

SOUL PRESCRIPTION

**OVERINDULGENCE:
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

SIN FAMILY #4

GLUTTONY DRUNKENNESS
OVERINDULGENCE OVER USE
SHOPAHOLISM DRUG ABUSE OF MEDIA

BILL BRIGHT & HENRY BRANDT

SOUL PRESCRIPTION

*Experience
True Healing and Freedom*

BILL Bright & Henry Brandt

Foreword by Tim LaHaye

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This book contains stories of people the authors met with over the years. In some cases, names and secondary details have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

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He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

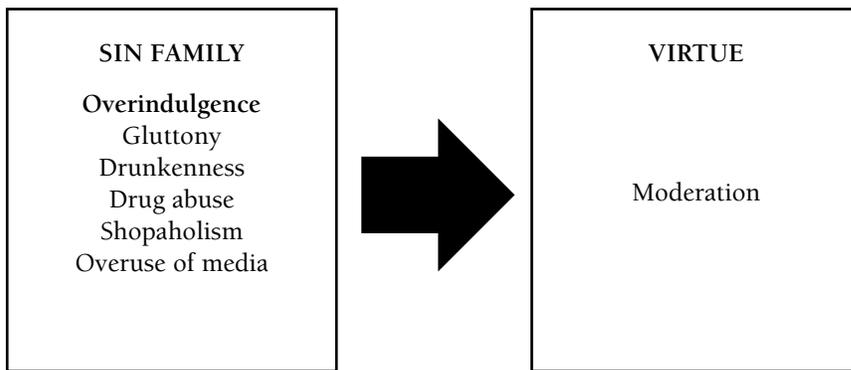
—Psalm 147:3 NIV

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OVERINDULGENCE: ENOUGH IS NOT ENOUGH



In my (Henry's) early years, one of my biggest problems was with drinking. Though I grew up in a Christian home where drinking was frowned upon, I rebelled in my teenage years and started drinking in bars, at parties, and in the homes of my friends.

Early signs of the danger in this lifestyle did little good. One of my drinking buddies burned to death in a fiery collision; another committed suicide. I was fired from a job for coming back from lunch drunk. But still I continued drinking.

Then one afternoon I staggered home drunk and dropped off to sleep on the couch. Soon a traveling salesman came to the door, shook me awake, and read me a tract about receiving Christ. I

prayed with the salesman, asking God to forgive and save me, then fell back asleep.

I went to a bar as usual that evening, but somehow the lifestyle that had seemed so exciting before now seemed no fun at all. My drunken prayer had made a real difference! My life began to change, and I left drinking behind, completely—though not without some struggles.

As a result of my own experience, I am able to understand those who overindulge in alcohol or other substances and experiences. Both Bill and I have counseled hundreds of persons who have struggled with overindulgence of different sorts. We know the pain it can cause and the difficulty people have in beating these habits.

Of course, everyone overindulges occasionally. For example, just about every American overindulges with food on Thanksgiving. But what we are talking about here is an ongoing overindulgence that interferes with healthy and holy living.

Sinful overindulgence can take many forms. Let us first deal with what is perhaps the most common form: gluttony.

THE LURE OF THE REFRIGERATOR

A pastor had a heart attack and was clinging to life in the ICU of a local church-affiliated hospital. The pastor's adult son came to visit him in the hospital and was praying by his side when a doctor came in. They discussed the father's condition, and the doctor informed the son that being overweight had put a strain on his father's heart.

Then the doctor pointed out that the son seemed to be heading down the same road. And, it was true. Like his father, the son had a sedentary lifestyle and enjoyed large quantities of convenience foods. His belly was already well on its way to matching his father's girth.

"Yeah, I've got an eating problem," admitted the son.

"No, you've got a sin problem," countered the doctor.¹

Overeating is the more common term these days, but *gluttony* is the time-honored label for the sin of putting more food in your mouth than your body needs for its health and strength. A glutton

is the type of person who tells himself or herself, “Eat, drink, and be merry!” (Luke 12:19). In the worst cases, you could say of gluttons that “their god is their stomach” (Philippians 3:19 NIV).

For some gluttons, the appeal of overeating lies in the enjoyment that the taste buds get as the food makes its way to the stomach. For others, the sense of fullness that comes after eating may compensate for emotional absences in their lives. However, while one might understand and sympathize with some causes for overindulgence with food, we must say unequivocally that gluttony is a sin.

Like any sin, gluttony trails in its wake a host of evil effects. Those who overeat often feel ashamed and guilty. They spend more of their money and time on food than it deserves. As they gain weight, they experience discomfort, reduced physical abilities, and embarrassment over how others view them. And like the pastor who had the heart attack, they may experience significant health problems. Each year, obesity in America accounts for health-care costs of approximately \$100 billion as well as contributes to at least three hundred thousand premature deaths.²

Gluttony can also damage one’s spiritual health. Philosopher Cornelius Plantinga Jr. pointed out, “Full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God.”³ The person whose body is overfed may have a starving soul.

The same sort of spiritual deprivation may be at work in those with a drinking problem.

Full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for righteousness. They spoil the appetite for God.

BLISS IN A BOTTLE?

For years, Jack Bivans was one of the voices on the popular radio theater program *Unshackled!* Produced by the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, *Unshackled!* portrayed the ways that real individuals were freed from alcoholism and other bondages through the power of Christ. What few listeners knew was that Bivans was in shackles himself.

Bivans began drinking while serving in World War II. Over the years, his drinking got worse and contributed to the dissolution

of two marriages. “My family life began a downward spiral and my emotional world started crumbling around me,” he recalled.

It all came to a head in 1975. Bivans said, “The lives of the people whose true stories I had portrayed on *Unshackled!* began to hit home. One day, following a taping, I was driving home alone and felt the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit within me. I changed. I was drinking, and sometimes too much, and so I gave it up.”⁴

Of all forms of overindulgence, none is more thoroughly covered in Scripture than drunkenness. Perhaps most notably, Solomon composed a vivid description of the effects of drinking upon the drunkard:

Who has anguish? Who has sorrow? Who is always fighting? Who is always complaining? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? It is the one who spends long hours in the taverns, trying out new drinks. Don't gaze at the wine, seeing how red it is, how it sparkles in the cup, how smoothly it goes down. For in the end it bites like a poisonous snake; it stings like a viper. You will see hallucinations, and you will say crazy things. You will stagger like a sailor tossed at sea, clinging to a swaying mast. And you will say, “They hit me, but I didn't feel it. I didn't even know it when they beat me up. When will I wake up so I can look for another drink?”

—Proverbs 23:29–35⁵

Rather than being under the influence of alcohol, we should be under the influence of God's Spirit.

The Romans liked to indulge in drinking parties where matters could get way out of hand. The apostle Peter, therefore, wrote to new believers, “You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, *their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties*, and their terrible worship of idols” (1 Peter 4:3, emphasis added).⁶ The message for Christians who have been heavy drinkers is this: Enough! It is time to put away your habit of drunkenness.

Paul made God's viewpoint on drunkenness as clear as it could be: “Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life.” Then Paul went on to say, “Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Rather than being under the influence of alcohol, we should be under the influence of God's Spirit.

DRUGS: WHEN ESCAPE BECOMES A TRAP

Unlike alcohol, drugs are not specifically mentioned in Scripture. However, the New Testament word usually translated “witchcraft” or “sorcery” (“participation in demonic activities” in Galatians 5:20) is *pharmakeia*, from which we get our word *pharmaceuticals*. It reflects the fact that mood-altering substances were often used in occult rituals in ancient times.

It is a safe bet that we can take the biblical injunctions against drunkenness as applying to drug abuse as well. We can therefore paraphrase Ephesians 5:18 as saying, “Don’t take drugs, because that will ruin your life.” The very fact that drug use is illegal puts it out of bounds for Christians, since we are instructed to “submit to governing authorities” (Romans 13:1).

Drug-taking is one sin that many presume Christians will not get involved in. Not so! Singer Johnny Cash is an example. Not long before his death in 2003, Cash told *Relevant* magazine,

I used drugs to escape, and they worked pretty well when I was younger. But they devastated me physically and emotionally—and spiritually. That last one hurt so much: to put myself in such a low state that I couldn’t communicate with God. There’s no lonelier place to be. I was separated from God, and I wasn’t even trying to call on him. I knew that there was no line of communication. But he came back. And I came back.⁷

As in Cash’s case, escape seems to be one motivation of people who take drugs. They think they can leave the difficulty or tedium of their lives behind with the vehicle of drugs. Unfortunately, it does not get them anywhere; they wind up in worse trouble than they started with.

Meanwhile, many drugs have a powerfully addicting effect on those who take them. Drug users still have a choice (that’s where the sinfulness comes in), but as the addiction changes their brain chemistry and physiological responses, the choice *not* to take drugs becomes harder and harder. Many find that their temporary “escape” becomes a trap out of which they cannot seem to work their way.

Actor Robert Downey Jr. said, “I’m allergic to alcohol and narcotics. If I use them, I break out in handcuffs.” We can laugh at the quip, but the fact is that drug users, while they may not be literally imprisoned as Downey has been, are bound emotionally and spiritually.

SHOPPING AS RECREATION

Some have said that America has been infected with “affluenza.” Materialism is a widespread illness, and for many it shows up in the way they buy far more than they really need. They shop just for the fun of it, and for the kick they get from owning new stuff, not because they really need these belongings. A term has been coined to describe these people: *shopaholics*.

While the term is new, the phenomenon it describes is not. Long ago, King Solomon went through a phase in which he deliberately tested what he could gain by spending, spending, spending.

I...tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!

—Ecclesiastes 2:4–8

What was Solomon’s conclusion after his spending spree? “This is all so meaningless!” (verse 15).

We do not mean to imply that all buying is bad. God loves to bless His children. It is a good thing when we can meet our own needs and even indulge our moderate and reasonable desires for pleasure. The problem lies in excessive accumulation of “stuff” out of a desire to meet some inner need.

We will let you decide, through seeking the mind of Christ in prayer, what “excessive” means for you. But one thing we know: possessions do not confer meaning upon a person’s life. Jesus said plainly, “Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own” (Luke 12:15).

Neither do possessions provide real security, though some people may think they do. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about this also:

Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

—Matthew 6:19–21

As if to illustrate His words in the Sermon on the Mount, at another time Jesus told a story about a farmer who had a string of good harvests. He began to base a hedonistic plan on his wealth. “I’ll sit back and say to myself, My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!” (Luke 12:19).

But Jesus said this man was a fool, because that very day was marked down in God’s calendar as the day when he would be called to account for his life. The lesson Jesus drew from this story is simple: “A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.” (See Luke 12:16–21.)

A person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.

MEDIA MAD

Our media options are proliferating like never before. Not only do we have television, radio, and movies, but now we also have computerized gaming systems, the Internet, DVDs, MP3s, handheld computers, and more. Some people spend untold hours with these media, living vicariously through televised sports or reality TV shows or video games, and there are a couple of problems with this.

Are You Overindulgent?

The following self-evaluation quiz will help you determine whether you have a tendency toward overindulgence.

- Do you feel guilty over your use of any substance or other source of pleasure?
- Have family members or close friends warned you that they think something is wrong?
- Do you lie to cover up how much food or drink you obtain?
- Do you use controlled substances in a way not prescribed by a doctor?
- Do you often eat, drink, or engage in an activity more than you had planned?
- Do you obsessively think about a certain substance or behavior?
- Do you vomit after eating or use laxatives to keep your weight down?
- Do you spend more time staring at a cinema, TV, or computer screen than you spend looking into the faces of the important people in your life?

First, excessive use of media can have a mind-numbing effect. A person who spends hours every week playing Xbox games has some fun and develops a certain type of skill, but is he really becoming a wiser, deeper, more godly person? It is not likely.

Second, too much time with entertainment distracts from other activities that are equally or more important. For example, someone who has what is dubbed a “Net addiction” may spend so much time online that she neglects her schoolwork, job, or family.

Perhaps we are in something like the position of the wealthy people of Judah in the prophet Amos’s time. Amos warned,

How terrible for you who sprawl on ivory beds and lounge on your couches, eating the meat of tender lambs from the flock and of choice calves fattened in the stall. *You sing trivial songs to the sound of the harp and fancy yourselves to be great musicians like David.* You drink wine by the bowlful and perfume yourselves with fragrant lotions. You care nothing about the ruin of your nation. Therefore, you will be the first to be led away as captives.

—Amos 6:4–7 emphasis added

Clearly the upper classes of Judah were overindulging in a number of types of luxury, including some we have already covered. As part of their error, they were indulging excessively in the entertainment of music when they should have been attending to more important matters.

Will the consequences for us be “terrible” (as Amos said) if we keep spending our lives with our eyes glued to video screens and with earphones stuffed in our ears? It would be better not to find out.

APPETITES OUT OF CONTROL

Along with more obvious forms of overindulgence, there are many other ways people may let their appetites get out of control like a stallion that leaps a fence. A mother might spend far more time working out at the gym than she needs to keep in shape, neglecting her family responsibilities in the process. A young person

might love the adrenaline rush from thrill-seeking activities, such as extreme skiing and class-5 river rafting, to the point that he risks his life. And what about caffeine? Or cigarettes?

As diverse as are the moral weak points of the human race, so diverse are the forms overindulgence may take. Yet all forms of overindulgence have something in common: they are ways of feeding an appetite. “All sins are attempts to fill voids,” claimed Simone Weil. That is certainly true of the sins of overindulgence.

People have a type of hunger, real or perceived, and then try to feed it in a way that is inappropriate. Maybe they are greedy for sensation. Or maybe they have an emotional hurt and are trying to mask it with a high or the yumminess of a dessert or a “fun fix.” Either way, they need to understand their real problem and address it in a healthy way. Overindulgence will only make matters worse.

Other motivators may also contribute to an overindulgence problem. For example, someone may abuse drugs as a way of rebelling against his strict upbringing. Rebellion, anger, disobedience—these are just a few of the sins that may complicate our tendencies toward self-indulgence.

“But wait,” you might say. “Is overindulgence really our fault? Might the real issue be illness, not sin?” Let’s consider that.

As diverse as are the moral weak points of the human race, so diverse are the forms overindulgence may take.

THE MEDICAL MODEL

One day I (Bill) received a call from the wife of an alcoholic. The woman said her husband was a wonderful person when he was sober but a demon when he was drinking. Why did he keep drinking?

Another day I talked with a young man who was on drugs. He was deathly afraid that he would be caught, end up in jail, and get a police record. Still, something about drugs wooed him to go on another trip, to smoke another joint.

These people have a compulsion to continue in their particular form of overindulgence—no doubt about it. Many others have the same problem. But how are we to understand such a compulsion?

The preferred approach at present is to use a medical model. In other words, people who cannot seem to stop drinking or taking drugs are deemed to have a disease, called an addiction. A genetic cause is at the root of the addiction, and the addiction needs to be treated with methods commonly used for other physical and emotional diseases.

There is some value in the medical model. Along with such factors as personality or temperament, a person's genes may give him or her some predisposition to addictive behavior. And sometimes medical treatments, such as methadone treatments for heroin addicts, have proven helpful. But even given such advantages, the medical model is woefully incomplete.

By labeling overindulgent behaviors a "disease," the medical model effectively cuts off the spiritual and ethical aspects of the human being involved. A person's behavior may be an addiction, but it is also *sin*. We have a responsibility—and a real potential—to do what is right, even if we have allowed a certain substance to gain a measure of control over us. Ultimately overindulgence is treatable only by the soul surgery of repentance.

That's what a young man named Franklin found out to his great surprise.

A LIAR WHO ENCOUNTERED THE TRUTH

Franklin had it all—all the problems you could imagine, that is. He liked to drink too much, take illegal drugs, and sleep around with both men and women. He was also insecure, unhappy, and riddled with guilt. He knew his life was a time bomb waiting to go off, but he had no idea of how to talk to God about his problems. Finally, he went to a counselor.

"Doc, I need to quit drinking and doing drugs. But I can't stop." Franklin started to sob.

"Well," the counselor replied, "I'm glad you are here. But I already have my doubts that you are ready to change. You've said two things to me, and one of them is not true. We are not going to get anywhere with an attitude like that."

"Lying? What are you talking about? I need help, not word games!"

“You said something irrational, Franklin. You said you couldn’t stop drinking and using drugs. Are you drinking and using drugs right now, or are you talking to me?”

Franklin said, “Of course I’m not taking drugs now! I’m talking to a worthless counselor who accuses me of lying the moment I sit down!”

“Then,” the counselor replied, “you admit that you can control when you abuse yourself and when you do not?”

Franklin began to think about his level of control. He did not drink until after 5:30 P.M. He did not do illegal drugs except on certain days. He had a favorite drink (gin and tonic) and would not touch domestic beer. He actually began to relax as he described his favorite blend of drugs and alcohol and how, if he timed it right, he could party all night, get an hour’s sleep on the bus going to work, and take an “upper” with his first cup of coffee and work all day without a break.

This took up most of Franklin’s first session. Before he left, the counselor asked two questions: “Franklin, why do you enjoy talking about the greatest enemies you have—the very things that will kill you if you don’t stop using them to alter your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors? Why are you so angry at God that you would keep lashing out at Him in flagrant disobedience?”

Franklin did not have an answer to those questions. But he had started thinking in a new way.

CHOOSE YOUR MASTER

Would Franklin submit to the control of God, or would he give up control to his appetites? All people who overindulge face the same question.

Not being controlled is not an option. We were made to worship and to serve another outside ourselves. And so we will always serve someone or something, and many choose to make their appetite their god, whether that appetite is for Jim Beam whiskey or lines of white powder or a third plateful at Country Buffet. The only worthy master is God. He is the one we were made to serve.

Of course, there is such a thing as Christian freedom. Some would justify indulging their appetites on the basis of that freedom.

We will always serve someone or something, and many choose to make their appetite their god.

But the apostle Paul preempted such an argument: “You say, ‘I am allowed to do anything’—but not everything is good for you. And even though ‘I am allowed to do anything,’ I must not become a slave to anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

No, we must not become a slave to anything. Not drink. Not drugs. Not food. Not anything. We must serve God alone. As we do so, He will enable us to make better choices in what we will consume. He will heal us spiritually, enabling us to partake of substances or experiences in moderation (if limited consumption is safe) or keep a distance from whatever substance or experience threatens to destroy us.

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

Have you had enough of too much? Are you willing to admit that your overindulgence is a sin? If so, we hope you will take action now by emptying your life of the sin and by filling the empty space with something far better. The virtue with which we should replace a sin of overindulgence is *moderation*.

“Do you like honey?” asked Solomon. “Don’t eat too much, or it will make you sick!” (Proverbs 25:16). This call to moderation is appropriate to many but not all kinds of overindulgence.

Moderation is the proper response when overindulgence often involves substances or experiences that are good in themselves. In itself, food is good; we need it to survive, and it provides enjoyment. In themselves, a house and the things we put in it are good; they help us to live our lives in safety and satisfaction. In itself, entertainment is good; it gives us both relaxation and mental stimulation. What’s bad is when we use these good things to the point of excess. Defining what is “excess” is a challenging, personal struggle.

This perversion of the good for evil is a pattern that has long been understood. Eighteenth-century devotional writer William Law said,

Our souls may receive an infinite hurt, and be rendered incapable of all virtue, merely by the use of innocent and lawful things....

What is more lawful than eating and drinking? And yet what more destructive of all virtue, what more fruitful of all vice, than sensuality and indulgence?...

Now it is for want of religious exactness in the use of these innocent and lawful things, that religion cannot get possession of our hearts. And it is in the right and prudent management of ourselves, as to these things, that all the art of holy living chiefly consists.⁸

In other cases, however, overindulgence involves substances or experiences that are wrong, period. Shooting heroin, for example, is always illegal and always destructive. The response in a situation like this should be what we might call an extreme form of moderation: abstinence. Here, any indulgence is overindulgence.

Also, there are the gray areas. We can all agree that it is wrong to get drunk, since the Bible is so clear on that point, but should Christians drink only in moderation or should they not drink at all? Both the authors of this book have chosen not to drink at all, so as to avoid any risk associated with drunkenness or dependence on alcohol. We would advise anyone else who has had a problem with overindulgence to likewise avoid the risk of drunkenness by avoiding alcohol altogether. For the rest, we say again: moderation. Through prayer, you can seek God's help to know whether moderation or abstinence is right for you in a given instance—and what "moderation" would mean in your case.

Moderation is what God wants to see in our lives.

Truly, moderation is what God wants to see in our lives. As we overindulge in our favorite ways, God grieves because He knows we are not filling ourselves with what we really need, and that is more of Himself. We can never get too much of God.

SOUL PRESCRIPTION FOR OVERINDULGENCE

Are you struggling with some form of overindulgence? We have outlined a five-step process to help you repent and heal in this area of your life. Take all the time you need with each of the steps below.

Step 1: Adopt a Correct View of God

If you are overindulgent with yourself, it is important that you understand God better as the loving Father. He has promised you that He will always provide for your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. You do not need to stuff yourself with whatever you can get your hands on.

- God is all-knowing. He designed you and knows what would make you the happiest.

“I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

—Jeremiah 29:11

- God is love. He will always give you only what is good for you.

Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.

—James 1:17

- God is faithful. He will always provide for your needs.

The LORD will withhold no good thing from those who do what is right.

—Psalm 84:11

Do not let a warped view of God justify your overindulgent lifestyle any longer. Undertake a search of Scripture for passages that depict God as your provider who satisfies you.

Step 2: Revise Your False Beliefs

God has called you to a life of holiness and moderate living. When you choose a different course for life, it proves that you really do not believe God will hold you accountable for your actions.

The following questions are designed to expose false beliefs of overindulgence.

- Do you believe you have the right to party excessively?

You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols.

—1 Peter 4:3

- Do you believe you have no choice in controlling your appetites?

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.

—Romans 8:12

- Do you believe you are not responsible for your sinful overindulgence?

We are each responsible for our own conduct.

—Galatians 6:5

Try as you may, you just cannot lay the responsibility for your excessive self-indulgence on the shoulders of anyone other than yourself. Learn from Scripture what is really true about self-indulgent behavior versus self-control.

Step 3: Repent of Your Sin

You must make the decision to turn away from your lifestyle of overindulgence and to disconnect your heart, mind, and spirit from that which enslaves you. Give your particular type of overindulgence a name (drunkenness, gluttony, or whatever else it may be).

Confess your sin to God and ask His forgiveness. If you wish, you can use the following prayer (inserting your own sin in the blank).

Father, I have sinned against you by _____. I know that this hurts You, and I am sorry for that. Please forgive me for the sake of Christ. Make me clean, Lord, removing from my heart the desires that have enslaved me. Fill me with the Holy Spirit, and through Him give me the strength to walk the path of righteousness one day at a time. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you have harmed others with your sin, apologize to them. Seek reconciliation and offer restitution where appropriate.

Step 4: Defend against Spiritual Attacks

Now that you have repented and been set free from your sin, this freedom must be defended. You have to understand the tactics of your enemies and defend against them accordingly.

- The world tells you, “It’s your body and you can do what you want with it.” Overcome the world system by rejecting such a distorted value. Embrace the value God places on self-control and moderation over self-indulgence. Listen to Him and not to the world.
- Your flesh wants the gratifications of physical sensations. So when such desires arise, remember that your flesh is dead; you are now living by the Spirit. You do not have to do what your flesh wants.

Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. However, those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit.

—Galatians 6:8

- Satan will encourage you to satisfy your desires for excessive self-indulgence. Hold up the “shield of faith” to stop the fiery arrows of the devil (Ephesians 6:16), showing you realize that ungodly self-indulgence does not offer lasting satisfaction.

The temptation to overindulge oneself tends to be especially persistent in a person's life. Plan on remaining vigilant toward your enemies' attacks for the rest of your life. The battle is long, but in God's power you *can* be victorious.

Step 5: Flee Temptation

Take proactive measures if you wish to remain free from the sin of overindulgence. By reducing temptation, you can improve the chances of your success.

- Focus on your relationship with God.

Start every day with God. Give Him your attention and devotion instead of concentrating on the thing that once held you captive to your selfish desires. Consider fasting periodically as a reminder that "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

—Mathew 4:4

- Latch on to God's promises.
Find truths in Scripture that will encourage you in your resistance to the temptations of overindulgence. Memorize key verses for recall when you need them. Here is one verse we recommend:

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and *self-control*. There is no law against these things!

—Galatians 5:22–23, emphasis added

- Establish safeguards.
What situations tend to encourage your excessive self-indulgence? Take decisive action to avoid those situations as much as possible. For example,

- If you are irresponsible in your eating, plan reasonable menus a week at a time and buy only what you will need.
 - If you get drunk, remove all the alcohol from your house, ask your friends not to serve alcohol when you are around, and never go to an eating establishment that serves liquor.
 - If you watch too much TV, get rid of your television set or put a timer on it.
 - Ask a trusted Christian friend to hold you accountable in your commitment to not overindulge.
-
- Expect victory.
You have the Spirit of God living in you and imparting to you everything you need to win this fight. Yield to Him daily in anticipation of total deliverance from your sin habit. When you do this, He will replace your self-indulgent desires with moderation and self-control.

Visit www.SoulPrescription.com for more insights and resources, and to download a free leader's guide for small group Bible studies.

Appendix A



HOW TO KNOW GOD PERSONALLY

Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God.

Law 1: *God loves you and created you to know Him personally.*

God's Love

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16

God's Plan

This is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

—John 17:3

What prevents us from knowing God personally?

Law 2: *People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.*

Human Beings Are Sinful

All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.

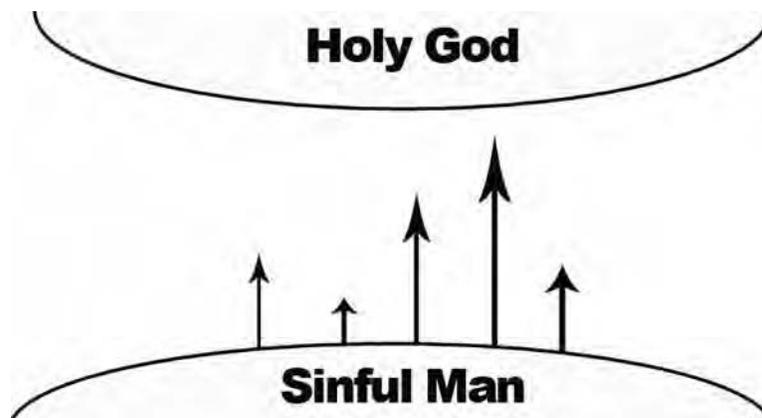
—Romans 3:23

The human race was created to have fellowship with God. But because of our own stubborn self-will, we chose to go our own independent way, and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

Human Beings Are Separated

The wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].

—Romans 6:23



This diagram illustrates that God is holy and humanity is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that people are continually trying to reach God and establish a personal relationship with Him through their own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion—but they inevitably fail.

The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gulf.

Law 3: *Jesus Christ is God's only provision for human sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love.*

He Died in Our Place

God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

—Romans 5:8

He Rose from the Dead

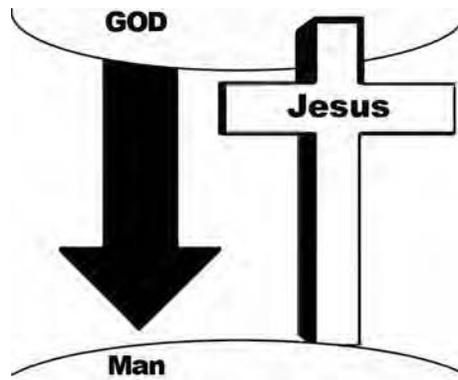
Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time.

—1 Corinthians 15:3–6

He Is the Only Way to God

Jesus told [Thomas], “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

—John 14:6



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place and pay the penalty for our sins.

It is not enough just to know these truths.

Law 4: *We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know God personally and experience His love.*

We Must Receive Christ

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

—John 1:12

We Receive Christ through Faith

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

—Ephesians 2:8–9

When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth

After dark one evening, a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to speak with Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are proof enough that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven. So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

—John 3:1–8

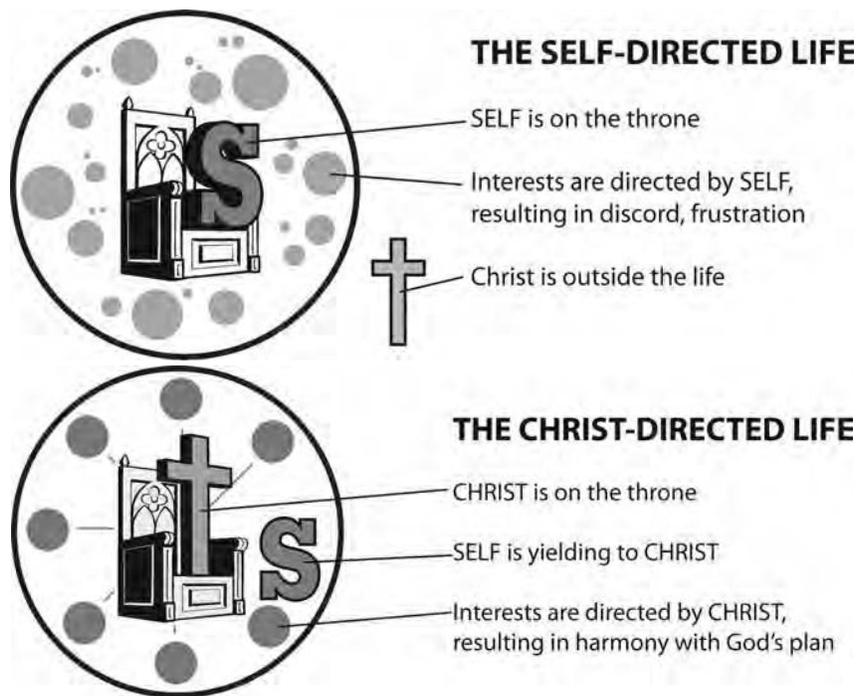
We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[Christ said,] "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."

—Revelation 3:20

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives.



Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

You Can Receive Christ Right Now by Faith through Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life

Did you receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said He would come into your life and be your friend so you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

The Bible Promises Eternal Life to All Who Receive Christ

“This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So whoever has God’s Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life. I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.”

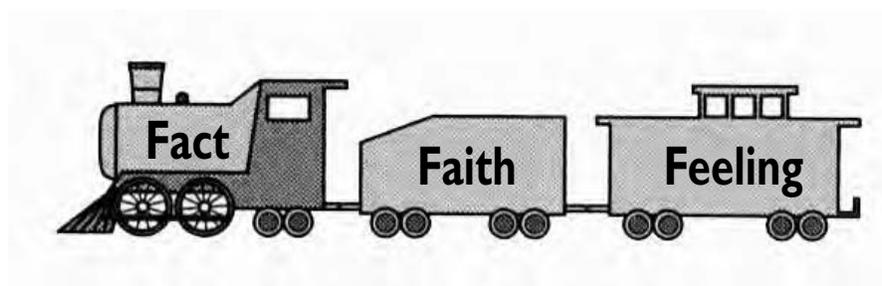
—1 John 5:11–13

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him in. He will not deceive you.

An important reminder...

Do Not Depend on Feelings

The promise of God’s Word, the Bible—not our feelings—is our authority. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. This train diagram illustrates the relationship among fact (God and His Word), faith (our trust in God and His Word), and feeling (the result of our faith and obedience). (Read John 14:21.)



The train will run with or without the caboose. However, it would be useless to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, we as Christians do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

Now That You Have Received Christ

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of your will, many things happened, including the following:

- Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20; Colossians 1:27).
- Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
- You became a child of God (John 1:12).
- You received eternal life (John 5:24).
- You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you? By thanking God, you demonstrate your faith.

Suggestions for Christian Growth

Spiritual growth results from trusting Jesus Christ. “The righteous man shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11). A life of faith will enable you to trust God increasingly with every detail of your life and to practice the following:

- G** Go to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).
- R** Read God’s Word daily, beginning with the gospel of John (Acts 17:11).
- O** Obey God moment by moment (John 14:21).
- W** Witness for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).
- T** Trust God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).
- H** Holy Spirit—allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:16–17).

Fellowship in a Good Church

God's Word admonishes us to "not neglect our meeting together" (Hebrews 10:25). Several logs burn brightly together, but put one aside on the cold hearth and the fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians. If you do not belong to a church, do not wait to be invited. Take the initiative; call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ is honored and His Word is preached. Start this week and make plans to attend regularly.

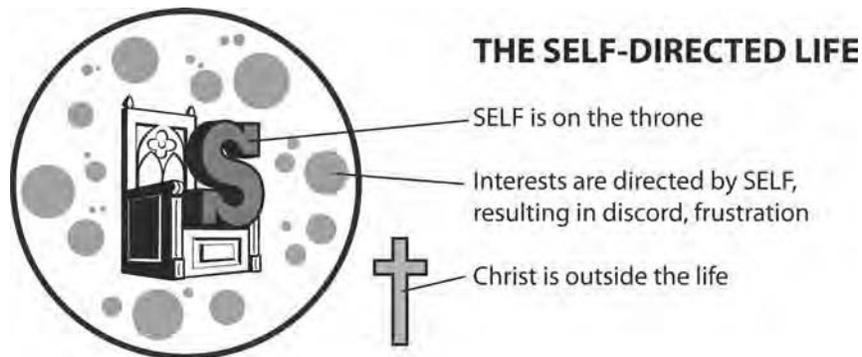
Appendix B



HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every day can be an exciting adventure for the Christian who knows the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit and who lives constantly, moment by moment, under His gracious direction.

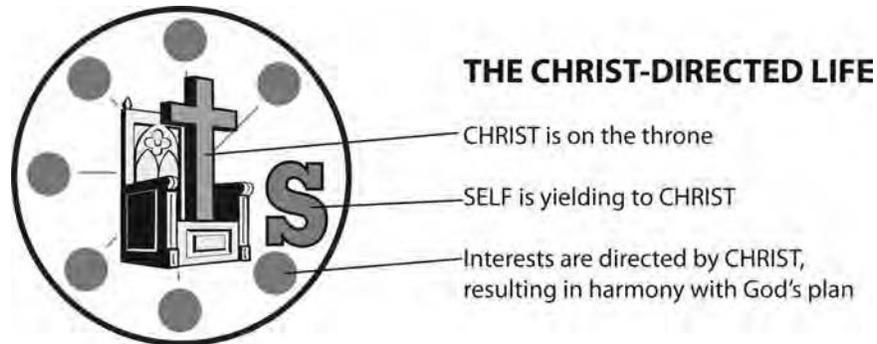
The Bible tells us there are three kinds of people:



1. The Natural Person: One who has not received Christ

People who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means.

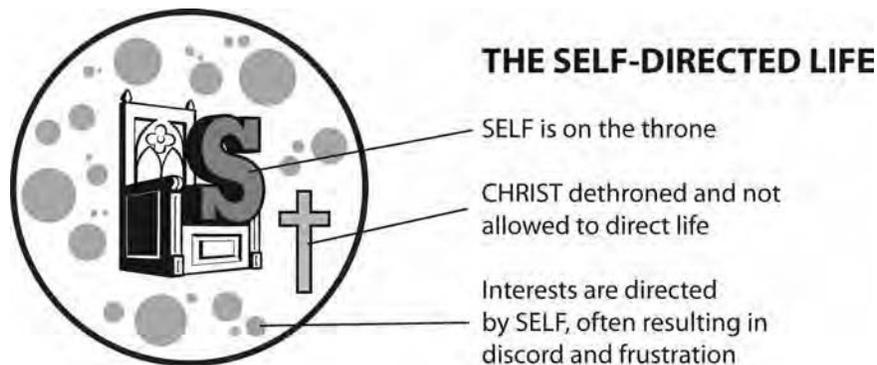
—1 Corinthians 2:14



2. **The Spiritual Person:** One who is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit

We who have the Spirit understand these things.... We have the mind of Christ.

—1 Corinthians 2:15–16



3. **The Worldly (Carnal) Person:** One who has received Christ but who lives in defeat because the person is trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord.

—1 Corinthians 3:1–3

The following are four principles for living the Spirit-filled life:

1. God has provided for us an abundant and fruitful Christian life.

[Jesus said,] “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.”

—John 10:10

[Jesus said,] “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:5

When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

—Galatians 5:22–23

When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

—Acts 1:8

The following are some personal traits of the spiritual person that result from trusting God:

Christ-centered
Empowered by the Holy Spirit
Introduces others to Christ
Effective prayer life
Understands God’s Word



Understands God’s Word
Trusts and obeys God
Experiences love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness,
faithfulness, gentleness,
goodness, and self-control

The degree to which these traits are manifested in the life depends on (1) the extent to which the Christian trusts the Lord with every detail of life and (2) his or her maturity in Christ. One who is only beginning to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit should not be discouraged if he or she is not as fruitful as more mature Christians who have known and experienced this truth for a longer period.

Why is it that most Christians are not experiencing the abundant life?

2. Worldly Christians cannot experience the abundant and fruitful Christian life.

Worldly (carnal) people trust in their own efforts to live the Christian life:

- They are either uninformed about, or have forgotten, God's love, forgiveness, and power (Acts 1:8; Romans 5:8–10; Hebrews 10:1–25; 2 Peter 1:9; 1 John 1; 2:1–3).
- They have an up-and-down spiritual experience.
- They cannot understand themselves—they want to do what is right but cannot.
- They fail to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life (Romans 7:15–24; 8:7; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; Galatians 5:16–18).

Some or all of the following traits may characterize the worldly person—the Christian who does not fully trust God:

Unbelief

Disobedience

Poor prayer life

No desire for Bible study



Legalistic attitude or critical spirit

Impure thoughts, jealousy, guilt

Worry, discouragement

Loss of love for God and others

(Those who profess to be Christians but who continue to practice sin should realize that they may not be Christians at all, according to Ephesians 5:5 and 1 John 2:3; 3:6–9.)

The third truth gives us the only solution to this problem.

3. Jesus promised the abundant and fruitful life as the result of being filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit-filled life is the Christ-directed life by which Christ lives His life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15).

- One becomes a Christian through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, according to John 3:1–8. From the moment of spiritual birth, the Christian is indwelt by the

Holy Spirit at all times (John 1:12; 14:16–17; Colossians 2:9–10). (Though all Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, not all Christians are filled—that is, directed and empowered—by the Holy Spirit on an ongoing basis.)

- The Holy Spirit is the source of the overflowing life (John 7:37–39).
- The Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ (John 16:1–15). When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she is a true disciple of Christ.
- In His last command before His ascension, Christ promised the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be witnesses for Him (Acts 1:1–9).

How, then, can one be filled with the Holy Spirit?

4. We are filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit by faith. Then we can experience the abundant and fruitful life that Christ promised.

You can appropriate the filling of the Holy Spirit right now if you:

- Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:6; John 7:37–39).
- Confess your sins. By faith, thank God that He has forgiven all of your sins—past, present, and future—because Christ died for you (Colossians 2:13–15; Hebrews 10:1–17; 1 John 1; 2:1–3).
- Present every area of your life to God (Romans 12:1–2).
- By faith claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit, according to

His command: Be filled with the Spirit.

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.

—Ephesians 5:18

His promise: He will always answer when we pray according to His will.

We can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for.

—1 John 5:14–15

Faith can be expressed through prayer.

How to Pray in Faith to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith alone. However, true prayer is one way of expressing our faith. The following is a suggested prayer:

Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have sinned against You by directing my own life. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now invite Christ to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You commanded me to be filled and as You promised in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. I pray this in the name of Jesus. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If so, bow in prayer and trust God to fill you with the Holy Spirit right now.

How to Walk in the Spirit

Faith (trust in God and His promises) is the only way a Christian can live the Spirit-directed life. As you continue to trust Christ moment by moment,

- Your life will demonstrate more and more of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Your prayer life and study of God's Word will become more meaningful.
- You will experience His power in witnessing (Acts 1:8).
- You will be prepared for spiritual conflict against the world (1 John 2:15–17), against the flesh (Galatians 5:16–17), and against Satan (1 Peter 5:7–9; Ephesians 6:10–13).
- You will experience His power to resist temptation and sin (Romans 6:1–16; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 1:19–23; Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:7).

Appendix C



SPIRITUAL BREATHING

If you become aware of an area of your life (an attitude or an action) that is displeasing to the Lord, even though you are walking with Him and sincerely desiring to serve Him, simply thank God that He has forgiven your sins—past, present, and future—on the basis of Christ’s death on the cross. Claim His love and forgiveness by faith and continue to have fellowship with Him.

If you retake the throne of your life through sin—a definite act of disobedience—breathe spiritually. Spiritual breathing (exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure) is an exercise in faith that enables you to experience God’s love and forgiveness.

1. *Exhale*: Confess your sin—agree with God concerning your sin and thank Him for His forgiveness of it, according to 1 John 1:9 and Hebrews 10:1–25. Confession involves repentance—a change in attitude and action.

2. *Inhale*: Surrender the control of your life to Christ, and receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit by faith. Trust that He now directs and empowers you, according to the command of Ephesians 5:18 and the promise of 1 John 5:14–15.



ENDNOTES

1. Adapted from David Slagle, "Doctor Calls Man's Overeating Sin," *Preaching Today*, <http://www.preachingtoday.com>, accessed October 2003.
2. American Obesity Association, <http://www.obesity.org/>, accessed September 2003.
3. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., in *The Reformed Journal* (November 1988), as quoted in *Christianity Today* 33, no. 2.
4. Quoted in Chuck Green, "Sound Salvation," *The Reader's Guide to Arts and Entertainment*, February 28, 2003, 6.
5. Other proverbs underscore the way drunkenness can lead to poverty and prevent the acquisition of wisdom. (See Prov. 20:1; 21:17; 23:20–21.)
6. See also Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:21.
7. Quoted in Steve Beard, "Johnny Cash Approaches Judgment Day with Faith," *Relevant*, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com>, accessed August 2003.
8. William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, chapter 7, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, http://www.ccel.org/l/law/serious_call/cache/serious_call.html3, accessed December 2003.



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Free Discipleship Courses

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From Coping to Cure

Why are so many Christians unhappy? From Coping to Cure by Dr. Henry Brandt looks at the relief available through people helping people, through human efforts apart from God. Then, the lessons explore the many dimensions of Christ the Cure: God's healing love can transform the most miserable life into one of comfort, joy, and deep personal peace. Lessons are sent once per week.

Keys to Happy Family Living

Sent once per week, Keys to Happy Family Living by Dr. Henry Brandt is written for anyone who desires to be the best marriage partner and the best parent possible. Happy, successful parenthood is based upon a successful partnership, which in turn requires two individuals who themselves are happy, contented and competent.

I Want Happiness Now!

Are you dejected and desperately unhappy? Good news! You can find relief from your frustrated, hopeless condition resulting from your response to the circumstances and people in your world. In this weekly series, *I Want Happiness Now!*, Dr. Henry Brandt reveals how you can tap into the resources freely given to us by God so you will be a truly radiant, contented and joyful person.

The Struggle for Inner Peace

This weekly study addresses the problem that many Christians hold hatred, fear, resentment, jealousy, and malice toward others. As a result, fellowship with these persons and the Lord is broken, joy is lost, and God's peace is not enjoyed. Confessing and forsaking one's sinful ways in obedience to the Lord and His Word are necessary if the Christian is to enjoy God's peace. This series was written with the hope that many Christians will be helped in their "struggle" for inner peace, released from anxiety, and set free to experience the "fruit of the Spirit" which includes peace (Gal. 5:22).

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SOUL PRESCRIPTION

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Does your life feel out of control? Are you struggling to free yourself from a web of destructive habits that are holding you in bondage? Are you engulfed in an endless cycle of trying to change but continually falling back into sin?

Soul Prescription offers the healing and hope you seek. With a unique, methodical, and biblically based approach to eliminating sin habits, this book will help you evaluate your behavior and attitudes in light of God's standards. As the authors gently lead you through the process of turning away from debilitating habits, you will be free to embrace Holy Spirit-empowered virtues.

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www.HenryBrandtFoundation.org.

Dr. Bill Bright was devoted to holy living and spent more than five decades building and leading Campus Crusade for Christ. Fueled by his passion to present the love and claims of Jesus Christ to every person on earth, he wrote the booklet The Four Spiritual Laws, which has been printed in 200 languages and distributed to more than 2.5 billion people. Find out about his 100 other books and pamphlets at:

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