

SOUL PRESCRIPTION

**IRRESPONSIBILITY:
THE UNDISCIPLINED LIFE**

SIN FAMILY #10

APATHY **LAZINESS** DISORDERLINESS
IRRESPONSIBILITY
PROCRASTINATION
NEGLIGENCE

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.

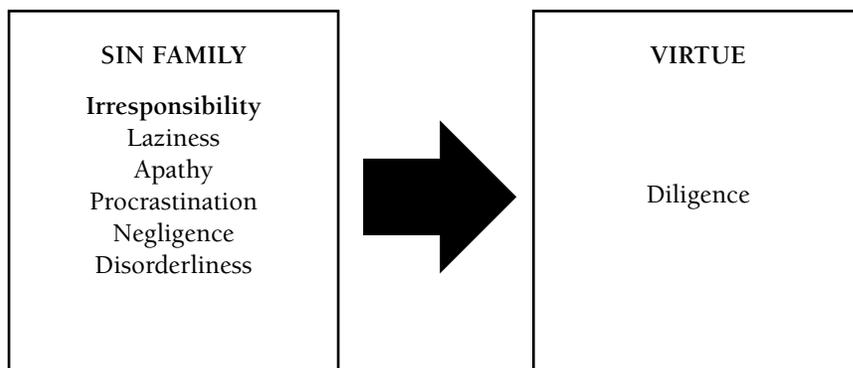
—Psalm 147:3 NIV

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IRRESPONSIBILITY: THE UNDISCIPLINED LIFE



About to open wide, with the drill lowering toward his mouth, a man humorously pleaded with his dentist, “Careful, Doc. I can stand anything but pain.”

By nature, every one of us is inclined to take the path of least resistance. The dentist usually injects us with Novocain to keep us from feeling any pain. We do not like the injection needle because of its momentary sting. We look for easy exercise programs that are perspiration free and tireless. Students shortcut their assigned reading by reviewing study notes.

And diets? There always seems to be a new fad for shedding weight without hunger or exercise. Liquid diets, banana diets,

grapefruit diets, carbohydrate diets, protein diets.... The list goes on and on.

When it comes right down to it, we do not like hard work. Areas that we recognize are in our best interest, such as with exercise, diet, and study, are avoided even though we know they will help us.

For most of us, the irresponsibility is merely occasional, cropping up only when a particularly hard chore stands before us. Others, though, are chronically irresponsible, rarely doing more than enough to get by at work, frequently arriving late for appointments, or so disorderly that their houses are a perpetual mess. Filled with lethargy and indifference, they go through life earning a reputation for being undependable. They have grown used to accomplishing little.

Does any of this describe you? Are you troubled in your conscience about your indolence, negligence, tardiness, apathy, or passivity? Are you aware that you only fulfill your responsibilities when it is clear that there is something in it for you? Our Lord would not have you so live.

I (Bill) have been inspired since my early Christian years by something the evangelist D. L. Moody said: "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him." Sticking close to God, working hard to fulfill His will for me in every facet of life—that is what I have strived to do, not for my own glory, but for God's.

A life of working hard at one's pursuits is a glorious adventure when we do it in tune with God's Spirit.

To what degree I have succeeded in my objective is for God to judge. But I can testify that a life of working hard at one's pursuits is a glorious adventure when it is done in tune with God's Spirit. It is the way we are meant to live.

If you have a sin habit of irresponsibility, it is not too late to seek the Lord's help for change. You can become a responsible and hardworking member of His kingdom if you will face up to your problem and seek to heal this area of your life according to His principles.

Let us begin our exploration of the sins of irresponsibility with laziness. No other sin in this family is so frequently addressed or

so roundly criticized in Scripture. “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically” (Romans 12:11).

A LESSON FROM THE ANTS

The book of Proverbs is about how to live skillfully, from a godly perspective. Given the frequency with which laziness is condemned in this book of the Bible, it is easy to see that sloth can have no place in a well-lived life. What can we learn about the causes and costs of laziness from the book of Proverbs?

1. In the worst cases, laziness can reach ridiculous proportions.

Lazy people don't even cook the game they catch, but the diligent make use of everything they find.

—Proverbs 12:27

Lazy people take food in their hand but don't even lift it to their mouth.

—Proverbs 19:24

2. Laziness is on a par with other serious sins.

A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things.

—Proverbs 18:9

3. Lazy people sleep too much.

As a door swings back and forth on its hinges, so the lazy person turns over in bed.

—Proverbs 26:14

(If you were not already convinced that the Bible has a sense of humor, this image should help to change your mind.)

4. The lazy make excuses for their laziness.

The lazy person claims, “There's a lion on the road! Yes, I'm sure there's a lion out there!”

—Proverbs 26:13

Are You Irresponsible?

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

- Do you sleep more than you need to?
- At work, do you watch the clock and worry more about looking busy than about being productive?
- Does your boss feel that he or she must keep an eye on you?
- Do you often forget appointments or show up late without any good reason for it?
- Do you put things off that you know you need to do?
- Do you start projects and then leave them undone?
- Do you have trouble finding what you need in your home or workspace?
- Do other people criticize you for carelessness?
- At night, do you ever look back on your day and wonder what you accomplished?
- Has it been a while since you were excited about anything you were doing?

(Now are you convinced that the Bible can be funny?)

5. The lazy delude themselves.

Lazy people consider themselves smarter than seven wise counselors.

—Proverbs 26:13–16

(If they are that smart, why aren't they, instead of others, serving as trusted counselors to the mighty? If they were half as smart as they think they are, they would know better than to be so lazy.)

6. The lazy grow unhappy because they have *wants* but do not have the *willingness* to work to fulfill those wants.

Lazy people want much but get little, but those who work hard will prosper.

—Proverbs 13:4

Despite their desires, the lazy will come to ruin, for their hands refuse to work.

—Proverbs 21:25

7. The lazy are unpopular, especially among those whom they let down.

Lazy people irritate their employers, like vinegar to the teeth or smoke in the eyes.

—Proverbs 10:26

8. Laziness leads to poverty and to a menial position in society.

Lazy people are soon poor; hard workers get rich.

—Proverbs 10:4

Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and become a slave.

—Proverbs 12:24

Those too lazy to plow in the right season will have no food at the harvest.

—Proverbs 20:4

9. The tendency of the lazy to oversleep is a key reason why they grow poor.

Take a lesson from the ants, you lazybones. Learn from their ways and become wise! Though they have no prince or governor or ruler to make them work, they labor hard all summer, gathering food for the winter. But you, lazybones, how long will you sleep? When will you wake up? A little extra sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—then poverty will pounce on you like a bandit; scarcity will attack you like an armed robber.

—Proverbs 6:6–11

Lazy people sleep soundly, but idleness leaves them hungry.

—Proverbs 19:15

Too much sleep clothes them in rags.

—Proverbs 23:21

10. Laziness actually makes life harder, not easier.

A lazy person's way is blocked with briars, but the path of the upright is an open highway.

—Proverbs 15:19

It seems, from all this, that the man or woman of God is expected to be diligent in all areas of life. We should be working hard at doing our jobs or studies, taking care of home chores, raising our children, serving in our churches and communities, and most importantly, cultivating our relationship with God through spiritual disciplines. One who is chronically lazy is a person with a serious sin habit.

The man or woman of God is expected to be diligent in all areas of life.

Of course, while saying this, we do not mean to imply that taking it easy is always wrong. In fact, rest has its proper place in a well-lived life.

THE PROPER PLACE OF REST

Jesus said, "My Father never stops working, so why should I?" Talk about a work ethic!

The rhythm of labor and rest goes all the way back to the beginning, as the Creator Himself rested on the seventh day. That was the example God offered when instructing His nation Israel to set aside one day of the week as a day of rest.

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

—Exodus 20:8–11

Based on this and other observations in Scripture, we affirm the need for periodic rest. Obviously, since God made the human body, He knows we need regular times for rest and recuperation. We should obey the Bible and see that our body gets its required rest.

I (Bill) was raised on a ranch where we grew crops and raised cattle. We worked between ten and fifteen hours a day, six days a week. But as important as work was during the Depression years, we did not work on Sunday.

Today, Sabbath keeping is still vitally important to me. I instruct my associates who arrange my travel not to book a flight that will require me to travel on Sunday unless it is absolutely necessary. I ask them to help me avoid situations where I would go out to eat in restaurants on Sunday, because that would cause others to work.

So Henry and I recognize that Sabbath rest is important. But what we are talking about in this chapter are the other six days of the week. We are talking about people who are idle when they should be working. We want to say that getting *too much* rest is wrong.

According to Hebrews 4, we can all look forward to a time of ultimate rest in the eternal state. But that time is not yet. Paradoxically (or so it would seem), we are bid to “labour...to enter into that rest” (Hebrews 4:11 KJV). In this life we have much to do. Let us get on with it.

A WORKING SAVIOR

The Bible is full of examples of men and women who labored diligently at their tasks. There was Jacob, who worked fourteen years for his two wives. There were Joseph and Daniel, two Israelites whose hard work and ability raised them to near the pinnacle of power in pagan nations. But if we are looking for a hard worker, we can find no better example than that of the carpenter turned rabbi, Jesus.

Let us consider a single day in the course of our Lord’s earthly ministry. (See Mark 1:21–39.)

One Saturday morning, Jesus attended a worship service at the synagogue in the village of Capernaum. There He gave the sermon and also expelled an evil spirit from one of the men attending the service. In the afternoon He visited the home of a pair of His disciples and healed a member of their family who was ill with a high fever. In the evening a crowd sought Him out, and “Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons” (verse 34).

If we had such a day, we might want to sleep in. But did Jesus? No. Rather, “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray” (verse 35). He would not let His outer (ministry) duties interfere with His inner (devotional) duties. His prayer time was interrupted by His disciples seeking Him out and saying, “Everyone is asking for you” (verse 37). And so the round of service to others began all over again.

Jesus expressed the divine attitude when He said on one occasion, “My Father is always working, and so am I” (John 5:17). Talk about a work ethic! This work ethic is passed down to us via the apostle Paul.

SACRED WORK

Paul told his readers (including us), “You should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). A part of that has to do with labor. Like Jesus, Paul was a hard worker.

Even though the apostle had a right to expect his converts to support him financially (1 Corinthians 9:3–19), he chose to support himself with a textile trade (Acts 18:3). And because of this practice, he was in a moral position to lecture some others who were idle.

Dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from all believers who live idle lives and don’t follow the tradition they received from us. For you know that you ought to imitate us. We were not idle when we were with you. We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so we would not be a burden to any of you. We certainly had the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow. Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: “Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.”

Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people’s business. We command such people and urge them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and work to earn their own living. As for the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

—2 Thessalonians 3:6–13

“Settle down and get to work.” Is that a command you need to hear? Jesus set the example for hard work. Paul followed it. We must follow both of their examples.

Our work matters to God. It does not merely improve our economic position; it also has spiritual significance. As Henry David Thoreau said, “You cannot kill time without injury to eternity.”

But you may say, “You don’t know how dreary my job is. You don’t know the way my work around the house is overlooked by my spouse. You don’t know the difficult people I have to work with on that committee I volunteered for.”

True, we do not. But no one ever said work would always be easy or enjoyable, just that it is the right thing to do. The Bible, however, describes a change of perspective that can affect our attitude about our work. And it comes out of a context that was worse than anything any of us has to deal with.

Our work does not merely improve our economic position; it also has spiritual significance.

BOSS OF BOSSES

Slavery was widespread in the Roman world, and consequently, many of the early Christians were slaves. No doubt Paul wanted all Christian slaves freed from their servitude, just as he did Onesimus.¹ But since that was not possible, he instead helped them understand how they should act in their circumstances.

Were they to slack off whenever they got a chance, like most slaves, since someone else was unjustly reaping the benefits of their labor? No. Instead, Paul told the slaves, “Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (Ephesians 6:6–7).²

No matter how bad your job is, at least it is not slavery! But did you catch Paul’s change of perspective? It can be useful to us in our own situations. We are to do our work as if we were working for the Lord rather than for people. That enables us to be consistent, diligent, reliable—and even happy—in our work.

And do you know what is most amazing? We *really are* doing our work for the Lord. When we earn an honest paycheck

for honest labor, when we take care of our children, when we cultivate our personal relationship with the Lord, or contribute to the life of our local church, we are doing it out of obedience to God because we know it is what He wants us to do. Our work is for Him.

Work is worship.

It should go without saying that this means we should strive for excellence, not just to put in our time. The Lord deserves the best, and so the Bible says, “Whatever you do, do well” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). As Martin Luther King Jr. once preached, “If a man is called to be a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say: ‘Here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.’”

Work is worship, if we will see it as such.

THE UNDEPENDABLE

Laziness may be the most common type, but not the only type, of irresponsibility.

Some people are irresponsible with time. They are habitually late for engagements, causing other people inconvenience as a result. Or they procrastinate, putting off doing what they know they ought to do.

Others are irresponsible with material objects. They borrow things from others and either forget to return them or else let them become damaged while in their possession. Or they may take poor care of their own possessions, letting their homes and workplaces get messy or rundown. They forget that “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” and that we are to “be sure that everything is done properly and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

Some people seem to be negligent, careless, and inconsistent in every area of life. Should you depend on them to fulfill what they promised? You had better not. Should you trust them to help you out if you are not keeping an eye on them? Certainly not.

What’s behind all this is usually an attitude problem, whether it goes by the name of apathy, boredom, or lethargy. Theologian J. I. Packer analyzed such attitudes when he said,

The world today is full of sufferers from the wasting disease that Albert Camus focused as absurdism (“life is a bad joke”), and from the complaint that we may call Marie Antoinette’s fever, since she founded the phrase that describes it (“nothing tastes”). These disorders blight the whole of life: everything becomes at once a problem and a bore, because nothing seems worthwhile.

But Packer also suggested the response to absurdism and Marie Antoinette’s fever:

What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something that catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has.³

What is the “big enough objective”? It is knowing God—a task that is like penetrating ever deeper into the interior of a land that is infinite in size and so accommodates an eternity of exploration. Do you sense that your life is a part of the great story God is writing in history? Do you understand that by obeying Him in your duties and relationships you are helping to build an everlasting kingdom?

With the right perspective, your attitude can change from apathy to enthusiasm. And your sin habit of irresponsibility can be replaced by the virtue of diligence.

GET GOING!

Every year in January, health clubs around the country report a surge in membership. Can you guess why? It is because of the New Year’s resolutions people make to lose weight and become more fit.

But by the end of February, attendance at the clubs is back to normal. In weeks, or even just in days, most people have broken their resolution to exercise. They are sitting at home, eating a snack or watching TV, when they could be working out for the good of their bodies.

If you have an ongoing problem with some type of irresponsibility, what we are *not* asking of you is a New Year's type of resolution to do better. We are not asking you to *force* yourself to do better on the job, at home, or wherever you tend to be irresponsible. If we asked this kind of self-effort from you, you would likely be no more successful than the people who show up at the gym with brand-new exercise clothes in January.

What we are asking of you is that you begin praying for help and committing yourself, in the grace of God, to fulfill the responsibilities He has laid on your heart. Seek the Lord, repent of your sin, and rely on the Spirit's empowering. Only in this way will you be able to acquire the virtue of diligence—and keep it.

When ejection seats for jet fighters were first invented, the pilot was supposed to push a button, clear the plane, and then roll out of his seat so that his parachute could deploy. The problem was that, under the intense conditions of a high-speed ejection, most pilots would hold on to their seat like it was their last link with safety. Their parachutes, consequently, could not open.

What did jet designers do in response to this unexpected problem? They invented a device that would force ejected pilots out of their seats, enabling them to correctly operate their parachutes—where their real safety came from.

If a responsibility is lying before you and you are hesitating to do anything about it, what will it take for you to get out of your seat? Get help now. Begin the healing process by embodying the virtue of diligence in every responsibility the Lord gives you. It is a privilege to serve Him with all that lies within us.

SOUL PRESCRIPTION FOR IRRESPONSIBILITY

Are you struggling with being irresponsible? 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

A poor conception of God may well lie behind your problem with irresponsibility. For example, if you see God as an uncaring and

detached deity, you will likely have the same attitude toward life. Are the following points ones you need to take to heart?

- God is absolutely concerned about every aspect of our lives.

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these?
If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

—Romans 8:31

- God uses His power on our behalf.

The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.

—2 Chronicles 16:9

In your Bible, read a sampling of some of the key events in salvation history, such as creation, the call of Abram, the exodus, and so on. Examine these events from the perspective of God's activity in the world. Begin to develop a picture of God as a deity who is far from apathetic or irresponsible toward His creation.

Step 2: Revise Your False Beliefs

Irresponsibility is fed by erroneous beliefs about life and one's place in it. How might your false views have helped to make you irresponsible? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you believe you cannot make any real changes in your world?

I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

—Philippians 4:13

- Do you believe that the needs of others are none of your concern?

Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

—James 2:15–16

Use a concordance to help you trace the themes of laziness and diligence through the Scriptures. Seek God’s help to correct your unbiblical views of life as they apply to irresponsibility.

Step 3: Repent of Your Sin

What type of irresponsibility is your downfall? Name it and disclaim it. Pray a simple prayer of repentance, and ask God to supernaturally motivate you into action.

God, I have been guilty of _____. I know it is sinful, and I am sorry for the way I have let You down. Forgive me now, I pray. Wash away the stain of this sin. Make me over into a person who uses Your power to reject irresponsibility and embrace a diligent lifestyle—one that pleases You. I ask these things in Christ’s 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, watch out for demotivating spiritual attacks. They are certain to occur.

- In the world system, responsibility is not a high value in itself. The world would tell you to only do what you need to in order to get by—everything else is a waste. But God’s values in this area are quite different. He wants diligence to be a regular part of your nature. You can overcome the world by rejecting its values and embracing God’s values instead.

- Laziness and other types of irresponsibility are pleasurable to your flesh (sinful nature)—they are easy and comfortable. The flesh will desire to get that kind of pleasure back. But you must recall that your flesh is really dead now, because of Christ. You are a new person and are to obey the Spirit and not the flesh.
- The Devil is scheming to draw you back to your old ways of irresponsibility. Put on all the armor of God to defend against him (Ephesians 6:10–18). If you will resist the Devil in God’s power, you can defeat him.

The quickest way to become irresponsible in life again is to be irresponsible about defending against spiritual attacks. Such attacks will come, and you should be ready for them. But remember that God will be empowering you and helping you be successful every time.

Step 5: Flee Temptation

The best way to avoid being tempted to lie on the couch and watch the world go by is to just do something. Take these active steps to be a more active person.

- Focus on your relationship with God.
Begin your new, more disciplined life by maintaining your spiritual disciplines with God. He has something for you to do; ask Him what it is.
- Latch on to God’s promises.
Find Bible verses that speak encouragement to you in your struggle against irresponsibility. Commit the verses to memory and use them when temptation arises. Here is one you may find valuable:

He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.

—Isaiah 40:29

- Establish safeguards.
What inspires you to be irresponsible? Do whatever it takes to block such influences from your life. These are examples of the kinds of things you can do:
 - If you are lazy, make a “to do” list of the things you ought to accomplish.
 - If you tend to procrastinate, create a calendar with all the deadlines for the things you are supposed to do.
 - If you typically leave your bedroom a mess, set your alarm a few minutes earlier so you can straighten it up every morning.
 - Ask a trusted Christian friend to hold you accountable in your commitment to not be irresponsible any longer.

- Expect victory.
The Holy Spirit will motivate you into action if you will yield your heart to Him. Trust Him to make you a diligent person. Look forward to the victory He will give.

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.

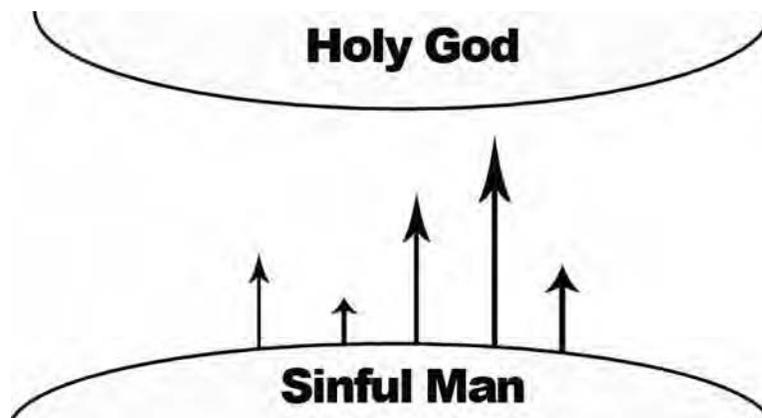
—Romans 3:23

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

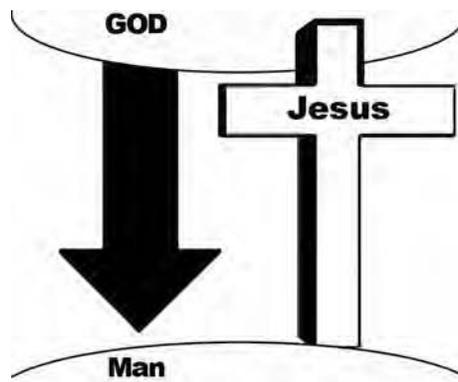
Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time.

—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

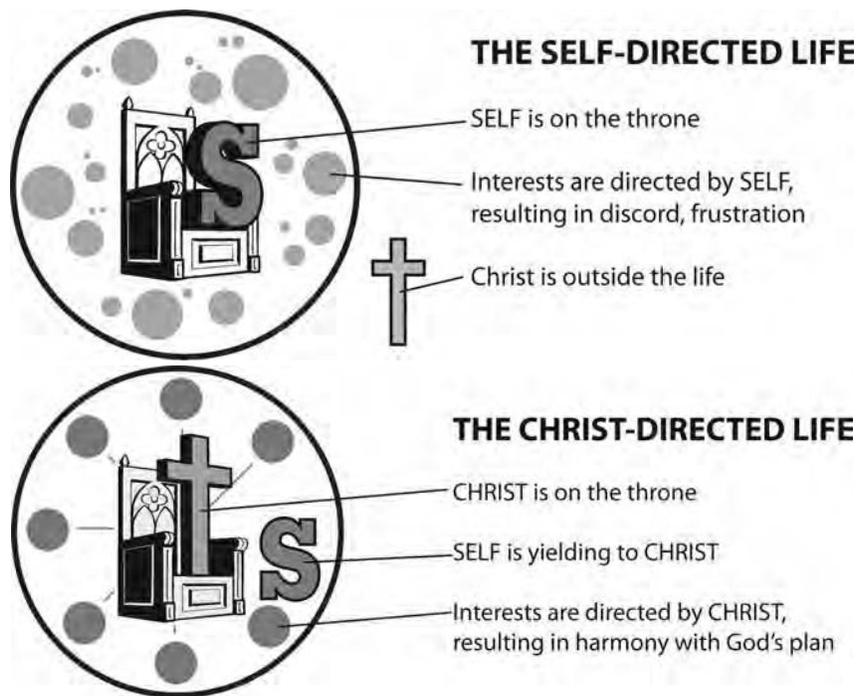
We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[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.”

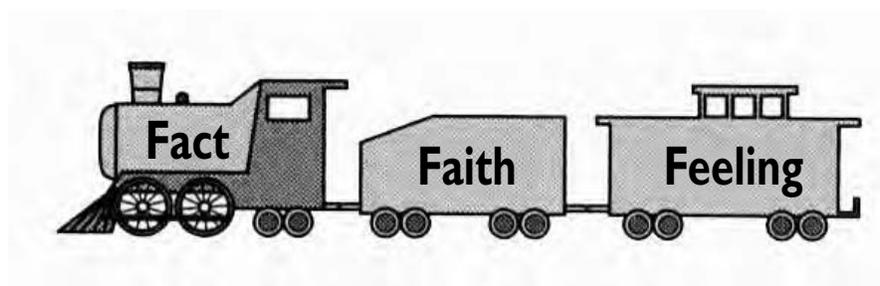
—1 John 5:11–13

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.

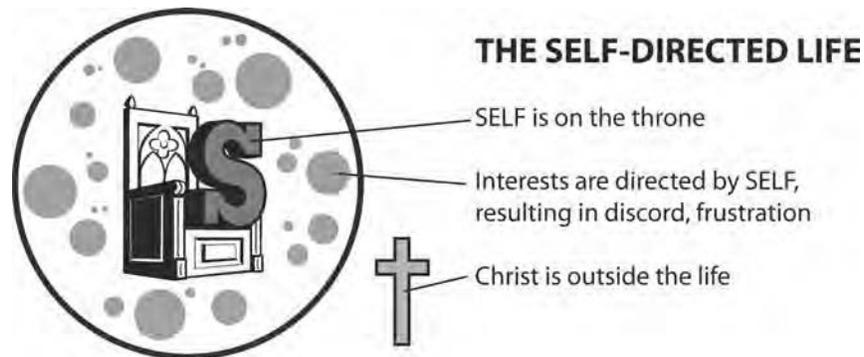
Appendix B



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.

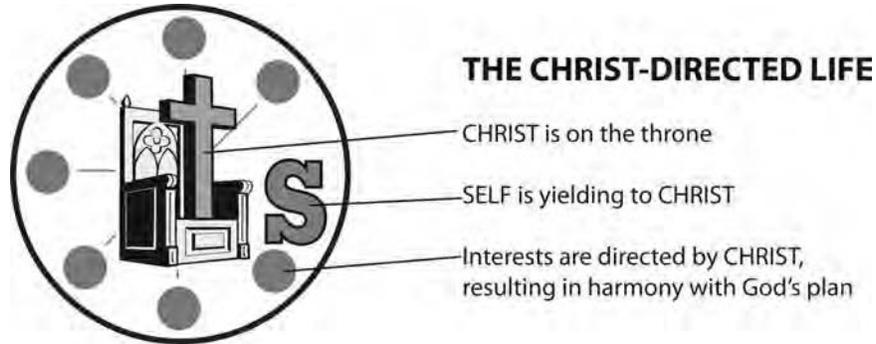
The Bible tells us there are three kinds of people:



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.

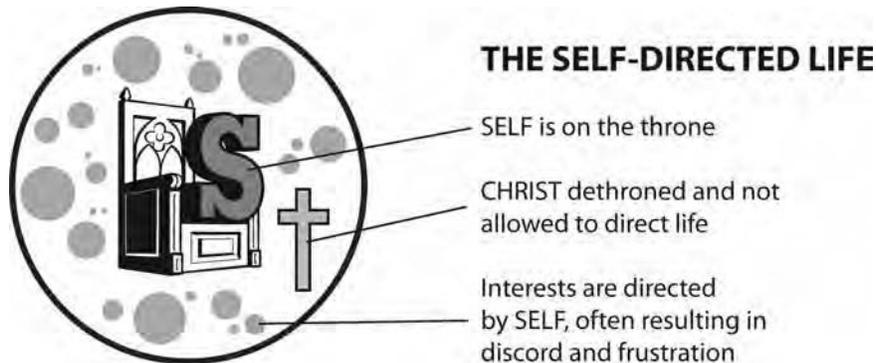
—1 Corinthians 2:14



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. See the book of Philemon.
2. For the whole context, see Ephesians 6:5–8. For similar discussions in Paul’s letters, see also Colossians 3:22–25; 1 Timothy 6:1–2; and Titus 2:9–10. The importance of slaves doing their work well was a consistent teaching of the apostle.
3. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 34, 106.



MORE RESOURCES

Free Discipleship Courses

Sign up for one of these weekly personal development courses at BiblicalCounselingInsights.com/courses/.

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).

More Free Resources

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SOUL PRESCRIPTION

WHEN WHAT YOU CHOOSE DESTROYS THE LIFE YOU WANT...

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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Dr. Henry Brandt is often called the "Father of Modern-Day Biblical Counseling." For decades he personally counseled individuals to evaluate their heart attitudes and behavior in the light of biblical teaching and guided them to a godly solution. His teaching continues to be a source of inspiration to people throughout the world through the Henry Brandt Foundation's resources and Web site:

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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