

SOUL PRESCRIPTION

**DECEIT:
SHOWING A FALSE FACE**

SIN FAMILY #7

HYPOCRISY
LYING **D** FLATTERY
DECEIT FRAUD
CHEATING

BILL BRIGHT & HENRY BRANDT

SOUL PRESCRIPTION

*Experience
True Healing and Freedom*

BILL Bright & Henry Brandt

Foreword by Tim LaHaye

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He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

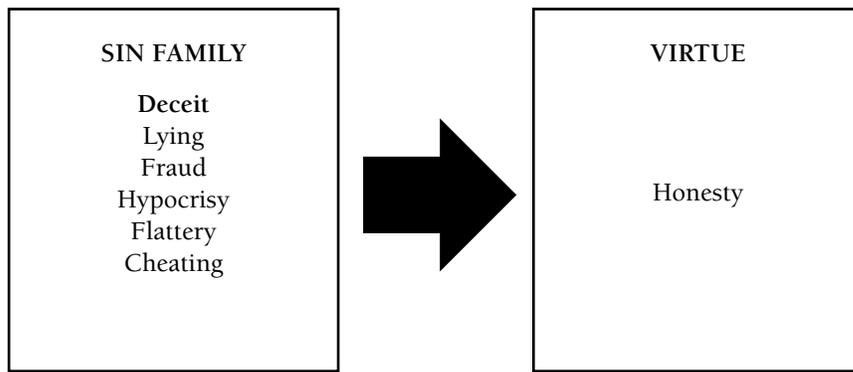
—Psalm 147:3 NIV

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DECEIT: SHOWING A FALSE FACE



You may remember the scandal from the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in which a French ice skating judge scored a Russian pair higher than the Canadians Jamie Salé and David Pelletier, who had turned in what was widely considered a superior performance. But do you know how the truth came out? With many tears and much loud wailing.

The French judge at the center of the scandal, Marie-Reine Le Gougne, was called into a meeting with the other judges just twelve hours after the skating event, on February 12, 2002. At one point the head referee, Ron Pfenning, passed around a sheet of paper that underscored the responsibility of judges to perform

their duties with honesty and integrity. The French woman broke down.

Teary-eyed from the beginning, Le Gougne now began to cry out loud and to let loose an avalanche of words. “You don’t understand,” she said. “We’re under an awful lot of pressure. My federation, my president Didier, I had to put the Russians first.” She was referring to Didier Gailhaguet, then president of the French Figure Skating Federation, whom she alleged instructed her in advance how to score the event.

Le Gougne’s wailing in the meeting went on for several minutes. Finally, it grew so loud that another person in the room covered the crack around the door with tape to keep people on the outside from hearing what was going on inside.¹

And what was going on? The wailing was the sound of a conscience catching up with someone who was guilty of conspiring to cheat others. She was a deceiver found out.

To her credit, Le Gougne felt bad about what she had done. Others involved in various kinds of deceit seemingly do a better job of keeping their conscience pushed down and out of sight.

Of course, all persons are guilty of deceit to some extent. After all, we are told, “the human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). Our race has participated in deception since Adam and Eve went along with the serpent’s lies about the fruit God had placed off-limits. But some of us have a more serious problem in this area of deception. Some of us are serial deceivers.

Does that describe you? If so, where is your biggest problem with deception? Do you tell falsehoods when it serves your purpose? Do you pretend to be what you are not? Do you tell people what they want to hear about themselves, even when it is not true? Do you cheat to gain an advantage in a contest? Do you trick others for profit?

Watch out! Scripture tells us,

You [God] will destroy those who tell lies.
The LORD detests murderers and deceivers.

—Psalm 5:6

Our race has participated in deception since Adam and Eve went along with the serpent’s lies about the fruit God had placed off-limits.

We know how tempting it can be to shade the truth or present oneself in a false light for selfish reasons. Nevertheless, each of us must give up deception and learn the ways of honesty and integrity.

TRUTH DECAY

The image of the early Christian church in the opening pages of Acts is, for the most part, an attractive picture of faith, unity, and love. But in the midst of all this exemplary godliness, one event struck a jarring note, and it had to do with lying.

But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property. He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!"

As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?"

"Yes," she replied, "that was the price."

And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too."

Are You Deceitful?

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

- Do you look on truth as something you can mold rather than as an unchanging reality?
- Do you bend—or break—the truth when speaking with others?
- Do you use slyness, trickery, underhandedness, guile, or invention as a tool to get ahead?
- Are you a different person when you are alone than when others are watching?
- Do you leave the impression with others that you are a better person than you actually are?
- Do you say good things about other people insincerely, hoping to get on their good side?
- Do you cheat people out of what is rightfully theirs?
- Do you break the rules you had agreed to abide by?

Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

—Acts 5:1–11

Fear, indeed, should be the reaction of anyone perpetrating dishonesty. God does not usually respond to lying by sending instant death. But lying is a form of deception that consistently earns His condemnation, for untruth interferes with justice and integrity in human relations.

One particular form of lying—perjury, or lying in a legal proceeding—made it into the Ten Commandments: “You must not testify falsely against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).² But both Testaments reflect how seriously God views the sin of lying. Consider this sampling:

Keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies!

—Psalm 34:13

The Devil is the sponsor of untruth.

I will not allow deceivers to serve in my house, and liars will not stay in my presence.

—Psalm 101:7

A false witness will not go unpunished, nor will a liar escape.

—Proverbs 19:5

Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

—Ephesians 4:25³

Don't lie to each other.

—Colossians 3:9

When we lie, we are not motivated by God but rather by His enemy. The Devil is the sponsor of untruth. Jesus testified that

Satan “has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Reading all this, you may excuse your own dishonesty by calling it a “white lie”—a small, insignificant untruth that could not hurt a fly. Or, you may think you have escaped guilt through lying by implication instead of by telling a falsehood outright. And what about half-truths? Ananias and Sapphira discovered to their peril that a half-truth equates to a whole lie. Let us, then, always tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We will be doing ourselves a favor.

The truth wants to be free. It has a way of escaping into daylight despite every attempt to keep it trapped under a lid—ask any politician who has tried to prevent a scandal from reaching public notice. Benjamin Franklin said, “A lie stands on one leg, truth on two.” In the plain words of Scripture, “Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed” (Proverbs 12:19). Just as God knows every time we counterfeit the truth, so other people usually find out as well.

The practice of lying can easily develop into a habit over time. But truth telling can become a habit too. If your character has suffered from truth decay, resolve with Job, “As long as I live,... my tongue will speak no lies” (Job 27:3–4).

Equally as serious as lying is another form of deception—hypocrisy, or pretending to be better than we are.

THE MASK OF GOODNESS

Some years ago I (Henry) taught a college-age Sunday school class. One young man in the class often said, “I am very devoted to the Lord. Because my body is the Lord’s, I want to take care of it. I don’t stay up late; I’m careful what I eat; I exercise regularly; and I don’t drink, smoke, or chase women.”

We all listened and nodded. “Good for you,” we would say.

Then one day, at an airport many miles from home, I saw this model student standing in front of the terminal building. Guess what? He had a cigar in his mouth and was puffing away as happy as could be. So much for taking good care of his body.

I walked up to chat with him. When he saw me coming, he did a strange thing. He stuck that cigar—still smoking—in his pocket!

Now, one would think that a young man would be glad to see his Sunday school teacher, especially so far from home. But the opposite was true in this case: my student seemed ill at ease and in a hurry to be off. A bit mischievously (that was *my* sin), I kept him talking as long as I could, until the smoke began curling up from his pocket.⁴

My student was a hypocrite. Are you? Do you act at church like your family gets along great, when in fact fighting is raging all the time at home? Do you pretend to have a profound relationship with God, when the truth is that your devotional life is about as substantial as a mirage? Do you let people assume that you are a highly moral being, even though you are sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend every weekend?

Hypocrisy is an add-on sin. If you are struggling with any other sin listed in this book, and then you lie about it through words or pretense, you have added hypocrisy to your burden of guilt. And even worse, if you have deluded yourself into believing that you are a godly person despite your sins, then you have let hypocrisy join hands with its favorite partner, self-righteousness.

Jesus reserved His harshest language for religious people who pretended to be holier than they were.

Jesus reserved His harshest language for religious people who pretended to be holier than they were. Matthew 23, in fact, is one long diatribe against the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Christ said of these religious leaders, “They don’t practice what they teach” and “Everything they do is for show” (verses 3, 5).

The Greek word used in the New Testament for “hypocrite” was originally applied to Greek and Roman actors. Following the convention of the day, these actors would play their parts while wearing large masks. In other words, the faces that theatergoers saw were not the real faces of the actors—those were hidden underneath.

So it is with hypocrites today: they put one face forward while hiding their real face from view. They “will act religious” but “reject the power that could make them godly” (2 Timothy 3:5). They “claim they know God” yet “deny Him by the way they live” (Titus 1:16).

Be honest about who you are. Authenticity puts you at a place where God may begin working with you to make things better. You might be surprised by how much people will still like you if you are honest about your failings. (There's a good chance they can smell the cigar smoke rising from your pocket anyway!)

"Get rid of all evil behavior." declared Peter. "Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy..." (1 Peter 2:1).

Hypocrisy is making yourself look better than you are. Flattery, on the other hand, is making *others* look better than *they* are. It is another form of deception.

BUTTERING UP

Darrin followed his boss into the conference room, and for a while the two of them were the only ones there.

"Is that a new jacket you're wearing, Mr. Gardner?" asked Darrin. "It's really stylish. I'd like to get one like that myself." Actually, Darrin considered the pattern in the sport coat to be way too busy.

Darrin's boss, Blaine Gardner, smiled and acknowledged the purchase of a new sport coat.

As Blaine started setting up his PowerPoint presentation, he passed the time by asking Darrin what Darrin thought about the proposal Blaine had circulated.

"It's great, Mr. Gardner!" said Darrin, even though he and all of his coworkers really believed the proposal would be far more costly to implement than management realized. "I think this will give us the market share we've been aiming for."

As Kirsten entered the room and overheard the final remarks, she rolled her eyes at Scott trailing behind her. Darrin was at it again, buttering up the boss.

The two-faced nature of deception is perhaps more evident in flattery than in any other form of deceit. Flattery is praising someone else untruthfully in the hope of gaining something by it, whether that gain is a promotion at work, mercy from a traffic cop, or even something as basic as attention from a friend. Flattery always has an ulterior motive.

Complimenting others is a neglected art form; we encourage praising the good in others. Flattery, however, goes beyond the honest compliment, using falsehood in an attempt to satisfy a selfish desire. As a result, it is destructive to relationships in the long run. “A lying tongue hates its victims, and flattering words cause ruin” (Proverbs 26:28).

The apostle Paul set an example of refusing to stoop to flattery. He told the congregation in Thessalonica, “Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money!” (1 Thessalonians 2:4–5).

Before praising another, stop and ask yourself: *Is what I am planning to say true? Why do I want to say it?* Taking time to evaluate your words carefully before saying them can help you keep your compliments within the bounds of truth. Your conscience will be your guide.

Your conscience will also guide you away from related forms of deception, fraud and cheating, if you will let it.

UNFAIR ADVANTAGE

Today, Frank W. Abagnale is sought after by governments and corporations as an expert on detecting forgery, embezzlement, and document falsification. But between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, he was one of the world’s most successful con artists. He cashed \$2.5 million in fraudulent checks in all fifty states and twenty-six foreign countries. He also successfully posed as an airline pilot, an attorney, a college professor, and a pediatrician before being apprehended by the French police. His life of crime was portrayed in the 2002 movie *Catch Me If You Can*.

Like Abagnale, some people are frauds, impostors, and cheats. These people are practicing some of the most self-serving forms of deceptions out there. They are obscuring the truth while trying to gain an advantage at another’s expense.

The problem of fraud in business came to public attention in recent years with a wave of corporate scandals. Enron’s Ken Lay and Jeffrey Skilling were suspected of accounting fraud. WorldCom’s

Bernard Ebbers was charged with securities fraud. Tyco boss Dennis Kozlowski was said to have used company money as his own. Such behaviors are hardly victimless crimes, as they have resulted in real losses to employees and small investors—not to mention the credibility of the US corporate world.

Do you think business fraud is a new problem? Think again. The Bible frequently takes on fraud in terms of businesspeople cheating their customers. For example, the prophet Amos railed against some of his fellow Israelites,

You can't wait for the Sabbath day to be over and the religious festivals to end so you can get back to cheating the helpless. You measure out grain with dishonest measures and cheat the buyer with dishonest scales. And you mix the grain you sell with chaff swept from the floor. Then you enslave poor people for one piece of silver or a pair of sandals.

—Amos 8:5–6⁵

What's so bad about fraud is that it frequently is a means for those with more wealth and power to oppress those who are less well-placed in society. God will always be on the side of the weak in such a situation.

Fraud is a perennial problem. Most are not committing fraud on the scale Amos mentions—or, certainly, on the scale of some modern-day CEOs lost to hubris. Instead, we commit fraud on the micro level. It goes by the label of “cheating.”

Tim Schutt, crew chief for NASCAR driver Mike McLaughlin, became a Christian during a retreat for members of the racing world and shortly afterward ran up against the temptation to cheat. McLaughlin's car was not performing as Tim wished, and so Tim decided to add a small device that was outlawed by NASCAR. Tim justified his decision to himself on the basis that many of the cars McLaughlin would be up against already had the hard-to-detect device.

Tim crawled under McLaughlin's No. 20 car and started to install the device. “I got halfway through putting it on,” recalled Tim, “and that verse ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God’ came flashing

in red in front of me, and whoa, that was it. I said, ‘I’m leaving this up to you, God.’”⁶ Schutt did not install the device.

As it turned out, McLaughlin won his next race anyway. When we choose to go against the trend of society and refuse to cheat, the outcome may not always be as positive for us. We may, in fact, lose whatever contest lies before us. But if we put God and His will first, determining to follow the rules no matter what, then in His eyes we will be winners every time. That’s the virtue of honesty.

THE BEST POLICY

*If we put God first,
determining to follow
the rules no matter
what, then in His eyes
we will be winners
every time.*

In 1948, while on my way to my wedding with Vonette Zachary, I (Bill) passed through the city of Okmulgee, Oklahoma, where my grandparents had lived for many years. Suddenly, I remembered my need to purchase gifts for the wedding party, and I stopped at a jewelry store.

Before looking for the items I wanted, I asked the owner if he would cash an out-of-state check.

“I’m sorry, sir.” He shook his head courteously. “It’s against our policy.”

“I understand,” I said and turned to walk out of the store.

He called after me, “Do you know anyone in this city?”

“No. My grandfather used to live here, but he’s been dead for several years.”

“What was his name?”

“Sam Bright.”

“Sam Bright was the most honorable man I have ever known!” he exclaimed. “If you’re anything like your grandfather, I will sell you anything in this store. And I’ll take your check!”

I was moved by this experience. Although my grandfather had been gone for many years, he had left a legacy of integrity.

What legacy are we leaving? What reputation are we building for ourselves? One act of deceit can make others distrust us. A pattern of deceit is hard to overcome. But with God’s help, any deceiver can begin to establish new patterns of honesty.

Shortly before his execution by the Nazis, the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer looked to the future. He said, “What the church will

need, what our century will need, are not people of genius, not brilliant tacticians or strategists, but simple, straightforward, honest men and women.” If anything, these words are more relevant today than at the time of World War II.

We deceive because we are worried about what will happen to us if we choose to tell the truth. What we find, though, is that when we practice deceit, we disappoint God, chip away at our own self-respect, and run the risk of a worse reaction from others when they find out the truth later. The proper response is to trust God to care for us as we honor His command to be truth tellers. There is, in fact, no peace to be had without truth.

A. W. Tozer said, “A guileless mind is a great treasure; it is worth any price.” Are you willing to pay the price? It means forgoing the easy payoffs that deceit can seem to bring, choosing instead the slow and steady dividends of making your word your bond.

Give up the too-easy and too-costly habit of deceit. Embrace instead the policy of honesty at all times.

When we practice deceit, we disappoint God, chip away at our own self-respect, and run the risk of a worse reaction from others when they find out the truth later.

SOUL PRESCRIPTION FOR DECEIT

Are you struggling with being deceitful in some way? 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

God is truth. To view Him in any other way will only serve to justify your deceitful behavior.

- God is absolute truth. He cannot lie and He does not change His standards.

God is not a man, so He does not lie.

—Numbers 23:19

- God is righteous, and He abhors dishonesty in every form.

Because what you say is false and your visions are a lie, I will stand against you, says the Sovereign LORD.

—Ezekiel 13:8

What is your view of God with respect to honesty and dishonesty? Go to Scripture and review every passage that talks about God's truthfulness. Don't fool yourself. God will not tolerate lies and deceitfulness.

Step 2: Revise Your False Beliefs

If you believe that your deceitfulness is justified or excusable for any reason, you are wrong. Perhaps mistaken views of yourself, other people, or how life works are making it harder for you to be truthful.

- Do you believe your “little white lies” do no harm?

Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow.

—Proverbs 25:18

- Do you believe others are yours to “use”?

Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

—Luke 6:31

- Do you believe the end justifies the means and thus makes your deceitfulness okay?

Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.

—Ephesians 4:25

Use scriptural truth about deceitfulness and honesty to expose errors in your thinking. Ask the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, to help you first understand the truth and then speak the truth to others.

Step 3: Repent of Your Sin

In what way are you deceitful? Identify it specifically. Then if you are prepared to give up this sin, pray a prayer of confession. A model prayer is presented below for your use, or you can pray in your own words.

God of truth, I have been deceitful by _____. This was a sin against You, and I am sorry for it. Please forgive me. Make me clean again, and fill me with Your power to help me remain clean of deceitfulness from this point on. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, 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

Your spiritual enemies—the world, the flesh, and the Devil—would like nothing better than to see you backslide into a pattern of deceitfulness. Beware of their wiles!

- The world system does not value honesty the way God does. The world's values would tell us to use deceitfulness if it will help us get ahead. We can overcome such an influence by immersing ourselves in God's value system. Develop the importance He places on honesty.
- Your flesh, or sinful nature, will tempt you to enjoy that self-reliant feeling that comes with trying to manipulate events through deceit. Do not give in to the craving! Your flesh is dead. You are a spiritual being now, living according to the Holy Spirit.
- Satan will make it as easy and as appealing for you to deceive others as possible. Put on the "belt of truth" (Ephesians 6:14) to help you discern true from false and remain committed to truth telling.

Be ever vigilant in defense against your spiritual foes. The attacks will not cease. Accessing the great power of God will empower you to be successful in every battle.

Step 5: Flee Temptation

You will never be able to completely avoid the temptation to return to your old deceitful ways. However, there are specific steps you can take to reduce your exposure and susceptibility to temptation.

- Focus on your relationship with God.
Spend time regularly cultivating your relationship with God. In particular, make Bible study a consistent discipline in your life. Constant exposure to the truth will make you a more truthful person.
- Latch on to God's promises.
Identify assurances in Scripture that make you more confident of winning over your sin of deceitfulness. Store assurances away in your mind as ammunition when the battle with temptation comes.

God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.

—Hebrews 6:18

- Establish safeguards.
Why not make holiness more easy for yourself as possible? Think of ways you can cut off common temptations. Here are examples of the kinds of changes you can make for the better:
 - If you cheat on your taxes, hire a tax preparer next year and make all your records available to this person.

- If you defraud your employer by falsifying your time sheet, ask a friend on your work team to verify its accuracy each week.
 - If you naturally resort to flattery, practice ahead of time what you can say in favor of a person without lying.
 - Ask a trusted Christian friend to hold you accountable in your commitment to not deceive others.
-
- Expect victory.
You are a new person in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit lives in you. He wants to create an honest heart in you. Seek His help as you eliminate deceit and adopt honesty in your life. As long as you are cooperating with Him, you cannot lose! Praise God!

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.

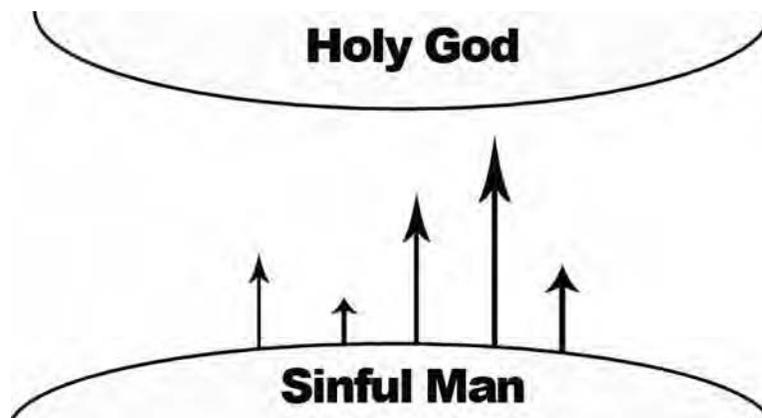
—Romans 3:23

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

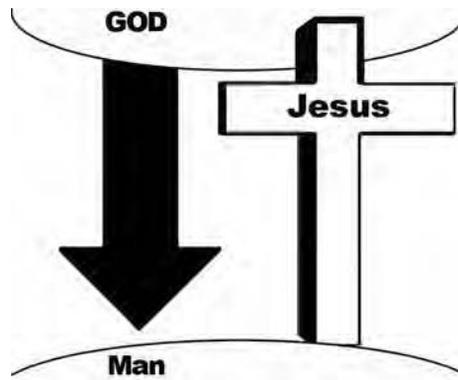
Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time.

—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

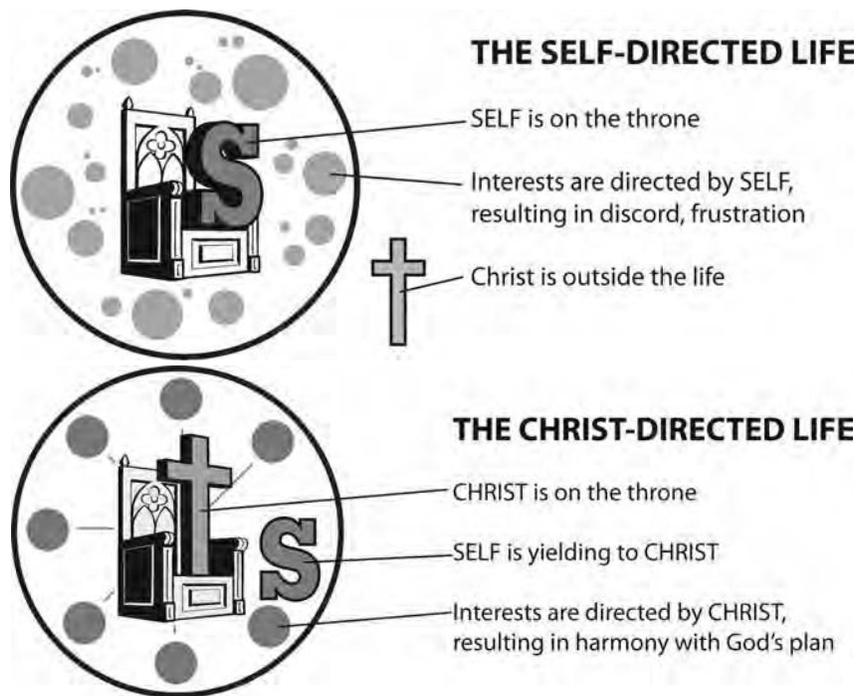
We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[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.”

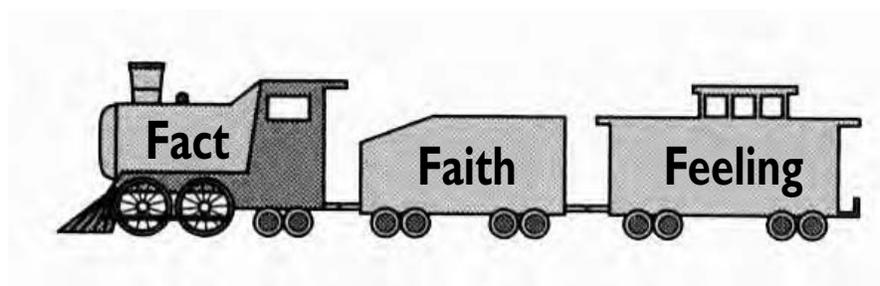
—1 John 5:11–13

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.

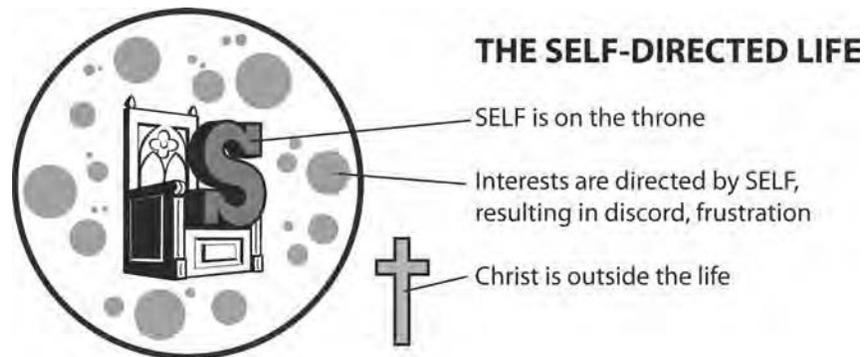
Appendix B



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.

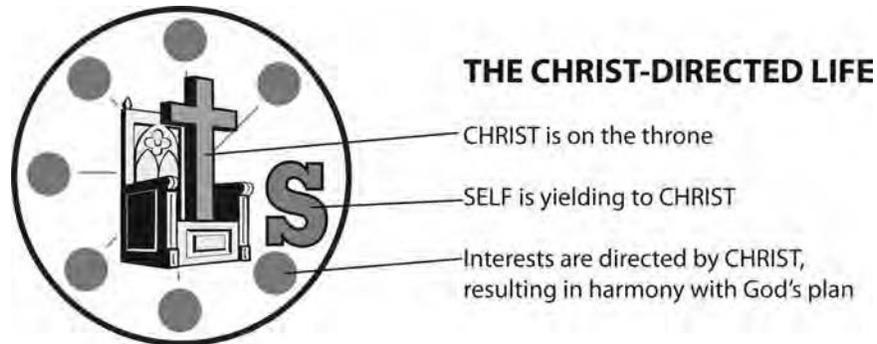
The Bible tells us there are three kinds of people:



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.

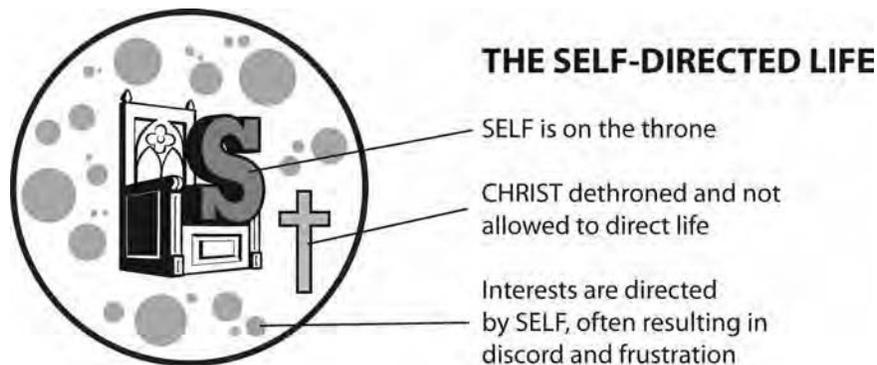
—1 Corinthians 2:14



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. Selena Roberts, "Olympics: The Pivotal Meeting. French Judge's Early Tears Indicated Controversy to Come," *New York Times*, February 17, 2002, sect. 8, p. 1.
2. For more on the ninth commandment and lying in general, see Bill Bright, *Written by the Hand of God: Experience God's Love and Blessing through the Liberating Power of His Ten Commandments* (Orlando, FL: New Life, 2001), chap. 14.
3. Paul was quoting Zechariah 8:16.
4. Adapted from Henry R. Brandt and Kerry L. Skinner, *The Word for the Wise* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 192–193.
5. For God's commandments against fraud, see Leviticus 19:35–36 and Deuteronomy 25:13–16. Proverbs 20:23 says, "The LORD despises double standards; he is not pleased by dishonest scales."



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Keys to Happy Family Living

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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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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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