



GrowN
Week 9: THE Path of GrowN – The Problem of Sin
November 8th, 2023

9/13 th - The WHY(God's Roles)	10/11 th – Why Suffering?	11/15 th –
9/20 th – The Payback(P.B.A. Prodigal.God's Grace means..)	10/18 th – Why Righteous?	11/22 nd –
9/27 th –The Power in Community	10/25 th – Why Prayer	11/29 th – ADVENT
THE Path of GrowN	11/1 st – Poor in Spirit	12/6 th – WNC Tmas Party?
(Sp. Disciplines -j 8 weeks)	11/8 th – The Problem of Sin	12/ 13 th – Family Worship
10/4 th – Meet the Bible		

[Week ? = Understanding the Kingdom of God????]

Series Resources: How People Grow by Cloud/Townsend and Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Zondervan. Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Week 2: Bailey, K. E. (2005). *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (Second Edition, pp. 42–44). IVP Books.

Handouts:

Week 1 – God's Roles Chart. Week 2 – Community. Week 4 – The Bible. Week 5- Suffering Verses. Week 7 -Prayer H.O. Week 8 – Devotional

GrowN Concept #1: Quadrant Growth

Luke 2:52 HCSB *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.*

Jesus grew: Intellectually ● Physically ● Spiritually ● Socially

GrowN Concept #2: The Inheritance of Reconciliation

The Long-term Goal of GrowN: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. NLT

***18** And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And **God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.** ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

YES: Reconciling = Living your Life OUTLOUD with others so they may see Jesus in action.

NO: Reconciling ≠ You are going to Hell if you don't accept Jesus. Stop SINNING! Never saying anything. God gives you the abundant life – including lots of \$\$\$ - here on earth.

THE Payback: I have earned this, God ↔ God cannot love me because...I have sinned so...

GrowN Concept #3: God is FOR me – There is no "God cannot love me because..."

Romans 8:31-32

*What then are we to say about these things?^(C) **If God is for us, who is against us?^(D)***

³² He did not even spare His own Son^(E) but offered Him up for us all;^(F)

how will He not also with Him grant us everything? HCSB

GrowN Concept #4: God will PROVIDE for me - I do not have to EARN His love.

Matthew 6:33 (25 – don't worry about your life)

*But **seek first the kingdom of God^(A) and His righteousness,^(B) and all these things will be **provided** for you.^(C)***

GrowN Concept #5: THE Power in Community

I. The Power of Relationships in Community II. The Power of Acceptance in Community III. The Power of Forgiveness in Community

GrowN Concept #6: The Disciplines

[Disciplines: C&T – The Bible. Role of Suffering & Grief. Righteousness. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin & Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. **FOSTER – (Meditation. Prayer. Fasting.)** Study. **Simplicity.** Solitude. Submission. **Service.** Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

How People Grow – Not a therapy book but a book on the sanctification process. Does not discount therapy (it is being written by two of them!) but ADDS the sanctification process to the therapeutical model.



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2 Peter 3:18

*¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard,^(A) so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability. ¹⁸ **But grow** in the grace and knowledge^(A) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.^{[a](B)} Amen.^[b] **HCSB***

With our FIVE GrowN concepts as a foundation:

- #1. Quadrant Growth.
- #2. Becoming a Reconciler.
- #3. Knowing God is for me.
- #4. Knowing God will provide for me.
- #5. Understanding the POWER in Community.

NOW WHAT do we actually DO? Concept #6: The Disciplines

[Disciplines: C&T – ~~The Bible~~ – ~~Role of Suffering & Grief~~ – ~~Righteousness~~. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin & Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. **FOSTER** – ~~Meditation~~ – ~~Prayer~~ – ~~Fasting~~. Study. Simplicity. Solitude. Submission. Service. Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

RIGHTEOUSNESS: **Repent**: Towards salvation and as a Disciple of Christ. **Understand & gain** insight: LEARN-Lifestyle. **Discipline**: Add what to my life? Subtract what? Sanctification: Immediate & Progressive

I. Define Sin:

[ii.how sin works iii.the big problem with the Law Response iv.Using the whole gospel to deal with sin]]

• **Transgression of the law of God**

1 John 3:4 *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. **NKJV***
*Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God. **NLT***
*Every person who practices sin commits an act of rebellion, and sin is rebellion. **CEB***

1 John 5:17b *All unrighteousness is sin, **NKJV***
*All wicked actions are sin **NLT***
*Every unrighteous action is sin **CEB***

• **Rebellion against God**

Deuteronomy 9:7 *Remember—don't ever forget!—how you made the Lord your God furious in the wilderness. From the very first day you stepped out of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebels against the Lord. **CEB***

Joshua 1:18 *Anybody who stubbornly opposes what you declare and doesn't obey any of your commands will be put to death. Be brave and strong!" **CEB***

• **What the word SIN means:** To sin = “miss the mark.”

Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*



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Hamartiology: The study of sin.

- How sin originated.
- How it affects humanity.
- What it will result in after death.
- WHY we miss the mark.
- How we miss the mark.
- The consequences of missing the mark.

(Thorough study. Not happening ALL tonight. Just some.)

- **Did we all inherit sin from Adam and Eve?**

Romans 5:12

*Just as through one human being sin came into the world, and death came through sin, so death has come to everyone, since everyone has sinned. **CEB***

- **Are all sins equal to God?** (I would say NO. Some are worse than others.)

However, the consequences of sin all lead to death (spiritually).

Romans 6:23

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. **NKJV***

II. How Sin Works:

[i.Define Sin iii.the big problem with the Law Response iv.Using the whole gospel to deal with sin]]

Which one is true?

(write on board ↓)

A. We are not only responsible for our sin, but also powerless to keep from sinning.

B. People are free moral agents and responsible for their sin.

Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Zondervan.

The winner is: A

But this is only part of the truth. The Bible does teach we are responsible and accountable for our sin. It is our problem and no one else's. But—and this would have been a surprise to the preacher—the Bible's message is much *more* devastating and convicting. For the Bible says not only that we are responsible for our sin, but also that we are powerless to keep from sinning. **Think about that for a moment: we cannot change, and we are held responsible for not being able to change. This can only lead to one conclusion: Anyone need a Savior?**

EXAMPLE #1: RESPONSIBLE VIEW

People should be punished for bad choices. We deserve it. Because we can avoid jail if we truly wanted to be making better choices. We need to repent and become better people by making better choices. Never allowing any ungodly pattern in our lives to rule us.

THE LAW TELLS US WHAT TO DO AND WE ARE TO AVOID DOING THAT!

But when we add in the other half—that we are responsible for that which we can't change—we find ourselves in a much worse shape than the jail cell to which the preacher wanted to send people. In his thinking, people should go to "jail" for making bad choices, but they could avoid jail, if they truly wanted to, by choosing differently. And they could get out of jail by repenting and becoming better people. His "tough stance on sin" had a strange kind of hope in it. **If we are agents who can choose, then let's just choose differently!** Why allow any pattern in our lives to ever rule us again. Let's just do better! You can almost hear the motivational speech gathering steam in the pews. "Stop being stupid! Don't let sin ruin your life anymore. Choose life! Make right choices and be successful."

HAVE I EVER FELT LIKE I HAVE BEEN HERE?



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EXAMPLE #2: POWERLESS and RESPONSIBLE VIEW

I go to jail because I sinned! But I can never get out because I cannot stop sinning!!!! I try to make better choices and it works for a while...then, life happens and....

THE LAW ENCOMPASSES ME AND ALL I DO. I AM BAD. I MUST HIDE. THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME. THERE IS NO HOPE FOR ME.

In the “powerless *and* responsible” view, you both go to jail and have no hope of getting out because you are unable to do better. And that is both what the Bible teaches and what any addict will tell you. No matter how many times someone with a compulsive behavior or an internal character problem tries to “just make better choices,” it doesn’t work. (Ask anyone who has ever been on a fad diet; it may work for a while, but give it time and it will fail.) And they still find that they are held responsible for the reality of the problem and its devastating consequences: relational, health, career, etc.

HAVE I EVER FELT LIKE I HAVE BEEN HERE?

EXAMPLE #3: I AM POWERLESS and I AM RESPONSIBLE so I need help outside of ME ... THAT’S WHY JESUS ❤️

Romans 7:18–19

I know that good doesn’t live in me—that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can’t do it. ¹⁹ I don’t do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don’t want to do. CEB

¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. NKJV

The Bible tells us that we cannot avoid the problems we find ourselves in, we cannot change ourselves once we are in them, and we are held totally responsible and accountable for them. In short, we are in prison or, as the Bible says, we are “slaves to sin.” As Paul explains it, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing”

We make choices, but all the while we don’t really have freedom. And we are held responsible. That is a much more brutal message than the tough preacher was delivering. But gracefully the Bible does not leave us there. When we are thrown into prison with no chance of parole, when we are asked, “Anyone need a Savior?” the Bible gives us one. For it is exactly into that prison that Jesus comes and tells us he will break us out. This is Good News indeed. When people realize that they are both powerless and responsible, they get serious about seeking help from outside themselves.

HAVE I EVER FELT LIKE I HAVE BEEN HERE?

RECAP:

1. We have a problem, and the problem is sin.
2. We are responsible and accountable for our sin.
3. We cannot do anything about it in a fully significant or sufficient way.
4. Trying to “do better” doesn’t work, so we need help because the sin is hurting us or someone else
5. Help has come in the form of the gospel.

CAN I ACCEPT THIS AS TRUTH?

TAKE CONSIDERATION:

MY OWN SIN is not the **cause of all** my struggles or my problems.

i.e. Consider JOB – His problems/suffering were due to a **Fallen World**

i.e. Consider the Man Born Blind - For **GOD to be GLORIFIED John 9:1-3(4-5)**

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. ² And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. ⁴ must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”



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i.e. Consider the Free Will of Others - Good Samaritan **Luke 10:30-37**

³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among [□]thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, [□]when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" ³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." **NKJV**

ASK: Who's fault was it that the Samaritan got beat up?

i.e. Consider regular LIFE: **Matthew 5:45b**

*He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. **CEB***

Now Add:

i.e. Our Sinful Nature **Romans 7:5**

⁵ *When we were self-centered, the sinful passions aroused through the Law were at work in all the parts of our body, so that we bore fruit for death*

Romans 7:1-6 Freedom from the Law

⁷ *Brothers and sisters, I'm talking to you as people who know the Law. Don't you know that the Law has power over someone only as long as he or she lives? ² A married woman is united with her husband under the Law while he is alive. But if her husband dies, she is released from the Law concerning her husband. ³ So then, if she lives with another man while her husband is alive, she's committing adultery. But if her husband dies, she's free from the Law, so she won't be committing adultery if she marries someone else. ⁴ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you also died with respect to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you could be united with someone else. You are united with the one who was raised from the dead so that we can bear fruit for God. ⁵ **When we were self-centered, the sinful passions aroused through the Law were at work in all the parts of our body, so that we bore fruit for death.** ⁶ But now we have been released from the Law. We have died with respect to the thing that controlled us, so that we can be slaves in the new life under the Spirit, not in the old life under the written Law.*

III. The BIG Problem with the LAW Response

[i.define sin ii.how sin works ivUsing the whole gospel to deal with sin]

Exodus 15:26

²⁶ *The Lord said, "If you are careful to obey the Lord your God, do what God thinks is right, pay attention to his commandments, and keep all of his regulations, then I won't bring on you any of the diseases that I brought on the Egyptians. I am the Lord who heals you."*



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Guilt (condemnation), **Anger** (rebellion), and **Fear**.

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“Therefore, if we are going to help people, we have to do better than tell them they are wrong and they should do right. This is what the law does, and it is ineffective in changing people.”

Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). [*How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*](#). Zondervan.

Hebrews 7:18–19 *On the one hand, an earlier command is set aside because it was weak and useless¹⁹ (because the Law made nothing perfect). On the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. CEB*

Romans 8:3 *God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. CEB*

Romans 5:9–10 *So, now that we have been made righteous by His blood, we can be even more certain that we will be saved from God's wrath through Him.¹⁰ If we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son while we were still enemies, now that we have been reconciled, how much more certain is it that we will be saved by His life? CEB*

Romans 5:20–21 *The Law stepped in to amplify the failure, but where sin increased, grace multiplied even more.²¹ The result is that grace will rule through God's righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, just as sin ruled in death. CEB*

Romans 6:14 *Sin will have no power over you, because you aren't under Law but under grace. CEB*

Romans 8:1–2 *So now there isn't any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. CEB*

1 John 4:18 *There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. CEB*

IV. Using WHOLE Gospel to deal with Sin

[i.define sin ii.how sin works iii.the BIG problem with the law response]

LIKE HOW?

1 John 3:23-24

²³ *This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love each other as He commanded us. ²⁴ Those who keep His commandments dwell in God and God dwells in them. This is how we know that He dwells in us, **because of the Spirit He has given us.***



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Romans 8:3-4 *God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. ⁴ He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. **Now the way we live is based on the Spirit**, not based on selfishness.*

The Law has been replaced by The Spirit

So...how does one LIVE IN THE SPIRIT?

- Admit: You are God. I am Not.

Colossians 1:12-14

¹² *giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. ¹³ He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. ¹⁴ We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, in Him. **HCSB***

- Admit He loves me with an everlasting love. (He is FOR me and HE wants to be WITH me.)

John 3:16 *"For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish **but have eternal life**. HCSB*

- Admit: That Christ paid the price for my condemnation, my sins.

Romans 6:23 *The wages that sin pays are death, but God's gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- Confess that I am powerless to live those 10 Commandments.

Romans 3:21-26

²¹ *But now God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. ²² God's righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in Him. There's no distinction. ²³ **All have sinned and fall short of God's glory, ²⁴ but all are treated as righteous freely by His grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ Through his faithfulness, God displayed Jesus as the place of sacrifice where mercy is found by means of His blood. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness in passing over sins that happened before, ²⁶ during the time of God's patient tolerance. He also did this to demonstrate that He is righteous in the present time, **and to treat the one who has faith in Jesus as righteous.*****

DO I KNOW THAT I AM BEING TREATED AS RIGHTEOUS?



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Galatians 5:16-26 Two different ways of living

¹⁶ I say be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires. ¹⁷ A person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit, and the Spirit is set against one's selfish desires. They are opposed to each other, so you shouldn't do whatever you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are being led by the Spirit, you aren't under the Law. ¹⁹ The actions that are produced by selfish motives are obvious, since they include sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, ²⁰ idolatry, drug use and casting spells, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, ²¹ jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that. I warn you as I have already warned you, that those who do these kinds of things won't inherit God's kingdom.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against things like this. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the self with its passions and its desires.

²⁵ **If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit.** ²⁶ Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.

Romans 8:1-5

So now there isn't any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. ⁴ He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. ⁵ People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, **but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit.**

LIVE IN THE SPIRIT:

- To make known that he is always with us and we need to abide in him (Ps. 139:7; John 14:18; 15:5–8)
- To search our hearts and show us what we need to change (Ps. 7:9; Prov. 20:27; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:10)
- To give us abilities to do what we need to do when we are unable (Ex. 31:3; Deut. 34:9; Judg. 14:6; 2 Sam. 23:2; Mark 13:11)
- To lead us and guide us in life (1 Kings 18:12; 1 Chron. 28:12; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 143:10; John 16:13; Acts 13:4; 16:6)
- To show us and teach us (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 John 2:27)
- To counsel us and help us (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13)
- To help us to live the life we need (Rom. 7:6; 8:2, 4–6, 9, 11, 13, 26)
- To fill us and control us (Rom. 8:6; Eph. 5:18)
- To complete us (James 1:4)
- To correct us and convict us (Ps. 139:23–24; John 16:8; Rom. 9:1; 1 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:15)
- To change us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:3; 5:16–25)
- To give us gifts to help each other and put the Body together around us (1 Cor. 12:7–12)
- To heal us through himself and others as they use his gifts (Ps. 147:3; Is. 61:1; Eph. 4:16; 1 Peter 4:8, 10)

WHERE DO WE LEARN THIS/PRACTICE THIS/LIVE THIS?



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WHERE DO WE LEARN THIS/PRACTICE THIS/LIVE THIS?

IN HIS COMMUNITY

(Power of Community – Week 3)

Ephesians 4:15-16

¹⁵ Instead, by speaking the truth with love, let's grow in every way into Christ, ¹⁶ who is the head. The whole body grows from him, as it is joined and held together by all the supporting ligaments. The body makes itself grow in that it builds itself up with love as each one does its part.

1 Corinthians 12:27

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it. ²⁷ You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.

2 Corinthians 6:16

¹⁶ And what agreement does God's sanctuary have with idols? For we are the sanctuary of the living God, as God said:

*I will dwell among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God, and they will be My people.*

- I. Defining Sin**
- II. Define How Sin Works**
- III. Identifying the BIG Problem with the Law Response**
- IV. Using WHOLE Gospel to deal with Sin**



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NOTES:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Don't you know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.

16

Pulling the Weeds: The Problem of Sin and Temptation

~~We are not only responsible for our sin, but also powerless to keep from sinning.~~

Back in the 1980s I (Henry) remember listening to a minister give his opinion on the recovery movement, which was becoming popular in the church. He was angry. People were getting off too lightly, he thought, and he was not going to stand for it. I can almost still hear his words today: “What’s all this stuff about people being ‘powerless’ over their addiction? Don’t you know? This is not what the Bible says! People are free moral agents and responsible for their sin! Don’t give me all this stuff about being powerless. People choose to sin, and they are responsible for their choices! It’s just sin, period.”

The minister was obviously upset at hearing people in recovery talk about Step One in the Twelve Step Process: “We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.” To him, powerlessness was a cop-out. He thought this was letting people off the hook; they needed to admit they were choosing wrong and begin to choose right. They were sinning. They are not supposed to sin. So to him the answer was clear: Stop it!

I remember thinking about all the addicts I knew who were listening, and I felt sorry for them. His was a message I was sure they had heard before, and it had not helped them very much.

At the same time I thought about both the truth and the error in what the preacher was saying. He was not wrong about addicts’ choices being sin; virtually everyone agrees on that. But his statement that “people are free moral agents and responsible for their sin,” is a loaded one. In this single statement lies much of the problem in how people both look at sin and try to help those struggling with it.

The preacher was only half right. People *are* responsible for sin. People *are* moral agents.

~~**But this is only part of the truth. The Bible does teach we are responsible and accountable for our sin. It is our problem and no one else’s. But—and this would have been a surprise to the preacher—the Bible’s message is much more devastating and convicting. For the Bible says not only that we are responsible for our sin, but also that we are powerless to keep from sinning. Think about that for a moment: we cannot change, and we are held responsible for not being able to change. This can only lead to one conclusion: Anyone need a Savior?**~~

I understand what the preacher was thinking, for it would seem that seeing ourselves as powerless and unable to change our lives would get us off the hook, a little like having a genetic illness (hemophilia) versus one caused by an unhealthy lifestyle (cirrhosis of the liver). We usually find ourselves having more immediate empathy for someone with a genetic problem than we do for someone who has made destructive choices and has contributed to his own illness.

EXAMPLE #1:

~~But when we add in the other half—that we are responsible for that which we can’t change—we find ourselves in a much worse shape than the jail cell to which the preacher wanted to send people. In his thinking, people should go to “jail” for making bad choices, but they could avoid jail, if they truly wanted to, by choosing differently. And they could get out of jail by repenting~~



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and becoming better people. His “tough stance on sin” had a strange kind of hope in it. **If we are agents who can choose, then let’s just choose differently!** Why allow any pattern in our lives to ever rule us again. Let’s just do better! You can almost hear the motivational speech gathering steam in the pews. “Stop being stupid! Don’t let sin ruin your life anymore. Choose life! Make right choices and be successful.”

EXAMPLE #2:

In the “powerless *and* responsible” view, you both go to jail and have no hope of getting out because you are unable to do better. And that is both what the Bible teaches and what any addict will tell you. No matter how many times someone with a compulsive behavior or an internal character problem tries to “just make better choices,” it doesn’t work. (Ask anyone who has ever been on a fad diet; it may work for a while, but give it time and it will fail.) And they still find that they are held responsible for the reality of the problem and its devastating consequences: relational, health, career, etc.

EXAMPLE #3:

The Bible tells us that we cannot avoid the problems we find ourselves in, we cannot change ourselves once we are in them, and we are held totally responsible and accountable for them. In short, we are in prison or, as the Bible says, we are “slaves to sin.” As Paul explains it, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:18–19).

We make choices, but all the while we don’t really have freedom. And we are held responsible. That is a much more brutal message than the tough preacher was delivering. But gracefully the Bible does not leave us there. When we are thrown into prison with no chance of parole, when we are asked, “Anyone need a Savior?” the Bible gives us one. For it is exactly into that prison that Jesus comes and tells us he will break us out. This is Good News indeed. When people realize that they are both powerless and responsible, they get serious about seeking help from outside themselves.

So, to summarize:

1. We have a problem, and the problem is sin.
2. We are responsible and accountable for our sin.
3. We cannot do anything about it in a fully significant or sufficient way.
4. Trying to “do better” does not work, so we need help because the sin is hurting us or someone else.
5. Help has come in the form of the gospel.

CAN I ACCEPT THIS AS TRUTH?

The goal of this chapter is to give a few thoughts on how the problem of sin works in our lives and how the gospel is the answer to this problem in all areas of growth.

FIRST, A WARNING

WHENEVER WE TALK ABOUT sin being a problem in the world of personal growth, we have to make sure you know what we are not saying. We are not saying that a person’s individual sin is the cause of all the struggles or



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problems he or she might have. All too often in the church, people are blamed for pain and struggles not of their own making.

Job was a great example of this. He had losses and pains he had absolutely no part in creating. In fact, it was the opposite. It was his righteousness that placed him in the cosmic contest between God and Satan. He was not suffering because he was bad, but, it could be argued, he was suffering because he was good. Who knows the reason for his suffering, really? It is too complex to ever fully understand. Yet we do know that his pain came from losing his family, his work, and his health. These losses were not his doing. He, like all of us, lived in a fallen world where there is suffering we cannot understand.

Jesus once said, when asked whose sin caused a certain man to be blind from birth, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life” (John 9:3). Some things we just don’t understand.

OTHER’S FREE WILL

In addition, people suffer because of the sin of others. We have all experienced—or have had someone close to us who has experienced—long-standing suffering because of the abuse of another. In the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus told us how to respond to this kind of pain. In that story, a man suffered at the hands of a robber who beat him up. A Samaritan came by, dressed and bandaged his wounds, and paid for his room in the inn and the innkeeper’s care for him. We are to reach out and help those who have suffered at the hands of others. (We will take a closer look at this in the section about the “sin of others” at the end of this chapter.)

So, as we look at the subject of sin, let’s first understand that everyone suffers and sometimes lacks growth for other reasons besides their sin. If we don’t understand this, we may fall into the trap of blaming the hurting person, as Job’s friends did. If we do that, we too will be “worthless physicians,” and the best thing we could do would be to be “silent” (Job 13:4–5)

WHAT DOESN’T WORK

IN CHAPTER 4, ON the God of grace, we looked in depth at the law and at its failure to change lives. In this chapter we would like to start with a brief reminder of what the “law of sin and death” is about and why it doesn’t work. As we deal with sin, this will keep us from trying something that is futile over and over again.

Being “under the law” is the system of having a commandment and then choosing to follow this commandment to be good and acceptable, or not following the commandment and being condemned. This simple formula is no problem. If we know what we “should” do, we should “just do it,” and then we have cured the problem of sin.

And this *was* true, once upon a time. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden, they were free to do the right thing and avoid the wrong thing. If they had done that, we would have “no problem,” but they did not, and now we have a real problem. Part of the problem is that we are *no longer free*, in ourselves, to do the right thing, no matter how much we want to.

Now, instead of freedom, we possess a “sinful nature” (Rom. 7:5).

This nature has a passion for things that are not good for us (“Get behind me, apple pie!”). We have a penchant for doing unhelpful things as well as sometimes doing downright destructive things.

THE CHANGE: Adam & Eve

SALVATION EQUATION

But it is even worse than that. Not only do we have a passion for doing those things that are against the law, but the law itself arouses in us a passion to do the very thing we shouldn’t do! (Rom. 7:5, 8–10). This is double jeopardy. We have the sickness, and the fact that we *ought* to be healthy makes us act out our sickness even more. Listen to the apostle Paul: “For



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which takes care of the guilt and condemnation of the law. (As Paul says, “there is no condemnation” for those who have a relationship with Jesus. As we said in chapter 9, guilt and condemnation must end for any change to take place.) Dirk did not change until he knew he was accepted and loved just as he is, weight problem and all. Then Dirk needed a change of mind and a change of direction about the seriousness of the sin. He finally realized that if he did not lose weight, he would likely have a heart attack. *His change of mind is what the Bible calls “repentance” (an entire changing of direction and thinking about the problem).*

Then, as the verse says, to be set free we must live according to the Spirit. Here is where most failure takes place. People think they only need to confess and lean on God for help, but as we saw in chapter 6, *there is a lot more to living according to the Spirit than that.* Living according to the Spirit includes many other things we have to ask God to do for us through his Spirit, such as the following:

- ~~To make known that he is always with us and we need to abide in him (Ps. 139:7; John 14:18; 15:5–8)~~
- ~~To search our hearts and show us what we need to change (Ps. 7:9; Prov. 20:27; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:10)~~
- ~~To give us abilities to do what we need to do when we are unable (Ex. 31:3; Deut. 34:9; Judg. 14:6; 2 Sam. 23:2; Mark 13:11)~~
- ~~To lead us and guide us in life (1 Kings 18:12; 1 Chron. 28:12; Neh. 9:20; Ps. 143:10; John 16:13; Acts 13:4; 16:6)~~
- ~~To show us and teach us (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 John 2:27)~~
- ~~To counsel us and help us (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13)~~
- ~~To help us to live the life we need (Rom. 7:6; 8:2, 4–6, 9, 11, 13, 26)~~
- ~~To fill us and control us (Rom. 8:6; Eph. 5:18)~~
- ~~To complete us (James 1:4)~~
- ~~To correct us and convict us (Ps. 139:23–24; John 16:8; Rom. 9:1; 1 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:15)~~
- ~~To change us (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:3; 5:16–25)~~
- ~~To give us gifts to help each other and put the Body together around us (1 Cor. 12:7–12)~~
- ~~To heal us through himself and others as they use his gifts (Ps. 147:3; Is. 61:1; Eph. 4:16; 1 Peter 4:8, 10)~~

In other words, winning the war over sin includes the entire growth process itself as we live the life the Spirit provides. We have to be doing many things to achieve the victory we need. Significant problems like addictions and other patterns of behavior do not give way to simple formulas such as “That is sin. I won’t do that anymore.” To achieve victory we need to change fully in all of life as we commit to the life of the Spirit.

This truth also explains why patterns of behavior that have not given way to those formulas do give way to the process outlined above: When we admit powerlessness, ask God and others for help, repent, continue to stay plugged into a supportive environment, seek healing for the hurting parts of ourselves, and receive deep forgiveness, give that to others, and obey God—when we do all these things, long-standing patterns of problematic behavior change. This is the way the Bible has described the process we need.

Too often Christians have a much too shallow view of sin, both in our ability to deal with it as well as the depth at which it must be dealt with. We cannot stop sin; we have to be *saved* from sin. And that means a much deeper healing process than just “stop being bad.” In fact, as Jesus spoke of his mission, he said it just like that—as a mission of “healing”:

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The word translated “save” in this statement is a word that actually means “healed” or “made whole.” Being “saved” from sin means being restored and healed at a much deeper level than we sometimes offer to people. People need more than just “Stop that!” They also need “and God and we will help you.” The biblical process of overcoming sin provides a deep healing. Anything else will fall short.



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So the Bible’s commandment regarding sin is and always has been: Repent. But many times people think “repent” means to stop sinning, and it does have that aspect to it. The reality is, however, that “repent” means to have a total change of mind, to think differently—and that involves an entire turning around of our entire life, not just behavior. It means to think differently about sin, to see it as destructive and producing death. It also means to think differently about how we are going to deal with it. It means to change one’s mind and to begin to live according to the whole life of the Spirit, as we have just seen. “Repent” is not a shallow commandment. It is a total life change to the life of the Spirit and all that entails.

REBELLION

BUT, LEST WE BECOME a little too comfortable in our “we are just sick and powerless and want to be healed” thinking, let’s look at another side to sin. It is not just our inability to keep from sinning that gets us into trouble. We are sometimes very able to keep from sinning, and we choose not to. We rebel, as Adam and Eve did *before* they had a sin nature. Even though we have the sin nature, at any given moment we do have control over some areas of our character, yet we choose not to exercise this control. There is no other word to use for this than *rebellion*.

Take the example of Sara and Joe.

Sara and Joe had had a rocky relationship for the five years they had been married. After the initial “falling in love” and mutual idealization of each other, they had gotten married. Not long after, they began to argue intensely. Sometimes they argued over significant issues, but most of the time they argued over Joe’s temper.

“I don’t know what to do,” Sara said, sobbing in my office one day. “I am not trying to control him or hurt him, but he lashes out at me in such a rage. I can’t take it any more.” She said she was feeling herself grow cold inside, since she had been hurt so many times by him. I feared she might not stick it out.

Until then, Joe had tried to make his case to me about how difficult Sara was to live with and how his anger was justified. As he put it, “You would go crazy with her too.” I would try to get him to look at his side of things, to no avail. But on this particular day, when the depth of Sara’s pain showed itself, Joe gained a different perspective. In the Bible’s words, he “repented.” He changed his mind about his own behavior. He no longer saw it as justified, but as destructive and hurtful. He was hurting the person he loved and needed.

So Joe finally agreed to work on his anger. For a period of months, he and Sara would come back in when he was not able to control his anger. But these sessions were different from the previous ones. We were now working on his real anger problem and not something to be justified. He was going to a good support group, meeting with a prayer partner, and exploring with me the hurt and history behind his anger.

FRUIT:

Slowly Joe changed as the “life in the Spirit” took hold. As Paul describes, he bore the “fruit” of the Spirit. He exhibited self-control, love, and patience (**Gal. 5:22–23**). (This is another example of how “fruit” works. He had cultivated the garden—his life in the Spirit—and now the fruit was coming.) More and more he became the loving husband Sara had desired.



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SIN:

One day, however, something happened. They had had a difficult weekend and had gotten into an intense argument. Sara was obviously wounded. When she described Joe’s behavior, I was shocked, for I thought we had made more progress than that. My first feeling was one of empathy not only for her, but also for him, for his having been “caught in a sin” again (**Gal. 6:1**). I wondered what had snapped inside of him or what had overcome him.

As I listened to Joe, my empathy gave way to anger. And as I asked myself why I was angry, it became clear. Nothing had snapped in Joe. Nothing had overcome him. He was perfectly capable of not acting as he did—but he did anyway. What I saw was pure and simple “meanness.” So I confronted him.

“Don’t give me any of this ‘my issues came up’ psychobabble,” I said. “The truth is that you just chose to be mean instead of restraining yourself. This was not weakness. This was a choice, and it is nothing but ugly sin.”

I never will forget the look in Joe’s eyes and the expression on his face. He was caught. Then he got sheepish, shied away a little, and said, “You’re right. You’re right. I was mad, and I took it out on her. And that was wrong.” I could see his spirit softening.

He then turned to Sara and said, “I’m sorry.”

Sara softened as well. She accepted his apology, and they were able to go on from there.

It was a powerful lesson for him, however, and one that affected many of his other patterns of behavior. He learned that some problems in life are not about things we are “unable” to do, but about things we are “unwilling” to do. He simply rebelled against what he knew to be right and loving. It felt good to him for the moment, but as is true of all sin, that was only for a moment. He paid the price in alienation afterward.

Sometimes we are unable to do what we are supposed to do at any given moment. In those areas we need more work of the Spirit and need to flee the temptation and run to get help. But sometimes we do not use the abilities we do possess, and we willingly, willfully choose to sin. As David put it, “Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression” (Ps. 19:13). We do have the ability to do the wrong thing on purpose.

The solution to this is confession, remorse, repentance, making amends, and reconciliation with whomever we have hurt. There is a lot going on in the name of growth today that is just sin in need of repentance. One doesn’t need the fruit of “self-control”; one just needs to exercise it.

When Joe was confronted with this reality, he took the confrontation from me into his soul, and it became a part of him. He now had the ability to confront himself—to say “don’t do that” to himself. He owned his sin, was sorry, repented, and was reconciled to Sara. From that point their relationship grew deeper, as Joe had a new dimension to his growth—the realization that he now had more freedom and, with it, more responsibility.

NO EXCUSES

I LISTENED ONE DAY to a man talking about the affair he had had; we were working through its aftermath in his marriage. The affair had been devastating to his wife, and he seemed to have little insight into her feelings. In our sessions he caught a glimpse of the pain he had caused, but just when we were getting a little deeper into how the affair had devastated her, he changed the focus.

“But all of this makes me sad for another reason,” he said.

“What is that?” I asked.



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“Well, if she had been meeting my needs in our relationship, I wouldn’t have had to go somewhere else to get those met.”

I thought I was going to throw up. I did not condemn him for his failure. Often in working with him, I had been reminded of Jesus’ response to the woman caught in adultery. Jesus had showed nothing but grace and acceptance. So that was not what made me sick.

What made me sick was the blame. He basically said that his wife was responsible for his affair. It had never occurred to him that he could have responded in a thousand ways to her other than by being unfaithful. He could have responded redemptively instead of destructively.

But then I had to become aware of something else. I have blamed others for my own behavior at times too. I have felt that familiar “Well, I wouldn’t have done that if you hadn’t...” Then, as I was feeling humbled, I remembered something else from the story of Adam and Eve that helped me. When Adam sinned and God came to confront him about it, Adam responded as this man had. He said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12). In one sentence Adam blamed both God and Eve. He said he would not have been in trouble if God had not given him the woman or if the woman had not given him the fruit. After this we see that blame knows no gender. When God confronted Eve, she blamed the serpent.

BLAME GAME (i.e. Adam and Eve WHERE DO I USE THIS?)

Blame is part of the natural order of fallen humankind. We do not “own” our behavior; instead, we automatically shift responsibility. I have a friend who, when she makes a mistake, imitates a kid and says, “No one told me.” As if she would have done her duty if someone else had done his or her job. Blaming is human.

But death is human too, and the Bible says that to the extent that we continue in blame and continue to explain our sin away, we will die. Sin kills us, and blame gives life to sin. Blame keeps sin breathing and thriving in our lives.

Much blame goes on in therapy circles as well. People use their past—what happened or didn’t happen in their growing up years—to explain away behavior. **“I do that because my mother....”** As we will see in a moment, getting to the roots of the motivations of our behavior is very important. Many motivations or driving forces are not our fault. *But this does not mean that our behavior is not our responsibility.* If a man’s father had been mean to him growing up and that man now hates and resists all authority, the father’s meanness would explain part of his motivation. He would certainly have anger and hurt. *But having that background does not explain why he chose to deal destructively with that hurt.* The only thing that can explain that is a fallen nature.

A spiritual response would be to submit that hurt and anger to the healing process described above and work it out without returning “evil for evil” (Rom. 12:17, 21).

If that person were working it out in the right way, he would be getting healing for the hurt, getting resolution and forgiveness for the anger, and seeking reconciliation as much as possible with his father.



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So when dealing with our own hurt, lacks, and other motivators of behavior and those of the people we help, we have to remember that there is a difference between what happens to me and how I deal with it.

ADD TO THE DEFINITION OF SIN

SIN IS MORE THAN EXTERNAL DEEDS

THE ABOVE EXAMPLES BRING us to another point about sin. Sin is not just something we do; it is not just behavior. It encompasses the roots of behavior as well. Too often we think of sin only in external terms, not internal. Jesus warned, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:39–40).

The two examples above—the man hurt by his wife and my hypothetical example of someone hurt by a parent—show the importance of dealing with internal motivations. Unresolved anger and hurt can turn into bitterness or lust. Hatred for authority has probably ruined more careers than lack of training. And many other monsters lurk in the shadow of the human breast. Consider this list:

“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (Mark 7:20–23).

Many illnesses, failures, addictions, relationship difficulties, and destructive behaviors originate in these motivators. As Jesus said, the fruit comes from the tree (Matt. 12:33–35). Looking inside ourselves and resolving the issues we find there is the key to having the outside be good. If we are full of “crummy stuff,” then we will exhibit crummy behavior; the same holds for good stuff.

The truth is, though, that all of us have crummy stuff within us. It is part of the fallen nature, the “sickness” of sin, as Jesus put it (Mark 2:17). If we are ever going to get well, we have to have the safety to look inside, confess what we find there, grieve it, repent of it, and “put off [our] old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of [our] minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22–24). We have to be made new from the inside out, and that begins with facing how ugly things are inside.

We all need a place where we can say, “You won’t believe how sick I am! Let me tell you about this thought I had today.” We need to make this kind of confession normal. Then we can begin to clean up our insides.

FROM MORALLY NEUTRAL TO MORALLY BAD

NOT ONLY THE UGLY stuff can lead us to sin, but also the good stuff. We saw earlier how a boy’s hatred of and revenge against his father led to resisting all authority later. But what about the legitimate hurt in the soul of that young man? Forget the hatred for a moment, and look at the hurt. What if someone like that does not act out the anger, but also never deals with the hurt? What happens?



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Unresolved hurt is going to do just that—hurt. The person who is brokenhearted and not getting healed is in pain. Often this person will do something to ease the pain. He may feel strong “cravings” for sex or food or alcohol to make himself feel better. He may feel driven to work and achieve at the expense of his loved ones. He may lust after material things, or he may strive for power to cover up his feelings of being small. Whatever the “drug of choice,” unresolved hurt can tempt a person to sin. The hurt is not the sin. *The sin is the way that the person deals with the pain and emptiness.* It is a result of trying to meet a valid need in a sinful way.

This is an often overlooked aspect of temptation about which the Bible teaches us. We read in Luke 4 that Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted. For forty days he was deprived of all things human—no companionship, food, or meeting of basic needs. *And when he was in this state of deprivation, Satan tempted him.* Satan went to Jesus and offered him ways to feel “better” when he was at his weakest point.

This is exactly how temptation occurs. Satan tempts us at our weakest moments and in our weakest areas. We need something, or we are in pain. And the temptation answers both of those *for the moment*. If someone needs love or is lonely, the deceptive sin of illicit sex (the lust of the flesh) can momentarily masquerade as love. If someone needs validation, the lure of power and the “boastful pride of life” can trick him into feeling as if his existence is worthwhile because of that power. If someone is feeling “not good enough,” the lure of materialism and the “lust of the eyes” can momentarily dull that pain. In those three areas, John tells us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15–16).

The world has its solutions to need and pain, and we can all be tempted to resolve our hurts with those. The age-old story of the Bible is that we try to meet with our own idols the needs God is supposed to meet. We depend on man-made gods instead of the one true God. Again, it is a problem of *dependency*. *Sin is failing to depend on God and not saying yes to his grace in all its various forms.* Meeting our needs our way is idolatry and never works. Our model is Jesus, who in his deprived state did not meet his needs through sin, but by dependence on God. Hebrews tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—*yet was without sin*” (Heb. 4:15).

So, sometimes we fail to understand that deprivation can be the weak state that makes us susceptible to carrying out what the sin nature tells us to do. Christians can try to deal with someone’s sin by dealing just with the bad behavior and not dealing with the need or the pain driving it. We deal with the “bad,” but we do not add the “good.” *Overcoming sin is never just about doing away with badness; it is always also about adding goodness.* Jesus came to do away with death, but he also came to give us life. This is why the Bible tells us to “put off the old” and “put on the new” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, 14). It is part of what Jesus was saying when he said he did not come into the world to judge the world, but to save (heal and restore) it (John 12:47).

Therefore we need to respond to people’s sin by looking beyond the sin nature to what is motivating and driving the sin. The ultimate reality is that sin is driven and perpetuated by being cut off from “the life of God.” This formula motivates sinful behavior, according to the apostle Paul. He tells believers not to think like other people:



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They are darkened in their understanding and *separated from the life of God* because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Eph. 4:18–19).

When we are “separated from the life of God,” we don’t have a life at all, and we seek to fill that vacuum in other ways. The life of God includes, among other things, support, connection, honesty, talents, healing, confession, repentance, correction, and discipline. So if people are hurting, they need to find the healing God provides through himself and his people. When that happens, and the hurt is dealt with, the temptation subsides. The need is no longer there, and the ability to resist is greater. Strength and life have replaced neediness.

If people’s hearts and minds were full of the life God provides, there would be a lot less room for temptation. I was talking with a thirty-year-old single woman who said she couldn’t separate from a hurtful boyfriend. She was sleeping with him even though she knew that was destructive. She said she finally hit bottom and reached out to God, and then his Spirit and his people began to meet her needs. She was able to separate from the hurtful boyfriend, and the sexual temptation went away. God and his way of life met the need and healed the pain. She dealt with the sin, but to do that, she not only repented, but she added the “good” things she needed as well.

So, some of what is behind “badness” is not so bad after all. It is a well of good needs and hurt and pain that people try to “medicate” in bad ways. This excuses none of the sinful answers we seek, and neither does it excuse the partial gospels we give to people as answers to their sin. If we and the people we help are going to have victory, it has to come from all God has offered, and that includes taking care of the needs and the pains that are not connected to his life.

AVOIDING SIN

NONE OF THIS HAPPENS very easily, however. In the meantime, temptation is still around. It does not go away, and we are not to sit idly around and wait for it to subside while we are “getting well.” The Bible has a strategy about avoiding it. Let’s just remind ourselves of this strategy, as follows.

Pray

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13).

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:41).

Flee and Escape

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Cor. 10:13).



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Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6:18).

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

We don't have to say a lot about these strategies as they are self-evident. The problem is that a lot of people do not practice them. How common is it to see people taking sin seriously enough to pray consistently to avoid it? And fleeing is drastically underrated. The Bible puts a huge emphasis on getting away from the temptation. It talks about fleeing it so that we don't fall prey to it. It implies that it is a very dangerous place to find ourselves, and the best advice is to run from it. While we are to resist temptation when we do encounter it, it is better not to flirt with it at all. So if you have a weak area, or you are working with someone who has one, encourage fleeing.

People tempted by sex should flee situations in which they will be tempted, like being alone with someone who is dangerous for them. Alcoholics should flee the bar. People with weight problems should flee the ice cream store. Pornography addicts should stay off the internet in private places. These are just examples, but the principle is clear: Get away from tempting things *before* the temptation, not after. "Run" is the advice of the Bible. If you are not there, you can't be tempted. And when you find yourself in danger, don't just stand there and try to win. Instead, run from it—flee it—treat it as dangerous.

REMEMBERING WHAT SIN IS

FINALLY, WE ARE TEMPTED to forget what sin actually is. Remember the theology lesson in chapter 2? God created humankind to be connected to him in specific roles. We were to be *in relationship* and *under* his lordship, staying in our own roles as creatures, not the Creator.

Instead, we tried to usurp God's role and become our own god. And that is basically what sin is, to live independent of God, trying to be him. When there is a sin problem, we are likely to find problems in these areas:

- Independence—moving away from dependence on God as the source of life and trying to meet our own needs apart from God and his people
- Loss of relationship—isolation from God and others
- Boss—not submitting to God and obeying him
- Control—trying to control others or things we can't control, resulting in a loss of self-control and a failure to yield to God's sovereign control
- Judging—moving away from being real and experiencing life and others, and moving toward judging self and others
- Self-rule—trying to design life on one's own terms

Sin always appears as some form of independence from God and a taking over and usurping his roles. So don't get confused by the distraction that individual acts of sin can cause. There is a deeper sickness that only humbling oneself before God can cure. In that one move, relationship is restored, and we once again become who we were created to be, humans and not gods.



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ONE MORE NOTE

WE CAN'T DEAL WITH sin and temptation without confession and repentance (see chapter 9). They are assumed in everything this chapter talks about, for it would be impossible to overcome sin and temptation without them. We have seen in this chapter, though, a deeper meaning of repentance, and we have reserved two separate chapters to go more deeply into the processes of confession and also obedience, which is also part of repentance. So make sure you include those in your understanding of the above.

THE TWO GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

In thinking about sin, it is so easy to get “religious” instead of spiritual. But religion never did a lot for overcoming sin, as we have seen. Instead, the Bible calls us to true spirituality in our fight against sin. Ultimately this has to do with love. Becoming spiritual is to realize the two great commandments of loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36–40). In fact, Jesus said that all the commandments rest on these two. So what does that have to do with dealing with sin?

Well, as we have seen in this chapter and others, to love God means that we begin to obey him as well as do things his way. That goes a long way toward curing the problem of sin. But also, we need to mention that loving others is also part of the cure to many sins of the self. We often think that to love others cures the sins of how we treat other people. For example, if we are mean, like Joe, loving others means to stop being mean. That is quite obvious.

What is less obvious, however, are the ways that loving others cures our own problems as well. Take the example of Dirk from chapter 4. Remember him? He was trying to lose weight and was dealing with that sin by feeling guilty and making a deeper commitment. We talked about the deeper repentance needed to free him from that behavior and about all the other aspects of grace that would help him. But there is also another element that would lead to his ultimate healing: loving others.

Remember that Dirk had children. His weight was becoming a health danger, and so there was a real possibility that he might one day fall down with a heart attack. What I suggested to his accountability partner was to have Dirk begin to stop thinking about his guilt and commitment program and instead think about loving his wife and children. I suggested he think about what it would be like for small children to lose a father at a young age. I asked him to get Dirk to think about how daughters become promiscuous later, if they are looking for a father's love, or withdraw from relationships with men altogether. I asked him to have Dirk write a story about what his wife's and children's lives would be without him for the next thirty years and how it would be different if he disappeared. Where would their income come from? Where would their guidance come from? What would happen to their lives? Could he see them in their pain and struggle?

The reality was that his sin of overeating and not getting healthy would not only be a sin of the “self” that hurt him, but also a sin that could devastate the lives of others, all the way to the marriages of his children and their children. The fears of abandonment that they might carry forward as a result of his death could affect them for life. If Dirk could begin to think of things that way, then eating and not exercising become more than the sin of laziness and gluttony. They become the sin of a lack of love for many people.



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If Dirk could think of that, then love could constrain him just as our love for God constrains us also not to cause grief to him.

This is proven true by prison programs that get criminals eye to eye with the victims of their crimes. When the criminals see the pain they caused, they change. Love does its work where rules and commitment could not. That is why Jesus said that all the other laws and rules depend on love.

Therefore, in your fight against sin, no matter what it is, remember the law of love. No matter what someone is struggling with, most likely someone else is being hurt by the sin. Addictions hurt the family. Lust hurts the marriage partner. Irresponsibility hurts many people. And on and on. There are no victimless crimes, and in helping people with sin, the Bible affirms a strong message: Think of how your behavior is affecting other people, and that will motivate you to stop when rules won't. Remember, all the Law and the Prophets rest on the ultimate Law of Love.

GOOD OLD-FASHIONED RELIGION

AS YOU READ THIS chapter, it might seem a little strange to hear so much about sin from psychologists. After all, didn't psychology explain away sin with early childhood deprivation and other reasons for behavior, such as abuse, unresolved grief and pain, and genetics? Not from our perspective. We strongly believe that if any one of us is going to grow personally, we must deal with our own sin, as well as the sin of others. For those are the two ways that sin affects our lives: sin by us and sin done to us.

The formula for dealing with sin we commit has been around for a long time: confession, forgiveness, and repentance for the "bad stuff" in our own souls. Also, as we have seen, with repentance comes a turning to the life of God and a filling up the soul with the "good stuff" of his life.

Likewise, the formula for dealing with the sin done to us is similar: confession, granting forgiveness, healing the wounds through God's life, and reconciliation, if possible. Both kinds of sin require the grace of God, facing the truth about oneself or others, receiving the life we need, receiving and granting forgiveness, and reconciling as much as we can.

There are no new ways of dealing with sin, for God gave us the Way a long time ago. We think this is very encouraging as we look at the prospects of growth from a biblical perspective. There is no rocket science, only the gospel. But what a gospel it is! It is the medicine for the sickness we all possess, and that really is good news.

TIPS FOR GROWERS:

- See yourself as both powerless and responsible for your sin. Die to any model of thinking that says that willpower will suffice and that if sin is ruling over you, you can just "do better." That is deluding yourself.
- See the seriousness of your sin and its destructiveness. Find the ways by which you have denied how it is keeping you from experiencing all that you want to have in life and with God and other people.



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- Take responsibility for your sin—honestly and squarely.
- Realize that personal sin is not the cause of everything bad in your life, because you live in a fallen world. See also where other people’s sin is responsible for bad things in your life.
- Get rid of the law in your life and the cycle of trying harder, failing, going into condemnation, and then trying harder, in contrast to living by the Spirit.
- Enter into the whole process of spiritual growth as you fight against sin and not just willpower, or leaning on God or even other good things apart from all that he gives us in the life of the Spirit. Make sure that you fight sin not with a few of the weapons God has provided but rather than with the whole arsenal.
- Face rebellion directly. It is one of the worst sins there is, and it will destroy you.
- Have an overall orientation toward repentance.
- Give no excuses for your sin.
- Make sure you have a view of sin that is not just external but also internal, and that you have a place that encourages you to deal with internal sin with God and others.
- Face and deal with the needs and deprivations that may be driving some sins. Find where you are separated from the life of God.
- Ask yourself where you are not avoiding or fleeing temptation. God has promised a way out. Make sure that you begin fleeing instead of thinking you can withstand temptation.
- Take a deeper view of sin—as in chapter 2—whereby you see the effects of original sin and how it is operating in your life. See where you have disconnected from God as the source of life, God as the Boss, relationship as primary, and the roles humankind is supposed to play. Deal with these roots in your life.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Teach a deep view of sin. Teach it as something people are powerless over, yet deeply responsible for. Do not sugarcoat its seriousness. Crush the idea that people can “just stop” whatever is ruling over them, and get them to a point of powerlessness and poverty.
- Provide opportunities in grace to face the seriousness and destructiveness of sin. Teach about the power of denial. Encourage a culture where responsibility for sin is seen as the way to live.
- Avoid the trap of blaming all suffering on personal sin, and provide contexts for people to deal with the sin of others and with the pain of suffering that is not the result of anyone’s sin but of living in a fallen world.
- Teach, as the Bible does, against seeing the law as a method of change and instead as a way of realizing our need for grace. Be aware of the subtlety of teaching the standard line: confronting failure, giving forgiveness, and



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- then just trying harder without giving growth and plugging into the process of life in the Spirit. Avoid commitment and willpower as the only tools available, and avoid other truncated views of dealing with sin. Where there is failure in dealing with sin, see if something is missing from the process, such as support, dealing with deprivation, confrontation, structure, or any of the other elements of life in the Spirit.
- Confront rebellion directly and teach about its destructiveness. Provide a context for facing up to it.
 - Teach that sin is internal as well as external, and provide experiences, contexts, and activities in which people can confess and deal with the internal sins as well as the external ones. Make sure that grace rules.
 - Deal with deprivations that are driving sin, and provide for what is missing. Help people understand that sin might be driven by something they are lacking and that this part of them must be connected to the life of God.
 - Teach on the value of avoiding and fleeing temptation.
 - Monitor how the deeper view of sin presented in chapter 2 is operating in people's lives. Make those issues a constant focus to be overcome, and make sure those issues are being confronted: disconnection from God as the source of life, God as the Boss, relationship as primary, and the roles humanity is supposed to play. Deal with these roots in your life.¹

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Too often Christians have a much too shallow view of sin, both in our ability to deal with it as well as the depth at which it must be dealt with. We cannot stop sin; we have to be *saved* from sin. And that means a much deeper healing process than just “stop being bad.” In fact, as Jesus spoke of his mission, he said it just like that—as a mission of “healing”:

¹ Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). [*How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*](#). Zondervan.



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“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The word translated “save” in this statement is a word that actually means “healed” or “made whole.” Being “saved” from sin means being restored and healed at a much deeper level than we sometimes offer to people. People need more than just “Stop that!” They also need “and God and we will help you.” The biblical process of overcoming sin provides a deep healing. Anything else will fall short.

DEFINE REPENT

The difference between unable and unwilling

THE GAME OF BLAME

But then I had to become aware of something else. I have blamed others for my own behavior at times too. I have felt that familiar “Well, I wouldn’t have done that if you hadn’t....” Then, as I was feeling humbled, I remembered something else from the story of Adam and Eve that helped me. When Adam sinned and God came to confront him about it, Adam responded as this man had. He said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Gen. 3:12). In one sentence Adam blamed both God and Eve. He said he would not have been in trouble if God had not given him the woman or if the woman had not given him the fruit. After this we see that blame knows no gender. When God confronted Eve, she blamed the serpent.

Blame is part of the natural order of fallen humankind. We do not “own” our behavior; instead, we automatically shift responsibility. I have a friend who, when she makes a mistake, imitates a kid and says, “No one told me.” As if she would have done her duty if someone else had done his or her job. Blaming is human.

But death is human too, and the Bible says that to the extent that we continue in blame and continue to explain our sin away, we will die. Sin kills us, and blame gives life to sin. Blame keeps sin breathing and thriving in our lives.

Much blame goes on in therapy circles as well. People use their past—what happened or didn’t happen in their growing up years—to explain away behavior. “I do that because my mother....” As we will see in a moment, getting to the roots of the motivations of our behavior is very important. Many motivations or driving forces are not our fault. *But this does not mean that our behavior is not our responsibility.* If a man’s father had been mean to him growing up and that man now hates and resists



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all authority, the father's meanness would explain part of his motivation. He would certainly have anger and hurt. *But having that background does not explain why he chose to deal destructively with that hurt.* The only thing that can explain that is a fallen nature.

A spiritual response would be to submit that hurt and anger to the healing process described above and work it out without returning "evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17, 21).

If that person were working it out in the right way, he would be getting healing for the hurt, getting resolution and forgiveness for the anger, and seeking reconciliation as much as possible with his father.

So when dealing with our own hurt, lacks, and other motivators of behavior and those of the people we help, we have to remember that there is a difference between what happens to me and how I deal with it.

SIN IS MORE THAN EXTERNAL DEEDS

THE ABOVE EXAMPLES BRING us to another point about sin

. Sin is not just something we do; it is not just behavior. It encompasses the roots of behavior as well.

Too often we think of sin only in external terms, not internal. Jesus warned, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?" (Luke 11:39–40).

The two examples above—the man hurt by his wife and my hypothetical example of someone hurt by a parent—show the importance of dealing with internal motivations. Unresolved anger and hurt can turn into bitterness or lust. Hatred for authority has probably ruined more careers than lack of training. And many other monsters lurk in the shadow of the human breast. Consider this list:



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“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (Mark 7:20–23).

Many illnesses, failures, addictions, relationship difficulties, and destructive behaviors originate in these motivators. As Jesus said, the fruit comes from the tree (Matt. 12:33–35). Looking inside ourselves and resolving the issues we find there is the key to having the outside be good. If we are full of “crummy stuff,” then we will exhibit crummy behavior; the same holds for good stuff.

The truth is, though, that all of us have crummy stuff within us. It is part of the fallen nature, the “sickness” of sin, as Jesus put it (Mark 2:17). If we are ever going to get well, we have to have the safety to look inside, confess what we find there, grieve it, repent of it, and “put off [our] old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of [our] minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22–24). We have to be made new from the inside out, and that begins with facing how ugly things are inside.

We all need a place where we can say, “You won’t believe how sick I am! Let me tell you about this thought I had today.” We need to make this kind of confession normal. Then we can begin to clean up our insides.

FROM MORALLY NEUTRAL TO MORALLY BAD

NOT ONLY THE UGLY stuff can lead us to sin, but also the good stuff. We saw earlier how a boy’s hatred of and revenge against his father led to resisting all authority later. But what about the legitimate hurt in the soul of that young man? Forget the hatred for a moment, and look at the hurt. What if someone like that does not act out the anger, but also never deals with the hurt? What happens?

Unresolved hurt is going to do just that—hurt.



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The person who is brokenhearted and not getting healed is in pain. Often this person will do something to ease the pain. He may feel strong “cravings” for sex or food or alcohol to make himself feel better. He may feel driven to work and achieve at the expense of his loved ones. He may lust after material things, or he may strive for power to cover up his feelings of being small. Whatever the “drug of choice,” unresolved hurt can tempt a person to sin. The hurt is not the sin.

The sin is the way that the person deals with the pain and emptiness. It is a result of trying to meet a valid need in a sinful way.

This is an often overlooked aspect of temptation about which the Bible teaches us. We read in Luke 4 that Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted. For forty days he was deprived of all things human—no companionship, food, or meeting of basic needs. *And when he was in this state of deprivation, Satan tempted him.* Satan went to Jesus and offered him ways to feel “better” when he was at his weakest point.

This is exactly how temptation occurs. Satan tempts us at our weakest moments and in our weakest areas. We need something, or we are in pain. And the temptation answers both of those *for the moment*. If someone needs love or is lonely, the deceptive sin of illicit sex (the lust of the flesh) can momentarily masquerade as love. If someone needs validation, the lure of power and the “boastful pride of life” can trick him into feeling as if his existence is worthwhile because of that power. If someone is feeling “not good enough,” the lure of materialism and the “lust of the eyes” can momentarily dull that pain. In those three areas, John tells us, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:15–16).

The world has its solutions to need and pain, and we can all be tempted to resolve our hurts with those. The age-old story of the Bible is that we try to meet with our own idols the needs God is supposed to meet. We depend on man-made gods instead of the one true God.



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Again, it is a problem of *dependency*. *Sin is failing to depend on God and not saying yes to his grace in all its various forms.* Meeting our needs our way is idolatry and never works.

Our model is Jesus, who in his deprived state did not meet his needs through sin, but by dependence on God. Hebrews tells us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—*yet was without sin*” (Heb. 4:15).

So, sometimes we fail to understand that deprivation can be the weak state that makes us susceptible to carrying out what the sin nature tells us to do. Christians can try to deal with someone’s sin by dealing just with the bad behavior and not dealing with the need or the pain driving it. We deal with the “bad,” but we do not add the “good.” *Overcoming sin is never just about doing away with badness; it is always also about adding goodness.* Jesus came to do away with death, but he also came to give us life. This is why the Bible tells us to “put off the old” and “put on the new” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, 14). It is part of what Jesus was saying when he said he did not come into the world to judge the world, but to save (heal and restore) it (John 12:47).

Therefore we need to respond to people’s sin by looking beyond the sin nature to what is motivating and driving the sin. The ultimate reality is that sin is driven and perpetuated by being cut off from “the life of God.” This formula motivates sinful behavior, according to the apostle Paul. He tells believers not to think like other people:

They are darkened in their understanding and *separated from the life of God* because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Eph. 4:18–19).

When we are “separated from the life of God,” we don’t have a life at all, and we seek to fill that vacuum in other ways. The life of God includes, among other things, support, connection, honesty, talents, healing, confession, repentance, correction, and discipline. So if people are hurting, they need to find the healing God provides through himself and his people. When that happens, and the hurt is dealt with, the temptation subsides. The need is no longer there, and the ability to resist is greater. Strength and life have replaced neediness.



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If people's hearts and minds were full of the life God provides, there would be a lot less room for temptation. I was talking with a thirty-year-old single woman who said she couldn't separate from a hurtful boyfriend. She was sleeping with him even though she knew that was destructive. She said she finally hit bottom and reached out to God, and then his Spirit and his people began to meet her needs. She was able to separate from the hurtful boyfriend, and the sexual temptation went away. God and his way of life met the need and healed the pain. She dealt with the sin, but to do that, she not only repented, but she added the "good" things she needed as well.

So, some of what is behind "badness" is not so bad after all. It is a well of good needs and hurt and pain that people try to "medicate" in bad ways. This excuses none of the sinful answers we seek, and neither does it excuse the partial gospels we give to people as answers to their sin. If we and the people we help are going to have victory, it has to come from all God has offered, and that includes taking care of the needs and the pains that are not connected to his life.

AVOIDING SIN

NONE OF THIS HAPPENS very easily, however. In the meantime, temptation is still around. It does not go away, and we are not to sit idly around and wait for it to subside while we are "getting well." The Bible has a strategy about avoiding it. Let's just remind ourselves of this strategy, as follows.

Pray

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13).

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

Flee and Escape

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6:18).



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Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

We don't have to say a lot about these strategies as they are self-evident. The problem is that a lot of people do not practice them. How common is it to see people taking sin seriously enough to pray consistently to avoid it? And fleeing is drastically underrated. The Bible puts a huge emphasis on getting away from the temptation. It talks about fleeing it so that we don't fall prey to it. It implies that it is a very dangerous place to find ourselves, and the best advice is to run from it. While we are to resist temptation when we do encounter it, it is better not to flirt with it at all. So if you have a weak area, or you are working with someone who has one, encourage fleeing.

People tempted by sex should flee situations in which they will be tempted, like being alone with someone who is dangerous for them. Alcoholics should flee the bar. People with weight problems should flee the ice cream store. Pornography addicts should stay off the internet in private places. These are just examples, but the principle is clear: Get away from tempting things *before* the temptation, not after. "Run" is the advice of the Bible. If you are not there, you can't be tempted. And when you find yourself in danger, don't just stand there and try to win. Instead, run from it—flee it—treat it as dangerous.

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Instead, we tried to usurp God's role and become our own god. And that is basically what sin is, to live independent of God, trying to be him. When there is a sin problem, we are likely to find problems in these areas:

- Independence—moving away from dependence on God as the source of life and trying to meet our own needs apart from God and his people
- Loss of relationship—isolation from God and others



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- Boss—not submitting to God and obeying him
- Control—trying to control others or things we can't control, resulting in a loss of self-control and a failure to yield to God's sovereign control
- Judging—moving away from being real and experiencing life and others, and moving toward judging self and others
- Self-rule—trying to design life on one's own terms

Sin always appears as some form of independence from God and a taking over and usurping his roles. So don't get confused by the distraction that individual acts of sin can cause. There is a deeper sickness that only humbling oneself before God can cure. In that one move, relationship is restored, and we once again become who we were created to be, humans and not gods.

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Well, as we have seen in this chapter and others, to love God means that we begin to obey him as well as do things his way. That goes a long way toward curing the problem of sin. But also, we need to mention that loving others is also part of the cure to many sins of the self. We often think that to love others cures the sins of how we treat other people. For example, if we are mean, like Joe, loving others means to stop being mean. That is quite obvious.



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What is less obvious, however, are the ways that loving others cures our own problems as well. Take the example of Dirk from chapter 4. Remember him? He was trying to lose weight and was dealing with that sin by feeling guilty and making a deeper commitment. We talked about the deeper repentance needed to free him from that behavior and about all the other aspects of grace that would help him. But there is also another element that would lead to his ultimate healing: loving others.

Remember that Dirk had children. His weight was becoming a health danger, and so there was a real possibility that he might one day fall down with a heart attack. What I suggested to his accountability partner was to have Dirk begin to stop thinking about his guilt and commitment program and instead think about loving his wife and children. I suggested he think about what it would be like for small children to lose a father at a young age. I asked him to get Dirk to think about how daughters become promiscuous later, if they are looking for a father's love, or withdraw from relationships with men altogether. I asked him to have Dirk write a story about what his wife's and children's lives would be without him for the next thirty years and how it would be different if he disappeared. Where would their income come from? Where would their guidance come from? What would happen to their lives? Could he see them in their pain and struggle?

The reality was that his sin of overeating and not getting healthy would not only be a sin of the "self" that hurt him, but also a sin that could devastate the lives of others, all the way to the marriages of his children and their children. The fears of abandonment that they might carry forward as a result of his death could affect them for life. If Dirk could begin to think of things that way, then eating and not exercising become more than the sin of laziness and gluttony. They become the sin of a lack of love for many people.

If Dirk could think of that, then love could constrain him just as our love for God constrains us also not to cause grief to him.

This is proven true by prison programs that get criminals eye to eye with the victims of their crimes. When the criminals see the pain they caused, they change. Love does its work where rules and commitment could not. That is why Jesus said that all the other laws and rules depend on love.

Therefore, in your fight against sin, no matter what it is, remember the law of love. No matter what someone is struggling with, most likely someone else is being hurt by the sin. Addictions hurt the family. Lust hurts the marriage partner. Irresponsibility hurts many people. And on and on. There are no victimless crimes, and in helping people with sin, the Bible affirms a strong message: Think of how your behavior is



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affecting other people, and that will motivate you to stop when rules won't. Remember, all the Law and the Prophets rest on the ultimate Law of Love.

GOOD OLD-FASHIONED RELIGION

AS YOU READ THIS chapter, it might seem a little strange to hear so much about sin from psychologists. After all, didn't psychology explain away sin with early childhood deprivation and other reasons for behavior, such as abuse, unresolved grief and pain, and genetics? Not from our perspective. We strongly believe that if any one of us is going to grow personally, we must deal with our own sin, as well as the sin of others. For those are the two ways that sin affects our lives: sin by us and sin done to us.

The formula for dealing with sin we commit has been around for a long time: confession, forgiveness, and repentance for the "bad stuff" in our own souls. Also, as we have seen, with repentance comes a turning to the life of God and a filling up the soul with the "good stuff" of his life.

Likewise, the formula for dealing with the sin done to us is similar: confession, granting forgiveness, healing the wounds through God's life, and reconciliation, if possible. Both kinds of sin require the grace of God, facing the truth about oneself or others, receiving the life we need, receiving and granting forgiveness, and reconciling as much as we can.

There are no new ways of dealing with sin, for God gave us the Way a long time ago. We think this is very encouraging as we look at the prospects of growth from a biblical perspective. There is no rocket science, only the gospel. But what a gospel it is! It is the medicine for the sickness we all possess, and that really is good news.

TIPS FOR GROWERS:

- See yourself as both powerless and responsible for your sin. Die to any model of thinking that says that willpower will suffice and that if sin is ruling over you, you can just "do better." That is deluding yourself.
- See the seriousness of your sin and its destructiveness. Find the ways by which you have denied how it is keeping you from experiencing all that you want to have in life and with God and other people.
- Take responsibility for your sin—honestly and squarely.
- Realize that personal sin is not the cause of everything bad in your life, because you live in a fallen world. See also where other people's sin is responsible for bad things in your life.



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- Get rid of the law in your life and the cycle of trying harder, failing, going into condemnation, and then trying harder, in contrast to living by the Spirit.
- Enter into the whole process of spiritual growth as you fight against sin and not just willpower, or leaning on God or even other good things apart from all that he gives us in the life of the Spirit. Make sure that you fight sin not with a few of the weapons God has provided but rather than with the whole arsenal.
- Face rebellion directly. It is one of the worst sins there is, and it will destroy you.
- Have an overall orientation toward repentance.
- Give no excuses for your sin.
- Make sure you have a view of sin that is not just external but also internal, and that you have a place that encourages you to deal with internal sin with God and others.
- Face and deal with the needs and deprivations that may be driving some sins. Find where you are separated from the life of God.
- Ask yourself where you are not avoiding or fleeing temptation. God has promised a way out. Make sure that you begin fleeing instead of thinking you can withstand temptation.
- Take a deeper view of sin—as in chapter 2—whereby you see the effects of original sin and how it is operating in your life. See where you have disconnected from God as the source of life, God as the Boss, relationship as primary, and the roles humankind is supposed to play. Deal with these roots in your life.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS:

- Teach a deep view of sin. Teach it as something people are powerless over, yet deeply responsible for. Do not sugarcoat its seriousness. Crush the idea that people can “just stop” whatever is ruling over them, and get them to a point of powerlessness and poverty.
- Provide opportunities in grace to face the seriousness and destructiveness of sin. Teach about the power of denial. Encourage a culture where responsibility for sin is seen as the way to live.
- Avoid the trap of blaming all suffering on personal sin, and provide contexts for people to deal with the sin of others and with the pain of suffering that is not the result of anyone’s sin but of living in a fallen world.
- Teach, as the Bible does, against seeing the law as a method of change and instead as a way of realizing our need for grace. Be aware of the subtlety of teaching the standard line: confronting failure, giving forgiveness, and then just trying harder without giving growth and plugging into the process of life in the Spirit. Avoid commitment and willpower as the only tools available, and avoid other truncated views of dealing with sin. Where there is failure in dealing with sin, see if something is missing from the process, such as support, dealing with deprivation, confrontation, structure, or any of the other elements of life in the Spirit.



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- Confront rebellion directly and teach about its destructiveness. Provide a context for facing up to it.
- Teach that sin is internal as well as external, and provide experiences, contexts, and activities in which people can confess and deal with the internal sins as well as the external ones. Make sure that grace rules.
- Deal with deprivations that are driving sin, and provide for what is missing. Help people understand that sin might be driven by something they are lacking and that this part of them must be connected to the life of God.
- Teach on the value of avoiding and fleeing temptation.
- Monitor how the deeper view of sin presented in chapter 2 is operating in people's lives. Make those issues a constant focus to be overcome, and make sure those issues are being confronted: disconnection from God as the source of life, God as the Boss, relationship as primary, and the roles humanity is supposed to play. Deal with these roots in your life.

What is Hamartiology?

Hamartiology is the study of sin. Hamartiology deals with how sin originated, how it affects humanity, and what it will result in after death. To sin essentially means to “miss the mark.” We all miss God’s mark of righteousness (Romans 3:23). Hamartiology, then, explains why we miss the mark, how we miss the mark, and the consequences of missing the mark. These are some important questions in Hamartiology:

What is the definition of sin? Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4) and rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7; Joshua 1:18).

Did we all inherit sin from Adam and Eve? Romans 5:12 speaks to this, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.”

Are all sins equal to God? There are degrees to sin—some sins are worse than others. At the same time, in regards to both eternal consequences and salvation, all sins are the same. Each and every sin will lead to eternal condemnation (Romans 6:23).

How can I know if something is a sin? There are things that the Bible specifically mentions and declares to be sin. The more difficult issue is in determining what is sinful in areas that the Bible does not directly address.

It might seem that studying a depressing subject like sin would be counter-productive for the Christian. After all, aren't we saved from sin by the blood of Christ? Yes! But before we can understand salvation, we must first understand why we need salvation. That is where Hamartiology comes in. It explains that we are all sinners—by inheritance, by imputation, and by our own personal choice. It shows us why God must condemn us for our sins. Hamartiology points to the solution for sin—the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When we truly come to grips with our sinful natures, we begin to fathom the depth and breadth of the nature of our great God who, on the one hand, condemns sinners to hell in righteous judgment, then,



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on the other hand, satisfies His own requirement for perfection. Only when we understand the depth of sin can we understand the height of God’s love for sinners.

A key Scripture on Hamartiology is Romans 3:23–24, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

What is original sin?

The term “original sin” deals with Adam’s sin of disobedience in eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and its effects upon the rest of the human race. Original sin can be defined as “that sin and its guilt that we all possess in God’s eyes as a direct result of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden.” The doctrine of original sin focuses particularly on its effects on our nature and our standing before God, even before we are old enough to commit conscious sin. There are three main views that deal with that effect.

Pelagianism: This view says that Adam’s sin had no effect upon the souls of his descendants other than his sinful example influencing those who followed after him to also sin. According to this view, man has the ability to stop sinning if he simply chooses to. This teaching runs contrary to a number of passages that indicate man is hopelessly enslaved by his sins (apart from God’s intervention) and that his good works are “dead” or worthless in meriting God’s favor (Ephesians 2:1–2; Matthew 15:18–19; Romans 7:23; Hebrews 6:1; 9:14).

Arminianism: Arminians believe Adam’s sin has resulted in the rest of mankind inheriting a propensity to sin, commonly referred to as having a “sin nature.” This sin nature causes us to sin in the same way that a cat’s nature causes it to meow—it comes naturally. According to this view, man cannot stop sinning on his own; that is why God gives a universal grace to all to enable us to stop. In Arminianism, this grace is called prevenient grace. According to this view, we are not held accountable for Adam’s sin, just our own. This teaching runs contrary to the fact that all bear the punishment for sin, even though all may not have sinned in a manner similar to Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12–18). Nor is the teaching of prevenient grace explicitly found in Scripture.

Calvinism: The Calvinistic doctrine states that Adam’s sin has resulted not only in our having a sin nature, but also in our incurring guilt before God for which we deserve punishment. Being conceived with original sin upon us (Psalm 51:5) results in our inheriting a sin nature so wicked that Jeremiah 17:9 describes the human heart as “deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” Not only was Adam found guilty because he sinned, but his guilt and his punishment (death) belongs to us as well (Romans 5:12, 19). There are two views as to why Adam’s guilt should be seen by God as also belonging to us. The first view states that the human race was within Adam in seed form; thus when Adam sinned, we sinned in him. This is similar to the biblical teaching that Levi (a descendent of Abraham) paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:4–9), even though Levi was not born until hundreds of years later. The other main view is that Adam served as our representative and so, when he sinned, we were found guilty as well.

The Calvinistic view sees one as unable to overcome his sin apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, a power possessed only when one turns in reliance upon Christ and His atoning sacrifice for sin upon the cross. The Calvinistic view of original sin is most consistent with biblical teaching. However, how can God hold us accountable for a sin we did not personally commit? There is a plausible interpretation that



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we become responsible for original sin when we choose to accept, and act according to, our sinful nature. There comes a point in our lives when we become aware of our own sinfulness. At that point we should reject the sinful nature and repent of it. Instead, we all “approve” that sinful nature, in effect saying that it is good. In approving our sinfulness, we are expressing agreement with the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We are therefore guilty of that sin without actually having committed it.²

What is the definition of sin?

Sin is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4) and rebellion against God (Deuteronomy 9:7; Joshua 1:18). Sin had its beginning with Lucifer, probably the most beautiful and powerful of the angels. Not content with his position, he desired to be higher than God, and that was his downfall, the beginning of sin (Isaiah 14:12–15). Renamed Satan, he brought sin to the human race in the Garden of Eden, where he tempted Adam and Eve with the same enticement, “you shall be like God.” Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God and against His command. Since that time, sin has been passed down through all the generations of mankind and we, Adam’s descendants, have inherited sin from him. Romans 5:12 tells us that through Adam sin entered the world, and so death was passed on to all men because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Through Adam, the inherent inclination to sin entered the human race, and human beings became sinners by nature. When Adam sinned, his inner nature was transformed by his sin of rebellion, bringing to him spiritual death and depravity which would be passed on to all who came after him. We are sinners not because we sin; rather, we sin because we are sinners. This passed-on depravity is known as inherited sin. Just as we inherit physical characteristics from our parents, we inherit our sinful natures from Adam. King David lamented this condition of fallen human nature in Psalm 51:5: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Another type of sin is known as imputed sin. Used in both financial and legal settings, the Greek word translated “imputed” means “to take something that belongs to someone and credit it to another’s account.” Before the Law of Moses was given, sin was not imputed to man, although men were still sinners because of inherited sin. After the Law was given, sins committed in violation of the Law were imputed (accounted) to them (Romans 5:13). Even before transgressions of the law were imputed to men, the ultimate penalty for sin (death) continued to reign (Romans 5:14). All humans, from Adam to Moses, were subject to death, not because of their sinful acts against the Mosaic Law (which they did not have), but because of their own inherited sinful nature. After Moses, humans were subject to death both because of inherited sin from Adam and imputed sin from violating the laws of God.

God used the principle of imputation to benefit mankind when He imputed the sin of believers to the account of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for that sin—death—on the cross. Imputing our sin to Jesus, God treated Him as if He were a sinner, though He was not, and had Him die for the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2). It is important to understand that sin was imputed to Him, but He did not inherit it from Adam. He bore the penalty for sin, but He never became a sinner. His pure and perfect nature was

² Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*](#). Logos Bible Software.



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untouched by sin. He was treated as though He were guilty of all the sins ever committed by the human race, even though He committed none. In exchange, God imputed the righteousness of Christ to believers and credited our accounts with His righteousness, just as He had credited our sins to Christ's account (2 Corinthians 5:21).

A third type of sin is personal sin, that which is committed every day by every human being. Because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, we commit individual, personal sins, everything from seemingly innocent untruths to murder. Those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ must pay the penalty for these personal sins, as well as inherited and imputed sin. However, believers have been freed from the eternal penalty of sin—hell and spiritual death—but now we also have the power to resist sinning. Now we can choose whether or not to commit personal sins because we have the power to resist sin through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, sanctifying and convicting us of our sins when we do commit them (Romans 8:9–11). Once we confess our personal sins to God and ask forgiveness for them, we are restored to perfect fellowship and communion with Him. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We are all three times condemned due to inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin. The only just penalty for this sin is death (Romans 6:23), not just physical death but eternal death (Revelation 20:11–15). Thankfully, inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin have all been crucified on the cross of Jesus, and now by faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior “we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

What is the sin unto death?

First John 5:16 is one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament to interpret. “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that.” Of all the interpretations out there, none seems to answer all the questions concerning this verse. The best interpretation may be found by comparing this verse to what happened to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–10 (see also 1 Corinthians 11:30). The “sin unto death” is deliberate, willful, continuous, unrepentant sin. God, in His grace, allows His children to sin without immediately punishing them. However, there comes a point when God will no longer allow a believer to continue in unrepentant sin. When this point is reached, God sometimes decides to punish a Christian, even to the point of taking his or her life.

That is what He did in Acts 5:1–10 and 1 Corinthians 11:28–32. This is perhaps what Paul described to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5. We are to pray for Christians who are sinning. However, there may come a time when God will no longer hear prayers for a sinning believer for whom He has determined that judgment is due. It is difficult to realize there are times when it is just too late to pray for a person. God is good and just, and we will just have to let Him decide when it is too late.

What is the unpardonable sin / unforgivable sin?



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The case of the “unpardonable sin/unforgivable sin” or “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” is mentioned in Mark 3:22–30 and Matthew 12:22–32. The term “blasphemy” may be generally defined as “defiant irreverence.” We would apply the term to such sins as cursing God or willfully degrading things relating to Him. It is also attributing some evil to God, or denying Him some good that we should attribute to Him. This case of blasphemy, however, is a specific one called “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” in Matthew 12:31. In this passage, the Pharisees, having witnessed irrefutable proof that Jesus was working miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit, claimed instead that He was possessed by the demon Beelzebub (Matthew 12:24). In Mark 3:30, Jesus is very specific about what exactly they did to commit “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.”

This blasphemy then has to do with accusing Jesus Christ (in person, on earth) of being demon-possessed. There are other ways to blaspheme the Holy Spirit (such as lying to Him, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–10), but the accusation against Jesus was the blasphemy that was unpardonable. This specific unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be duplicated today.

The only unpardonable sin today is that of continued unbelief. There is no pardon for a person who dies in unbelief. John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The only condition in which someone would have no forgiveness is if he/she is not among the “whoever” that believes in Him. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). To reject the only means of salvation is to condemn oneself to an eternity in hell because to reject the only pardon is, obviously, unpardonable.

Many people fear they have committed some sin that God cannot or will not forgive, and they feel there is no hope for them, no matter what they do. Satan would like nothing better than to keep us laboring under this misconception. The truth is that if a person has this fear, he/she needs only to come before God, confess that sin, repent of it, and accept God’s promise of forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This verse assures us that God is ready to forgive any sin—no matter how heinous—if we come to Him in repentance. If you are suffering under a load of guilt today, God is waiting with His arms open in love and compassion for you to come to Him. He will never disappoint or fail to pardon those who do.³

³ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*](#). Logos Bible Software.