



## **From Coping to Cure**

*By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.*

### **FINISH LINE: FOUNDATION**

#### **THOUGHT STARTER:**

Do you know that everyone can finish the race of life as a winner?

*In a race, everyone runs but only one person gets first prize. So run your race to win. To win the contest you must deny yourselves many things that would keep you from doing your best. An athlete goes to all this trouble just to win a blue ribbon or a silver cup, but we do it for a heavenly reward that never disappears. So I run straight to the goal with a purpose in every step. I fight to win. I'm not just shadow boxing or playing around. Like an athlete I punish my body, treating it roughly, training it to do what it should, not what it wants to. Otherwise I fear that after enlisting others in the race, I myself might be declared unfit and ordered to stand aside.*

1 Corinthians 9:24-27, LB

What we have covered in this series are lessons that focus on the beautiful and simple truth that God loves us and has provided a simple way to live an abundant and peaceful life. This is done by confessing our sins quickly and asking the Holy Spirit to control our lives. If you miss the simplicity of this truth, going through this series has been a waste of your time.

Seeing the lasting results in my own life and the lives of thousands of others over the last forty years has convinced me beyond any doubt that the Spirit-controlled Christian life is a miraculous experience. As long as I keep my sins confessed and ask the Holy Spirit to cleanse and fill me as often as necessary, the miracle continues.

Although I hesitate to use the word "magic" or miracle, the Holy Spirit does work miracles in our lives when we turn our lives over to God beyond anything we could do ourselves. Even now, after seeing so many lives changed over the years, the results of the Holy Spirit working in people's lives still constantly amaze me!

Over the years I have found several tools that have helped me find a biblical basis for

my faith and the change in my life.

There was a lot of changing to do. Some changes were instantaneous and final; the urge to drink and swear just left and never returned. Other changes were more gradual and inconsistent: unselfishness, a servant attitude, compassion, experiencing the fruit of the spirit. Consistency in Bible study and prayer also ranged from eagerness to nothing at all.

Bible memorization and Bible meditation have been the most helpful activities that have sustained me. Researching topics in the Bible has been a close second. A serious effort to understand the Bible was inspired by a fellow engineer who wanted to know how I changed my behavior at work. The challenge of giving him an answer got me started researching biblical topics. My pastor suggested that I get a "concordance."

I picked a few words to look up just for practice. Love was used in at least 1000 verses. Peace was used in at least 700 verses. In the years to come, next to the Bible, a concordance proved to be the most helpful tool ever used to discover what was in the Bible.

The first question on my mind: Why study the Bible? I opened the concordance to look up the word, *Bible*. What a surprise! The word *Bible* is not used in the Bible. I quickly learned there were other words: commandments, Word, Scripture, written Law, Word of God, teaching, precept.

I discovered there are hundreds of verses in the Bible that describe the Bible. I looked them all up; this took several months. I am not suggesting that there is a short cut to knowing the Bible. In the process I received the answer to my question about the Bible. I discovered that the way to understand a topic is to find as many Bible verses as possible about the topic. The Bible is the best single commentary on itself.

As a beginning Bible researcher, some ideas developed as I went along:

- Looking up verses helped me become familiar with the books of the Bible.
- Some verses leap out at you, some don't.
- Take your time. When a verse stands out, take a few minutes to think about it.
- If you have a day when the verses are "dead," quit for the day.
- Some days I had only fifteen minutes to work, other days several hours. There is no hurry.
- I developed my own personal concordance of verses that were especially meaningful to me.

The process of writing or typing out these verses helped fix them in my mind.

I have researched many, many topics. I will list some of them: God's resources, prayer, love, guidance or God's will, comfort and peace, power, sowing and reaping, sin, marriage, parenting, freedom, suffering.

You can add or subtract to such a list. As I attempted to learn more about the Bible, I worked on developing more than one topic at a time. I was catching on to the idea of meditating day and night.

I put topical headings on three-by-five cards and carried them around with me because I was learning that verses pertaining to my topics popped up in unexpected places. The most common place was the pastor's sermon. There were other places: at dinner, over the radio or TV, in a magazine article, in a book, or newspaper articles.

One topic that has been especially valuable to me is "God knows the heart." I will use that topic to illustrate how my procedure developed.

### **GOD KNOWS THE HEART**

- 2 Timothy 2:22
- 1 Peter 3:4, 3:15
- Deuteronomy 4:28-31, 6:5
- Matthew 18:35
- Psalm 51:10
- Hosea 9:16
- 1 Thessalonians 2:4
- Isaiah 51:7
- Luke 8:15
- Psalm 38:8

On a three-by-five card I wrote "God knows the heart." When I heard a verse used or read on this subject, I wrote down the reference.

After accumulating a group of references, I transferred them to a looseleaf notebook and made a brief description like a concordance. It looked like this:

#### **God Knows the Heart**

2 Timothy 2:22—Call on God out of a pure heart.

1 Peter 3:4—Hidden man of heart to be meek and quiet.

1 Peter 3:15—Sanctify God in heart.

Deuteronomy 4:28-31—Find God when search with whole heart.

Deuteronomy 6:5—Keep word in heart.

Matthew 18:35—Forgive from the heart.

Psalm 95:10—Israelites erred in heart.

1 Thessalonians 2:4—God tries the heart.

Isaiah 51:7—Law in heart removes fear.

Luke 8:15—Nothing secret to God.

Psalm 38:8—Roar because of a disquiet heart.

The list under this topic numbers over one hundred verses. Another step is to rearrange the references in the order they appear in the Bible.

There are books that have Bible verses already arranged for you. An example is the Thompson Chain Reference Bible. It's a wonderful Bible to use and to study; the topics are well worth the time.

I recommend this method to the one who is unfamiliar with the Bible. Most importantly, I learned to use the Bible and to fix the verses in my mind. The process of writing out a Bible reference with a one-sentence description of the verse helped me to fix the content in my mind. Later on, I would scan those one-liners as I added to the list. A quick review occasionally has been like a drink of cold water to a thirsty pilgrim.

Long ago I learned that I didn't need to argue with anyone about God, His plan, His peace, or His joy that is available to all of us. I cannot make choices for anyone other than myself. If someone wants to be miserable, that is their choice. I am not going to try to talk them out of their misery.

At this time, I know that I am approaching the finish line of my race. And today, if I had a choice, I would not choose to go back and start life over again. I eagerly look forward to meeting Jesus and many good friends in heaven.

If I go before you, I would like to be holding the tape when you finish the race God has given *you* to run.

Now I live each day so that I am ready to cross my own finish line.

## **DISCUSSION STARTERS**

- Review the thought starter at the beginning of the chapter. What thoughts were started?
  - Review the lead Bible verse. What does it say to you? Did you observe yourself in relation to the verse? Did you observe others in relation to the verse? Did you find any additional verses?
  - What is your response to the lesson at the end of the chapter?
1. Are you ready to cross your own finish line?
  2. How many new verses did you memorize going through this course?
  3. What was the single most important thought for you in this course?

4. Have you experienced the amazing power of the Holy Spirit to change your life? Visit <http://www.biblicalcounselingoutreach.com/feedbackforms/form.asp> to tell us about it.
5. How would you describe the "simplicity" of the Christian life?

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