



“I hurt. I’ve been abused. Does anyone care?”

An easy to read, easy to understand guide to healing, hope, and understanding.

Michael Blunk

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Introduction

There is an old saying that goes something like this: “Laugh, and the world laughs with you, but cry, and you cry alone.” If this maxim is true, and I rather suspect that it is, our world is not a very sympathetic place. If you are hurting or if you are still nursing old wounds from the past, you may have discovered empathy and understanding are in short supply. How many times have you asked yourself, “Does anyone really care about me? Does anyone understand all that I have endured? How can I make others realize my wounds are both very painful and very real?”

Here are twenty-one daily readings that I hope and pray will provide you with a measure of comfort, understanding, encouragement, and even a bit of useful advice. If I have done my job right, over the next three weeks, you may not feel so misunderstood and alone and, ideally, these terrible hurts will have already begun to heal.

“What are your credentials?” you may rightfully ask. “Why should I listen to you?” I am no guru, but I have spent many years working with abused women, substance abusers, and prison inmates. I have witnessed the seamier side of life; I have also had my share of hurts, too, though this guide is not about me, but about you.

Let me close in saying, “No, you are not alone and, yes, there is hope. You are loved.”

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Day 1

Is the abuse I am enduring justified because of the mistakes I have made?

Preview

Everyone makes mistakes, but some mistakes are more serious and are followed by more severe consequences than others. And so an individual who committed a grievous sin or made a foolish decision and is suffering abuse because of that lapse of moral judgement asks, “Am I deserving of this abuse? Could it be that I have no one else to blame but myself? Am I reaping what I’ve sown? Maybe I ‘had it coming.’”

Let the finger-pointing begin

As inherently flawed human beings born with a sin nature, all of us are prone to making outlandish mistakes. Of course, foolish decisions and unwise choices are invariably followed by consequences. (Job 4:8; Galatians 6:7) As an observer standing on the outside looking in, it is easy to see the shortcomings and breaches in sound judgment of others and, by and large, we consider it our sworn duty to bring these failures to their attention. Finding fault in others is a game nearly everyone knows how to play, and the condemnation begins with words that sound something like this:

- “What were you doing spending time in a place like that?”
- “Any woman who dresses like you is simply asking for it.”
- “Didn’t I warn you? I suppose you’ll listen to me next time.”
- “You made your bed, now sleep in it.”
- “Son, if you had done as I told you in the first place, none of this would have happened.”

While there may be an element of truth in each of these accusations, chances are pretty good that the person needs no reminders of his or her wrongdoings.

Is abuse justified?

A reasonable motorist is hardly surprised when a police officer issues a traffic citation. Likewise, a student who repeatedly skips class and fails to turn in assignments rather expects a failing grade. This is what sowing and reaping looks like. But what if the police officer drew his pistol and riddled the offending motorist’s automobile with bullet holes? Or what if the teacher spent the entire class period cruelly berating the student for failing to submit an assignment? These are outlandish examples, of course, but assuming such occurrences really happened, we would readily agree that extreme abuse is uncalled for and never deserved.

Abusive treatment cannot be justified. No woman deserves to be slapped around by a brutish man. No child deserves to be beaten by an out-of-control parent. No employee needs a harsh dressing down in the presence of his or her coworkers. For that matter, no inmate deserves to be locked in a cell and left to starve. As to abusive treatment, no one “has it coming.” We can and should learn from our mistakes, but the lessons we learn should not include welts, bruises, cruel taunts, excessive humiliation, and biting ridicule.

Summary

If, by chance, you are suffering from extreme abuse, this is not in accordance with God’s will. No, it does not matter what you did, you are not deserving of cruel, malicious, vindictive physical or emotional maltreatment. True, we reap the harvest we have sown, but, again, no one deserves to be a punching bag. This is not God’s will for your life, and anyone who says otherwise reeks of smoke and brimstone.

Day 2

Who says I deserve all the evil that has happened to me?

Preview

As we sow, we reap, right? Plant an apple seed and, in time, an apple tree springs from the earth. Drop a grain of corn into the soil and up comes a cornstalk. The same holds true in human behavior. A student who diligently studies will likely get the better grade. An employee who is chronically tardy can expect to be sacked. We reap what we sow. The Apostle Paul made this observation in Galatians 6:7. So, is this to say everyone who is experiencing pain and suffering must be guilty of some wrongdoing? No, no, and no.

Our quest for answers

People have a need for answers. We want to understand why this or that occurs. As beings created by God with an ability to think and reason, we are naturally curious and spend much of our lives searching for explanations. Animals are different. They seem to accept things as they are with no questions asked. No tiny parakeet has ever wondered why he shares a home with a menacing cat; no goldfish has pondered what manner of ingredients are present in its fish food flakes, but people question everything. Unfortunately, too many people are far too willing to accept partial truths, erroneous answers, and even lies when good answers are not readily available.

A drunk driver need not wonder why he struck Ir vehicle. He plowed Into the other car because his reflexes were woefully impaired by alcohol. Charged with DUI and on his way to jail, the drunken driver is reaping what he has sown; however, what about the severely injured driver in the other car? Nothing stronger than an iced latte had entered her system. She was on her way home from the office when her vehicle was struck by an inebriated driver, and now she is in the hospital with multiple injuries and wondering to herself, “Why did this happen to me?”

When a righteous man named Job was blindsided by calamity after calamity, his friends gathered to theorize what had caused these terrible events. Rather than rallying around their wounded friend, they appointed themselves a committee of three to determine why Job was in such a situation. They were on a quest for answers. While Job languished from the loss of his children, his wealth, his health, and his wife’s respect, his fair-weather friends concluded that Job must have been guilty of some secret sin, for God would not allow a good man to suffer. (Job 4:3-8; 8:20; 11:14-17)

While the questions surrounding Job’s series of ordeals were eventually answered, we may not always know why a baby dies in its crib, a bride is killed on her honeymoon, a pastor is falsely accused of wrongdoing, a faithful mother of three is abandoned by her husband, a beloved teacher is slain in a drive-by shooting, or a conscientious employee nearing retirement is suddenly discharged. God’s people are in no way immune to calamity. Of the Lord’s disciples, it is believed all but one suffered a martyr’s death, and John, the only one to die of old age, had been banished to a desert island. For that matter, our Lord Jesus Himself suffered as no man has ever suffered. (Isaiah 53)

Summary

To assume all tragedies are a form of divine punishment is foolish, arrogant, hurtful, and simply wrong. Let us not repeat the mistakes of Job’s “miserable comforters.” (Job 16:2) Rather than formulating theories, we should be drying tears and dressing wounds.

Day 3

Why are people often prone to blaming the victim?

Preview

There are some who are victims of circumstance. There are others who are victims of their own poor decision making. Regardless, is it right to point accusing fingers at those who have been hurt, abused, misused, or betrayed? Is there a better way of responding to those who are nursing wounds?

The Blame Game

For many of a more cynical nature, finding fault and assigning blame to every calamity that comes along is a popular, if not ignoble, pastime. Even our Lord's disciples occasionally participated in a round of the ever-popular blame game:

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. ‘Rabbi,’ his disciples asked him, ‘why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents’ sins?’ ‘It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins,’ Jesus answered.” (John 9:1-3 NLT)

Clearly, Jesus did not want His disciples engaging in this brand of fault finding.

Those who are familiar with the Old Testament Book of Job will readily recall how Job's “miserable comforters” sought to condemn their innocent friend with cruel and insensitive tongue lashings and finger-pointing (Job 16:2).

Perhaps pinning the blame on the donkey is a game most of us have played, but is this how we are to respond to those who are suffering?

The Good Samaritan Response

This appears to be an excellent time to revisit our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan:

“Jesus replied with a story: ‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying

there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, “Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.””” (Luke 10:30-35 NLT)

Here is not what the Samaritan said of the wounded traveler lying in the road: “Why was he traveling alone? Everyone knows this is a dangerous highway. How stupid can you get? Well, as I see it, he got what was coming to him. He has no one but himself to blame.”

Rather, the Samaritan interrupted his journey, bandaged the injured man’s wounds, removed him from harm’s way, and arranged for his ongoing care.

Summary

As believers, we can respond to victims in two ways: We can model ourselves after Job’s “miserable comforters” and lambast the wounded with stinging words and hurtful accusations, or we can bandage their wounds and attend to their healing and restoration. It takes very little effort to give someone a proper dressing down, but to work toward someone’s greater good comes at a cost. Of course, if we are willing to show love and compassion to those in need, aren’t we acting in accordance with God’s will?

Day 4

Why did God create the evil that brought about my pain and suffering?

Preview

In the opening chapter of Genesis, we learn that God created the heavens and the earth and all that dwell on our planet. God made the forests, the mountains, the expansive plains, and the oceans—these are all His handiwork. But did God create evil? If God created everything, He must have created evil, but as we shall soon discover, this is a false assumption.

Evil and suffering

It is far easier to discuss the subject of pain and suffering from a detached, scholastic, “theological” standpoint than from the position of an actual victim nursing deeply inflicted wounds. With this said, no amount of explaining, regardless how clever the words, can erase the suffering. If you are a victim of abuse, your pain will not be alleviated by philosophical insights and slam-dunk arguments. Our goal is not to “explain away” your hurt, but to offer a measure of comfort, assurance, and truth.

What is evil? Evil has been defined as a morally reprehensible action or deed, but this definition is lacking, for what is repugnant to some is lauded by others. There is a better definition. Now, just as cold is the absence of heat and darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of good. Where there is no good, there is evil. Before God created light, there was only darkness. Before God created sound, there was only silence. God did not create darkness. God did not create cold. God did not create silence. And God did not create evil, for evil is the absence of good.

Very well, then, but God tolerates evil, right? Yes, God tolerates evil, though we know that He does restrain and counters evil. (Genesis 19:1-29) Satan, a being who is void of anything good, is not free to unleash an all-consuming tidal wave of bedlam and havoc upon the world. In other words, Satan is tethered to a leash, a long leash, but his actions are monitored and restrained. (Job 1)

If you are reeling from tragic circumstances, all this may sound like cold comfort, This is what you can know. As a believer in Jesus Christ, God is not punishing you for some secret, hidden sin. Jesus took the punishment we deserve on the cross. (Isaiah 53:5). God punishes the lost; He does

not punish His own. There is a difference between God’s discipline and God’s punishment. Again, you are not being punished.

God allows His own to suffer for reasons we may not readily understand. As all things work for the good of those who belong to Jesus (Romans 8:28), the evil you have endured or are presently enduring will, in time, usher in a greater good. God is not capricious. Everything that He permits is backed by a reason—a good reason. And though you may not see it now, the time will come when you look back and say, “Those were dark days, but now that God has given me perfect understanding, I no longer question why this happened to me. On the contrary, I now embrace the suffering I endured, for I see all of the good that was brought about through my pain.”

Summary

The Apostle Paul, who was imprisoned and then beheaded by order of Caesar Nero, wrote, “Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity.” (I Corinthians 13:12a NLT) Suffering saint, your day of vindication is coming.

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Michael Blunk

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Day 5

How should we regard guilt and shame?

Preview

Some mental health practitioners insist that feelings of guilt and shame are unhealthy and even damaging, but such an opinion is highly debatable. Is there a positive side to guilt?

The nature of guilt

It might be argued that guilt is like an elixir that helps us see ourselves and our actions as God sees them. Of course, like all medicines, guilt must be taken in small, measured doses. By the spoonful, guilt reveals our sinful actions and our degrading behavior. These revelations help us to understand our faults while sending us to our merciful God for confession and repentance.

Sadly, there are those who think they must wallow in a cauldron of guilt. They are overwhelmed and consumed by their shame. Rather than taking the recommended dosage, it is as if they fill a tub and bathe themselves in guilt. Like any medicine or serum, an overdose has adverse and even deadly effects. Those who immerse themselves in guilt find themselves in a hopeless state of despair—an emotion no Christian should feel. To cower in despair is to say, “I am beyond redemption. God cannot save me. I am ruined and nothing can be done.”

What does the Bible say about God’s mercy?

Do not be deceived by a lack of understanding or runaway emotions. God is not a harsh ogre waiting to zap us with a lightning bolt the moment we cross the line. On the contrary, the Bible says,

- “...Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God’s people, who are set apart by faith in me.” (Acts 26:18 NLT)
- “He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.” (Ephesians 1:7 NLT)
- “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32 NLT)

God’s heart is not carved of flint. He is abundantly merciful, abounding in love, and full of grace.

No, you have not crossed the “line of no return”

But someone steeped in guilt will say, “You do not understand. What I did was inexcusable. I am beyond redemption. Even God cannot forgive me for what I did.” Is that so? Prior to his conversion, the Apostle Paul was a fanatical, fire-breathing zealot—a religious terrorist whose hands were bloodstained by the innocent Christians he had so violently persecuted. And then God forgave him and put him to work as a tireless missionary, orator, and prolific writer. Paul contributed more to the New Testament than any other writer. By his own admission, Paul confessed, “This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’—and I am the worst of them all.’” (I Timothy 1:15 NLT) It stands to reason that if God can forgive the “chief of sinners,” He can surely forgive all of the runners-up.

Summary

Both Judas and Peter betrayed our Lord Jesus. Both committed a shameful act, but Peter readily accepted the Lord’s restoration while Judas hanged himself. Judas could have received our Lord Jesus’ forgiveness, but rather than confess his traitorous actions, he chose to snub God’s mercy by taking his own life. May we, like Peter, rush to the fountain of Christ’s cleansing blood when convicted of our sins.

Day 6

Am I at fault because my spouse cheated on me?

Preview

Statistically, 99% of married people fully expect their spouses to remain faithful throughout their marriage. According to the same study, people take a dimmer view of adultery today than they did in the 1970s. Slightly more than one in five men will engage in an extramarital affair; the percentage of unfaithful wives is slightly less. Overall, about one in four marriages will be tainted with infidelity. With this said, are there situations and circumstances in which adultery is justified, and are there times when the injured spouse is to blame?

What is marriage?

In its purest sense, marriage is a legally and morally binding agreement between a man and a woman for the sake of fidelity, mutual support, and both physical as well as emotional gratification. Wedding vows are a promise of faithfulness while the ceremony is a public declaration of the wedded couple's pledge of exclusivity. As the stability of any society is largely based on the strength of the family, marriage is not a partnership that is to be taken lightly. According to the Bible, the married couple becomes "as one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) When the wedded couple becomes as one, infidelity is tantamount to ripping that flesh asunder. (Mark 10:9)

Can infidelity be justified?

The reasons spouses cheat are many:

- boredom at home
- an attempt at feeling young again
- revenge, that is, a desire to "get back" at their marriage partner
- selfishness
- a lack of scruples and boundaries
- an overly aggressive sex drive

There are men and women who crave the tang of "forbidden fruit." They find attention from someone other than the husband or wife at home thrilling, adventuresome, and self-gratifying. They believe an affair will help them recapture the excitement of falling in love once again.

But are there instances when adultery is justified? Upon learning of a spouse's unfaithfulness, the injured party may ask, "Am I responsible for my husband/wife's infidelity? Did I fail to meet his/her needs? What might I have done that would have prevented him/her from straying? Did I allow my appearance to fade? Have I become dull and uninteresting? Am I at fault?"

Let us make this point perfectly clear: Even if one has carelessly allowed himself/herself to gain weight, become less attractive, spend too much time at the office, become less interested in sex, or evolve into a "dull and uninteresting" person, adultery is never justified. The injured party may have contributed to the diminishment of the couple's homelife, but the infidelity belongs to the offending spouse.

The marriage vows include a promise of absolute, unconditional fidelity. This sacred promise of exclusionary faithfulness is not nullified because one of the spouses eventually grows bored, frustrated, or happens to crave a few extramarital thrills. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King Solomon wrote that it is better not to make a vow than to make a vow and later break it. (Ecclesiastes 5:5)

Summary

Every marriage is, to some degree, at risk, and both husband and wife should seek ways of keeping their union strong. If, however, one spouse strays, the injured party should not heap the blame on himself or herself. The adulterer is the one who is to blame. With this said, a broken marriage may be salvageable, and, by God's grace, many marriages are saved. Thankfully, with God, all things are possible and "all things" include happy endings.

**Questions? Concerns? Please visit my website: michaelblunk.online
or inquire via email at dr.michaelblunk@gmail.com**

Day 7

How do I respond when asked, “God forgave me, so why haven’t you forgiven me?”

Preview

We are told to forgive the offenses of others just as we expect God to forgive our offenses, but how are we to respond to those who have inflicted deep wounds and then seemingly demand full and immediate forgiveness? How should a victim answer an accusation such as “I asked God to forgive me, and now that I have His forgiveness, I am expecting your forgiveness, too, and if you don’t forgive me right away, you are the one doing the sinning.” Such an ultimatum may be likened to the skin of the truth stuffed with a lie.

Forgiveness

By our Lord’s very words, we are to “forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.” (Matthew 6:12 NLT) Does this command from the lips of Jesus require victims of heinous acts to immediately and unequivocally excuse their perpetrators from all guilt, responsibility, recompense, and suspicion?

The Bible does not insist that victims of violent acts must immediately welcome their brutal attackers into their homes with open arms. Prior to his conversion, the Apostle Paul’s hands were stained by the blood of innocent Christian martyrs. (Acts 9:1) He was a dreaded enemy among our Lord’s early disciples. Soon after Paul’s conversion, a saint in Damascus named Ananias was told by the Lord to receive him. Ananias was initially reluctant, and understandably so, for without God’s assurance, Ananias might have feared that Paul’s conversion was, in fact, a clever ruse to win the saints’ confidence before having them all arrested and killed. (Acts 9:10-15)

God knows the hearts of all people. (Psalm 44:21) He knows when a confession is genuine; however, we cannot read the minds of others. A victim, particularly someone vulnerable who has been treated hatefully, violently, or cruelly by a more fearsome, formidable adversary, has every right to approach the repentant perpetrator with caution. Crocodile tears look no differently from their genuine counterparts. No one should expect victims, particularly women who have been physically or psychologically abused, to lower their guards or place themselves back in harm’s way. Perpetrators who are sincere in their regrets and apologies will not make hasty, unreasonable

demands on those whom they have victimized. Many prison chaplains have witnessed what are known as “jailhouse conversions.” Such questionable professions of faith are frequently offered for the benefit of judges who will soon pronounce sentencing. Only God knows who is genuine and who is not. Once again, a victim has every right to exercise caution.

With this said, does the victim have a right to withhold forgiveness? Consider this: it is entirely possible to forgive someone while keeping that someone at, shall we say, arm’s length. As an example, a deacon caught stealing money from a collection plate can be forgiven and, of course, given a chance to make restitution, but the church might do well to assign the repentant deacon to other duties around the church that do not involve direct contact with cash. Jesus said we are to be wise as serpents yet gentle as doves (Matthew 10:16). There are doves and there are pigeons.

Summary

In George Orwell’s classic *Animal Farm*, a rather insincere cat extended his paw to a flock of birds pledging comradery and lasting friendship. Until the cat’s claws are removed or until the feline is known to be a strict vegetarian of long standing, a canary has every right to keep out of the cat’s striking range.

Day 8

As we are made in God’s image, is abuse ever justified?

Preview

Unlike domesticated and wild animals, people are created in the image of God. We share some of God’s traits and characteristics. This implies every human, even those guilty of reprehensible behavior, is deserving of a rightful measure of dignity. Abuse is offensive to God.

In the image of God

We are fashioned in the likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26) This is not to say we are divine beings or little gods, for we are not. And this is not to say God dwells in a body of flesh, for He does not. God is not an exalted man. (John 4:24) We do, however, share many of our Maker’s qualities. These are known as “communicable attributes.” He has given us a full range of emotions. He has given us a level of self-awareness no animal could possibly comprehend. While most animal behavior is based on instinct, He has bestowed upon us the precious gift of logic and reason. No animal is aware of God. No animal can comprehend the reality of God. And though the Bible warns against cruelty to animals, no animal is man’s equal. (Genesis 1:26) We are not miniature gods, but we are certainly more than highly evolved beasts. Two thousand years ago, God came to earth, born of a woman, and clothed in human flesh. God became “one of us.” (see John 1) At the risk of sounding irreverent, Jesus did not come to earth as a giraffe or a leopard. He became like you and me. The Incarnation is further proof that man has been set apart from the beasts and is worthy of an appropriate measure of dignity.

Abuse is an offense to God

Let there be no doubt God abhors abuse. This is not to say bad behavior is to be ignored; on the contrary, inappropriate behavior must be corrected. An unruly child is deserving of punishment. A reckless motorist should be cited. A chronically lazy or incompetent employee should be demoted or fired. A violent criminal should be placed behind bars. Without corrective measures, societies would deteriorate even more than we are currently witnessing. God condemns societies overtaken by chaos and anarchy. The Apostle Paul wrote, “The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish

you. They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong.”
(Romans 13:4 NLT)

Even so, an unruly child is not to be beaten with a whip. A reckless driver is not to be pulled from his car and shot on the side of the road. A lazy employee is not to be tarred and feathered by management, and a convicted felon is not to be taken to a dungeon to face torture on a rack. Such cruel abuse is an affront to God.

Particularly grievous are acts of abuse directed toward vulnerable women, children, the elderly, the disabled, the impoverished, and the mentally handicapped. No one is deserving of abuse. No one. In some instances, one may ponder, “Maybe I deserve mistreatment. Perhaps I have brought this on myself.” There is no denying that poor choices and regrettable decisions can place us in vulnerable situations, but abuse is never justified.

Summary

According to our Lord Jesus, we are to treat others as we would be treated. (Matthew 7:12) How different the world would be if we responded to others with a fitting measure of dignity.

Day 9

As a wife and mother, does God expect me to live under tyrannical domination?

Preview

At the risk of oversimplification, a power dynamic is the relationship of authority that exists between two or more people. While power dynamics are established for the sake of stability and order, some power dynamics turn sour when the leader behaves in the manner of an ironfisted tyrant. Those in authority who misuse their power with threats, intimidation, and bullying are an offense to the Lord. (Philippians 2:3, 4; Isaiah 1:17; Leviticus 19:18)

Everyday examples of power dynamics at work

A father on an outing with his five-year-old daughter is the authoritative figure in this relationship: The father's duty is to protect his little girl from all manner of threats and harm as she plays in the fresh air and sunshine. By nature, he is bigger, stronger, and wiser. If he is a good father, his obligations will include making sure his child thoroughly enjoys their outing.

Many businesses chart their firms' chains of command beginning with the owner, president, or CEO and ending with the custodian who mops the warehouse floor at night. In a classroom, the teacher wields the most authority. Onboard a Boeing 737, the captain has the final say. During a traffic stop, the officer with the ticket book is in charge.

Of course, power dynamics can change and shift. The CEO of an international business empire may oversee dozens of factories and thousands of employees, but during a routine medical examination, the CEO does as the doctor says. An on-duty police officer exercises lawful authority, but if the officer happens to take night classes at the community college, it is the instructor who is in charge of the classroom.

Power dynamics exist for the sake of order. A seasoned airline captain with 20,000 hours of flight experience should not take orders from an attendant who hands out peanuts and reminds passengers to keep their safety belts fastened. Even during the incarnation, our Lord Jesus was under the

authority of His Father. (John 14:31) Jesus never was and never will be inferior to the Father, but during His earthly ministry, He made Himself subject to Father God. As Jesus submitted Himself to His Father, we learn there is no shame or dishonor in obedience.

When power dynamics are abusive

Regrettably, there are occasions when authority is abused. A supervisor has no right to seek sexual favors from an employee. A teacher mercilessly berating a student is not justified. True, an unruly child should be corrected, but ranting and screaming are hardly appropriate. And, in the home, an overbearing husband and father has no right to rule the home like a banana republic dictator.

Never once does the Bible grant a father and husband a right to bully, berate, and browbeat his wife and children. In the hierarchy of a home, the husband is to lovingly lead and protect the family in the manner in which Christ Jesus loves, preserves, and heads the church. (Ephesians 5:25) A foul-tempered man who screams profanities, throws furniture, clinches his fists, and makes threatening gestures is behaving, not like Jesus, but like the devil himself. A man who insists it is “my way or the highway” is no man at all, rather, he is a two-hundred pound crybaby who needs a shave and a change of underwear.

Summary

The bottom line is this: God expects men to love and protect their families. Those who fail to properly provide and care for their wives and children are worse than atheists. (I Timothy 5:8)

Day 10

How can we prevent our struggles from leading to hopelessness and despair?

Preview

It has been said people are creatures of habit. We tend doing the same things again and again. This holds true with sinful behavior. Many of us repeatedly engage in the same behaviors as before. Much like an alcoholic attempting to give up the bottle or an overweight person walking away from the refrigerator, we may do well resisting our “sins of choice” for a time, but then, in a moment of weakness, we yield to our desires and, once again, it is back to business as usual. And then we feel like worthless, good for nothing failures. Is there hope, or are those of us who struggle with habitual sin destined to everlasting defeat? The short answer is yes, there is hope.

Why do I do what I do?

Many of us have wondered why we keep reverting back to our old destructive habits and behaviors. If you have known the frustration of defeat in the battle against recurring sin, you are not alone. The Apostle Paul admitted, “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” (Romans 7:15 NLT) There is a reason why we struggle with sin. Each of us has a sin nature, that is, an innate desire to sin that has been a part of our very being since conception. (Romans 5:12; Psalm 51:5) We might say that sin is a part of our spiritual DNA.

Of course, understanding why we sin is only an explanation and not a cure. Is victory against recurring sin possible? Yes.

If at first you don’t succeed...

While the old saying, “If at first you don’t succeed, try and try again,” does not appear in the pages of the scriptures, the concept of perseverance is there. When we stumble, we are to stand up, regain our footing, brush off the dust and debris, and keep moving forward. (Galatians 6:9) Many of our Bible heroes such as Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, and Peter knew setbacks, obstacles, roadblocks, and even failure, yet they persevered. Although he was not a Christian, Thomas Edison understood the value of perseverance; the famed inventor failed 6,000 times before he discovered

the right alloy that made the lightbulb possible. Without perseverance, we might be reading our Bibles by candlelight.

Equipped for battle

In our war against sinful behavior, we are to clad ourselves in the “full armor of God,” that is, equipping ourselves with the protective gear He has provided while wielding the weaponry at our disposal. (Ephesians 6:10-18) God does not send His people into battle wearing only skimpy swimming apparel and armed with water pistols.

In our struggles, we often look for an avenue of escape when we should be looking to our merciful God for strength, hope, and comfort. Do not give in to feelings of anxiety and despair. (Philippians 4:6) As God is faithful, pray with a thankful heart. (Colossians 4:2) Pray with boldness. (Mark 11:24) When we pray, we are in direct contact with the Sovereign King of the Universe. Who could ask for a greater ally?

Summary

Again, there will be battles lost, but in the end, we will cross the finish line as victors. Keep reminding yourself of Paul’s encouraging words: ”And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.” (Philippians 1:6 NLT)

Day 11

Am I wrong for feeling hurt and betrayed by someone I love?

Preview

A dog may not be clever enough to play chess or operate a motorcar, but dogs are masters of loyalty. We, who can play chess and drive motorcars, often fail in the loyalty department. Is it any wonder dogs are known as “man’s best friend?” Many years ago, the name Fido, which indicates loyalty and fidelity, was a favored dog name. Dogs come in many colors, but most of them are true blue, and this may cause us to wonder, “Why can’t we be more like dogs?”

The Benedict Arnolds in our midst

Honor is a virtue that appears to be in short supply these days. Our world seems to have far too many unfaithful spouses, traitorous friends, backstabbing coworkers, ungrateful children, and turncoat family members. It is painful when a sacred trust is broken, or a promise is unkept—particularly when the betrayal comes from the hand of someone we know and love.

How are we to respond to acts of disloyalty? Our Lord Jesus was betrayed by both Judas and Peter (Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:54-62). King David was betrayed by his son Absolon (II Samuel 17:14). Tamar was betrayed by her father-in-law Judah (Genesis 38:6-14). Joseph was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery (Genesis 37:12-36).

Nowhere in the Bible does it say the victim of betrayal must always roll over and play dead. When Tamar was wronged by her father-in-law, she devised a plan to set matters right (Genesis 38). In the end, Tamar forced her father-in-law’s hand to make restitution. He freely admitted his wrongdoings and set matters right. With this said, the means and methods of addressing our betrayers must never involve revenge (Romans 12:19).

And nowhere in the Bible does it say victims of betrayal must ignore their wounds, put on a smile, and pretend as though nothing happened. King David lamented, “I am weary with my moaning;

every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping (Psalm 6:6 ESV).” A false smile with a “fake it till you make it” attitude is not how we are to handle betrayal.

There are dozens of wrong ways to confront those who have hurt us, but the Lord Jesus has given us the right way of addressing our betrayers in Matthew 18:15-17. According to our Lord’s specific instructions, we may need to terminate such a troubled relationship until matters are made right once again. When in doubt, the injured believer will do well to consult with a trusted pastor or Christian counselor. God does not expect a frightened wife to remain under the same roof with an abusive husband who communicates through his clinched fists. God does not expect beleaguered parents to allow their grown children to continually take advantage of their patience and generosity. Again, under some circumstances, we are to remove such persons from our inner circle (Matthew 18:17).

Summary

We should always pray for the restoration of those who have harmed us. Joseph graciously pardoned the older brothers who had sold him into slavery. We read, “But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (Genesis 50:19-21 NIV).”

The psalmist wrote, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18 ESV) In this life, hurt is inevitable, but God has a way of overcoming evil with good. By faith, believe He really and truly loves you and cares for you.

Day 12

Does the Bible encourage husbands to bully their wives?

Preview

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” (Ephesians 5:22-24 NKJV) Is this a license that allows husbands to bully their wives? Please be assured the answer to this question is a big, fat “NO!”

Bullying is *not* a Christian virtue

Let there be no confusion or misunderstanding: God’s word most certainly does not encourage, foster, permit, condone, call for, or allow a brutish husband to bully his wife. Any man who points to this passage as some kind of license to run slipshod over his wife is biblically ignorant. A wife is a partner. She is not a slave. She is not a hired hand. She is not a menial. She is not a doormat. A wife is a person of immeasurable worth and value created in the image of God. To mistreat one’s wife is tantamount to delivering a cold slap in the face of God her Maker.

But doesn’t the Bible explicitly say that wives are to submit to their husbands? Yes, but as we explore the common sense meaning of this passage, let us first take a close look at the role a Christian husband plays in marriage.

This is what God expects from husbands...

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25 ESV).” What does loving one’s wife as Christ loved the church look like in a marriage? A husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church will

- be willing to die for her if necessary
- be forever mindful of her needs
- never browbeat or belittle her

- treat her with gentleness
- shower her with kindness and affection
- stand with her when she is facing difficulties
- shield her from those who would take advantage of her
- be willing to help her in all circumstances
- give her good gifts
- offer guidance as needed
- never forget that she is, first and foremost, a beloved daughter of God
- be quick to forgive her when she stumbles
- defend her name, her honor, and her reputation
- shield her from those who would take advantage of her
- edify, uplift, and encourage her
- be her Boaz twenty-four hours a day seven days a week

By the way, husbands, if you do not know who Boaz is, you will do well to read the Old Testament Book of Ruth without delay—not tomorrow, but today.

Summary

Any husband who loves his wife as Christ Jesus loves the church will discover how easy and effortlessly it is for a wife to respond in love to her husband. And how does a godly wife respond to a godly husband? She will be in agreement with him. And why not? Such a husband will think and act and make decisions as one who has the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). She will, therefore, be on his side. She will stand with him because he is already standing with her.

Husbands, if you love your wife as Christ Jesus loves His church, you probably enjoy a happy homelife. On the other hand, if you do not love your wife as the Lord loves His church, please do not wave Ephesians 5:22 under her nose. You cannot rightfully expect her to fulfill her role until you've learned to fulfill your role.

Day 13

Why isn't my husband (or wife) more attentive to my needs?

Preview

It is possible to love one's marriage partner, enjoy a happy homelife, and yet not feel entirely satisfied or fulfilled. Perhaps something is missing. And perhaps this something, whatever it is, is a need, a want, or a desire that only your spouse can fulfill. And though you love him or her and pray that God will grant the two of you many years together, something is missing. Why isn't he or she a bit more attentive? Let's talk about this.

Don't be afraid to ask

Let us briefly examine a passage from the New Testament that, on the surface, seems to have no relevance to the subject at hand, but maybe it does:

Now as Jesus was approaching Jericho, a man who was blind was sitting by the road, begging. But when he heard a crowd going by, he began inquiring what this was. They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. And he called out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He asked him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And he said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Regain your sight; your faith has made you well." And immediately he regained his sight and began following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God (Luke 18:35-43 NASB).

Do you find it curious that our Lord Jesus asked the blind man begging for help, "What do you want Me to do for you?" It seems rather obvious that a blind man would want his sight restored, right, so why would Jesus ask such an obvious question? Surely, our Lord Jesus did not think the blind man was in need of a loaf of bread or a shekel or a new pair of sandals. What more would a

blind person want than sight? So, again, why did Jesus insist that the blind man make his needs known in such a specific manner?

Many of us are entirely too vague about what we expect out of life. This vagueness most likely hinders our prayers, too, for when we approach God in a wishy-washy manner, it is as if we don't know what we want and are expecting Him to figure it out.

Jesus healed the blind man after he specifically said, "Lord, I want to regain my sight!"

We are told to "ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7)," but if our mind is fuzzy about our particular need, then our prayers are plagued by the same kind of fuzziness. Furthermore, how can we "seek and knock" if we don't really know for what it is we are asking? No, God wants us to be clear thinkers and not muddle-minded creatures who itch in one place yet scratch in another.

Summary

In marriage, as in prayer, make your needs known (Philippians 4:6). Although God can read our minds, our spouses cannot, therefore, rather than writing them off as uncooperative or insensitive or even clueless, let us give them the benefit of the doubt by sharing our needs with them. Of course, this consideration works both ways, so a good place to begin might be taking the lead and saying, "I love you, sweetheart. What can I do to make you happier?"

Day 14

Will someone tell me why my parents don't love me?

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12 ESV).

Preview

A young boy wonders why his parents seemingly ignore him. They show little interest in him. They fail to recognize his accomplishments. No matter what he does, his mother and father seldom take notice. Even when he is on his best behavior, he feels as though his parents consider him just another burden they must bear.

A rather awkward little girl lives in the shadow of her older sister who, in her mind, is smarter, prettier, and far more graceful. Try though she might, she can never please her parents who do nothing to hide the fact that they much prefer their older daughter. For as long as she can remember, she has been taunted with, “Why can’t you be more like your older sister? You are such a disappointment to us.”

A high schooler doesn’t feel unloved, but his father lives out of state and seldom calls or visits while his mom, with whom he lives, comes across as preoccupied with her career, her friends, and her hobbies. She sees that his physical needs are met and is even generous with the spending money, but between his mother’s new boyfriend and her recent job promotion, he often feels as though he is a nuisance who puts a wrinkle in her preferred lifestyle. He would be willing to relocate, but his father insists that he stay where he is for the present. Maybe he can come for an extended visit later, but not now.

Anyone who has been abandoned by parents knows nothing hurts quite like love deprivation.

When love is in short supply

There are few experiences worse than feeling unloved, unwanted, and uncared for by one's own parents. Children raised under these circumstances may

- struggle to foster healthy relationships as adults
- be haunted by feelings of self-doubt and worthlessness
- live with an ongoing sense of failure
- grow up to be loners who live in relative isolation
- find sexual and emotional intimacy with a spouse difficult to achieve
- be prone to anxiety, mood swings, and depression
- seek relationships with unsuitable persons as in “looking for love in all the wrong places”
- be more prone to excessive alcohol consumption or substance abuse

This is only a partial list of the various types of emotional damage unfeeling parents can heap upon their children.

While there is no emotional “quick fix” for those raised by insensitive, incompetent parents, it is important that these victims do not allow their upbringing to define them. What about you? Were you brought up by cold, heartless parents? If so, you must remember

- God wants to be your Father (Galatians 3:26)
- He loves you—no kidding! (Romans 5:8; John 3:16)
- God delights in giving good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11)
- the Holy Spirit can fill your heart with divine love (Romans 5:5)
- your future is vitally important to Him (Jeremiah 29:11)

Summary

The Bible offers plenty of positive, loving, practical advice to parents on the multi-faceted subject of childrearing; unfortunately, some moms and dads are either woefully ignorant, lazy, or simply do not care. They inflict terrible wounds and do considerable damage to their offspring, but healing is more than possible—restoration and renewal are there for the asking (John 14:13). Be assured that Jesus is never too busy for you, so go to Him now with your hurts (Matthew 11:28, 29). He's waiting to hear from you.

Day 15

How can two emotionally damaged people survive marriage?

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Psalm 147:3 NASB).

Preview

By God's grace, most of us will never find ourselves as long term patients in a drug and alcohol recovery program, but to illustrate a truth, imagine, if you will, you are undergoing inpatient treatment at such a facility. You live on the facility's campus, attend daily classes, and your outside contacts are curtailed. Most of your interactions are with other recovering substance abusers. As a resident patient, one lesson you will hear again and again is to avoid becoming romantically involved with another recovering addict. Assuming you are single, your counselors will repeatedly warn you against forming an intimate relationship with another patient. Why? Isn't there strength in numbers? Doesn't iron sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17)?

There is strength in numbers and iron does, indeed, sharpen iron, but when one broken person attaches himself or herself to another broken person, the iron turns to rust and all that is left is double the chaos.

Marriage is tough (but you already know this)

Marriage is an honorable institution ordained by God (Hebrews 13:4), but when considering the monumental demands heaped upon a lawfully wedded couple, marriage is definitely not for the faint of heart. Men and women who have experienced

- childhood trauma
- physical abuse
- abandonment
- insensitive, unfeeling, unloving parents
- emotional trauma

- extreme betrayal
- molestation
- clinical depression
- extreme anxiety
- and, of course, addiction

should never enter into a close, intimate relationship until such wounds are healed. When two people, both nursing fresh wounds, come together, their problems are multiplied exponentially. One broken person cannot rescue another broken person just as a blind person cannot lead another blind person (Matthew 15:14).

Even on a good day, marriage is not without its stresses and challenges. Two people, bloodied and bruised and reeling from hurt, are simply not ready for intimacy. Rather than finding strength in numbers, such a hapless, hopeless, tattered couple is more likely to realize the person sharing their bed is just another stumbling block or, worse yet, an enemy.

To avoid being burned, one needs to keep away from the flames, but for those already involved in a marriage laden with the kind of emotional baggage we've been discussing, this may be the time to seek the wise counsel of a seasoned, mature pastor or a Christian marriage counselor. In the meantime,

- bring these heavy burdens to the Lord (Psalm 55:22)
- ask God for an extra dose of wisdom (James 1:5)
- allow the Holy Spirit to give you the ability to shower your troubled spouse with love (Romans 5:5)
- avoid hammering your spouse with insults and accusations (Colossians 4:6)
- learn to listen attentively to your spouse (James 1:19)
- rather than clinging tenaciously to past hurts while fostering a desire for retribution and revenge, yield yourself to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; I Thessalonians 5:19)
- never lose heart or sink into despair, for God is still in the business of mending broken dreams, broken relationships, and broken lives (Galatians 6:9)

Summary

In closing, those who are in the process of healing from past wounds should not rush into marriage. This is doubly true when both parties are nursing old hurts. To those already embroiled in a troubled marriage, a godly pastor or Christian marriage counselor may prove to be the best friend you can make during these turbulent times. Two broken people navigating the strains and

difficulties of married life is much like two blind people attempting to cross a busy, sixteen-lane highway, yet with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). Not easy, but nonetheless possible.

Day 16

Does God deserve a bad reputation?

Preview

Reputation is defined as the overall quality of character as judged by the majority of people. Some reputations are deserved; others are not. Reputation may have nothing to do with accuracy, rather, reputation is what people perceive to be true. God has a reputation. Although it is safe to say most people have very little knowledge of Him due to widespread biblical illiteracy, He nonetheless has a reputation that is largely based on how people perceive the church and the Christians they know.

God's reputation = Church's reputation

God is invisible, but the church is not. People cannot see God, but they certainly see Christendom on television, in the press, on social media, in the pulpit, and among those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. Much of what the public at large sees is not at all good. When skeptics and nonbelievers witness greedy televangelists garbed in designer clothes begging for money or read of shameful scandals involving child molestation among the clergy, the general public's perception of God and the Christian faith takes a sharp nosedive. If God's servants are abusive, they reason, then God must be abusive.

If, by chance, you are a victim of church abuse, you must understand false teachers in no way reflect the tender, loving heart of God. Like you, God is offended by these morally corrupt individuals, and in time, He will deal with them. (Galatians 6:7) In the meantime, please know that

- God loathes the boastful, the proud, the arrogant, the brutal, and the corrupt (Proverbs 6:16-19)
- Rather than supporting these spurious pastors and evangelists, we are to expose them (Ephesians 5:11)
- We must guard ourselves against those who use lies and flattery for personal gain (Romans 16:17, 18)

- We are to challenge these false teachers in the presence of godly Christian believers (Matthew 18:15-20)
- We are not to associate with these false teachers (Titus 3:10)
- It is the devil, not God, who is the father of lying prophets and greedy, self-serving teachers (John 8:44)

As God’s reputation among the lost is often based on what they see in us, the Apostle Peter wrote, “Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.” (I Peter 2:12)

Jesus was also a victim of religious abuse

If you have suffered at the hands of evil people within the church, please know that our Lord Jesus was also victimized by the religious establishment. At one point, the religious rulers called Jesus a liar to His face. (John 8:13) Soon afterwards, they accused Him of being possessed by the devil. (John 8: 48) Jesus was fully aware the religious rulers were secretly plotting His death. (John 8:40) And it was the professional clergy who paid Judas Iscariot thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus. (Matthew 26:14)

God allowed His Son to suffer at the hands of evil religious rulers. His suffering, loathsome and agonizing and certainly undeserved, was necessary for our greater good. In other words, Jesus became a victim for you and me. (Isaiah 53:5)

Summary

If you are a victim of church abuse—or any kind of abuse, perhaps you can take comfort in knowing that our Lord suffered, too, and through His suffering came good. In time, you will understand that your suffering also brought about a greater good. (Romans 8:28) This may seem like cold comfort now, but in the end, God will wipe away all tears—including yours. (Revelation 21:4)

Day 17

Why would God intentionally plan and then allow me to be abused?

Preview

Those familiar with the Old Testament Book of Job will recall that Job's friends conjured all manner of fanciful theories as to why such terrible calamities had befallen him. In the end, their explanations proved worthless, and these so-called "wise counselors" were shown to be babbling fools. Some people endure horrific tragedies. They are victims of circumstance. They played no role in their downfall. They suffer at the hands of others, and we wonder why all this has happened. In truth, the reasons may be concealed from us. There may be no ready answers to the "whys."

"I want to know why..."

Here is what we know: Nothing is concealed from God. He knows the future. He knows a calamity will strike before it strikes. He knows the hurts that will be inflicted before the hurts are inflicted. He knows the victims' names before they are victims. Besides being all-knowing, God is all-powerful. He could prevent these calamities from happening. He could spare the victims from their wounds. He could prevent all catastrophic events from occurring, but He does not. We may therefore conclude God allows good people to endure unspeakably horrid tragedies.

This is true. God allows innocent people to suffer. His reasons for allowing pain and misery are often explained with answers like "God allowed this to get his or her attention," or "God is working toward a greater good," and these may be true, but such explanations may also prove to be of little comfort to those drowning in grief. Again, going forward with what we do know, God is good, and our best interests are of paramount concern to Him. (Romans 5:8, 8:37-39; John 3:16) God's plans for our lives offer meaning and purpose. (Jeremiah 29:11) While we may not understand God's reasoning on this side of eternity, God will see that a greater good comes from the tears and ashes of our sufferings.

No one wants to suffer, but suffering can be a very real part of Christian living. The Apostle Peter, whom we believe was also crucified on a cross, wrote, “For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.” (I Peter 2:21) If you suffer or have suffered, this is not due to the capriciousness of God. Furthermore, if you have been abused or victimized, this is by no means saying something callous like, “You had it coming,” or “You’re only getting what you deserve.” Job’s friends made these accusations and were proven to be liars. Jesus knows your suffering, and He is not blind to your hurt. He will not allow wearisome agonies to bring you to ruin. (I Corinthians 10:13) You will overcome. You have God’s word.

Summary

When the day comes when He wipes away all tears (Revelation 21:4), we will look back on our sufferings and say, “At that dark time in my life, I would have sworn God had abandoned me, but now I see that He never left my side. I also see the evil I endured was not in vain. Much good came from my suffering. At the time, I did not understand why I had to endure such misery, but now I have answers and, yes, the tears I wept and the wounds I bore were well worth the good that resulted. Knowing what I now know, I would go through the same suffering again. Thank you, Lord Jesus!”

Day 18

Must I bear my shame in silence?

Preview

In our minds, there is sin, and then there is sin with a capital S, I, N followed by half a dozen explanation marks. There are those seemingly minor, hardly-worth-mentioning sins in which we shrug our shoulders and say, “After all, I’m only human,” and there are the shocking, brooding, festering sins that appear too shameful for words. For those who have committed the worst of the worst sins, are they justified in thinking, “I crossed the line, and now I must live silently with the consequences, for why should anyone care about me? How could anyone forget what I have done?” As we consider this thorny matter, may we never question the abundance of God’s mercy.

A point of no return?

All sin is detestable to God. We expect His wrath to be kindled by those who commit the kinds of sin that inspire gossip or make the front pages of the tabloids, but what about seemingly minor sins such as falsifying an income tax form or helping oneself to the petty cash drawer? Again, all sin is detestable to God, but He is just as eager to forgive those unspeakably deplorable sins as He is forgiving the pilfering of company postage.

Simply stated, those who feel as though they have crossed the line, committed an unpardonable act, and have reached the proverbial point of no return are certainly not beyond hope. No one must bear their shame in solitude and silence.

Some will lament saying, “Considering what I have done, I don’t deserve mercy, and I have no right to expect help from God and others.” In a very real sense, this is true. No one deserves mercy, for if mercy was deserved, it would not be mercy. Justice is getting what we deserve. Mercy is getting what we need.

To those suffering souls convinced they have crossed the line of no return, this is a lie from the lips of the devil that reeks of smoke and brimstone. God is rich in mercy—His supply of mercy is never exhausted. (Ephesians 2:4) No matter what you have done, God is eager to forgive you. “Come now, let’s settle this,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. (Isaiah 1:18 NLT)

Prior to his Damascus Road conversion, the Apostle Paul, then known as Saul, was a fiery religious terrorist whose hands were stained by the blood of Christian martyrs. Looking back on his past, Paul referred to himself as the “chief of sinners.” (I Timothy 1:15) Please listen carefully: If our Lord Jesus can forgive the chief of sinners, He can surely forgive the runners up.

It is not God’s will that anyone should live under the burden of guilt and shame. Our Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross in order to pay the exacting price of our sin debt. (I Corinthians 15:1-4) There is absolute, total redemption through His blood. (Ephesians 1:7) The prodigal always has a place in the Father’s house. (Luke 15:11-32) You will find the door to His house welcoming.

Summary

If you are under the burden of guilt, our Lord wants to forgive you. He does not extend His mercy with any measure of hesitation or reluctance. (Psalm 86:5; I Peter 1:3) No matter what any of us has done, His loving, welcoming arms are ready to receive us.

Day 19

Is Satan to blame for my suffering?

Preview

The great Christian writer C.S. Lewis explained, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” As we consider how Satan is responsible for much of the world’s suffering, let us give the devil his due, but not a pittance more.

Understanding the devil

There is a sizable percentage of the clergy that simply denies the existence of Satan; rather than recognizing him as a fallen angel, they insist he is simply the personification of evil. At the other extreme are those who find the devil hiding under every bed, living inside every television, and lurking inside every church but their own. Others, still, wrongly assume he is as powerful as God and are convinced the final outcome in the great battle of good versus evil is too close to call.

Satan is not equal in power and might to God; on the contrary, he is a mere created being, that is, a fallen angel (Ezekiel 28:13-19; Revelation 12:7-9). No creature can be greater than its Creator. Steeped in pride, he seeks to usurp God’s authority (Isaiah 14:13). He is a murderer, the father of lies (John 8:44), and a master of deception (II Corinthians 11:14). The Apostle Peter called Satan a “roaring lion” on the prowl and looking for an opportunity to devour us (I Peter 5:8). And just as Satan led Eve astray, he likewise seeks to lead us astray through intrigue and cunning (II Corinthians 11:3). Too, he does not work alone. We have reason to believe he leads a huge army of other fallen angels (Revelation 12:4). Never underestimate the extent of Satan’s dominion. Our Lord Jesus Himself referenced Satan’s kingdom (John 12:31; Matthew 12:26). Obviously, his operation is substantially more than a quaint little dog and pony show.

To what extent?

You may ask, then, if the devil is responsible for the abuse and suffering you have experienced or are currently enduring. In Job's case, Satan appeared to be entirely responsible for the death of his children, his many physical maladies, the forfeiture of his wife's support and encouragement, and the loss of his substantial wealth (Job 1, 2). As if all this evil was not enough, beginning in Job 3, we discover Job's friends became his accusers. Added to his losses was the loss of Job's good name. For this, however, we can blame the shortsightedness of Job's friends. These "miserable comforters" simply picked up where Satan had left off (Job 16:2). How tragic it is when one's friends turn their backs in times of need. While Job languished in his miseries, his friends pointed fingers and wagged their tongues. It may be safe to say Job's calamities were brought about by Satan but perpetuated by Job's friends. As in many cases where innocent people appear to suffer through no fault of their own, there seems to be enough evil for multiple sources to get the credit.

Summary

Where there is evil, Satan's fingerprints are everywhere. The Apostle Paul spoke of his plans and his physical health being both hindered by Satan (I Thessalonians 2:18; II Corinthians 12:7). The devil's rap sheet must be five miles long, and he has more pain and suffering to inflict before the Lord Jesus tosses him into the Lake of Fire (Matthew 25:41). Be comforted, suffering Christian, knowing the devil's reign of terror is coming to an end.

Day 20

What does God's forgiveness mean to me?

Preview

Forgiveness is not pretending an offense never happened. Forgiveness is not saying, “Oh, shucks! We all make mistakes.” Forgiveness is realizing that a wrong was committed, but releasing the offender from all hatred and resentment and refusing to pursue punitive actions or revenge. When God forgives sin, He looks upon the sinner with the tenderest affections. God does not struggle to let go of His anger. When we are forgiven, we are forgiven to the uttermost. (Hebrews 7:25)

The full gravity of sin

As beings with a sin nature, we do not understand the full gravity of sin. We recoil in horror from certain sins, particularly violent acts such as murder and rape, but we tend to wink at other sins such as greed, lust, laziness, and pride. We attempt to sanitize some forms of dishonesty by calling them “little white lies.” Because we are sinful creatures, we are too accepting of and too comfortable with sin.

How can we understand God's reaction to sin? Dogs are not picky about the sanitary conditions of their food. No dog ever walked away from its dish because its owner did not wash his or her hands before preparing its meal. No self-respecting buzzard ever said of a carcass, “This roadkill is disgusting. This dead animal has fleas, and you expect me to eat it? No, thanks!” Bears rifle through dumpsters with no thought of germs, bacteria, or other foodborne contaminants. Civilized people expect clean dishes and sanitary food, but animals are not so picky.

When it comes to most sin, we take the same cavalier attitude that a buzzard takes when surveying roadkill. We are okay with sin. Sin does not offend us. In fact, we are rather accepting of many forms of sin. God is not like us. All sin, even those “little white lies,” are repulsive to Him. At the risk of sounding crude, asking God to accept sin would be like asking you and me to share a meal

with maggots. Figuratively speaking, sin makes God sick to His stomach. Let us not expect Him to look upon our sin with a nod and a smile. He cannot and He will not lower His righteous standards simply because we are all too comfortable with many forms of sin.

The cleansing blood of Jesus

Sin is serious business. Sin does not go away simply because someone glibly says, “Sorry, sorry, sorry, but I’m only human.” Sin is no laughing matter. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), and to this date, sin has never missed a payday. There is an exacting price to pay for sin—even those seemingly minor sins—and only the sacrificial blood of Jesus can clean us and make us fit for Heaven. (I John 1:7) Being sorry is not enough, but being forgiven is, and our salvation from the heavy penalties of sin comes through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. The Apostle Paul wrote, “God saved you by his grace 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 NLT)

Summary

God went through a lot of trouble to save you and me. His forgiveness is no small matter. Jesus endured unspeakable suffering so that we would not have to. (Isaiah 53) To take sin lightly is to take our Lord’s death lightly. May we not be so ungratefully foolish.

Day 21

Why would God expect me to forgive those who have harmed me?

Preview

Acting as though no offense has taken place is not forgiveness. Likewise, writing off an offensive deed with a casual, “Oh well, we all make mistakes” is not forgiveness. Forgiveness agrees that a wrongful act has occurred, but the injured party refuses to hold a grudge or seek revenge.

Forgiveness is saying, “I could remain angry with you, but I won’t. I could get you for this, but I won’t. I could bring this up again and again, but I won’t.” When God forgives us of our sins, He promises to “throw them into the depths of the ocean!” (Micah 7:9) And we are to do the same when others offend us.

Being imitators of Christ

Forgiving someone who has inflicted deep wounds and caused much hurt is no simple matter. It is rather easy to volunteer at an inner city soup kitchen or assist in the church nursery—and such acts of charity are vitally important—but when we forgive someone who has harmed us, we are engaging in a godlike task. Forgiving those who have brought hurt and grief through their calloused behavior requires a lot of determination and fortitude. Vengeance is a tasty morsel that delights the tongue, but in the end, this tasty morsel brings rot and decay to the soul. Our Lord Jesus said we are to forgive others in the same manner that God forgives us. (Matthew 6:14, 15) No, this is not always easy, but when we forgive those who have “trespassed against us,” we are acting more like our Lord Jesus than at any other time.

There is an old maxim that says the bottle that contains poison is just as deadly as the poison itself. When we release the toxic resentment that floods our injured soul, we are actually freeing ourselves from the vile lust for revenge. “This sounds quite magnanimous,” someone may rightly and reasonably protest, “but you have no idea how badly he hurt me. Don’t tell me to forgive my abuser until you know what I’ve been through.” To those who have experienced unspeakable pain

and suffering at the hands of another, may the rest of us never scoff at wounds we ourselves have never suffered.

For some, it is impossible to forgive their tormentors. In certain instances, no amount of determination and self-will can produce forgiveness. That's okay. When we cannot forgive our enemies, we turn to God and ask Him to give us the love and mercy we need to release our anger and let go of that pent-up hatred. Will God give us love for our enemies? Will He fill our hearts with love for those who have caused us so much grief? Yes. Our empty hearts can be filled with God's divine, supernatural love. We have God's promise of this in Romans 5:5. God will give you the love you need to forgive those who have caused your suffering.

Summary

There is freedom in forgiveness. Hatred, resentment, and a thirst for “settling an old score” are burdens that are truly too heavy for us to carry. With forgiveness comes a buoyancy of spirit that adds savor to life and a gladness of the heart. Bottled-up anger robs one of joy. There is nothing quite so liberating as complete, total forgiveness. Enjoy the liberation that comes with emptying one's inner self of those wretched venomous, putrefying, caustic emotions born of long-held grudges and a desire for revenge.

May all who hurt be set free!

If my boyfriend/fiancé physically abuses me, should I give him a second chance?

Tidbit

Any couple, no matter how loving or committed, will have their share of clashes and disagreements over time. Early in a relationship, lovers tend to be more tolerant of their partner's shortcomings. The thrill and enchantment of infatuation tends to diminish notice of our lover's habits and flaws—flaws that will likely become major annoyances after a few years of married life. Quirks in their behavior that we magnanimously shrug off today may give us plenty of reason to grumble and complain later. Love is blind—but only for a short while. And this leads us to a rather prickly question: Should a woman give her boyfriend or fiancé a second chance if he physically abuses her? Should she forgive him, or should she send him packing?

Rats in the cellar

We agree that disagreements and conflicts are bound to occur between two lovers, but let's say, in the heat of an argument, a young man strikes a woman with his fist. Realizing what he has done, he apologizes saying, "I'm sorry. I was caught off-guard. Sweetheart, I am not really a violent man. I acted without thinking."

In truth, he really *is* a violent man (Proverbs 29:11). The beloved Christian author and philosopher C.S. Lewis used rats in a cellar as a metaphor for situations such as this. If someone quietly enters a dark, rat-infested cellar, he is likely to encounter a pack of filthy rodents. If, however, he makes a lot of racket and fills the cellar with light before making his way down the steps, the rats will likely conceal themselves from sight. And so it is with our character flaws. A man's bad temper is much like a pack of rats living in a cellar. Lewis wrote, "Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth? If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am. The rats are always there in the cellar, but if you go in shouting and noisily, they will have taken cover before you switch on the light."ⁱ

The man who tells the woman he has just struck, "I don't know what came over me. This is not who I really am," is either delusional or a liar. This is exactly who he is, and he is likely to do it again and again (Proverbs 26:11).

A woman who is physically abused by a boyfriend or fiancé needs to break off the relationship immediately (Psalm 1:1). No ifs, ands, or buts. Run, don't walk away from this ill-tempered young man.

“But he didn't hit me that hard,” she might protest. He will hit her harder the second time around. Furthermore, there is no education in the second kick of a mule.

“But as a Christian, I have forgiven him,” she says. Good, but forgiving him doesn't mean she should marry him.

“He has agreed to attend anger management classes,” she explains. Yes, he needs counselling, but will he attend counselling even if she breaks off the engagement? Probably not. So, in truth, attending counselling sessions is only an appeasement. In his mind, he has done little wrong.

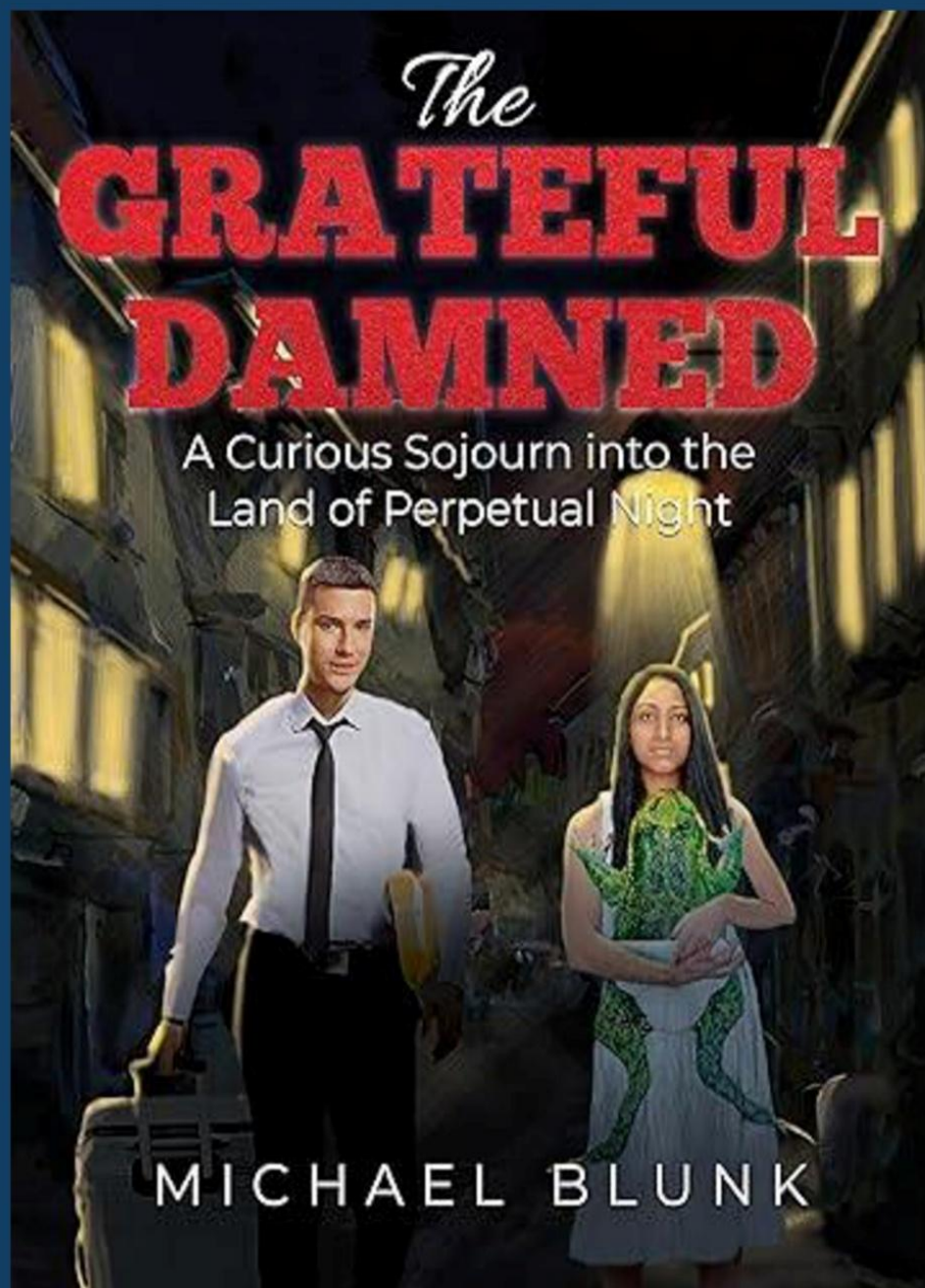
Summary

Even under the best of circumstances, marriage is tough. Learning to live peaceably with another is no easy task, but when one of the partners is unable to control his temper, the other is in for a lifetime of regrets (Proverbs 14:12).

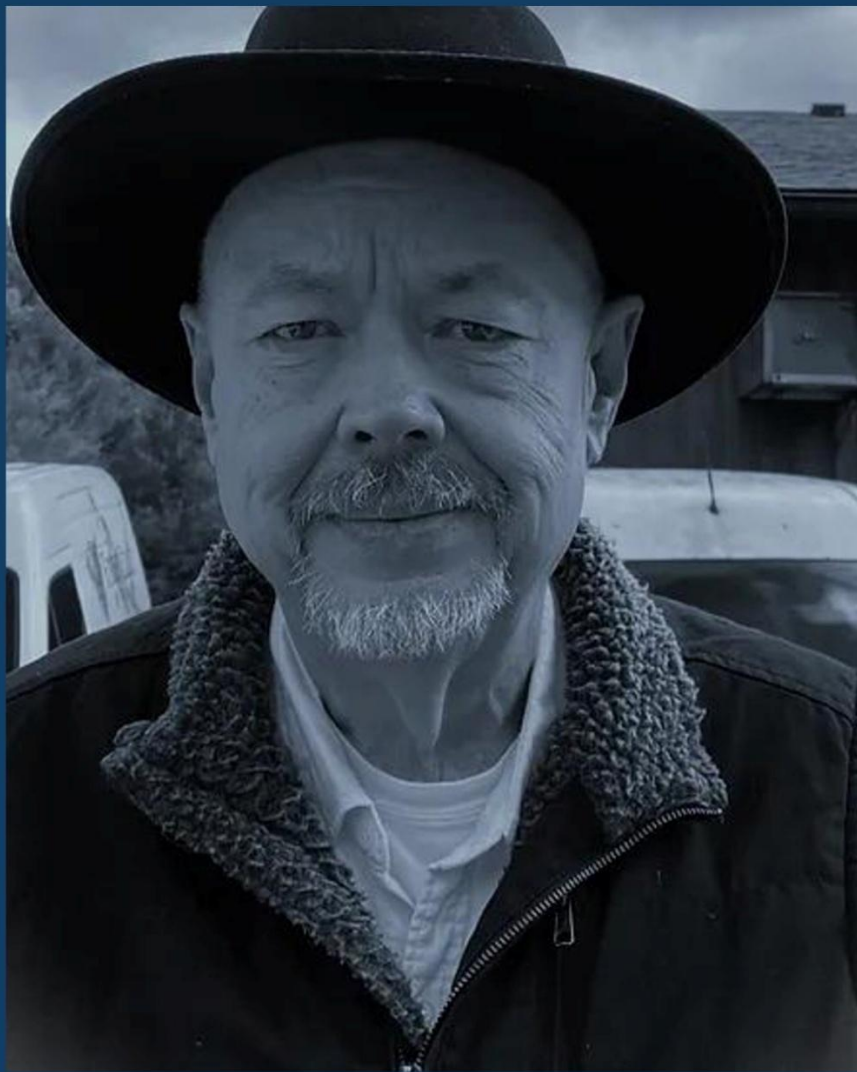
The Grateful Damned—a curious dystopian fantasy by Michael Blunk

When high school English teacher Sherwood “Woody” McCormick’s wife Abbie dies in a plane crash only one day after their wedding, Woody is left reeling and seeking answers about fate, the universe, and the nature of God. He turns to lonely waitresses, unorthodox preachers, and psychics eager to shake him down before an Angel appears and intervenes. Woody will be allowed to visit hell in an effort to find Abbie and get some closure on her untimely death. Far from the fire and brimstone pits of popular imagination, Woody discovers that hell is actually a buzzing, endless metropolis with an inscrutable economy (everything only costs one “Tetzel,” which is simultaneously worth everything and nothing), a false promise of eternal youth, and fancy seven-course dinners that never truly satisfy. Countless kooky characters start to come out of the woodwork offering to guide Woody through this strange alternate reality.

Blunk’s modern-day Orpheus story is bursting with clever ideas and quirky characters that jump off the page in rapid succession, calling to mind the numerous idiosyncratic figures populating the works of Kurt Vonnegut, or David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. In the same vein, Woody’s journey is epic in both scale and absurdity. Here, hell is an exaggerated American mega-city with an endless sprawl of traffic, dizzying skyscrapers, and distressing urban decay that gets summed up by Exie as “nothing more than a pigsty with crosstown subway service.” The book’s satirical barbs seem to be aimed at pretentious city dwellers who barter in delusions of grandeur. (Hell’s bogus economic system is probably Blunk’s most ingenious idea, as it sets up plenty of wonderful jokes and bigger, philosophical notions about value.) —Kirkus Reviews



michaelblunk.online Available through Amazon



About the Author

Michael Blunk is a retired chaplain/teacher who currently writes for an apologetics ministry. His first novel, *The Grateful Damned*, was released in 2024. A sequel is in the offing.

His next effort, *The Anger Book*, is scheduled for release in the late summer or early fall of 2025. *The Anger Book* looks at anger management from a biblical perspective. It is intended for individual or group study.

Also in the works is *The Sobriety Book*. This is a Christ-centered, biblically based 12 Step program guide.

He enjoys drawing and painting. As an artist, his claim to fame is selling a cartoon to a famous 1980s rock band. He also writes music and plays three instruments.

Please visit his website: michaelblunk.online

ⁱ <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/reflections-february-2008/>