem arises. It is not just the job of the pastor.

- That people are not to jump into situations that do not concern them and call it confrontation. That is being a busy body and that is not good.
- We must assume the best, but confront anyways.
- Boundaries are good, and should be used.

Included in that teaching is your own godly example of proper confrontation. You will also want to explain what is going on in the church, and teach on issues that are relative to them. Feel good sermons about someone else's problems do not help anyone solve their own. It is good to focus on the issues that actually occur in your church rather than ignoring them in fear of offending. The idea that 'you will lose people if you preached on that' is not from God. Preach on the hard topics so that your congregation will mature, and teach your people that conviction is good for them. A mature congregation that behaves is ultimately easier to pastor!

Congregation: Help your pastor by following his lead. Do not undermine what he is doing by doing the opposite. If you have a problem with what he is doing, talk to

him. If he is the problem, Matthew 18 applies to him as well, but it is not to be done lightly due to his position. Pastoral problems affect the whole church, so you better be 100% sure he actually has one before you rebuke him.

When congregations understand and support what the pastor is doing, the church runs smoothly. We never want to be pulling in different direction as a church. The pastor leads, but it is up to the congregation to take care of problems too. The pastor should not have to deal with minor squabbles every day. Knowing how to confront will help you work out problems before they ever need to reach the pastor's ear.

Problems in Your Personal Life

Unfortunately problems in our personal life, also affect the church. Fortunately, as we have seen, Matthew 18:15-17 also applies to these situations as well. What we need to remember is that there is a difference between a problem and an annoyance. Annoyances fall under the category of scriptures that tell us to turn the other cheek⁶⁸, and to not be easily offended⁶⁹. They include body odor, grumbling, minor nit picking etc. While it is reasonable to talk to people about these issues, they do not necessitate removing the person from your life if they do not repent of them. A mother who nags you about your appearance despite your telling her how much you dislike it, and the daughter-in-law who is always late fall under this category as well.

People that annoy you should be told repeatedly that their issues are harming your relationship with them. If they will not change, it is reasonable to not include them in activities where their behavior will affect you without feeling guilty. For example, the nagging mother-in-law does not need to go on your family vacation, and the chronically late daughter-in-law does not get invited to your 'work' parties where you are trying to impress your boss with your organizational skills and network. If you have told them about the problem, then it is reasonable to give these people less access to your life. People who truly love you do not go out of their way to do things that they know bother you.

⁶⁸ Luke 6:29

⁶⁹ James 1:19

Unfortunately, annoyances affect us. We know that we are not to let them bother us, and that we are to think on positive things instead⁷⁰, but this is easier said than done. In order to keep annoyances in their proper place, we need to keep ourselves strong. This involves our self-esteem as well as our physical self! Many people in today's society have very few, if any, true 'Biblical' (sticks closer than a brother) friends. They have many, many acquaintances however, and believe that they are not lacking. A small group of close friends gives you the emotional support you need to believe that you are truly a valuable person. This enables us to ignore the 'stupidity' in our lives more easily. True friends affirm you, but they also show you where you went wrong and help you to fix it. Either way the problem is over. Friends who you complain with only are not doing you any good⁷¹! The proper response to a problem is to either: help the person to understand that it is not their problem, and help them to move on; or to help the person to understand that it is their problem, and help them to fix it. Having a pity party only solves nothing and leaves the problem for another day.

We also need to rest, pray, exercise and eat right. When our body does not feel good, we do not feel good. We can handle the world much better when we take care of the body God gave you. (Caution: You can go over board taking care of your body! If you begin to look down on others for how they take care of themselves, or you cannot associate with people because they do not eat like you do, if people tell you to stop dieting because you are too thin, or if you have little time for anything else you have gone too far!)

We also need to do productive work. Even before sin Adam had a job⁷² tending the garden and naming the animals. We too need to be doing something that bears good fruit. If you are not doing this, start. If you are a caregiver (stay at home mom, or have an elderly person at home) and feel like you are doing nothing tell the devil to go away. You are too valuable! Knitting, and quilting sometimes help as hobbies in these situations because it may be the only thing that ever gets close to looking done in your life, despite how many hours you spend caring for those you love!

⁷⁰ Philippians 4:8

⁷¹ Jude 16

⁷² Genesis 2: 5, 19

Blaming Others

There are times however, when we convince ourselves that the problem is someone else's when in reality it is ours. Many of these times are when we have no authority in a situation, and are mad because the other person won't do things our way. Other times are when we were rude, and we want the other person to 'fix' it for us, or not hold us to the consequences of our actions. Being mad because your friends did not wait for you to go to the movie falls under this category. You were late, they did not want to miss the movie. The consequences of being late are that you miss the movie. By getting upset you are saying that you want all of your friends to miss the movie and suffer with you because of your error. You were missing the movie anyway (the consequence of being late); you are just being selfish when you expect them to miss it too. Here are some more examples:

When the problem is YOUR problem, but you think it is theirs! (examples)

1. You can't stand going over to your daughter-in-laws house because it smells like cat. (You are not allergic; you just don't like cats.) –Get over it. It is not your house. Even if your son doesn't like it, stay out of it. You have no authority here!
2. You are an hour late for dinner and arrive to find that they started without you. (They are not rude for starting without you; you are rude for being late! Apologize and be gracious. If they are on desert then that is all you eat. Do not complain that there is none left for you!)
3. You missed the planning meeting. The people in the meeting agreed to things that you do not like. You do not feel that you should have to participate in something you are not pleased with. (This is your problem! You missed the meeting. You may mention that you have a different idea, but if they do not change it, you volunteered and are expected to help-happily. So unless they are preaching that Jesus did not rise from the dead, or are doing something immoral, you are obligated to help with a smile!)

Matthew 18 versus 'Turn the Other Cheek' (Luke 6:29)

Many people become confused because, while the Bible clearly tells that there are times to avoid people, it also tells us to 'turn the other cheek.' So when do we do what?

When to Avoid

The truly wonderful thing about Matthew 18:15-17 (warn the three times, in three ways, then avoid) is that it helps you to define who you are to avoid. People are fallible. Everybody will be a little lazy, a little bit of a busybody, a little foolish, a little angry etc. at some time in their life. The difference between the Christian that errs, and the person committed to sin, is in their willingness to repent. By presenting them with boundaries, and education about what they are doing that is harmful to you, you are enabling them to make an informed choice. Where before they may have been unaware of their problem, after being confronted repeatedly, they have knowledge and are fully responsible for the choices that they make. People in error will improve. They will seek help and try to change. They may still stumble occasionally, but there will be progress. These are the people that we help, even when they occasionally fall. The difference between their fall, and the unrepentant person doing the same thing again, is that the repentant person will be sorry for what he has done. The unrepentant will offer excuses, and perhaps try to convince you that he was right to do it.

The people to avoid are the unrepentant. If after three warnings there is no significant change, if they are still making excuses, or trying to convince you that they are right, you are free to leave. Unrepentant people look for loopholes. They play on your sympathies. They twist things to make you look like the bad guy. You do not need to do this. If they are unrepentant, this will last for as long as you allow them in your life. The true test for who to avoid is then, after you have told them well that they are causing trouble: Does the person's actions clearly show that they wish to do what is right? Don't be fooled by half-hearted measures, and self-protective stances. God will help those who come to Him with a sincere heart. If they wish to repent, there will be fruit.

Try these examples: *Repentant or Unrepentant?*

1. A woman has been warned not to gossip. She has been a significant problem. She shows up to the pastor's office every day in tears, saying how she wants to change. Her best friends begin to snub the people the pastor has told her to go to and seek forgiveness. Repentant or Unrepentant? *Most likely unrepentant. Unless there is another way for the 'friends' to know, this woman is telling her friends what went on in*

the pastor's office in a way to encourage them to hate the other women. Most likely she is venting about how they must have been the ones to 'get her in trouble.' She is blaming others, and the tears are a smoke screen. She continues to talk behind other's back. She and her friends need to be approached to discern what is actually happening, and correct it.

2. A man has become a new Christian. He has said that he has given up his old life style, but he comes into a small group of Christians and confesses that he has slept with someone he is not married to last night. Repentant or Unrepentant? *Most likely repentant. Repentant people confess. Unrepentant people do not admit to sin easily, and usually try to hide, or justify it. The only exception is when the unrepentant know that you know and want to appear repentant, or spin the story to make them look better.*
3. Your friend has become distant from you. You have found out that she shared a deep secret of yours with a known gossip and it is all around the church. You go to her and she can barely look you in the eye. Repentant or Unrepentant? *She is most likely repentant, but scared. She knows that she has done wrong, but does not know what to do about it. Don't be hard on her. Forgive and allow her to help correct the problems in church. This may be a time for her to stand with you as you are open and honest and correct any misinformation while assuring people that whatever it is, it is indeed in the past, never to occur again. The secret is out. You have to deal with it. It is better to do it with this friend on your side supporting you, than to do it alone. She loves you; she just messed up.*

Matthew 18 makes it easier to determine who cares about others, and who does not. People who care do not wish to hurt other people. When they are made aware that their actions are hurting others, they make honest attempts to change. People who are self-absorbed do not care about others. There is no Christ in them. They merely care about whether, or not, this makes them look bad, or interferes with their life.

They do not want to do the hard work, they merely want you to leave them alone. Until they can see beyond themselves enough to actually care about the other person they cannot be helped. If three clear warnings do not work, then avoidance is your only option.

When to 'Turn the Other Cheek'

Matthew 18 actually encompasses the spirit of 'turn the other cheek.' By warning the person, you are not retaliating. You are, in essence, allowing the person to do the same thing to you up to three times. But, the hope is that the person will see the error of his ways and repent, so that you will not be hurt again. I explain it to my karate students this way: If someone hits you, and you do nothing, they have two choices: hit you again, or realize they made a mistake and end the fight. If you hit them back (since they were already angry enough to hit you) it is now a fight. In the first scenario, where only one person was throwing the punches, it is only one person behaving badly. In the second, where you punch back, it is a fight because both people are involved. We want to avoid fights. This does not mean that we never fight back. In Luke 6:29 we are talking about a slap, not a dangerous blow. Of course we avoid danger, but we do not overreact to annoyances. (I also teach my karate students to block punches. In these situations, this would be setting boundaries.)

Following the admonition to turn the other cheek, is instructions on what to do if someone steals your coat. In this case we are to give him a shirt too. Here we are assuming that the reason he is stealing our coat is because he is cold and too poor to afford proper clothing. While stealing is till not in appropriate, we assume that he is desperate and hurting, or he would not have done it. We assume the best. We do the same thing when we 'turn the other cheek.' We assume that the other person did not truly mean the offense, and we give them the time to repent, rather than retaliate.

When we utilize Matthew 18:15-17 we assume that if the person knew they were causing problems, they would stop. We take two or three with us the second time, under the assumption that they merely did not believe us, or that we may be in error, and the witnesses will help us to see that. We go before the church to show the person the seriousness of the situation. If the situation is not serious, the majority of the church should not be behind it. As a church we must remember that we are never to

follow blindly, but to use our own brain. Even the pastor makes mistakes. He is human too. If you believe something is not wrong, or misunderstood, say something. Either people will clarify it for you, or you will enlighten them. Either way, the purpose of going before the church is so we never throw anyone out by ‘accident,’ or due to malice. If you truly believe the person is innocent of the charges, you must say so. Going with what you think is the majority out of fear is not what God intended!

Scenarios For Group Discussion

1. Come up with and discuss other scenarios and decided who truly ‘owns’ the problem.
2. Discuss topics that your group would like your pastor to teach on, and let him know. Remember that they are suggestions, and that he may put them off as he feels the spirit leads.
3. Get food and fellowship! The course is done. (Of course if your leader did not read this before hand you probably do not have food. Someone may have to make a quick donut run, and forgive your teacher. Your teacher is probably repentant and highly embarrassed. Remember that they are human too! Show mercy and see if there is anything you can do to help if they are overwhelmed in life. Satan often piles things on when a believer steps out to work for God. By the end of my first home Bible study I was so overwhelmed I was in tears due to the stress of keeping my home clean!)

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