

RADICAL CHANGE by the POWER of GOD

"Reading this book is like opening a toolbox. The Macks provide a biblical framework to address the problems you and I face." —Steve Viars

SECOND EDITION

God's Solutions to Life's Problems

WAYNE A. MACK
& JOSHUA MACK

Foreword by John MacArthur

“God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems is an extremely helpful book. Lucidly written, it examines the enormous dilemmas of modern man and earths its analyses and answers in historic Christian teaching. This is no stilted, predictable, simplistic response. The book is a page-turner full of illustration, contemporary example, memory, and apposite quotation. All this is grounded in the exegesis of the Bible and solid theology. One’s admired teachers and authors are referred to in these chapters: D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer, John MacArthur, Thomas Watson, Thomas Boston, John Owen, Gresham Machen, John Murray, and William Hendriksen. As guided by the Macks, one is taught how to become a more courageous, wiser pastor and counselor. In many places, truths are so freshly written and illustrated that they simply jump off the page. Preachers will find the book invaluable in preparing sermons, and they will wish that it had been written ten years ago. But the way it encourages all of us to solve life’s problems is by a manner that is accessible to every single Christian. The book was a means of grace to me.”

—**Geoff Thomas**, Pastor, Alfred Place Baptist Church (Independent), Aberystwyth, Wales; Conference Speaker

“Once again, we are indebted to Dr. Wayne Mack for providing solid biblical counsel for living in our morally depraved and biblically illiterate age. In the author’s familiar writing style, he takes the reader continuously through a plethora of Scriptures as he directs us in the way to solve our problems God’s way. The result? We are constantly assured throughout that our problems can be tackled God’s way by the approach Mack uses both to address and then to answer each of our familiar struggles and even some of the shockers. This means that this book is a needed guide for our crooked age. Every believer, and especially every pastor, needs to read it a few times and consult it often. The Christian life is lived out in a real world, and this tool shows believers how to live realistically and therefore repentantly to the glory of God. I believe the fruit of this book will be not only in the help it offers to our individual Christian lives, but also in how it will help us to become what we need to be for our brethren!”

—**Jerry Marcellino**, Pastor, Audubon Drive Bible Church, Laurel, Mississippi; Co-Founder, Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals (FIRE)

“One of my personal heroes in the faith is Dr. Wayne Mack because of his unwavering commitment to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the time-honored Christian doctrine that the Holy Scriptures are sufficient for all that pertains to life and godliness. I heartily commend Dr. Mack’s work *God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems* as a spiritual resource that will serve as both preventative and corrective spiritual medicine for the soul. To read the refined wisdom from Dr. Mack’s lifetime study and ministry of the Scriptures is to be blessed abundantly.”

—**Richard Mayhue**, Executive Vice President and Dean, The Master’s College and Seminary; Author; Pastor

“For years I have been reading and using in my classes many resources written by Dr. Wayne Mack. In this current edition, joined by his son Joshua, Dr. Mack has given us another wonderful tool to be used in fulfilling God’s calling on our lives. On every page we are reminded of the usefulness and sufficiency of God’s Word, His faithfulness, and His sovereignty. Thank you, Wayne and Joshua Mack, for a wonderful, useful tool that will assist me and my students in becoming better equipped for a lifetime of ministry.”

—**Frank J. Catanzaro III**, Associate Professor of Adult Education and Counseling, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina

“Wayne Mack has written an eminently valuable book titled *God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems*. In the book, Mack shows what a Christian is/is not, that his nature has been changed so as to enable him to make changes that truly solve problems God’s way, and what he must do to make such changes. It is a helpful volume that every counselor/pastor/believer should own.”

—**Jay Adams**, Author; Former Pastor; Seminary Professor

“Reading the book *God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems* is like opening a toolbox. The Macks provide a biblical framework to address the problems you and I face. You will find solid help from two men who demonstrate

a knowledge of God’s Word and an understanding of the challenges of real life. I heartily recommend it.”

—**Steve Viars**, Pastor, Faith Baptist Church, Lafayette, Indiana;
Seminar Speaker

“*God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems* by Wayne Mack and Joshua Mack is a primer on the Christian life. The chapters of this book brim with encouragements to Bible study, personal discipline for Christian growth, motivation for obedient living, and careful guarding of the heart. You will find two things you need here: biblical direction and hope for victory rooted in Christ. Any book that does that is worth reading.”

—**Tedd Tripp**, Pastor; Seminar Speaker; Author, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*

“What do ‘your problems’ have to do with such Bible words as *sin* and *temptation*, *grace* and *truth*, *Christ* and *the Spirit*, *repentance* and *faith*, *obedience* and *discipline*? Everything! But we often need help drawing out the immediate connections. Wayne and Joshua Mack trace out the ‘how do you change?’ implications of the theological worldview that has been so well articulated by writers such as Sinclair Ferguson, John Owen, Jerry Bridges, Jay Adams, and John Calvin. They call believers to the long race. They teach us about an intentional and carefully lived life, about lifelong immersion in Scripture, about utter reliance on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, about vigilant self-examination and willing self-denial, about devotion to Jesus Christ whole and simple.”

—**David Powlison**, Editor in Chief, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*; Executive Director, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

“Christians today are taught how to cope with problems, not solve them. Many believe that the tough issues of modern life are beyond the Bible’s range of answers or that it provides authoritative answers to get to heaven but not how to live here on earth. *God’s Solutions to Life’s Problems* is a persuasive argument to the contrary. It demonstrates that insightful theology is not only practical, it is functional for resolving

deep-seated problems in life. It is obvious that this book is the product of good pastoral theology and a rich life-experience of counseling people-problems. The Macks are to be commended for providing yet another helpful tool for Christians serious about changing and growing.”

—**John D. Street**, Chairman, Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling Graduate Program, The Master’s College; President, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

“Dr. Wayne and Pastor Joshua Mack have given the church a most wonderful volume of biblically based teaching on a variety of sanctification subjects. You could call it a ‘handbook on spiritual surgery for the soul’! Mack and Mack are skilled spiritual physicians, taking the delicate, dynamic instrument of the Word of God and powerfully, yet appropriately using it to slice into the spirit of a man, dissecting their way to not only discovering the initial causes of the malady, but also offering the only viable, life-sustaining healing—God’s solutions to life’s problems. It is a most commendable effort. Oh, how the Body of Christ needs these kinds of books! The various and insidious diseases which inflict the Body are crippling its effectiveness. Please pray along with me that the church would diligently seek the remedy given herein, for the sole glory of the Great Physician.”

—**Lance Quinn**, Director, Grace Advance Pastoral Training Program, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California

God's Solutions to
Life's Problems

ALSO BY WAYNE A. MACK

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Courage (with Joshua Mack)

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God's Solutions to Life's Problems

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POWER of GOD

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WAYNE A. MACK

JOSHUA MACK



P U B L I S H I N G

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Foreword

WHEN I HEARD this book was in the works, I knew it would be an extremely valuable, rich, and readable resource—and I was not disappointed. Wayne and Joshua Mack have a fervent love for the Word of God and an unshakable conviction that the only valid, trustworthy, and effective solutions to the problems of life are biblical answers. Wayne has been a skilled counselor, pastor, and teacher of biblical counseling for many years. Joshua is also a gifted pastor who shares his father's commitment to the Bible and his expertise in applying the Word of God clearly and persuasively to real life.

Wayne and Joshua themselves will tell you that what makes their counsel so effective is the inherent power of God's Word. The Bible speaks with the full weight of God's own authority. Its solutions to life's problems are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous altogether (Ps. 19:7–9). No other resource addresses human problems as thoroughly and as reliably as Scripture. So when it comes to resolving personal conflicts, marital difficulties, emotional disorders, character flaws, spiritual problems, and similar issues, the Bible is the place to turn for right answers.

Unfortunately, many people today—including some who profess faith in Christ—imagine they can find more effective help elsewhere. They seek unwise, unbiblical counsel. They run after various fads in psychotherapy. They buy up whatever kinds of spiritual snake oil or psycho-quackery are currently popular. Meanwhile, biblical counsel and biblical preaching are widely ridiculed as too simplistic, ineffectual, and old-fashioned. Even some Christians seem to lack confidence in biblical answers. I heard one influential evangelical leader offhandedly deride all biblical counseling as “nothing more than quoting Bible verses at people with serious problems.”

If you have ever been tempted to give any credence to such a caricature of biblical counseling, this book will dispel the notion from your mind. Wayne and Josh Mack handle the Word of God practically and perceptively, and they show with absolute clarity how it addresses the problems of life and human behavior.

As for “people with serious problems,” no problem is more serious or more desperate than the problem of sin. It is a universal problem. And despite psychologists’ frantic attempts to redefine all human problems in clinical terms, the fundamental human behavioral problem is still sin. It is a moral problem, not a medical one. And the only remedy for sin is outlined in Scripture. Ultimately then, only the biblical counselor can give people answers to life’s most difficult problems.

I’m grateful for this simple, clear, and helpful guide for human problem solving. May it provide clear answers for people who are struggling. May it increase the confidence of those who are helping people deal with their problems biblically. And may it produce a whole new generation of wise counselors who understand that God’s Word is the best place to turn for solutions to the problems of life—and who know how to apply the truth of Scripture skillfully.

Dr. John MacArthur
Pastor-teacher, Grace Community Church
President, The Master’s College and Seminary
Host, *Grace to You* radio program
Author

Acknowledgements

SCRIPTURE ADMONISHES US to render to all what is due them: honor to whom honor is due. In keeping with that admonition, we want to recognize the help that a number of people gave us as we sought to make this book a reality.

Along the way, in my (Wayne's) Christian life and ministry, many people have encouraged me in the writing process. Numerous people have expressed appreciation for the help they have received from other books I have written and have encouraged me to produce more written material. Some have reminded me that books can go where I can't go and can continue to minister after I am no longer around to minister. These comments have motivated me to spend more time in writing for publication.

While serving as an elder and pastor of the Joint Heirs Fellowship group at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, it was my privilege to minister to a dear godly lady by the name of Melicent Hunt, "Gramma" to most of us. Gramma's love for Christ and her desire to see Him exalted was an encouragement to everyone. She was a real prayer warrior who committed herself to pray for my ministry regularly. In particular, she was so concerned that I do more writing that she instructed my wife to protect me from interruptions so that I could spend time in writing. She also promised she would pray especially for me at least two days a week—and that I had better use those days for the purpose of writing. Her commitments and admonitions were often a stimulus for me to get at the task. I knew that the next time I would see Gramma she would be quizzing me about my faithfulness in working on this project.

Dr. David Harrell, a former teaching colleague in the biblical counseling department at The Master's College and now pastor-teacher of

Calvary Bible Church in the Nashville area, deserves credit for his help with the material found in chapter 1.

Joshua and I would be remiss if we failed to mention a number of other people who have helped us in writing this book. First and foremost are our wives, Carol and Marda. They have supported us with their prayers and devotion and have also read the material and made valuable suggestions about its content and style. We love them dearly and appreciate their faithfulness to Christ and us in all our endeavors. They are “suitable helpers” and models of a Proverbs 31 woman. My daughter, Beth, who was an administrator in the Biblical Counseling Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling modular program at The Master’s College, also gave valuable assistance.

We appreciate the willingness of a number of very busy people to read the book while it was still in manuscript form and make comments about it. These people include Dr. Richard Mayhue, executive vice president of The Master’s College and Seminary; Dr. Steve Viars, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Lafayette, Indiana; Randy Patten, director of training and advancement for the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors; Jerry Marcellino, pastor of Audubon Bible Church; Dr. Jay Adams, author, former pastor, and seminary professor, president of Timeless Texts publishing company; Dr. Theodore Tripp, elder at Grace Fellowship Church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, author, and conference speaker; Geoffrey Thomas, pastor of Alfred Place Baptist church in Aberystwyth, Wales, and frequent conference speaker in Great Britain and America; Dr. Lance Quinn, director of Grace Advance at Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California; Dr. Frank Catanzaro, professor of adult education and counseling at Southeastern Baptist Seminary; Dr. David Powlison, editor of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, and executive director of Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation; and Dr. John Street, chairman of the graduate and undergraduate biblical counseling department at The Master’s College and president of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors.

A special word of thanks goes to Dr. John MacArthur, pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church, president of The Master’s College and Seminary, and Bible teacher on the *Grace to You* radio program, for

writing the foreword to this book. John is one of the busiest and most productive men I know. In fact, he is so busy with such extensive responsibilities in many areas that I hesitated to ask him to write a foreword for this project. However, when asked, Dr. MacArthur responded in the way he typically responds when I ask him for help in some endeavor. He said, "I'll be glad to do it. Just send me the manuscript." Thank you, John, for being so devoted to Christ and His Word and for all the help you've been to us and countless others in our Christian lives and ministries.

Introduction

THIS BOOK, along with *Courage: Fighting Fear with Fear*, has been a long time coming. For many years I have wanted to write some books that could be used to help people deal with the inevitable problems they face as they live in this sin-cursed world. I wanted to produce some written material that could be used by individuals in their own struggles, or as counseling assignments, or in Bible study groups to help people understand and solve their problems in a biblical way.

I wanted to do this because I have discovered that many professing Christians seem to be unaware of the tremendous resources we have in the Scriptures for facing, understanding, and solving life's problems. As I have presented much of this material in conferences in spoken form in various parts of the world, I have had many people tell me that they never realized how practical and helpful the Scriptures are for dealing with the nitty-gritty issues of life. Again and again, I have been asked the question, "Is this material available in any of the books you have written?" When this has occurred, I have had to say, "It's available on audio and video tapes, but to this point I haven't put it in book form." Upon hearing this, many have encouraged me to put the material in written form and make it available for Christians everywhere.

For various reasons, until now I hadn't been able to do what others encouraged me to do. This book is an attempt to make the requests for material in written form a reality. The title tells it all in terms of what this book is all about. We're going to be dealing with God's solutions to life's problems.

To introduce the purpose and content of this book, let's examine what the title indicates. First, it indicates that we will have problems in

life. This, of course, is in keeping with the clear teaching of Scripture and is confirmed by the experience of every one of us. There is no such thing as a problem-free life. Problems are, in the words of 1 Corinthians 10:13, “common to man.” In this study, we will be discussing some of the problems that are most “common to man.”

The title also indicates that life’s problems can be solved. In other words, we don’t have to go through life being overcome by the difficulties we encounter. We can, as Romans 8:37 indicates, “overwhelmingly conquer.” Or, in keeping with the truth declared in 1 Corinthians 10:13, the title suggests that there is a way of escape from every trial and pressure “under the sun” that we experience in our lives. We don’t have to be the defeated; we can be the defeaters.

“Yes, but how can I be an overcomer?” is a question many have asked when someone makes statements like the ones in the last paragraph. The answer is found in the first two words of the title: by responding to and handling your problems “God’s way.” According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, “God is faithful” and He “will not allow you to be tempted [tested, pressured] beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide a way of escape also, that you may be able to bear it.” Note that this text, which is part of the “true and righteous altogether” Scriptures (Ps. 19:9 NKJV), states definitively and conclusively that there is a way of escape. Note also that it indicates that the way of escape is provided by a faithful God, a God on Whom we can depend, a God who is absolutely trustworthy, a God who knows everything, a God who is wisdom personified. Make no mistake about it. This God has provided us a way to solve our problems.

It is the purpose of this book to explain and illustrate that way of escape. In this volume, we will be dealing with some general issues that are absolutely foundational for identifying and solving life’s problems God’s way. What you will find in this volume can be plugged into and used with any of life’s problems. In *Courage*, we will explore the specific problem of fear, examining and explaining Scripture passages that delineate God’s way of solving it.

Our prayer is that this book will help Christians discover afresh the sufficient and superior resources God has given us for living life “under the sun.” Our prayer is that this book will help Christians live in a way that brings great glory to Him, greater joy and blessing to them, and makes them a powerful witness to a world that really doesn’t have valid solutions to the problems of life.

The Wheat and the Tares

When the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. . . . “Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”
(Matt. 13:26, 30)

IT WAS ANOTHER typical day at my church office. I had prepared spiritually and mentally for a day of counseling—prayer, reflection, and meditation on some of my favorite psalms with one of my favorite praise CDs playing in the background, and a review of the files of my counselees that I would be meeting. I thought I was ready to once again enter the dark caverns of human misery and confusion, praying that the Holy Spirit would use me to point them to the Light of the World, and allow Him to lead them to safety and a God-honoring life.

The ministry of restoring people who are caught in the web of sin—bearing their burdens and thus fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)—is a task that can often exhaust even the strongest of counselors. After all, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness,

against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The apostle Paul warned us that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations [false ideologies] and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Certainly anyone who has even casually wrestled with his or her own personal life issues, much less other people’s problems, will quickly concur that sin can so tenaciously grip our hearts that nothing less than the convicting hand and power of the Almighty can pry us from its grip.

But sometimes we encounter individuals who seem to be in a category all their own—a category beyond mere spiritual ignorance or even the remnants of indwelling sin patterns. People who seem to epitomize evil. Those who seem to never be able to stop the momentum of offending those they claim to love—especially God. People who never really change, who never grow into spiritual maturity. Regardless the counsel, regardless the consequence, they continue with a seemingly resolute determination to lead a life of flagrant disregard for the commandments of God. It’s as though they enjoy their sin and do it with impunity. What makes this even more treacherous is that more often than not, their true character is typically so well disguised with the veneer of religiosity and personal charisma that even their most intimate acquaintances have great difficulty in recognizing and confronting the insincerity and hypocrisy of who they really are.

I encountered such a person that afternoon. It was an eerie, demonic sort of experience, but one that is, tragically, becoming increasingly more common in our everyone-who-goes-to-church-is-a-Christian culture. The following true story illustrates the dilemma of religious externalism. This story has only been changed for confidentiality purposes without compromising the central concepts.

A Grip and Grin . . . Shuck and Jive: The Stuff of Religious Hypocrisy

As soon as I saw Tom and Lisa in the waiting room, it was obvious that Lisa was mortally wounded. I’ve seen that glazed over, hollow look

in a person's eyes hundreds of times before. I call it the "concentration camp" look: trapped, hopeless, dying.

As I introduced myself, Tom immediately jumped to his feet, smiled gregariously, shook my hand firmly, and nervously initiated some small talk. I had to deliberately turn away from him to acknowledge Lisa, who remained seated. Had I not done so, no formal greeting or introduction would have taken place. And Lisa wouldn't have noticed it. Years of being ignored had left her numb.

Tom had a deep tan, a lot of gaudy gold jewelry, permed hair, and flashy GQ-type clothes. He had what would commonly be called the "midlife crisis" look. It was obvious that he loved attention and got lots of it.

Lisa rose to her feet as I moved toward her. She mechanically stretched forth a trembling hand. Her handshake seemed to be an extension of her inner self—ice-cold and lifeless. Her appearance was that of one who was professionally groomed, right down to her long, painted acrylic fingernails. Though she was modestly dressed with an understated elegance, her natural beauty was overpowered by a thick veneer of makeup, an attempt at disguising the deep wrinkles of many years of relational pain.

We entered my office and, as I expected, Tom and Lisa chose seats as far apart from one another as possible. You could have cut the tension with a knife.

Tom was a well-known evangelist and author; Lisa was the typical "ministry widow" who stayed at home to raise their three children. I soon discovered that they had been married for eighteen years. Although none of their married life had been rich and rewarding, the last eight years had been especially miserable due to Lisa's suspicions that Tom was having an adulterous affair—or affairs. She described the strange phone calls from other men and women, Tom's extensive travel without accountability, his secret collection of pornographic videos, and his repulsion when it came to anything romantic with her.

As she related her story, I was struck with the incongruence between her plastic smile and her tears. Deep lines around her mouth and eyes betrayed years of trying to project an image that everything was "fine . . . just fine!" when in reality, she was miserable inside.

Her tears quickly degenerated into heart-wrenching sobs as she finally told me that her worst nightmares had proven to be true. Tom had recently admitted to years of illicit relationships with women, and occasionally even with men. He had lovers scattered literally all over the world.

As I listened to her story, I watched Tom closely. He nodded his head in agreement with her tragic tale but showed no emotion whatsoever. Certainly no remorse. Occasionally he would look at her, then the floor, but mostly he looked at me. It was as though he were studying my reactions to his wife's allegations. He had a disconcerting smirk on his face. A look of haughty pride. An arrogance that seemed to permeate the room like a poisonous gas. He said nothing.

I distinctly remember that old familiar feeling deep inside me as once again I was immersed in the cesspool of human iniquity. A choking, agonizing feeling combined with an almost overwhelming urge to throw up my hands in frustration and run out of the room. But, as He had so many times before, the Holy Spirit constrained and comforted me as I silently cried out for strength, courage, and wisdom. I then asked them specifically about their expectations of me and of our meeting together.

Tom finally spoke for the first time. He calmly concurred that what Lisa had said was "absolutely true." His response showed no emotion, only a duplication of Lisa's plastic smile, but without the tears. He went on to say that the reason he had come to see me was to get some help for his "addictions" and, hopefully, "to rebuild" their marriage. It was apparent by the look on Lisa's face that she didn't agree, so I asked her what she hoped for.

Lisa's answer revealed both fear and guilt. She was afraid that the marriage was "dead—so dead that the corpse was rotting and burial was long overdue." Guilt, because she didn't "trust God enough to somehow miraculously heal the marriage—raise the dead, if you will." She admitted that she didn't really know why she was there, but she was quick to add her confusion over the simultaneous love and hatred she had for her husband. Her desires to "make it work" were often overshadowed by a stubborn unwillingness to even entertain the thought, especially if she had to ever "do anything sexual with him." She was not only

afraid she couldn't physically respond, but she was also horrified at the possibility of getting AIDS.

I then asked Tom why he wanted to rebuild the marriage now, after all these years. Before he had a chance to respond, Lisa very angrily answered for him. I suddenly saw a different side to her—a side I respected. There was at least some life left in her. "I'll tell you why he wants to rebuild the marriage," she said. "I'll tell you exactly why." She glared at her husband. "His precious bookings are beginning to suffer because word of his immorality is leaking out. No bookings, no money . . . and no more romantic rendezvous. And then there are the publishing contracts. Those guys are getting pretty nervous with all the rumors floating around. If the marriage falls apart, as if it hasn't already, he'll lose it all. And he's afraid I'm going to blow his cover and file for divorce. So he's here to use you just like he has me all these years."

Maintaining a condescending smile, Tom coolly replied, "Oh, don't be silly. You know as well as I do that I've had problems with my addictions for years and I've always been too busy or stubborn"—said laughingly—"to deal with them. I've been to several counselors over the past few years, and they agree that I take after any number of men in my family, especially dear old Dad who had the same types of problems. And I've been doing a lot of reading lately." He named three or four Christian pop psychology books, then went on to say, "I can't believe how accurate they were in describing me. It's as though they've been reading my mail for years! And the good news is that I'm beginning to recover!"

He then began to summarize what he had discovered through his previous counseling experiences. "Bottom line, I've been diagnosed as having a histrionic personality disorder"—a secular psychological diagnosis that has as its essential feature pervasive and excessive emotionality and attention-seeking behaviors, commonly characterized by inappropriate sexually seductive or provocative behavior. Tragically, his diagnosis, indicative of all psychological diagnoses, had no authority and merely provided a sophisticated method to repackage sin. He went on to say, "I have an addictive personality. And I'm also an adult child of a family of closet alcoholics; I'm severely codependent, and my drug of

choice is, and always has been, sex—with a little alcohol thrown in on the side. But I can't get enough sex! I'm a classic case of sexual addiction! I've discovered that virtually everything I do is a result of my shame-based, addictive personality, especially my tendencies toward bisexuality."

He then turned to Lisa, and with a sarcastic tone continued, "If Lisa would be honest with you—or maybe I should say, with herself—she would have to admit that she is also a shame-based codependent, highly addicted to everything but sex. Her drugs of choice are prescription drugs, fad diets, and shopping. She's also a churchaholic, addicted to women's Bible studies and seminars. And she absolutely cannot go one day without calling her mommy and daddy to bad-mouth her husband and get a little sympathy."

The veins in Tom's face and neck bulged as he continued to spew forth the venom of years of pent-up hatred toward his wife—and anything else that assaulted his conscience. Lisa just sat there. No tears. No rebuttal. No comment. She just stared out the window as if she were trying to mentally escape. It was as though she had left her body to go somewhere else and all that remained was a well-groomed corpse with a heartbeat.

The Nature of True Saving Faith . . . Questioned

My mind was flooded with thoughts as this scenario played on. It was obvious that Tom had swallowed—hook, line, and sinker—all the clever theories that had not only provided him with the necessary psycho-jargon to abdicate any personal responsibility but had also short-circuited any recognition of the heinousness of sin. He wore his labels like a badge of honor, labels that could only describe, albeit superficially, but never restore. Yet he honestly felt he was "in recovery."

I couldn't help but notice the blatant absence of any reference to spiritual things in Tom's recap of his "diagnosis." Yet there he sat: a highly visible "Christian" leader, a man who was supposedly a new creature in Christ . . . called according to His purpose . . . in the process of becoming conformed to the image of Christ . . . and supposedly a man who was called by God to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But how could this be true? My mind filled with Scripture that challenged all that this man claimed to be.

I thought about Christ's parable about the wheat and the tares, and how true believers can be identified by the fruit they bear and the commandments they keep. My thoughts especially focused upon our Lord's words in Matthew 7:22–23, where He warned:

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Could this man sitting across from me be a man who had what James called a faith without works . . . a dead faith that cannot save (James 2)? Why was there no mention of sin or repentance? Why was he not even remotely sensitive to his wife's pain—not to mention God's? Why was nothing said about prayer, about the Holy Spirit and His convicting and cleansing role? Why wasn't his heart so overwhelmed with his sinfulness that he would literally cry out for forgiveness and mercy, absolutely brokenhearted over offending and mocking the One he claimed to represent?

Didn't the man have a conscience? How, in the name of heaven, could he possibly stand before an audience and extol the transforming power of Christ? How could he talk about loving a Master he so routinely disobeyed? How could a man who claimed to be a new creature in Christ live such a consistent life of unbroken and blatant sinfulness? Most Christians I know couldn't live with themselves if they had been involved in even a fraction of this man's escapades. Guilt and shame would so assault their consciences that they would eventually throw themselves at the feet of God's mercy and beg for forgiveness and cleansing. Surely this man was more than a "carnal" Christian. Far more than a "backslider." This man was seriously sinful. Something far beyond hypocrisy!

Prior to this encounter, I had wrestled with these same issues concerning others I had worked with in the past who were similar to

Tom. I had to admit that people like him never really seemed to “get better.” At best, they would rearrange their circumstances or substitute their symptoms with another set of equally sinful, though maybe more “acceptable,” behaviors. Yet the insidious nature of their sinfulness would continue to enslave them with a treacherous bondage. Could it be that those people, and this man who sat before me, were not truly regenerate—even though they claimed to be? Was it naive to accept their testimony as the final word on a subject of such eternal significance?

Entering the Rage

Hoping to somehow get at these issues, I calmly asked Tom to tell me about his spiritual convictions, beginning with his conversion experience. He very quickly informed me that their problems were “psychological, not spiritual,” and consequently, my line of questioning was “inappropriate.”

Trying to be compassionate and sensitive to his ignorance, while at the same time being forthright and decisive, I attempted to succinctly expose the false dichotomy between psychological and spiritual problems (discussed in chapter 3). After I concluded my brief spiel, I proceeded with my original line of questioning.

Tom squinted his eyes, and while shaking his head he answered, “So you want me to tell you about my conversion experience? I bet you’re one of those who thinks I’m not a Christian.” He sneered. “Well . . . quite frankly, I’m highly offended! But nevertheless I’ll answer your question.

“I asked Jesus into my heart when I was fifteen years old. But being saved has nothing to do with all this. I know I’m a Christian—just a Christian with loads of baggage from a dysfunctional background! Everything from my family to the self-righteous Christian community I have had to endure all these years.” He glared at Lisa. “Why don’t you ask her if she’s a Christian?”

Ignoring his question regarding Lisa, I decided to enter into his obvious rage by answering his original question regarding his conversion experience. So I said to him, “Tom, the reason I asked you about your conversion was because of two things. First is the noticeable absence of

any spiritual remorse in your summary. I've not heard you even mention the word *sin*. Second, I have a hard time harmonizing your lifestyle—not to mention your present attitude—with that of a new creation in Christ.”

His sinister smile now expanded into a silent, open-mouth laugh. As he shook his head in dismay, he reminded me of a professional basketball player arguing with the referee after he has just been called for a flagrant foul. He was utterly dumbfounded.

He then proceeded with an epic performance worthy of an Academy Award: “Oh, this is just great! I come to see you to get some psychological help, and I get a sermon! I suppose you think I need to re-ask Jesus into my heart and bingo, all my problems will disappear!”

He put his head in his hands and mumbled a string of curses too vulgar to repeat. Then he abruptly straightened up and glared at me in defiance, awaiting my response. His outright hostility triggered in me a strong, selfish desire to retreat in order to protect myself. Instead, I chose to stand my ground, knowing that my authority base was the Word of God, not mere human opinion. This man was attacking the Truth, not me.

Speaking the Truth in Love

In the power of the Spirit of God, I tried to boldly speak the truth in love: “Tom, you’ve come to me to seek counsel because your life, Lisa’s life, and your marriage are all a colossal mess. But the counsel I offer must be God’s counsel, coming directly from His Word, because in and of myself I really have nothing to offer but my own personal opinion. And frankly, opinions are like noses—everybody has one. Therefore, based upon the principles clearly set forth in Scripture, and with a sincere desire to help restore you in the spirit of gentleness, I’m suggesting that you call sin *sin* and deal with it with all your might. I’m asking you to get serious about the wretched, vile, insidious nature of your depravity. I’m asking you to at least entertain the possibility that Satan has blinded your spiritual eyes. I’m asking you to fall on your face before a Holy God in absolute brokenness over your sin and experience the refreshing, cleansing waters of forgiveness. The fact that you are so offended

by such a request convinces me even further of the appropriateness of questioning the nature of your faith. Quite honestly, your faith is dead. Sin is your master, and you refuse to admit it!"

Tom stood up in a fury. Fearing a physical altercation, I stood as well. He then proceeded to curse me with an eruption of rage I have seldom experienced in my life. I still vividly remember the spray of his saliva on my face and the violence in his eyes. I'll never forget his concluding comment: "I've spent the last three years trying to get over my feelings of guilt. I've paid counselors thousands of dollars to help me deal with my shame. And now, thanks to you, in less than thirty minutes it's all coming back!"

With that, he stormed from my office. I followed him to the outside entrance and as he opened the door I quietly said to him, "Tom, if you ever want to deal with your life, let me know. I'll do everything I can. Meanwhile I'll be praying for you. That's a promise!" Without a word or a backward glance, he walked away.

Reflections of Sadness

I remember standing there at the door and watching him drive away. A deep sadness filled my heart as I reflected on what had just happened. I silently prayed that the Holy Spirit would bring great conviction to Tom's heart. My contemplation was interrupted by Lisa's broken voice behind me.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. Just a little unnerved and disappointed," I replied. "How about you?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she stared out the doorway where her husband had just departed. She softly replied, "Well, I don't know quite how to put this, but for the first time since I can't remember when, I feel there's hope. Hope for Tom, and hope for me. Not necessarily for the marriage . . . maybe someday, I don't know. But somehow that doesn't seem all that important right now. What's important is for Tom to give his heart to Christ. And you know, I think he knows that but is too proud to admit it."

We went back into my office where she very calmly told me about the incredibly sad and shamelessly sinful activities of her husband. The heartbreaking nature of their marriage, the hypocrisy of his “ministry,” and the dreadful state of their children’s lives once again exposed the grotesque consequences of sin.

Tom and Lisa are now divorced. Lisa and the children are doing well. Tom has dropped out of sight, and no one really knows where he is. He surfaces only occasionally. Rumors indicate his lifestyle has remained unchanged. He has no contact whatsoever with his children. But for Lisa, “the corpse of my dead marriage has finally been buried.”

A Victim of Cheap-Grace Evangelism

I was intrigued with the level of defiance in the heart of a man who claimed to be called by God as an evangelist. So I asked Lisa to let me view some of Tom’s evangelistic videos. Unfortunately what I witnessed has become common fare on so-called Christian television and radio. It could be best described as a “Christian carnival”—a religious version of professional wrestling. Tom was a performer, not a preacher, and he was obviously on stage for his own glory, not God’s. His “crusade” was indicative of so many church revivals and evangelistic crusades where perspiring preachers with quivering voices and rhythmic gasps seduce naive congregations into superficial spiritual decisions. The mesmerizing crescendo and decrescendo of spiritual clichés and choreographed gestures shame the vulnerable into all sorts of things—everything from “salvation” and rededication of their lives to foreign missionary service.

Tragically many of these resolutions die with the emotions that bore them. But equally disastrous is the false assurance such actions perpetuate. Most have no sense of severity of guilt before God and stubbornly resist any plea to obey Christ. It’s as though making Jesus Lord of their life is optional. They merely want some “fire insurance” and a supernatural resource to make them healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Tom’s messages and methods were nothing more than a manifestation of his heart—a heart that had never been shattered and broken over personal sin, resulting in confession and repentance. A heart that had

never experienced the transforming power of forgiveness that energizes enduring change, validated by a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Like so many people today, Tom saw Christ as his personal blesser, not his personal Savior. In his mind, Christ existed for him; he did not exist for Christ. And that is exactly the heresy he so passionately preached.

The Supreme Importance of Examining Our Faith

This whole scenario triggered in me a passionate desire to more fully understand the nature of true saving faith. I was becoming increasingly aware of the multitudes of people who name the name of Christ as their Lord and Savior, people who were supposedly called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9), yet who love darkness rather than light (John 3:19). People who have nothing in their lives to give evidence of such a transformation. People who are slaves to sin, whose god is their lusts. All this directs our attention to the Holy Spirit’s warning through the apostle Paul: “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5).

The Scriptures are very clear as to the litmus test of true saving faith. Finish filling in the following verses:

Matthew 7:16a: “You will know them _____.”

Romans 8:13–14: “For if you are living according to the flesh, _____; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, _____. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, _____.”

Ephesians 5:5–6: “For this you know with certainty, that _____

_____. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for _____.”

Titus 1:16: “They profess to know God, but _____, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.”

James 2:14, 17: “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, _____? Can that faith save him? . . . Even so _____.”

1 John 2:3–4: “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, _____. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ _____.”

1 John 3:9–10: “No one who is born of God practices sin, because _____ . By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: _____.”

1 John 5:13: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, _____.”

Why Some People Never Change

We all know people who are just like Tom. All the godly counsel in the world will never impact their lives until Christ transforms their hearts. This is why it’s a waste of time to admonish someone to become obedient to God’s Word if he or she doesn’t have the spiritual resources to do so. As we are informed by the Holy Spirit through the words of the apostle Paul: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; _____ and he cannot understand them, because _____” (1 Cor. 2:14).

In light of this, based on the Word of God, whenever an individual is seemingly a slave to sin, his or her faith should be examined. This is the necessary starting point. Evangelism must always precede exhortation.

A Great Man of God Expresses His Faith

There can be no better illustration to contrast the heartbreaking story of this chapter than that of the testimony of a great man of God, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Although his words give evidence to God's transforming work of grace in his life, it was his life that validated their veracity.

In his sermon titled "Sovereignty and Salvation," he began with a penetrating description of his salvation experience:

Six years ago today, as near as possible at this very hour of the day, I was in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, but had not yet, by divine grace, been led to feel the bitterness of that bondage, and to cry out by reason of the soreness of its slavery. Seeking rest, and finding none, I stepped within the house of God, and sat there, afraid to look upward, lest I should be utterly cut off, and lest his fierce wrath should consume me. The minister rose in his pulpit, and, as I have done this morning, read this text, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." I looked that moment: the grace of faith was vouchsafed to me in the self-same instant.¹

Spurgeon also addressed the issue of assurance: how can we know with great certainty that we are truly in Christ? The following are excerpts regarding this crucial issue, taken from one of his sermons delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, England, sometime in the late 1800s. It is titled "The Priest Dispensed With." He wrote:

How do I know that I am a believer? Why, *by the very remarkable change* which I underwent when I believed; for when a man believes in Jesus Christ there is such a change wrought in him that he must be aware

1. C. H. Spurgeon, "Sovereignty and Salvation," *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 2 (London: Passmore and Sons, 1857), 49.

of it. As in the case of the blind man when his eyes were opened he said, One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see . . .

Brethren, we have further evidence that we believe, for *our affections are so altered*. The believer can say that the things he once loved he now hates, and the things he hated he now loves; that which gave him pleasure now causes him pain, and things which were irksome and unpleasant have now become delightful to him. Especially is there a great change in us with respect to God. We said in our hearts, "No God." Not that we dared say, "There is no God;" but we wanted to get away from him; we would have been glad to hear that there was no God. How altered are our affections! Now our greatest joy is in God, the nearer we can approach to him the better, the very sound of his name is delicious music to us. . . .

We know, also, that *we believe because though very far from perfect we love holiness and strive after purity*. You that have believed in Jesus, do you not now pant after holiness? Do you not endeavor to do that which is right, and when you are conscious that you have failed does not conscience prick you? Have you not gone on your knees in bitterness of soul and said, "My God, help me and deliver me, for I delight in thy commandments; help me to keep thy statutes?" By this change of conduct we know that we have believed in Jesus Christ. . . .

We know that we have believed in Jesus Christ because *now we have communion with God*; we are in the habit of speaking with God in prayer, and hearing the Lord speak with us when we read his word. Some of us have spoken with our Lord Jesus so often that we have grown to be near and dear friends, and whatsoever we ask in prayer he grants us. Answered prayers are sweet testimonies to faith. . . .

We know that we have believed in the Lord Jesus because we have over and above all this a secret something, indescribable to others, but well-known by ourselves, which is called in Scripture *the witness of the Holy Spirit*: for it is written, "The Spirit himself also beareth witness with our spirit that we are born of God." Do you know what it means? If you do not I cannot tell you. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." There comes stealing over the soul sometimes a peace, a joy, a perfect rest, a heavenly deliciousness, a supreme content, in which, though no voice is heard, yet are we conscious that there is rushing through our souls, like a strain of heaven's own

music, the witness of the Spirit of God. We are sure of it, as sure as we are of our own being, and by that witness we know that we are indeed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.²

The Glory of God

Although not every denomination uses it, we would all do well to remember the foundational statement of the Westminster Catechism because it simply yet profoundly answers the crucial question, “What is the chief end of man?”—To glorify God and enjoy Him forever! This, dear friends, is the foundation of all true religion. This should be the passion of our hearts. This should rule every thought and deed of every waking moment. This must be the basis of every Christian’s life.

But apart from the transformation that takes place in the human heart when we are born again, these words will be nothing more than religious platitudes. Devoid of power. Unable to save. As the Scriptures so clearly attest: “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The supernatural genius of the gospel is its simplicity. The power to transform is in its truth. This is why the apostle Paul could so confidently extol its virtues: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

Submitting to the gospel message gives birth to a transformation that gives us true meaning in life, and gives God the glory He deserves. Therefore, for the sake of all people everywhere who are searching for answers, the apostle Peter most effectively argues for the sufficiency of Christ and the centrality of the basics found in the gospel.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped

2. C. H. Spurgeon, “The Priest Dispensed With,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 21 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1991).

the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or shortsighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 1:2–11)

If these words are hollow to you, maybe it's because you have never experienced the transforming power of Christ. Maybe you have never truly been born again. This is why it is so important to be able to answer the question posed in the next chapter: what is a Christian?

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the biblical reasons why counseling is difficult work?

2. What are some problems with the way Tom responded to Lisa's accusations?

3. What are some of the emotions that Lisa was feeling? What was she thinking?

4. What did the counselor think was Tom's problem? Why?

5. What are some reasons people like to have unbiblical labels for their sinful behavior?

6. What was Tom really saying about his behavior by describing the cause in the way he did?

12. As you reflect on the five answers Spurgeon gave to the question, “How do I know I am a believer?” can you honestly say that those five things are true in your life?

13. What are the most important lessons you learned from this chapter?

Where can we possibly find unfailing answers to our problems?

Not in ourselves. Not in the world. Only God can diagnose our condition and equip us for real, lasting change. Wayne and Joshua Mack show how we can flee temptation, break free of sin, and live our lives as *overcomers*.

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