



# How Emotional Problems Develop

We believe that materials such as these are always "in process" and able to be improved. We will be grateful to receive any feedback you have to share with us.

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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated are from the New International Version of the Bible, © 1978 by New York International Bible Society

NOTES: In the interest of editorial brevity and simplicity, these documents treat gender-neutral and gender-plural references with the masculine pronoun "he" rather than "she," "he or she" or other constructions. When clarity is better served by other words, we follow whatever usage seems to aid readers best. Worldwide Discipleship Association follows Scripture in joyfully recognizing that God created man and woman in His image as equal recipients of His grace and mercy.

### *How Emotional Problems Develop*

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# **How Emotional Problems Develop**

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## Created in God's Image

God has put in all of us a sense, an inward feeling, that we were created for something better, greater and grander than we now experience. He has "set eternity in the hearts of all men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We sense this because it is true. We were created for something better. God created us in His image (Genesis 1:26,27), and created us a little lower than Himself and crowned us with glory and honor (Psalm 8:5).

But we also know that our lives fall short of this glory and honor, and we long for something better. Of course, we will experience the completion of what we were created to be only in eternity. But we can also receive more fulfillment in this life. Jesus calls this fulfilled life, the abundant life (John 10:10). To experience this fuller, better life we must become disciples of Christ. We must set our hearts to follow Him fully and to put off the things that trap and entangle us in this world.

This booklet discusses some of the ways we can become entrapped and damaged by sin. It also discusses how to become free to follow Christ more fully and completely. In *Addendum C* entitled *A Biblical View of Restorative: Isaiah 61: 1-4* you will find a discussion about how Jesus' ministry applies to people with emotionally based problems.

## The Source of Our Struggles

We live in a fallen world that is imperfect and unable to give us all the things that we need to live healthy, productive lives. The Bible says that Satan is the ruler of this world (John 12:31) and that unbelievers are blinded by him (II Corinthians 4:3-4) and under his power (Acts 26:18). He is compared to a thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Therefore, we can conclude that the world is a dangerous place to live. Part of the reason the world is so dangerous is that it is composed of fallen people. We are all born into this world in a fallen state (Psalm 51:5). In that fallen state we are separated from God and greatly influenced by an internal nature which the Bible refers to as the sin nature (Galatians 5:16-17) or the earthly nature (Colossians 3:5). Before a person becomes a Christian he is said to be in bondage to that nature or a slave to sin (Romans 6:6).

When a person becomes a Christian by turning from his sin and trusting Christ for salvation, God begins to transform him to become like Christ (Romans 8:29). This transformation process, which is called sanctification, is an ongoing, lifelong process that is not completed in this life. God gloriously completes it when we go to be with Him!

This growth process is not completed in this life because we continue to have a sin nature as long as we live. Although we can make progress against sin during our life, we will not be able to fully overcome it. We are no longer enslaved to sin. We have a

choice, but the influence of sin is still very strong. Thus, we see that the source of our struggles is our own fallenness and the fallen world we live in that is enslaved to sin and Satan.

## **Correcting an Imbalance**

Although Christians universally agree that our three enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil and that these three interact (Ephesians 2:1-2), sometimes we underestimate the impact of the world on us. In particular, we underestimate the impact of the unhealthy environments that we grew up in and have to continually deal with because of the fallenness of individuals and the world. Christians and non-Christians alike are sometimes hurtful in how they deal with one another. Unwise actions and attitudes are often not deliberate, and indeed, many times we are not even aware that we are making mistakes as we interact with others. However, merely the fact that we are human means that we are fallible and will make mistakes.

Often we in the church have failed to understand the full extent of the damage present in people's lives resulting from their past and current living environments. For this reason, we have often not done enough to help people deal with the emotional damage they have suffered. This neglect is not deliberate, but grows out of a lack of understanding about how emotional damage occurs in a person's life, how it affects a person, and how healing takes place.

Many pastors do not know what to do to help the hurting, wounded people in their congregations. They continue to hope that the traditional teachings of the church will eventually bring about healing, but they often don't. These hurting people do not seem to get better, and in fact, some of them actually get worse. Many may eventually give up and drop out of the church altogether.

It has been estimated that 20% of the people in the church are struggling with such severe problems that they never make much spiritual progress. Their problems are often obvious to everyone. The bulk of church members, about 60%, are able to grow spiritually but are hindered in significant ways because of unaddressed emotional issues. An example might be a person who suffers from low self-esteem and the fear of people to such a degree that he is never able to share his faith with another person. People in this group often do not understand why they are struggling. The remaining 20% grow in spite of their problems. However, they do have some emotional issues that affect them, and they would benefit from dealing with those issues.

It is not just church members that struggle with unaddressed emotional issues. Christian leaders also are affected. A church leader who was responsible for overseeing hundreds of churches in his denomination indicated that many of the pastors he works with need to work through similar emotional issues in their own lives.

We in the church need a more comprehensive understanding of how people develop emotional problems and need to provide instruction, support, and opportunities for healing. This lack of understanding is often the result of an inadequate view of sanctification. We assume that when a person accepts Christ the impact of his past has been wiped out. The Bible says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." (II Corinthians 5:17). This verse has been used against those who stress the need to deal with the past. Certainly becoming a Christian and gaining the resources that Christ provides gives us the potential and power for change. But to say that our past has been wiped out and no longer affects us is incorrect. We are a product of our past. This is exactly what sanctification begins to heal, restore and change. The transformation that Christ works in us is a transformation from what the past has worked into us. So, in essence, being transformed by Christ is dealing with our past.

When Romans 8:13 tells us to "by the Spirit... put to death the misdeeds of the body," it is telling us to put to death the things we did and learned in the past. So we must learn how to deal with the past in an effective way. It is not enough just to try to stop sinning. We must come to understand what is driving particular sins in our lives. A real key to this is to understand how the past has affected us and how it is presently affecting us. Sanctification involves two parts. One part is to build a relationship with Christ and learn how to minister with Him. But a second, and often missing part, is to deal with the damage of our past which has occurred because of our own sinful choices and the sinful choices of others.

## **How Problems Begin**

Emotional problems usually begin in childhood, and they primarily begin with unresolved pain. Painful things (events, situations, circumstances, words, etc.) can be disruptive to our lives. And if the pain is unresolved, it is even more disruptive. According to Scripture, pain that comes into our life through suffering and tribulations is supposed to bring good into our life, and indeed it does, if we are able to process the pain and let it be our teacher. When we deal with painful things in appropriate ways, it eventually brings positive results to our lives even though it may take time. For example, if a teenager experiences serious emotional trauma, it will take a long time for him to heal from the damage. But with the proper help he can heal and grow from it. However, if he does not deal with it (by denying the pain, minimizing it, etc.) the trauma will probably generate serious problems that will affect him the rest of his life.

Pain can be our enemy, but it can also be our ally. Without pain, we would injure ourselves seriously. Dr. Paul Brand, in his book *The Gift Nobody Wants* (the gift being our ability to feel pain), gives tragic illustrations of lepers who are unable to feel physical pain. When they injure their bodies, they are not immediately aware of their

injury because they don't feel any pain. As a result, they unknowingly continue to hurt themselves to the point that they completely destroy parts of their body.

Pain not only warns us to stop dangerous activities, it also teaches us valuable lessons and shows us where our limitations are. In Roman 5:3, Paul says, "we rejoice in our sufferings" and then goes on to describe the fruit of suffering. If we replace the word "pain" for "sufferings", the verse would read like this, "We rejoice in our 'pain' because we know that 'pain' produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." This verse indicates that if we do not suppress our pain, but feel it and learn from it, it will produce positive benefits in our lives. Pain, when handled correctly, can have a positive impact on our lives.

Problems occur when we are unable to process pain in a safe environment. *Addendum A* entitled *Development of Emotionally-Based Problems* at the back of this booklet explains how unresolved pain creates problems in a child's life that carry over into adult life and may cause life-controlling problems. (You may want to take out this addendum and refer to it as you continue reading.) It is important for hurting people to understand the sources of their pain if they are going to deal effectively with their past. They are also in danger of repeating their experience with their own children. The first column of the chart (far left) deals with some of the ways pain comes into a child's life. (For most people, these issues begin in childhood. However, these problems can result from unresolved pain which begins in adulthood.) This next section, "Sources of Pain for Children", will explain this left-hand column more thoroughly.

## Sources of Pain for Children

The growing-up process is painful in and of itself. It is not easy learning to make our way in this world. It is the parents' responsibility to protect their children from grave dangers in life but not from all pain. As painful things happen the parents should provide a safe environment for their children to work through their pain and learn from it. Adolescence is often an especially difficult period, but there will be many other times throughout a child's life when he will have to face loss and disappointment.

The following is a list of ways parents may make life more difficult for their children. Parents may not provide a safe environment for their children, or they may ignore their children's needs, or they may add to their pain by not providing a way to work through pain and learn from it. (See Column 1 of *Development of Emotionally Based Problems, Addendum A.*)

- 1. Active Abuse** - Active abuse occurs when an adult or peer inflicts harm on a child. This may not be done deliberately or knowingly. The word "abuse" is used to denote the impact on the child not necessarily the intent of the person harming the child. The following are several examples of active abuse:

- a. **Physical Abuse** - This refers to deliberately depriving a child of physical resources necessary to meet his needs or physically harming him through excessive physical punishment. Physical abuse includes actions directed toward the child such as punching, jerking, choking, or kicking. It also includes threats of violence or abandonment as well as witnessing violence done to another. Spanking is not necessarily physical abuse, but it can be if it is too harsh or extensive.
- b. **Sexual Abuse** - Statistics tell us that one out of three girls and one out of seven boys have been sexually abused by the age 18. These statistics hold true for those raised in a Christian background. It has been our experience that when this is talked about in a church setting, people acknowledge that they were sexually abused but usually have not begun to deal with it.

Sexual abuse causes more damage than other forms of abuse if left unattended. It is extremely damaging to a child, and if there is sexual abuse in a person's background it may add as much as two years to their restorative process. There are many forms of sexual abuse that do not involve penetration of any sort. They include sexual touching or fondling, exhibitionism, inappropriate sexual talk, teasing about sexual body parts, showing a child pornography, sexual kissing, knowledge inappropriate to the age, witnessing parents' sexual behavior, and violations of sexual privacy or boundaries of children. Sexual abuse may occur with same sex or opposite sex parents, siblings, relatives, neighbors, teachers, church leaders, or friends.

- c. **Verbal/Emotional Abuse** - Words can hurt as much or more than physical pain. Often physical damage will heal while the emotional wounds continue to damage the child. What is said and how it is said is very important. Numerous Scriptures warn us to be very careful with our words (James 3:9,10 and Ephesians 4:29). There is no faster way to exasperate or embitter children than to abuse them verbally (Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4).
- d. **Emotional Incest** - Emotional incest is anything done by an adult that places a child in an adult role. This may involve role reversals where the child has to take care of the adult instead of the adult caring for the child. It might involve giving a child adult responsibilities such as raising other children or having the entire responsibility to clean the house, do the laundry, or cook the meals. Emotional incest also occurs when an adult looks to a child for emotional support rather than being the child's



emotional support. When these things happen, part of a child's childhood is stolen from him.

- e. **Negative Existential Messages** - These are messages that a child receives about himself, others, life, and God which are negative and inaccurate. These messages may be unspoken, but the child still perceives them through the attitudes and actions of others. Some examples are "All men/women are bad", "I'm no good", "People of other races are inferior/superior", "God is a divine policeman waiting for me to get out of line", "You cannot trust anyone", etc.

There are three messages typically present in a dysfunctional home:

- "Don't feel" (e.g. "I'll give you something to cry about" or "Just get over it" .),
- "Don't think" (e.g. "Just do what I say" .)
- "Don't talk" (e.g. "Children are to be seen and not heard" or "Don't sass me/talk back" .)

These three messages tell children that they are "non-people" instead of communicating that they are people who need to be treated with respect.

- f. **Suppression of Independence** - Suppression of independence is a common problem among Christians. Well-meaning parents may either over-control, over-correct or over-protect their children. The long-term goal of parenting should be to empower children to be able to think critically, take responsibility, and live independently. Being too controlling or too rigid or doing too much for children will cause them to have difficulty developing normally. They will either have trouble establishing their independence or seek independence inappropriately.

2. **Passive Abuse/Neglect** - By passive abuse we are referring to the ways parents may fail to meet the needs of their children. God created us with needs: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Thankfully, He has provided ways for us to get those needs met. A primary way of getting needs met is through healthy relationships with other people. For the child, parents are the most significant agents in meeting needs, and when parents neglect to meet their child's needs, the result is pain. The child who is neglected does not receive what he needs to live a healthy life.

For example, if a child does not get enough positive attention, he may develop poor self-esteem or act-out in negative ways to get attention. The effects of this lack of attention in his life may carry over into adult life. He may not know how to give positive attention to his own children thus passing on the neglect to the next generation. Unfortunately, in our society this type of passive abuse

is quite common. If both parents work or if they are distracted by other things, sometimes children are left to raise themselves.

It would be easy for parents reading this section to feel that they have ruined their children because of parenting failures. Every parent has made mistakes, but the truth is that most parents have done far more good than harm to their children. God is a gracious God. He overcomes parents' failures by providing avenues of healing for children. He also overcomes parental failure by continuing to change the parents themselves. As parents deal with their own emotional issues, they can lead the way for their children to deal with their issues as they see parents change and become more whole and healthy.

- 3. Poor Choices by the Child** - Pain does not come into a child's life only through outside sources. It also enters because of a child's poor choices. Because he is a child, he has an immature perception of the world, and therefore, will make unwise, hurtful choices at times.

All children make poor choices sometimes. However, a child born with a strong will tends to push every limit and question everything. This child will undoubtedly get hurt. The goal of parenting is not to over-control this child or to try to protect him from the consequences of his choices. It is to help him go through the hurts, face the consequences and learn from them.

- 4. Personality of the Child** - The personality of the child also influences how much he is damaged by the struggles of growing up. All personalities have strengths and weaknesses and can get hurt. However, some children are more sensitive than others, and they will get hurt more easily and more often. Those who fight and will not give in will also get hurt.
- 5. Role in the Family** - It has long been recognized by psychologists that each person in a family has a certain role, a part to play in the family. Some of the most commonly acknowledged roles are: the hero, the scapegoat, the mascot, the lost child, etc. (See *Love is a Choice* by Hemfelt, Minirth, Meier for a discussion of these roles.)

Some of these roles are more hurtful than others. The "scapegoat" is a child who often gets in trouble because of his rebellious attitude. Even if he does not do anything wrong, he often is blamed for whatever the problem is at the time. This role almost always results in significant emotional injury. Another hurtful role is the "lost child." This child is very shy and quiet and avoids trouble. He gets hurt because he tends to fade into the background and get ignored and neglected. This child may be too isolated and become depressed.

The biggest factor leading to the continuation and deepening of emotional problems is the child's perception that there is no way to deal with his pain. The only way to heal from the painful things that happen is to work through the pain in a safe environment and learn the lessons it can teach. When a child is unable to do this, it sets off a negative chain reaction rather than a healing process. Parents are the primary source God has provided to help children work through the painful and difficult parts of life.

## **The Results of Unresolved Pain**

As you can see, there are many potential sources of pain in a child's life. If a child does not learn how to work through his pain in a safe environment then, as the pain builds up in his life, he will do unhealthy things to cope with it. In fact, when a child cannot deal with pain and learn from it, it sets off a predictable negative chain reaction. The child must do something to survive the pain. There are four common reactions in a child's life.

1. **The Child Adapts to Survive** - There are two common adaptations that the child might make in order to deal with pain:
  - a. **Addictions** - An addiction is anything used to medicate pain: to eliminate it, dull it or distract a person from it. A person may use something to make himself feel better like drugs, alcohol, sex, food, spending, etc. Or he may use something to dull pain like sleep, drugs, or alcohol. Or he may use something to distract himself from the pain, like work, cleaning, shopping, TV, video games, etc. An addiction is an external focus that helps a person avoid what is going on inside.

Of course, some of things we can be addicted to are not bad in and of themselves. They can be normal and beneficial. What makes them bad is how and why they are being used. If they are being used to avoid dealing with problems or to avoid feeling negative emotions, they are unhealthy attempts to escape.

As pain builds up for a child, he begins to look for a way to medicate it. The forms of addiction available to young children are usually fairly benign, but as a child gets older the options become more and more dangerous.

- b. **Unhealthy Survival Mechanisms** - The child may develop unhealthy survival mechanisms to keep from getting hurt again. Some typical survival mechanisms are denial, dissociation, over-eagerness to please, hypervigilance (that is, hyper-sensitivity to people, emotions, etc.), mistrust of others, denial of a need for others, etc. These mechanisms help the child

survive but ultimately cut him off from the real help he needs. This, of course, leads to more pain.

An example of an unhealthy survival mechanism is the child who decides to never get close to anyone again because every time he does, he gets hurt. As he distances himself from people who hurt him (which is appropriate), he also cuts himself off from the safe people in his life from whom he needs attention. This isolation prevents him from getting his real needs met, and therefore, leads to more pain.

- 2. The Child Suppresses Emotions** - If a child cannot process his emotions and thereby release them, what happens to them? They get stored (buried) inside him in the form of stress. This internal stress builds up and usually becomes evident in one of three ways: explosion or over-reaction, hyper-sensitivity, or lack of feeling.

One indicator that internal stress is building up is that there is an explosion or an over-reaction to the things going on around him. Suppose a child "loses it" when he reaches a stress level of 10. If he has an internal stress level of "7" all the time because of buried (suppressed) pain, it will now only take a "3" event to get a "10" response. This is an over-reaction to the present situation.

A second indicator that emotions have been suppressed is hyper-sensitivity in areas in which the person has been hurt. If a little girl was abandoned by her parents, as an adult she may feel that her husband is not going to return every time he goes to work although he may have never given her any reason to believe that he would not return. This is caused by the hyper-sensitivity to the unaddressed emotional hurt in her life.

A third indicator of buried emotions is that the child has few or no feelings. A child may numb his feelings and choose not to have feelings rather than to face them. For this child negative feelings seem too overwhelming to deal with. A classic example of numbing feelings is the person who talks about an emotionally-charged subject in a very detached, non-emotional way.

- 3. The Child Develops False Beliefs** - There are a number of wrong beliefs that a child may develop when he does not have an adult available to help him work through and interpret things that happen to him. The child develops an experiential belief system: a belief system based on his experiences. This belief system will tend to override any intellectual system he learns later. He will believe what he feels more than what he or others assert intellectually. Typical types of false beliefs are: "I am all alone", "No one will protect me", "I cannot trust anyone" (including God), "I should have known better", "It was my

fault", "I deserved it", "It is just a matter of time before it happens again", "I can't stop this", "There is no way out", "Not even God can help me", "I will never be happy", "I am a burden", "God can never love or accept me", or "I have no value".

- 4. The Child Develops a Shame-Based Identity** - If enough negative things happen to a child without any resolution, the child begins to think there is something wrong with him. He concludes that because bad things keep happening to him, he must be bad, broken or defective in some way. He does not just make a mistake. He is a mistake. This can be worsened if a parent, authority or even a peer is telling him he is a mistake. Eventually, a tape of self-depreciation and defectiveness plays in the child's mind whenever he does anything wrong. These messages play back in his mind: "I can't do anything right", "I'm dumb", "I deserve what is happening", "I deserve to be punished".

In summary, when a child is unable to resolve the painful things that happen in his life and the pain begins to build up, it sets-off a chain reaction. To deal with the pain the child may turn to addictions to medicate his pain or to unhealthy survival mechanisms to keep from getting hurt again. He may bury his negative emotions on the inside, develop a false experientially-based belief system or develop a distorted shame-based self-image.

### **Typical Adult Problems that Result from Unresolved Pain**

The child takes all these unhealthy ways of living into his adult life with him: the wrong and ineffective behaviors, the buried emotions, the false beliefs and the distorted self-image. This causes even more pain. If these issues continue to go unaddressed, the problems will get worse.

Interestingly, these very problems often show the person his need for Christ. Coming to know Christ usually brings many positive changes into the person's life, but the types of problems mentioned here tend to lurk in the background and usually do not get resolved until they are addressed directly. This is why new Christians often seem better immediately after conversion, but problems surface (or may return) as time goes on. It is not that Christ does not make a difference: He does. And ultimately, He is the answer. However, we must apply the Biblical principles to these emotional issues in order to resolve problems.

The second column of *Addendum A (Development of Emotionally-Based Problems)* lists some of the typical problems an adult will face when the emotional issues of the past go unaddressed. This list applies to Christians as well as to unbelievers. The problems listed in the middle column are really symptoms of the underlying issues which are described in the first column. These issues (Column Two) are what bring people into

counseling and into restorative groups. They need help to understand the root problems (Column 1) and to learn the skills necessary to overcome these problems. They also need support from others through the process.

The following is a short description of each problem listed in Column Two of *Addendum A*. This is not a complete list of problems that might occur. People may experience one of the symptoms, several of them or all nine.

- 1. Relational Problems** - A person's survival mechanisms, addictions, compulsions, and emotional immaturity will interfere with relationships. As a result of unresolved problems, a person may not have the relational skills to interact with others in a healthy way.
- 2. Poor Decisions** - Because the person does not think correctly about himself, his emotions, his needs or life issues, he will often make poor decisions that add even more pain to his life. For example, it is not unusual for this person to be out-of-control financially. In spite of being intelligent, he seems to lack the ability to think wisely about finances.
- 3. Full-Blown Addictions** - Addictions which may have existed in seed form in a child's life now take on a life of their own and get worse. The pain increases so the addictions worsen. People can be poly-addicted: they use several things to deal with pain. Usually they use whatever is most accessible and convenient at the time.
- 4. Needs Still Not Met** - Addictions, wrong beliefs, unhealthy survival mechanisms and the inability to deal with emotions prevent a person from recognizing and getting his needs met. For example, if a person is not able to acknowledge and feel his emotions, he will not be aware of his own needs, because it is our emotions that alert us to our needs. Even if a person is aware of his needs, the other problems listed here may hinder needs being met. It is only through a healthy relationship with God and with others that a person can get personal needs met.

One result, when a person does not get his needs met, may be that he becomes driven. Everything he does is focussed on getting his needs met. People who live this way are often totally unaware (consciously) of their needs. They don't realize what they are doing. If a person's beliefs are wrong about what will meet his needs (and they usually are), then he is destined to get on an endless treadmill of doing things that do not successfully meet his needs. Most of us know people like this: they are extremely needy and draining to be around. Yet they may totally deny that they have needs. Their attempts to meet their needs may turn into addictions as they become more and more compulsive.

5. **Abusive Relationships** - If there were abusive relationships in a person's past, he may unwittingly seek out similar relationships as an adult because these kinds of relationships "feel" normal. Each of us has several relational systems in his life: original family, present family, work family, social family, church family, etc. A person may set up dysfunctional relational dynamics in each of these relational systems similar to those he had in his original family. Of course these relationships are unhealthy and only produce more pain and problems. It is not uncommon for a person to go from one abusive relationship to another, repeating the same pattern over and over.
6. **Depression** - If a person lives with internal stress for a long time and also experiences many of these external problems (Column 2), the stress may become too much. It can cause a breakdown in the chemical balance of the brain, and the result will be a clinical depression. This type of brain chemical imbalance usually needs to be treated with an anti-depressant. Clinical depression has become as prevalent as the common cold in our culture, but unfortunately, many people who are suffering from it do not even know it.
7. **Numb or Primarily Negative Feelings** - Negative emotions and positive emotions are integrally connected. Therefore, if negative emotions are suppressed, a person may eventually lose the awareness of positive emotions also. The most difficult emotion to suppress is anger. If anger is suppressed, the person will often be left with only the feeling of numbness. When a person reaches this point, he is actually disconnected from reality to some degree.
8. **Poor Relationship with God** - All relationships are affected by the issues mentioned above, including our relationship with God. The problems, which began in childhood (Column 1), usually lead to distorted views of God or negative feelings towards Him. For example, the need to be in control may make it hard to give up control to God and trust Him. It may be difficult for a person to believe that God loves him. As a result, a person may stop growing spiritually and may even regress.
9. **Feeling Out of Control** - As problems intensify, a person increasingly feels out-of-control, even though he may be very controlling. The impact of childhood problems and the resulting adult difficulties often do not significantly hinder a person until he gets into his thirties or forties (although this can occur earlier or later in life). His coping mechanisms enable him to get through his teens and twenties, but as the stresses of life increase and build up, a person's life slowly begins to disintegrate. He "falls apart". It is at this time that marriages and families fracture or the person has some form of emotional breakdown.

## The Healing Process

Thankfully, healing is possible. Nothing is impossible with God! The following is an overview of the healing process in two parts. First, we will discuss some of the essential elements of the healing process, and second, the order in which restoration normally takes place.

It is important to point out that restoration is not about blaming problems on parents or others. It is about everyone, both children and adults, taking responsibility for their own words and actions. Even when someone does or says something hurtful to me, I am still responsible for anything that I might say or do in response.

### The Essential Elements of the Restorative Process

The third column of *Addendum A (Development of Emotionally-Based Problems)* describes elements of the restorative process. The following is a brief description of each element:

- 1. Stop Abusive Relationships** - Before restoration can begin, any abusive relationships must be stopped either by intervention or by separation. If a person stays in an abusive relationship, it will take all his energy to survive, and there will be little energy left to work on restoration. The goal is to create a situation where restoration can take place.

There may be resistance in the Christian community to separation even when serious abuse is taking place, and a person (especially a spouse) may be encouraged to endure abuse or stay in a dangerous situation. Often separation may be necessary to save the relationship or the marriage before the situation becomes intolerable. Separation can put appropriate pressure on those involved to get help. The church discipline passages in the New Testament (I Corinthians 5:1-13, Matthew 18:15-17) teach the use of separation to bring about positive results.

There is a legitimate time and way to persevere and forbear with one another. Scripture urges us to do so, developing patience. Unfortunately, the person who is the victim of abuse is often unable to recognize it. Therefore, he may need the input of others to identify the abuse and decide on a course of action.

- 2. Control Addictions** - If a person has severe addictions, he will not be able to work on emotional issues until these addictions are under control. This is especially true with drug and alcohol addictions. Severe addictions consume a person and prevent him from being able to deal with his emotions since



addictions medicate emotions. Therefore, addictions must come under control before a person can make any headway in restoration.

Some difficult steps may need to be taken to control the addiction. Some kind of in-patient care might be necessary or a Twelve Step group that deals specifically with the type of addiction the person has might be needed.

These first two elements (stopping the abuse and controlling addictions) must be completed before the last seven can be addressed adequately. If there are serious problems in these first two areas they prevent any real progress in restoration. The last seven areas listed below can occur simultaneously during the restoration process, but for purposes of discussion, we have separated them.

3. **Learn to View and Express Emotions Properly** - Since not being able to deal with emotions properly started this negative process, this is one of the primary issues that must be addressed. Many people need to learn how to get in touch with their present emotions before they are able to deal with buried emotions. They also must come to understand both what their emotions mean and how to deal with them appropriately.
4. **Grieve Pain and Losses** - As a person becomes aware of his buried pain he needs to learn how to process it and release it. This is called the grieving process. He needs to learn how the grieving process works and go through this process a sufficient number of times to deal with all the buried pain from the past. The goals of the grieving process are forgiveness and the release of feelings. Grieving losses will significantly reduce internal stress and the ill-effects of buried emotions.
5. **Understand Needs and How to Get Them Met Appropriately** - People who suppress their emotions, usually suppress or deny their needs as well. It is important for a person to become aware of his needs, realize that needs are acceptable and learn appropriate ways to get them met. Most people who have significant emotional issues have little awareness of what their real needs are or how to get them met. Each person must take responsibility for his own needs and getting them met. It is not an issue of selfishness but of stewardship.
6. **Learn to Distinguish Between Healthy and Unhealthy Thinking and Behavior** - We all tend to see our original family as normal since we knew nothing different. This is also true of a person who grew up in a dysfunctional family. Since we are strongly influenced by our family of origin, we tend to repeat the same thinking and behaviors in our current relationships. Therefore, it is important to compare healthy and unhealthy family systems and relational

patterns so we can recognize what is unhealthy and can make good choices rather than follow our programming.

- 7. Develop a Correct View of Ourselves, Our World, and God** - Scripture says that the truth will set us free (John 8:32) and that we are to be transformed through the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). Underlying most unhealthy behavior is a distorted belief system, and it is important to correct the wrong and distorted views. Our belief system may even be unconscious to us, but it is there. Most people live consistently with what they really believe. When a person's behavior is inconsistent with his stated beliefs, there is usually another belief system (probably unconscious) which competes with his stated beliefs. This leads to inconsistent and confusing behavior. A person's underground belief system must be unearthed and replaced by the truth.

To change a person's belief system several steps are necessary. First, the wrong beliefs must be identified, and then the correct beliefs must be clarified. Internalizing correct beliefs requires that the person intentionally act on the new beliefs over a period of time.

- 8. Develop Healthy Relationships and a Healthy Support System** - Everyone needs a safe and caring support system where they can be totally honest about who they are and be totally accepted at the same time. Most people who are struggling emotionally are also isolated from others and have few supportive and empathetic voices in their lives. The church needs to be that kind of support system. Only when people can be fully honest and transparent can the wounds begin to heal. One of the first things a person in the restorative process needs to develop is a personal support system.
- 9. Learn to Grow Spiritually** - A person with many emotional issues usually struggles with his relationship with Christ. Much attention needs to be given to this relationship. The more Christ is involved in the restorative process, the faster it goes. Each person in restoration should be encouraged to have a personal quiet time, participate in a Bible study and be in a discipleship relationship.

### **The Order of the Restorative Process**

Another way to look at the restorative process is to focus on the order in which it occurs. The diagram in *Addendum B* (entitled *The Restoration Process*) shows this order. The processes on the left side of the diagram usually must be well-established before a person is able to focus attention effectively on the right side of the diagram. The left side deals with working through the grieving process by going into pain and processing

it. The right side deals with the rebuilding process in which a person gains the skills he needs in order to live a healthy life and impact the world for Christ.

Point A in the diagram describes a person who is having significant difficulties in life. He may be addicted, feel out-of-control, be depressed, have relational problems or some combination of these symptoms. This person is often in denial about the nature and severity of his problems. Point B describes someone who is determining the direction of his life, has healthy relationships, and is overcoming his problems. This person is growing spiritually and impacting his world for Christ.

No one wants to be at point A. Everyone wants to be at point B. But how does one go from point A to point B? It is commonly thought that there is a slow upward process of putting off the old and putting on the new. But experience has shown that for those who are deeply wounded, a different route must be taken. They must first face their pain and grieve it before they can begin rebuilding their life. In order to get better, wounded people must first allow themselves to feel their pain. They need to come out of denial and identify the real issues in their lives, especially their losses. Addictions and unhealthy survival mechanisms need to be given up. They need to take responsibility for the unhealthy choices they have made and behaviors they have been doing and discover what is driving them. They need to grieve the losses in their life and learn how to handle emotions correctly.

All this will take time because it involves a steep learning curve. There may be a long period of grieving depending on how much pain they have buried. In the process, the person will learn how to grieve pain, deal with negative emotions, utilize healthier coping mechanisms and overcome addictions. Usually, as a person deals with these issues, he begins to feel better about his life and has a closer, growing relationship with Christ.

The second part of restoration is the rebuilding part (Point B). Many of the unmet needs in a person's life come about because he does not have the skills to maintain healthy relationships or to impact his world. Needs will be met primarily through good relationships with God and His people and having the ability to impact our world for good.

There are several developmental tasks a person needs to complete before he has the skills to relate to the world in a healthy way. Ideally, these tasks are completed in childhood. However, if they were not completed as a child, they need to be completed as an adult so that the restorative process will move forward.

## Four Developmental Tasks

Psychologist Erik H. Erikson (and others after him) identified four “Developmental Tasks” in their study of childhood development. This section is a brief summary of the information in this field of study. The section on “Sorting Out Good and Bad” and some of its unique insights comes from the work of Henry Cloud and John Townsend in their book *Changes That Heal*.

1. **Bonding** - Bonding, which begins in infancy (0-9 months), is the process by which children learn to connect with the people who care for them. Through thousands of interactions with parents, the child develops a sense of connection with them. In fact, if all goes well, the child will see himself as an extension of them and not as an independent person at this point. Throughout this period as parents take care of and play with the child, a number of messages are normally and naturally internalized by the child:

1. I am loved.
2. My feelings and needs are OK.
3. I can trust others to meet my needs.

Once these messages are internalized, the child can start to move away from his parents (separate) and still believe these messages without needing to have them constantly reinforced. However, if adequate bonding does not take place or if these messages are distorted or replaced later on, the child will probably have problems connecting with others as an adult because he cannot accept love, does not trust others, or is unaware of his feelings and needs and thus denies his need for others.

To heal from these bonding problems an adult needs to become involved in a safe group of people where he can be honest and be accepted for who he really is. Within that context he should be able to begin connecting with people and eventually with God. It is usually necessary to successfully connect with people before one is able to develop a close relationship with God.

2. **Separation** - Separation is the beginning of the process in which children form their own individual identity. This happens between 9 months and 6 years of age. During this period children begin to pull away from their parents and experiment with individuality. As they become more mobile, they can do more things on their own. Children are normally able to pull away and still feel connected and secure if they have internalized the bonding messages.

If a person fails to form a separate and strong sense of identity, he may face some of the following problems:

- A general lack of self-understanding and direction in life (identity confusion).
- Relational problems such as being too dependent on others, being too isolated from others, feeling overly responsible for others, or becoming a caretaker of others.
- Significant boundary problems:
  - Allows others to take advantage of or overpower him
  - Takes advantage of or overpowers others

In order to heal from these problems a person needs a safe group of people who will encourage him to become aware of his true feelings, needs, and desires. Within this context, the group needs to encourage members to not take responsibility for another's feelings, needs, and desires and begin to take responsibility for their own feelings, needs, and desires. They need to understand what healthy boundaries look like and begin to experience them. By establishing boundaries they will better define who they are and who they are not.

**3. Sorting Out Good and Bad** - A person who does not complete this task makes too big a division between good and bad. He tends to see things as “all good” or “all bad”. Everything looks black or white—there is no gray. The essence of the problem is that he cannot tolerate bad in himself or in others. The reality is that nothing or no one in the world is all good or all bad. Everything contains a mixture of good and bad.

If a person makes too big a division between good and bad, he will tend to have one or more of the following problems:

- **Deny the Good** - This person has the tendency to see himself as bad and blame himself for everything bad that happens. He denies his worth or his ability to contribute anything good. This person may exalt others as better than himself or judge others as bad also.
- **Deny the Bad** - Since this person cannot tolerate bad in himself, he may deny the existence of bad in himself and blame others for anything bad that happens while justifying himself. This person has difficulty acknowledging his own faults.
- **All Good to All Bad** - This person sees people and situations as “all good” at first, but later, after experiencing problems, sees the same people and situations as “all bad”. The truth is that people and situations are good and bad at first, and good and bad later. As a result of this distortion, this person may initially see a new relationship, church, or job as perfect, but as

intolerable later, as reality sets in. The result of that he keeps changing relationships, churches, and jobs searching for the “perfect” situation.

Healing will take place as this person begins to see himself as he really is: good and bad. He must also give himself grace. Problems sorting out good and bad usually result from not getting enough grace growing up. The best place for healing to occur is within a safe group of people where the person can talk about his “bad” self and have other people love him as he is, less than perfect.

This person also needs to see other people and situations from a more realistic perspective. He needs to develop more tolerance for the bad that is in the world and needs to realize that the ideal does not exist in a fallen world. Not only is he good and bad, but so is everything else. He needs to practice seeing both the good and bad in a situation, institution or person.

**4. Gaining Independence and Maturity** - This last developmental task has to do with adolescence. During adolescence a child moves away from a dependent relationship with his parents and other adults where he has less authority, freedom and choice, and into an “equal” relationship with them. This process happens slowly. In America it is seldom totally completed until the age of 26. It is supposed to be completed when the child leaves home and moves out of a dependent relationship with his parents. Some adults never complete this task and continue to be dependent on their parents and other adults or continue to feel less than other adults.

If this task is not completed, several of the following characteristics are usually present:

- An inordinate need for approval
- A fear of disapproval
- A fear of failure
- A need for permission
- Feelings of inferiority
- A loss of power (often given away to others)
- An over-dependence on others
- An idealization of people in authority

In order to complete this task a person may need to do several of the following:

- Begin to see himself as an adult, equal to others, with all the rights, privileges, and authority of other adults.
- Begin to question and disagree with authority figures in an appropriate way.
- Start making his own decisions without checking with others first.

- Pursue and develop his talents in order to develop areas of expertise.

## **All of Us Need Restoration**

We all are wounded in some way. We grew up in imperfect homes and have dealt with things in our lives imperfectly. In addition, there is often little permission in the world or in the church to admit that our wounds exist, and little teaching about how to deal with them.

Woundedness can be looked at on a continuum. No one is 100% wounded. They would be dead. And no one is 0% wounded. People who are in the 60%-70% range are just surviving. People who are in the 20%-30% range are coping fairly well with life, but have some issues they need to address.

Everyone can benefit from identifying and working on areas of their life that have been negatively impacted by unresolved pain or unmet needs. An additional benefit of healing from past issues is that we can better understand others and the ways they struggle.

## **Finding Help**

Most of us are unable to deal with emotional issues by ourselves. We need the help of others to gain insight into our lives and encouragement and support to work through issues. Some of us may begin working on issues because of a crisis in our life, but then stop when the crisis subsides. We need others to nudge us to keep working and to not settle for less than what is needed. It is also helpful to work on issues with others who are also working on their lives. It is encouraging and enlightening to know that you are not the only one who is struggling. Groups can be very helpful to this process.

There are a number of options available for finding help. The following is a list of options which may be used at different times individually or in combinations:

- Personal Study
- Personal Counseling
- Support Groups - These groups usually focus on a single issue that all group members have in common (e.g. death of a child, divorce).
- Addiction Groups (12 step groups) - These groups focus on a specific addiction.
- Restorative Groups - These groups focus on dealing with past issues and learning how to process emotions.

## **Reason for Hope**

We know that with the help of Christ and those who know how to deal with emotional issues we can all overcome many of the struggles in our lives. Jesus came to heal us as well as to help us grow. In fact, it is quite common that as people heal from emotional issues they experience tremendous spiritual growth as many of the barriers in their relationship with God diminish. The critical event is to begin to recognize these issues and begin dealing with them.

The church can often provide what people need for restoration and is growing in its effectiveness to help people heal from emotional wounds. Currently, WDA is developing restorative group leadership training for church leaders with the goal of equipping leaders to establish and facilitate groups focussed on restoration. It is our hope that this booklet will further the understanding of how emotional problems develop and some of the dynamics necessary for healing.



# DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONALLY-BASED PROBLEMS

## CHILDHOOD

### Unresolved Pain

1. Active abuse
2. Neglect - unmet needs
3. Sinful responses and choices of the child
4. Personality of the child
5. Role in the family

### Results of not being able to process pain

1. Adapt to survive
  - a. Addictions
  - b. Defense mechanisms
2. Suppress negative emotions
3. Develop false belief systems
4. Develop a shame-based identity

## ADULTHOOD

### More Pain

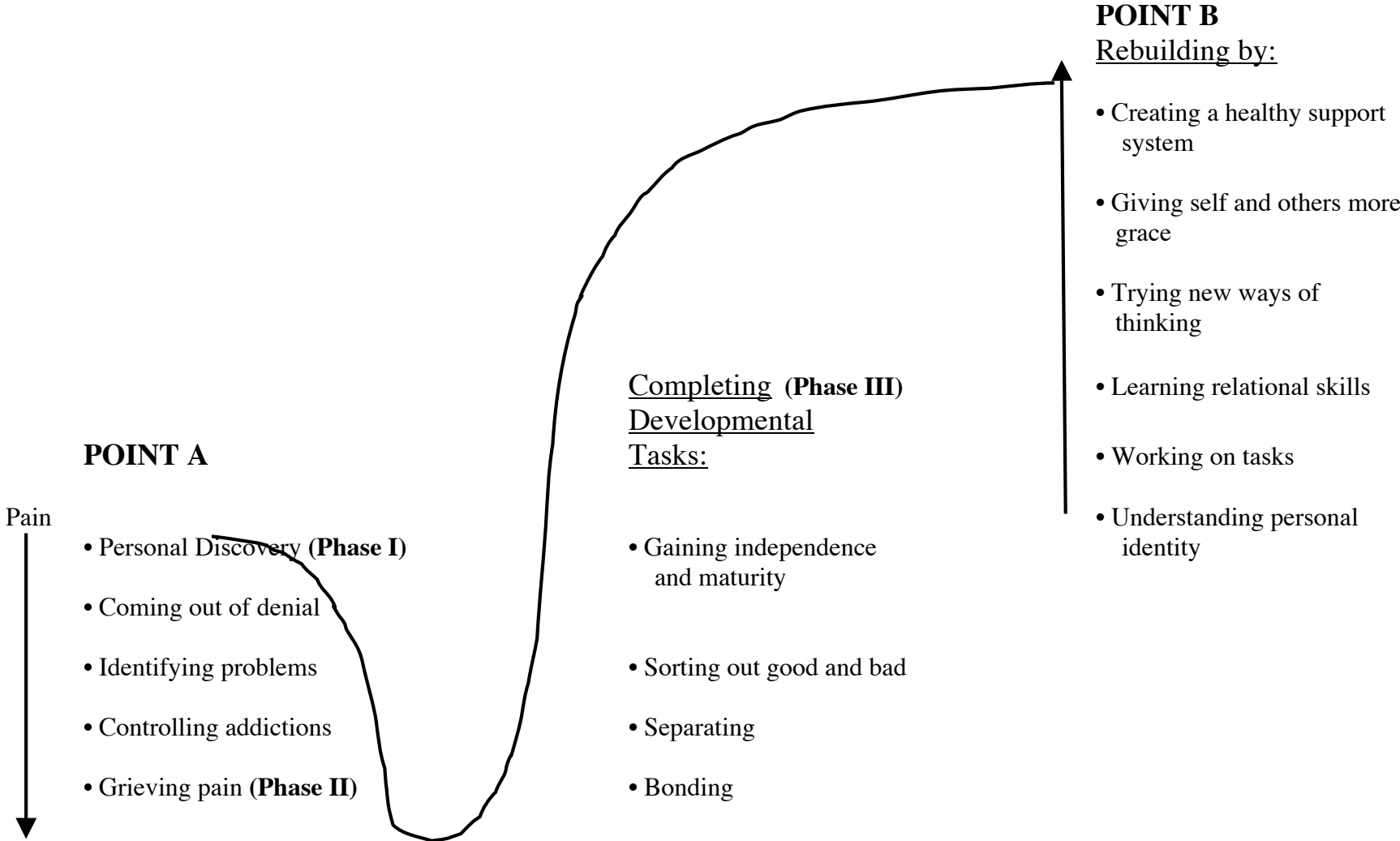
1. Relational problems
2. Poor decisions
3. Full-blown addictions
4. Needs still not met
5. May continue in abusive relationships
6. Depression
7. Numb or mainly negative feelings
8. Poor relationship with God
9. Feel out of control

## ADULTHOOD

### Restorative Process

1. Stop abusive relationships
2. Control addictions
3. Learn to view and express emotions properly
4. Grieve pain and losses
5. Understand needs and how to get them met appropriately
6. Learn to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy thinking and behavior
7. Develop a healthy view of self, our world and God
8. Develop healthy relationships and a healthy support system
9. Learn to grow spiritually

# THE RESTORATIVE PROCESS



# **Addendum C**

## ***How Emotional Problems Develop***

### **A Biblical View of Restoration: Isaiah 61:1-4**

Isaiah 61: 1-4 is of primary importance today for two reasons. By quoting this passage in Luke 4 and citing Himself as the One to fulfill the prophecy, Jesus clearly states that He is the promised Messiah and King of the Jews with authority to redeem and deliver. This passage also sets forth six key aspects of Christ's ministry of redemption and (by implication) how they apply to His Church. In effect, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah and describing the nature of His ministry at the same time. We need to take a closer look at this passage in order to see the significance of what He was saying and how it applies to people with emotionally-based problems.

The Messianic passages in the Old Testament fall into two categories: One emphasizes that the Messiah would come as a "conquering king" or "deliverer"; the second describes the Messiah as a divine servant who would suffer and secure redemption for the people of Israel. Ironically, both descriptions refer to Jesus. The role of "suffering servant" describes Jesus in His first coming, while the role of "conquering king" refers to Jesus in His second coming. The Jews, as a whole, did not recognize Christ's first coming, and subsequently, are still looking for the Messiah to appear.

At the time of Christ, the Israelites were weary of foreign dominion. They had not experienced political freedom for centuries. After the Babylonian captivity they struggled with Greek control followed by Roman occupation. It is little wonder that the idea of a Messiah who would appear as a conquering king resonated with them. Unfortunately this emphasis caused them to minimize the Messiah's other role as suffering servant.

Chapter 61 is one of several passages in Isaiah that describe the Messiah as a "suffering servant". Others include: Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53; and chapter 53. The Jews generally applied these passages to themselves as a nation, claiming that they were the "suffering servant". Most scholars agree that these passages refer instead to a man often identified as the "Servant of God". This Servant was the Messiah, also appointed to be the mediator of a new covenant, the light of the Gentiles, the salvation of God for the whole world, and the one who would reach this glorious height through servanthood, a service leading to death.

### **Six Aspects of Christ's Ministry**

Isaiah 61:1-4 describes many of the same elements contained in this booklet. Jesus quoted this passage at the beginning of His ministry in Luke 4:17-21 to both explain and

underscore the nature of His ministry. He concluded by saying, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”, indicating, as we will explain, that His ministry was designed, at least in part, to bring about healing from emotionally-based problems that result from the damages of sin. In these verses, Jesus mentions six components of His ministry that relate to healing emotional issues:

1. Proclaim the Good News to the poor
2. Bind up the brokenhearted
3. Proclaim freedom to the captives
4. Proclaim release to the prisoners from the darkness
5. Proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor/ day of vengeance
6. To comfort all who mourn

The first aspect of Christ’s ministry that contributes to restoration from emotional damage, is the Gospel message, or Good News. Jesus proclaimed God’s love and forgiveness wherever He went, seeking to draw people to Himself for salvation. Becoming a Christian is foundational to the restorative process. Non-believers can heal to some degree, but people cannot heal fully until they experience His forgiveness and the new birth He offers.

A lack of forgiveness is a root cause of ongoing feelings of condemnation, and detrimental to the restorative process. To fully experience healing, we must receive forgiveness from God, forgive ourselves and forgive others. Jesus’ death and resurrection provides the only real basis for substantial forgiveness.

It is not coincidental that God’s offer of forgiveness was directed (initially) toward the poor. Everyone needs forgiveness, but people who have experienced poverty in any of its forms, are usually more aware of their need for help and forgiveness. The ability to acknowledge and receive forgiveness as a free gift from God through Christ, is the starting point for further restoration.

The second aspect of Christ’s ministry is “to bind up the brokenhearted”. In this passage, "brokenhearted" refers to people who have been deeply hurt (wounded-in-the-heart) and in need of substantial emotional healing. Taking our hurts directly to Christ promotes healing. He is, after all, a suffering servant who understands our hurts (Hebrews 4:15-16). But Christ also means for His church to be a place where healing can occur (I Corinthians 12:26). Wounded people need a safe environment where they feel emotionally protected as they express their hurts and receive validation from caring friends. People need to be able to grieve their losses in the presence of their Lord, and also in fellowship with His people.

The third aspect of Christ's ministry is "to proclaim freedom to the captives". Through His death and resurrection Christ defeated Satan and set His people free. There are two dimensions that were affected by this liberation. The first deliverance occurred in the spiritual realm and has a spiritual application, the second occurs in everyday life and has a very practical application.

In Scripture the spiritual dimension is also referred to as "the invisible realm". Though we can't see this dimension, it is a very real and substantial place. In this realm, Christ set us free in a very real and dramatic sense. Scripture asserts emphatically that believers have been "delivered from the dominion of Satan and brought into the Kingdom of God" (Colossians 1: 12-1). This deliverance means that Satan no longer has the legal, or moral, right to control or condemn the children of God. We may or may not experience this new freedom, but it remains true and substantive nonetheless. The implications are profound! The Kingdom of God is a place of freedom. We are no longer slaves to sin (Romans 6:6; John 8:31-36), no longer captives.

But Christ also intends that we experience His freedom in the visible world. It is not enough that we simply understand the truth that the evil one no longer has authority to control and manipulate us, or that indwelling sin no longer dictates our choices. Christ wants us to experience this truth regarding our deliverance in a real and substantial way. There is a practical dimension involved in this deliverance.

Though legally defeated, Satan continues to exert his control over people, holding them captive in two ways. The first way is through the "schemes of the devil", habitual strategies that we embraced in an attempt to offset the effects of sin. They evolve into addictions and defense mechanisms that people use to address unresolved pain. If we continue to use old mechanisms to deal with our pain, rather than rely upon Christ, we remain (literally) in bondage to them, to sin, and to the evil one. This passage reminds us that Jesus came to set us free from these unhealthy ways of living. Through His guidance and power we can recognize and replace these unhealthy practices with more effective and healthy ways of living.

But there is a second way that the enemy keeps us captive. In addition to encouraging addictions that can persist long after people accept Christ, Satan also blinds people to truth, effectively keeping them prisoners in the dark. But Christ wants to release us from the captivity of darkness. This fourth aspect of His ministry, "to proclaim release from darkness to the prisoners", is what we will now consider.

Scripture states that Satan has the power to blind unbelievers (II Corinthians 4:4) and does so very effectively, preventing them from seeing the truth about Christ and His

Kingdom. But at salvation, Satan's power to keep people in the dark is removed. In addition to being set free from the dominion of Satan, we are also set free from the darkness of unbelief. Now we have the capacity to see things clearly.

But Satan's blinding activities continue to exist and can remain effective even after people accept Christ. These activities occur directly through spiritual attacks, and indirectly through a world system of lies that Satan retains control over until Christ returns. These strategies are intended to confuse and mislead Christians, keeping them away from Christ, and in effect, prisoners of the evil one. Over time they evolve into belief systems, strongly held emotional convictions that shape our view of the world, others, and ourselves. Though believers now have the capacity to recognize these lies, they often fail to because they have not "trained themselves to discern good from evil". Jesus came to lead us out of the darkness into the light. The light is the truth. It is the truth that sets us free. Part of the process of healing from the damages of sin involves increasingly replacing wrong beliefs with the truth.

When I first studied these verses in Isaiah as a paradigm for promoting healing ministries in the church, I thought that these descriptions represented the needs of different groups of people who needed different kinds of help. But as I continued to research this matter, I began to realize that everyone (to some degree) had all these needs, and were in need of healing in each area.

Everyone needs Christ for salvation, and for forgiveness and deliverance from sin. Everyone needs to process unresolved pain and learn how to deal with emotions correctly. Everyone needs God's direction and power to deal with the addictions and unhealthy defense mechanisms they use to deal with pain. Everyone also needs help replacing wrong beliefs with the truth. Isaiah 61:1-2 describes the restoration Christ brings to all people, and His ministry is designed to provide healing in all areas. Incidentally, these were the same areas I had discovered were keeping people in bondage (see pages 7-9 and *Addendum A*).

Built into Christ's ministry was a restorative process that heals the damage of sin. During His earthly ministry, Christ introduced a restorative process that roughly parallels the early stages of human relational/emotional formation identified by many childhood development specialists. This restorative process, carried out in a small group that imitates many of the dynamics of the family-of-origin, provided a safe environment for dealing with wounds and reinforcing the tasks associated with healthy development.

We must remember that Jesus does not deliver us from all of the damage instantaneously. Though forgiveness is granted at the moment of salvation, it may take time for people to fully realize it, or appreciate it. The other areas (unresolved pain,

addictions, defense mechanisms, and false belief systems) may take even longer to correct. In truth, some of these may be so ingrained that we struggle with them for the remainder of our time on earth. But for sustained spiritual growth to occur, we must continue to heal from the damages of sin in these areas.

The fifth aspect of Christ ministry is “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God”. The day will come when Jesus will return to gather His people and reward them for what they suffered on His behalf. Conversely, He will dispense wrath to those who rejected Him. Everyone will receive their just reward, either for good or evil (Romans 2:5-11). Armed with the knowledge that God offers forgiveness, but that He will eventually punish all evil, enables those who have been hurt to forgive those who hurt them. They realize it is not their responsibility, or prerogative, to take revenge (Romans 12:19). Only God can right all the wrongs.

The sixth and last aspect of Christ’s ministry is “to comfort all who mourn”. Mourning is not a pleasant experience in and of itself. Grieving our losses causes us to feel depressed or sad. But this process is a necessary step in healing us from the damages of sin. Jesus promises to be “a very present help in time of trouble” and a comfort for people who mourn. In Isaiah, He also promises “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair”. This describes what happens after people complete the grieving process: (viz.) they begin to live again. They are able to feel joy (gladness). Their countenance changes (beauty) because they feel better and have been released from the stress caused by buried emotions. They want to give praise to their God.

## **The Impact of a Healing Ministry**

But more happens than just this. When people have experienced significant healing, they are able to grow into healthy and solid believers. The prophet Isaiah calls them “oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor”. Without healing, believers will remain forever crippled, less than what God has designed. This is extremely sad, for all believers can become “oaks of righteousness”.

Isaiah goes on to say that those who have been healed in these significant ways, and who have grown up, becoming “oaks of righteousness”, will be the ones who will “rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations”. In other words, these people will have the knowledge, wholeness, and ability to effect healing throughout their culture. They will be able to reverse generations of moral decay and devastation. They will be able to reverse the effects of the “sins of the fathers which have been passed along to the third or fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5). They will be able to rebuild the

culture in a healthy and godly manner, bringing Christ's healing ministry everywhere they go. They foster revival and renewal for generations to come (Exodus 20:6).

This healing process is not an option for Christians. It is the plan Jesus left for us to follow. It is our only hope to restore the Church to her healthy role and reverse the degeneration of our culture, or any culture. Jesus is willing to bring about healing for those who enter into the process He has laid out for us. The choice is ours. What will we do?