



From Coping to Cure

By Henry Brandt, Ph.D.

LESSON 6:

WHY DON'T YOU JUST CONCENTRATE ON THE POSITIVE?

THOUGHT STARTER:

Is it difficult to deal with the negative in your life?

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.
Galatians 5:16, NKJV

My good friend, Dick Andrews, is a dentist. One day when I went to his office as a patient, I was startled to see him approach me with his hands in rubber gloves and a surgical mask covering his face.

"Are you going to operate?" I asked.

Through the mask he mumbled, "With the advent of AIDS, all dentists have adopted gloves and masks as routine protection." Dick proceeded to see if he could find some trouble in my mouth. By the time he did some mysterious poking around, and his dental hygienist got through polishing my teeth, I walked out of there with gleaming, clean, healthy teeth. They looked for problems and it was positive that we dealt with the negative.

The physician also deals with negatives, yet he is one of the most respected people in the community. The way he helps us is to look for trouble and fix it. I experienced this in high school when I injured my knee while playing basketball. It was badly swollen and just barely fit into my pants leg. I had to keep it bent to ease the pain. I hobbled into the team physician's office on crutches. He said, "You have a bad knee." He didn't even mention my good knee or the rest of my healthy body. (Is that negative?)

He said, "stretch your leg out on this table," and ignored the fact that this caused me excruciating pain. He began to thump my knee, asking me where it hurt the most. When he found that spot, he thumped it some more to be sure. Then he smiled, "We will need to lance it. This will hurt." Sweat poured out all over my body from the pain. Then he plunged a knife into my swollen knee. Lots of nasty stuff poured out. I had never felt such pain before! But my knee did get better.

It was positive that he dealt with the negative.

FOCUS ON THE NEGATIVE

The physician and the dentist are members of professions we hold in high esteem. Yet, their focus is on finding trouble in your body:

"You have two cavities."

"You have an abscess in your knee."

The comforting side of their professions is that when they find out what is wrong, they proceed to fix it. They can only help us as they deal with the negative.

Actually, much of society focuses on correcting or preventing the negative: firemen, police, auto mechanics, physicians, lawyers, dentists, laboratories, and many others. You can imagine the results if a fireman ignored a fire or a doctor only wanted to focus on my good leg. Even in the field of counseling we usually study the problems of clients; we don't spend a lot of time studying happy, contented people. In sports, if you want to be good, you locate a coach who will study what you are doing wrong so you can eliminate that flaw in your performance. So it is with our spiritual lives. We need to deal with the negative.

The Psalmist prayed:

**Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
and see if there be any wicked way in me. (Psalm 139:23-24, KJV)**

In order to be healthy, spiritually speaking, we also need to look for trouble, a sinful condition in the body, so it can be fixed. The Bible says:

Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16, NKJV)

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OR FILLED WITH SIN

While my wife and I were researching the subject of sin we also discovered lists that describe the fruit of the Spirit. Look at the difference in living while being filled with the Spirit and in living a "normal" life with sin in control (see Table 3).

**Table 3:
Spirit Controlled Living vs. Sin Controlled Living**

| Spirit-Filled Mind | | Sins of the Mind | |
|--|---|---|--|
| forgiveness hope appreciation willingness impartiality | humility thankfulness confidence wisdom | unforgiveness evil thoughts covetousness greed lust | pride ingratitude selfish ambition deceitfulness |
| Spirit-Filled Emotions | | Sinful Emotions | |
| love peace gentle spirit gladness | joy long suffering kindly spirit | hatred rebellion bitterness envy bad temper | anger unloving attitude jealousy malice |
| Spirit-Filled Mouth | | Sins of the Mouth | |
| truthfulness thankfulness gentle answer encouraging tact | praise timeliness soothing tongue pleasant words | lying complaining yelling contentiousness boasting | slandering disputing backbiting quarrelsomeness blasphemy |
| Spirit-Filled Behavior | | Sins of Behavior | |
| kindness righteousness obedience goodness courage | gentleness self-control cooperation sincerity servant | fornication adultery drunkenness murder revelry | brutality without self-control stealing violence disobedience to parents |

Will Anderson, my son-in-law, relates this incident:

I was studying this chapter and decided to go down the list of sins to see what areas I knew were problems in my own life, because I knew I was serious about my Christian life. After checking off the few points where I felt I needed slight improvement, I asked a friend to give me his opinion. A third of the way down the list, I was experiencing inner turmoil! I knew this guy cared about me, but his

list was a lot different than mine! I thanked him for helping me with the list and told myself that I needed a second opinion.

After asking four people to cooperate in this exercise, including my wife, the vote was in—their lists agreed in almost every area. I was in shock! After my emotions calmed down over the next few days, I had to agree with the truth. Their requested honesty has led to an inner humbling, prayer, and repentance in those areas of my life.

The inner change and personal growth is observable to both me and my family. It is also coming through in very positive ways in my friendships and my business.

Most people would agree that walking in the Spirit is a superior way to live, but, realistically, a miracle is needed to actually live this way. Fortunately, the power to walk in the Spirit comes from God. And no human beings or circumstances can interrupt your relationship with Him.

We all have a choice. The Bible says:

In the past you voluntarily gave your bodies to the service of vice and wickedness—for the purpose of becoming wicked. So, now, give yourselves to the purpose of righteousness—for the purpose of becoming really good.

(Romans 6:19, Phillips)

Only God can cleanse us from sin and empower us to walk in the Spirit. Good news: we are free to choose.

Lesson: It is negative to ignore the negative; it is positive to eliminate the negative.

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 serious about really wanting to know the truth about yourself?
2. Study this list of the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of the flesh. Talk with God and ask Him to show you in which areas you fall short.
3. The left hand column in Table 3 is a word picture of the fruit of the Spirit.
 - a. Can you act Spirit-filled without being Spirit-filled?
 - b. Won't acting Spirit-filled gradually make you Spirit-filled?
 - c. Can another person tell if you are only acting?
4. The right-hand column is a "normal" life with sin in control.
 - a. Under each category, can you cover up and act like you are Spirit-filled?
 - b. What will covering your sins do to you?
5. If you want to get serious about understanding the areas in which you fall short in these lists and if you are brave, you might ask your mate or a close friend to let you read off the words on this list. Ask them to give you a quick "yes" or "no" to the question, "Am I _____?" or "Do I _____?" "Do I have _____?" "Do I have a problem with _____?" Be sure to tell them to be totally honest before God because you need their help. If you do this with three or four people that are close to you, I guarantee you will have an eye-opening experience. Expect to be surprised. This is not a parlor game. Reserve the right to stop at any time. Don't react outwardly when your inward reaction to your helper is screaming, "You're crazy! I don't have a problem in that area. Don't argue; just write the "yes" or "no" down next to the area for later prayer, thought, or discussion.
6. Read Jeremiah 17:9-10. How would these verses apply to the lesson?

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