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ONE

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# WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?



HIS DIVINE POWER HAS GRANTED TO US EVERYTHING  
PERTAINING TO LIFE AND GODLINESS, THROUGH THE  
TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM WHO CALLED US BY HIS  
OWN GLORY AND EXCELLENCE.

*2 Peter 1:3*

NOT LONG AGO, Julie approached me (Laura) at a conference where I was speaking to ask my advice about her depression.

“Can you tell me about how your problem began?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” she responded. “One day I just began to feel sad for no apparent reason. Over time I lost my appetite and had difficulty falling and staying asleep at night. Now I often cry for no reason. My doctor tells me that I have depression, and that I need to take medicine to cure it. Do you think that medicine would help me?”

I asked Julie about anything that might have happened shortly before the onset of her symptoms, and she told me she couldn’t think of any significant changes that had occurred in her life. Then I asked her some general questions about her marriage, family, work, and faith.

Julie told me that she felt trapped in a loveless marriage. In addition, her ten-year-old son was a behavior problem in school. And her teenage daughter had been caught abusing illegal drugs. Julie was also worried she might be laid off from her job soon.

“As for my faith, I’m really struggling with why God would allow all these things to happen to me,” Julie concluded.

“Wow, you have a lot of serious problems!” I exclaimed. “I think many people would be tempted to lose heart and question their faith in God if they had even a few of your problems.”

“No, that’s not it,” Julie objected. “I mean, I do have problems, but I think I have a disease, and I’d be depressed even if I didn’t have these problems. My doctor says that when your depression comes on you out of the blue like this, it is a disease, not just problems. He said that when this happens, it means I need medicine.”

### WHERE ARE THESE FEELINGS COMING FROM?

Many women experiencing painful emotions similar to Julie’s are confused about what is happening to them and wonder what, if anything, they can do about them. Some women, after trying for years to find the right answers, have become convinced their pain is a disease and that only medicine can make them feel normal again. Well-meaning doctors may even have told them that they cannot possibly hope to improve without the help of medicine.

Other women notice that there seems to be a connection between their pain and the difficulties they are facing, and feel uneasy about taking a drug to solve what may really be an emotional problem. Yet their loved ones urge them to take medicine, reasoning that it’s important for them to start feeling better as soon as possible. This does seem to make sense, doesn’t it? Why wouldn’t we want to take a pill if it can make our emotional pain go away?

In this chapter, we’ll learn what the Bible teaches about our physical and spiritual makeup. We’ll also discuss what the Bible teaches about the origin of our emotions, and how our responses to them can make our problems better or worse.

Along the way you'll be introduced to a biblical perspective of our nature as human beings created by God. This information may be new to you, and perhaps you never considered learning about God's design of the body in order to understand your emotions. But as you read on, you'll see there is a definite connection. And what you learn will give you a foundation upon which you can make better-informed decisions about your emotional pain.

## INTRODUCING THE "REAL YOU"

### *The Biblical Perspective*

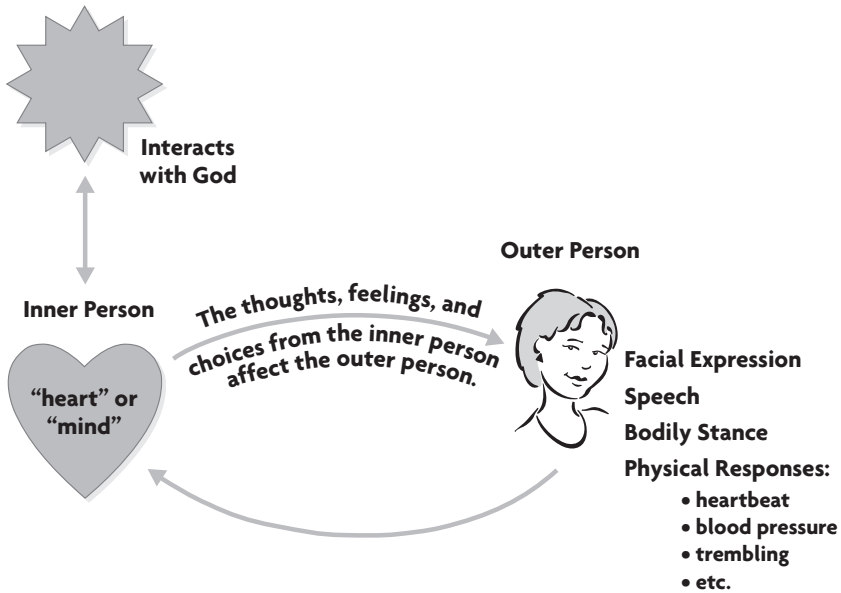
Many passages in the Bible teach that we are duplex beings.<sup>1</sup> That is, we consist of two distinct aspects: a body or outer person, and a spirit or inner person. Your outer person is what everyone around you sees and is most aware of—it's the "you" everyone recognizes. On the other hand, your inner person, what the Bible calls the "heart," "soul," "mind," or "spirit," is the hidden side of you that thinks, feels, and makes choices.<sup>2</sup> This inner person is the real you that God sees and interacts with (1 Samuel 16:7; Hebrews 4:13). Your inner person is the source of the activity that can be measured in the brain, which is part of your outer person, or your physical body.

When a woman is feeling sad inside, her body reveals that sadness outwardly in her face, the tone of her voice, and her actions. We can often guess what she is thinking, feeling, or choosing on the inside because it affects what is happening on the outside. *Our speech and behavior are the body's outward expression of our inner life.* Jesus taught this truth when He said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good . . . for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Luke 6:45).

It's obvious that our bodies can respond to the thoughts, feelings, and choices from our inner person with noticeable physical changes. For instance, our blood pressure rises and our cheeks flush when we become angry. This works the other way too. Our physical bodies can also influence our thoughts, feelings, and choices. For instance, an untreated rapid heartbeat can cause us to feel anxious, even if there is

nothing to be worried about. Physical pain or illness can also produce a variety of painful or negative emotional responses.<sup>3</sup>

## A BIBLICAL VIEW OF PEOPLE



### *The Materialist Perspective*

The Bible teaches you are made up of two distinct yet interacting parts: an outer person and an inner person. In contrast to this biblical teaching, many people today believe that we consist solely of a body. This view is called *materialism*, which is the belief that the material world (what we can sense and measure) is all that there is. A true materialist does not believe in God, the afterlife, or the inner person. A materialist would deny that the faith you hold dear is anything more than the evolved firing off of certain nerve synapses in your brain.

It seems clear we can't hold to a materialistic view and a Christian view at the same time, doesn't it? Even so, many of us who

believe in the Bible are prone to think as materialists do when it comes to our health. Although we believe in an unseen and powerful inner or spiritual realm that exists beyond the physical world, we can sometimes lose sight of that inner realm when we think about how our bodies work.

We're sure you'll agree it is very important for your faith to serve as the foundation upon which you make decisions about your health. In order for that to happen, you need to understand how the materialistic view of the body contradicts the biblical teachings about the nature of humanity.

### *Our Beliefs Shape Our Conclusions*

A materialist believes that the physical brain is the part of us that thinks, feels, and makes choices. He believes that our thoughts, feelings, and choices depend *solely* upon the balance of our brain's chemicals. A materialist would say that what we experience as consciousness is simply part of the chemical activity that takes place in the brain.

The materialist believes that our thoughts come solely from our brain's activity because scientific studies have shown a connection between our brain's functions and our thoughts, feelings, and choices. The data that the materialist is looking at is valid. The brain does change when a person is thinking, feeling, or choosing, and these changes can be measured. But the conclusions the materialist draws from this data are false because he bases these conclusions on his belief that the physical world is all there is.

Here's an example of how our beliefs shape our conclusions: If I believe that the world is flat, when I look out at the ocean (which I love to do every summer), I'll think that the horizon I see must be the edge of the world. If I believe that what I can see with my eyes is the only truth (and the earth sure *seems* flat!), I may even laugh at those who try to tell me that the earth is round.

We all interpret what we see based upon what we believe. If you believe that you consist of a body *and* an inner person, then you'll interpret problems with your emotions differently than you would if you believed that you were solely a physical body.

For the Christian, then, the interpretation of scientific information has to begin with an unchanging assumption: *God's Word is true*. Our interpretation of everything we see and hear must begin with this belief. When we look at scientific facts through the lens of Scripture, we will arrive at very different conclusions than the ones materialists reach when they look at the same facts through the lens of their assumptions.

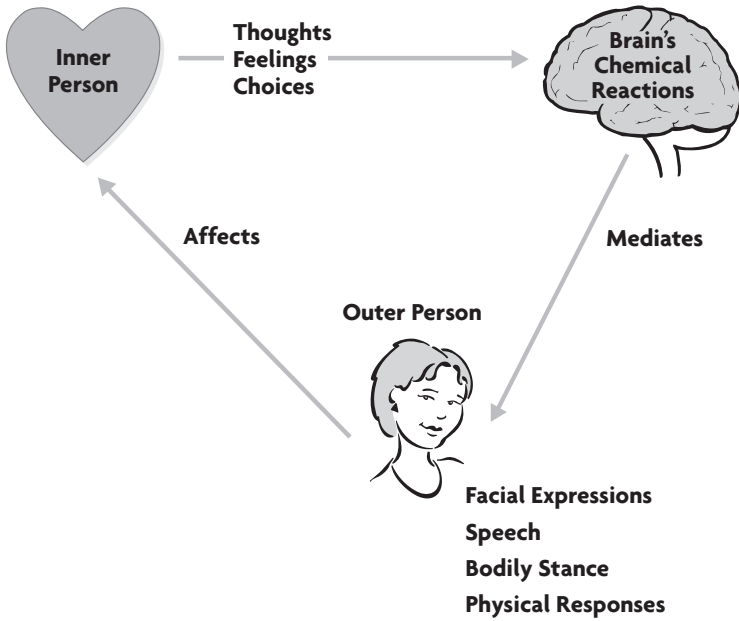
That brings us to a key point for this book: The Bible clearly teaches that our invisible inner person (not our brain) is the source of our thoughts and intentions (Hebrews 4:12), our emotions (Romans 9:2), and our choices (Matthew 15:18). When the Bible talks about our thoughts, sometimes it calls the inner person the *mind* (Romans 8:7; 12:2). Other times Scripture talks about our thoughts originating in our *heart* (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; Hebrews 4:12). The exact word used to refer to the inner person is not so important. But whatever we call it, we want to remember that our thoughts, choices, and feelings originate from the inner person, not in the physical matter of the brain.

Because this is true, the real and measurable chemical activity of our brain is simply a *reflection* of what is going on in our heart, or inner person, and not the *source* of our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The inner person, or heart, is the source of our outer, physical words and actions. Professor of practical theology Dr. Edward Welch summarizes the interaction between the inner person and the brain in this way: "It is as if the heart always leaves its footprints on the brain."<sup>4</sup>

The following diagrams will help you see the differences between the biblical view and the materialist view:

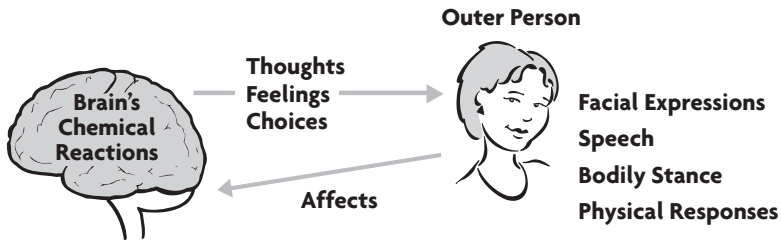


## THE BIBLICAL VIEW: OUR INNER AND OUTER PERSON



*The heart or mind thinks, feels, or chooses, and this registers on the brain and results in words and actions.*

## THE MATERIALIST VIEW: NO INNER PERSON



*The chemical reactions in the brain create our thoughts, feelings, or choices, which in turn leads to various physical functions.*

The biblical view, then, can be summed up this way:

- Christians hold to the unchanging assumption that God's Word is true.
- The Bible teaches that we consist of two parts: the physical body and the inner person.
- There is much interaction between our body and our inner person. Our body can influence our inner person, and vice versa.
- Generally speaking, the changes that occur in our brain when we take any action, or when we feel sad or anxious, originate in our inner person. These changes in the brain can be measured and studied, but the brain is not the place where thoughts or feelings originate. As we've demonstrated from the Bible, they come from the invisible inner person.<sup>5</sup>

### IS EMOTIONAL PAIN A DISEASE?

Our friend the materialist would strongly disagree with the biblical view and would say that a healthy brain produces happy feelings,

comfortable thoughts, and good behavior. He would view negative feelings, thoughts, or behavior as disease, an uncomfortable and undesirable condition due to a dysfunction in the brain.

Could there be a different reason for our emotional pain? What would you do if you began to have severe pain in the lower right side of your abdomen? Would you take pain pills to stop the pain, or would you check to see if you had appendicitis? Abdominal pain is a sign that something is wrong in your abdomen. It is not a disease in its own right. In the same way, emotional pain or distressing thoughts may be signs that something is not right with our heart, or inner person.

In the same way that our cars come equipped with warning lights to let us know when there is a problem with the engine, our gracious heavenly Father has created our bodies with the capacity to experience pain, and that pain serves as a “warning light” for our bodies. When we see a warning light on our dashboard, we get our car checked out; we don’t just ignore the light or place black tape over it so we don’t have to look at it. When we have physical pain, we go to a doctor to get examined; we don’t just take pain pills and hope that will solve the problem. In the same way that pain medicines will not cure appendicitis but will only cover up the signs, medicine directed at our emotions may only cover up the signs that what we really have is “heart trouble.”

*Emotional pain is not a disease.* It is a sign of a problem with our heart, just as abdominal pain is a sign of appendicitis. Remember that one of the words the Bible uses for the inner person is *heart*. In biblical terms, then, we have “heart trouble” when we are struggling with our thoughts, emotions, or desires.

Please note that this truth does not necessarily rule out the possibility that a physical problem may also be affecting our feelings, in the same way that a rapid heartbeat can produce anxiety. Remember that our inner person can affect our physical health, and our physical health can affect our inner person. But generally speaking, “problem” feelings are an indicator of a problem in our inner person.

In either case, our feelings aren’t dysfunctional or sick. Our feelings are doing just what they were created by God to do. They’re

showing us that we have a problem. *To feel better, we need to fix the problem, not just make the pain go away.*

### WHAT CAN OUR FEELINGS TELL US?

Our emotions are given to us by God in part to let us know about the condition of our inner person. He didn't give us emotions so we could let them rule our lives or even guide us in making decisions. The line often heard in sentimental movies, "Trust your feelings," is not God's advice. We should not make decisions based on how we feel. Instead, God has given us His Word to direct our thoughts and choices.

Although we should not be *led* by our emotions, we do need to *listen* to them. We should be aware of them because they can help us understand what's going on inside of us. Here's an example: If I assume that I'm loving God with all my mind but I am constantly anxious about the future, then my anxiety may be telling me something about my inner person that I wasn't aware of. Perhaps my anxiety about the future tells me I've allowed other things to become more important to me than God, such as fear of loss or the love of money.

Rather than seeking to deaden, ignore, or elevate the importance of our emotions, we should allow them to speak to us about our hearts. Because God gave us the ability to experience emotions, we want to be very cautious about ignoring what they may be telling us. We want to carefully consider whether dampening the awareness of our feelings through the use of medication (or alcohol) is the best road for us to take to better health.

Medicines or alcohol may make us feel better for a time, even if our "heart problem" is not addressed. For example, we know that morphine dulls the pain of a broken arm. It does not heal or reset the bone, and it does not fix the root cause of the pain. The same is true about medicines and emotional pain. In order to resolve such pain, we need to deal not with the symptoms, but the root causes of the pain.

*Please understand we are not saying there are no physical causes for emotional pain.* The brain itself can develop diseases, just as the rest of our body can. Alzheimer's disease, for example, causes physical changes in the cells of the brain, leading to their death. Disease processes in other organs can also affect the brain, causing changes in our thoughts and feelings. *But this is very different from considering bad feelings or uncomfortable thoughts, in themselves, to be brain diseases.*

In summary, then:

- God gave you emotions so you can recognize what's happening in your inner person.
- Your decisions should not be based on your emotions.
- Troubling emotions are not, in themselves, brain diseases.
- Instead of seeking to deaden our painful emotions, we need to listen to what they're telling us and respond in faith to the Lord and His Word.

### WHY IS BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE SO IMPORTANT?

Why is having a biblical understanding of our emotions so important? Because we consist of both a spirit *and* a body, and any solution to our problems that leaves out the spiritual side is only a partial solution.

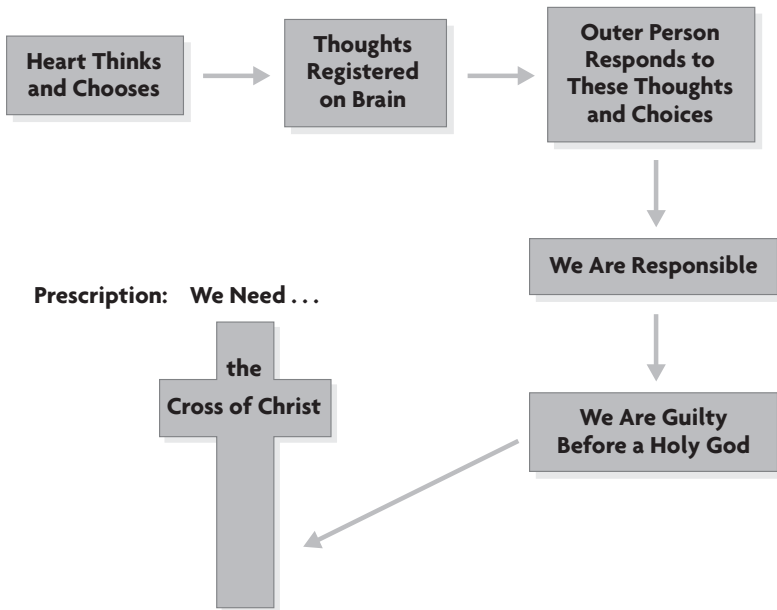
What's more, the materialistic view of the brain has very serious implications for our faith. *If our thoughts and choices are determined solely by the physical activity of our brains rather than by our inner person, then when we do wrong, it must not be our fault. A disease must be to blame.*

Stop and think carefully about what we've just said. Doesn't the Bible teach us that we must believe in Christ to be saved from the penalty our sins deserve? And that we should evidence that belief through our thoughts and behavior? But if our inner person is not the source of our thoughts and choices (as the materialist believes), then we can't possibly be pronounced "guilty" of our sins. If we aren't

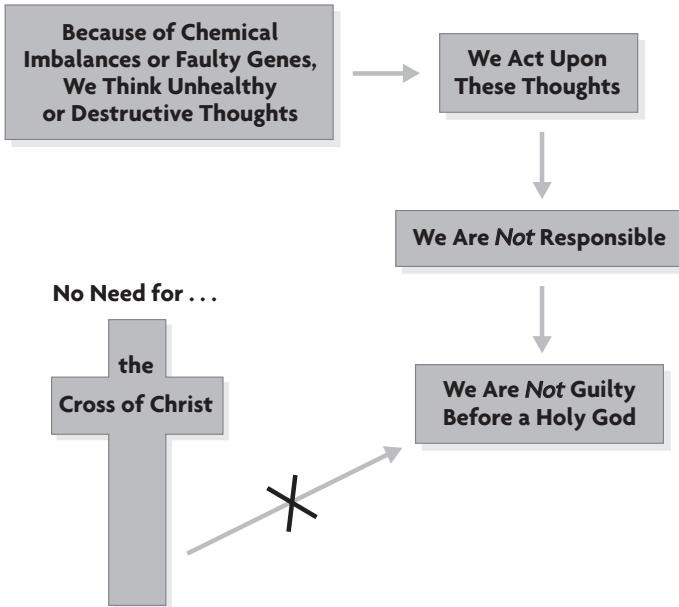
guilty, we don't need a Savior. And if we don't need a Savior, then Christ's death was in vain. This is not what the Bible teaches.

According to the biblical view, what is the prescription for our problems? The cross of Christ.

## THE BIBLICAL DIAGNOSIS



## THE MATERIALIST'S DIAGNOSIS



*The materialist view denies responsibility for our wrong thoughts and actions, so we are not guilty before a holy God.*

According to the materialist, what is the prescription for our problems? Since we are merely a collection of chemicals, chemicals will cure us. Since the immaterial or invisible world doesn't exist, there is no God or afterlife to be concerned about.

Again, please understand that we are not arguing that there are no brain diseases that can lead to disordered behavior, or that to use medicines for emotional pain is always wrong. There are also times when real brain diseases can cause us to experience emotional pain, and these often require the use of medication. We'll be exploring these subjects in greater detail later in this book.

## THE COMFORT OF THE DISEASE MODEL

Most of us would prefer to think of our painful emotions as having a physical origin, rather than as being rooted in our hearts. The implications of your view on this are very important: If your suffering results from your own thoughts and choices as well as from your physical state, then you must be part of the problem. It's very difficult for any of us to admit that!

We may prefer to believe that we are suffering from an illness, because if this is the case, there is little we can do that will change our condition. At first, believing this may make our problem seem less overwhelming because it places the responsibility for change outside of us rather than inside. But in the long run, such a perspective leads to a sense of powerlessness and despair because we have to rely upon something outside of ourselves to give us hope. And what if the medicines don't work as we hoped they would? This occurs more often than most women realize.<sup>6</sup>

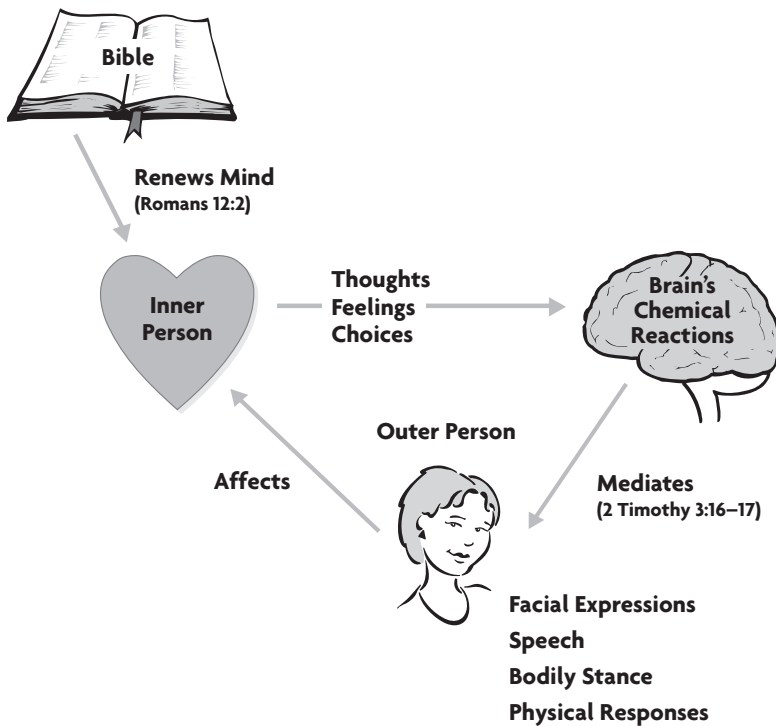
Even more importantly, if we do not see ourselves as being able to solve our problems through the grace and power of God, we have missed one of the main themes in the Bible: God enables His people to live victoriously even under very difficult circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Believing that we cannot change our situation by changing our lives causes more problems than it solves. When we accept the disease model as an explanation for our painful emotions, we have, in essence, concluded that the Bible consists of inspiring stories but does not offer practical help that relieves our suffering. The problem here is that the Bible clearly teaches that it *does* have solutions. Second Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV) tells us that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In other words, the Bible is able to reprove and correct us and equip us so we can serve God more effectively. If we believe that what God's Word says is true, then we can't conclude that it doesn't provide help for the problems we face.



The disease model, then, excludes the Bible as a source of help. If you are a Christian, you probably want to address your pain using answers that are founded upon your faith. That's what this book is about. In chapter 2 we'll talk about the uses of medicines and help you understand how to make the best choices for your specific situation. Then in the chapters that follow, we will outline practical principles from God's Word that will help you seek God's solutions for the problem of emotional pain.

## HOW THE BIBLE INFLUENCES US



*The Bible helps to direct our inner person and shape our thoughts, feelings, and choices.*

### CAN I REALLY CHANGE?

By now you may be feeling a little overwhelmed. You have learned that drugs do not take care of the cause of emotional pain; they only decrease the awareness of it. You have also learned that the Bible offers help for dealing with emotional pain.

You may be thinking that the Bible is fine for those whose problems are not so great, but that your problem is different and requires stronger action. Perhaps you are already taking some drugs. Maybe you have placed your faith in medicines, and you're wondering whether it's really possible to do otherwise. Or, maybe you're not sure your faith is strong enough to enable you to solve your problems without medicine.

While any decisions you make regarding medication should always be made in consultation with your physician, there is great wisdom in researching your options and seeing if perhaps you've overlooked solutions that might work better for you. It is our hope that this book will encourage you to consider the possibilities.

As for the Bible's power to change lives, we find countless evidence of this in the pages of Scripture itself. For example, the Bible's "Hall of Faith Chapter" (Hebrews 11) lists people who persevered through difficult situations by looking to God in faith. These people were like us—they were ordinary people who did extraordinary things because they trusted God. For example, Joseph was a slave who spent years in prison. He trusted and obeyed God and after much suffering became a great leader in the land of his slavery.

Rahab was a prostitute. Who knows what secret humiliation she endured? But by God's grace she trusted in Him and became an honored ancestor of Jesus Christ (Joshua 2:1–22), as did Ruth, who belonged to a despised people and was widowed at a young age. Her faith made her one of the great ones (Ruth 4:13–17). Abraham and Moses, who were fearful by nature, trusted God in difficult situations too (Romans 4:3; Hebrews 11:27) and were transformed into men of faith.

These faithful believers, and many others like them (Hebrews 11:32), experienced the emotional pains of fear, worry, uncertainty, depression, homelessness, enslavement, shame, and the threat of death. They endured their sufferings without drugs, and their faith is held up as an example to us. So can emotional pain be overcome with God's help? The answer is clearly yes. And the power that helped the people in Hebrews 11 walk in faith is the same power that's available to you today.

### GROWING IN YOUR FAITH

1. Have you been tempted to think of your painful emotions as having a physical origin over which you have no control? Can you see that they could be originating in your heart?

2. Can you begin to own your feelings by changing the way you think in response to them? For example, instead of thinking, *Rainy weather depresses me*, you can think, *I'm tempted to feel downhearted when it rains*. Commit yourself to thinking honestly about your emotions this week, and journal the changes you decide to make in your thought habits.

3. A helpful exercise for personal growth is to summarize what you have learned from a chapter right after reading it. Then later on, you can look back over your notes and remember what you learned. Why not do that now? In four or five sentences, summarize the main points of the chapter.