

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

By Dennis Tucker



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Spiritual "equipment" for the contest of life.

Introduction

In my years of preaching I have faced the following scenario many times. A member calls and wants to talk. We get together and he is distressed, maybe to the point of despair. Something is wrong in his life and he just does not know what to do. After telling me of the situation, he wants to know what he should do. Problems such as a couple having trouble working out marital difficulties, children that are out of control, financial stress, in-laws interfering, parents that need help, sibling rivalry, divisiveness among brethren, depression, drug abuse, and a host of other problems are often heard. The common theme is that they feel as if God and everybody else have forsaken them.

I can understand the need to ask for help. People sometimes need a different and fresh perspective and want an objective viewpoint. Yet many times they want the impossible. Many want an answer that inflicts no pain and/or requires little effort on their part. In most situations I have sympathy toward those that face difficult and heart rending decisions. In some cases they have been placed in bad circumstances due to no fault of their own—like Joseph sold into slavery, lied about by Potiphar’s wife, and forgotten in prison. In other cases, they may be like Pharaoh who hardened his heart and caused Egypt to suffer through ten plagues. They themselves have made decisions which brought about their plight.

This series of lessons is intended to do the following: examine the Scriptures so as to avoid problems and to correct the ones we have. Mark Twain said, “We must learn from the mistakes of others for we do not have time to make all of them ourselves.”

Bad decisions will cause us to suffer. I want to encourage us to make the same good decisions that other children of God made in times past. Remember, the best solution is to make the right choice to start with. Sometimes we do make bad decisions and must make the best out of a bad situation. In that case there is usually a price to be paid; but if we are willing to pay that price, things will get better.

I hope these studies provide a source of encouragement, stimulate your mind, and build up your faith. Beware that most solutions are not painless and almost all will require effort on our part. Life is not always fair, but it can be lived, with eternity in mind.

–Dennis Tucker

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What Should I Do...

WHEN I HAVE MADE BAD DECISIONS

Lesson 1

Each decision we make impacts our life. Some such as where we eat for lunch or what to wear today may have a very limited impact. Others will change our life forever. Let me give you an example. A young preacher decides to preach for a congregation in Southern Indiana as opposed to preaching in Florida or Kentucky. One day as he enters the church building he is introduced to a young lady that happens to be visiting some relatives. A day later he is invited to dinner and spends the evening talking with the young lady. The next day he is to play mixed doubles in tennis and needs a partner. She accepts his invitation to play tennis. She invites him to visit her family in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He flies out to spend some time with this new friend and her family. Eventually he asks her to marry him. She accepts and they become husband and wife. A number of years later they have three children, a house, cars, and a life built together. It all started that first Sunday at the church building and the first decision to have dinner at her relative's house. How different life would have been if he had preached somewhere else. What would have happened if she had not come back to visit?

We cannot see the end result of our decisions at the time we are making them. Do you remember the Broadway play about a man who sold his soul to the devil? Satan promised this man the ability to play baseball for the New York Yankees. He left his home to go and play ball. The team starts winning and everything seems well. However, he started to face temptations that he had never known before. Satan reminds the man that his soul belongs to him. As the season starts to wind down, the man realizes the devil now has his soul and he looks for a way out. Many a person has made decisions to serve Satan.

There are a lot of people looking for a way out of their bad and often hasty decisions. They are unhappy in their marriage and want a way out. A young lady is pregnant, not married, and wants to know what to do. What is her way out?

Consider the following questions and their related passages.

1. List some bad decisions people make in the following areas:
 - a. Dating – The following are some common problems: dating before one is mature enough to date, getting serious too quickly, dating someone that uses drugs, quick tempered, not of the same religious background, someone that has no right to be dating, and simply overlooking the character of the person. Often a person thinks they can change the other person—such is a recipe for disaster.
 - b. Marriage – someone that has no right to marry (a person that is bound to another person), different religious backgrounds, choosing a person that is not compatible to you, to get out of mom and dad's house, not looking at what the Bible says about marriage and responsibilities in the marriage until later on, etc.

c. Work – taking a job that is too demanding, requires missing services on a regular basis, aids immoral behavior (distillery, gambling, bar, etc.), not taking the time to be adequately trained and prepared to get a job that will pay what is needed to provide for a family.

d. Finances – spending too much money on credit, not saving, and not taking one’s financial obligations seriously. I have known people to not have any idea of how much they have in the bank and their monthly expenses.

e. Recreation – we need time to wind down and relax but some people allow their recreation to take too much of their time. They neglect their family, miss worship services, and may dress improperly.

f. Children – withholding discipline, playing favorites, spoiling.

g. Entertainment – going to movies that are sexual in nature and/or profanity, violence, playing computer games that can do the same things, going to places that may encourage immoral behavior such as casinos.

2. What choice did Cain make when he offered his sacrifice toward God? Genesis 4:4-5; Hebrews 11:4 tells us that Cain did not offer his sacrifice with the same faith as Abel. Perhaps not what God had commanded or not offered with the proper attitude. In essence he decided to follow his will instead of the will of God.

3. What warning and encouragement did God give Cain in Genesis 4:7? “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” In other words Cain could have chosen to please God but he also could have decided to not obey Him.

4. What decision did Cain make in regard to his brother? He killed his brother.

5. What were the consequences of Cain’s decisions? Genesis 4:11-12. “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” There are consequences for our actions. In Cain’s situation the ground would no longer produce the same yield as before. He would also be an outcast among his people. Often sin makes life harder on the sinner and separates them from their fellow man.

6. Was this fair? Before you answer, consider Cain’s reaction in verses 13 and 14 and God’s reaction in verse 15. Cain thought it was unfair or more than he could handle. He even saw his life being in danger. Fact is the law breaker often thinks the punishment is unjust or more than they should bear. The mark God set on Cain was to protect him.

7. What unwise decision did Esau make? Genesis 25:29-34. He sold his birthright for a bowl of stew.

8. What problems did this create between Esau and Jacob? It created enmity between the two brothers. Their relationship was damaged due to Esau’s hasty decision.

9. Could the consequences of this decision have been avoided once the decision was made? Hebrews 12:14-17. No. Some decisions cannot be undone. We have to live with the consequences. People that make unwise decisions in marriage have to live with their decisions.

10. Was this fair? If not, why not? Esau agreed to sell his birthright for a bowl of stew. He only had himself to blame.

11. What did God want Israel to do as they entered Canaan? Deuteronomy 7:1-2. **God wanted Israel to completely destroy the nations in the land of Canaan.**

12. What trick did the inhabitants of Gibeon play on Joshua and Israel? Joshua 9:3-10. **They pretended to be from a far away country by showing the people of Israel old and stale food and clothes that were worn out.**

13. What mistake did the men of Israel make? Why? Joshua 9:11-15. **They made a covenant with the people of Gibeon. They were tricked because “they did not ask counsel of the Lord.” Often we make bad decisions because we do not first see what the Bible says. Only afterwards do we look at the Bible and then are upset.**

14. What consequences did the people of Gibeon face? verses 21, 27. **They were to be woodcutters and water carriers for the nation of Israel. In other words they would be Israel’s servants.**

15. What did this bring on the children of Israel? Deuteronomy 7:16. **They were a snare to Israel. The children of Israel learned to serve the gods of the land instead of Jehovah.**

16. David decided to stay in Jerusalem at the time his men were out in battle, 2 Samuel 11. David made a number of bad decisions. What decisions were made in the following passages?

a. 2 Samuel 11:2-3 – **he saw the woman and inquired of her. There was nothing wrong with walking on the roof and perhaps he innocently saw the woman but he then asked who she was. He allowed his mind to dwell on her.**

b. 2 Samuel 11:4 – **He sent for her and then lay with her. The sending was probably for the purpose of committing adultery. Even if David had not originally intended on committing adultery he was still placing himself in a position to be tempted.**

c. 2 Samuel 11:6-13— **he tried to cover up Bathsheba’s pregnancy by trying to get her husband to lay with her.**

d. 2 Samuel 11:14-15 – **he wrote a note and sent it with Uriah. The note told Joab to place Uriah in a place where the battle would be fierce and then withdraw his men. This would cause Uriah to be killed. Therefore, David was guilty of shedding innocent blood, murder.**

17. What were the consequences of those decisions?

a. 2 Samuel 12:10-11 - **the sword or violence would not depart from the house of David.**

b. 2 Samuel 12:14a - **caused the enemies of Israel to blaspheme the name of the Lord. Our bad decisions often reflect unfavorably upon our Lord.**

c. 2 Samuel 12:14b, 19 - **“the child who is born to you shall die.”**

18. Was this fair? **God is always “fair.” Who are we to say what is and is not fair when it comes to the judgment of God? The criminal often thinks the penalty for his crime is unfair.**

19. What heartaches did David face in the future? See 2 Samuel chapters 13, 15, and 18. **Amnon raped his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Absalom had Amnon killed (2 Samuel 13:29). Absalom rebelled against his father, David. Eventually Absalom was killed, 2 Samuel 18:33. Let us not minimize the grief and heartache David must have felt with each of these events.**

20. What decision did the young man make in Luke 15:12-13? **The young man decided to leave his father's house and waste his part of his inheritance in riotous living.**

21. What consequences did he face in verses 14 and 16? **He began to be in want (14); he had to join himself to a person of that country and feed the hogs (15); he was so hungry he would have eaten the hogs' food (16). He was alone, broke, and hungry.**

22. What decision did he make in verses 17-19? **To return to his father, acknowledge his sins, and become one of his father's servants.**

23. Was this fair? **Yes. He was still relying on his father's mercy and grace. The prodigal son deserved no better since he decided to leave.**

24. Promises are made voluntarily, Ecclesiastes 5:4-6. Are we obligated to keep those promises? Are there situations where we should break a promise? **We should keep our promises unless they are against the law of God. Therefore we should be careful of what we promise. In some cases we must fulfill our promise and pay the consequences; in other cases we should acknowledge our mistake and repent.**

APPLICATION:

A lady has been married a few years and is unhappy. Her husband is not providing for the family as she desires, and she is tired of his ways. She exclaims, "I just cannot live any longer with that man!" What should she understand, and what should she do?

She entered into the marriage covenant. The promise was to love until death. Instead of quitting her marriage she needs to work at making it better.

You decide to sell your car, baseball card collection, house, etc. A friend makes you an offer and you accept but have not actually made the transaction. In the meantime somebody else offers you twice as much. What should you do?

Keep your word and sell to the friend who made the original offer.

A young lady, who is a Christian, calls with a problem. She is not married and is pregnant. She had planned on going to college but a baby jeopardizes her plans. What should she do?

She should not have an abortion in order to escape the consequences of her decisions. She should have the baby and realize it may take longer to graduate. Her decision to have sex before marriage violates God's law and brought on some unintended consequences. Aborting the baby will punish an innocent child and add another sin to her account.

What Should I Do...

WHEN I HAVE SINNED

Lesson 2

I once was asked what is the most common medical problem mankind has today. I named heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, and a number of other ailments. The correct answer was tooth decay. It made sense to me but I overlooked it.

The most common problem of mankind today is not global warming, nuclear war, over-population, or war—but sin. Sin is against the very nature of our Creator. Hate is a strong word and not used lightly in the Bible. The Psalmist says God hates all workers of iniquity (Psalm 5:5) and wickedness, Psalm 45:7. We are to love good and hate every false way, Psalm 119:128.

God will punish those in sin, Matthew 25:46a; John 5:28-29. The end result of sin is death. We cannot minimize the importance and impact of sin in our life. Yet sin does not have to keep one from reaching heaven. What will keep us from going to heaven is what we do once we have sinned.

1. Genesis 6:5 gives us the condition of mankind during the days of Noah. What made Noah different from everyone else? Genesis 6.8. **Every thought and intent of man was sinful, Noah was a man of faith and obedience. It was common then and is common now for men to attempt to live without God.**
2. Abraham is our father in the faith, Romans 4:16. Read Genesis 12:7; 13:3-4. Why did Abraham offer these sacrifices? **He realized he had sinned and needed forgiveness.**
3. List the faults of Abraham in the following passages:
 - a. Genesis 12:10-20 - **he lied to Pharaoh about Sarai being his wife.**
 - b. Genesis 16:1-3 - **he listened to Sarai and had a child by Hagar.**
 - c. Genesis 20:1-23 - **he lied to Abimelech about Saria being his sister.**
4. How could Abraham be called the father of us? Romans 4.16. **He lived by faith and obedience to God's word. As Romans 4 points out Abraham believed God when promised he would have descendants as numerous as the stars, Genesis 15:5. Abraham believed God when promised that his heir would come through Sarah (Genesis 17:10-11), and he believed God when promised that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed, Genesis 22:18.**
5. What was God looking at when selecting a successor to King Saul?
1 Samuel 16:7. **The Lord was looking at the heart.**
6. Did David meet that requirement? **Yes, he was the one selected by Samuel and therefore has a heart that God approved of.**

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7. What sin(s) were committed by David in the following passages?
- a. 2 Samuel 6:3-11 - moved the ark differently than God prescribed, when he placed it on a cart.
 - b. 2 Samuel 11:4-17 - he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, killed.
 - c. 2 Samuel 24:1 - he numbered the children of Israel against the will of God. In this passage it is obvious that God was not giving David permission to do so.
8. List David's reaction to his sin(s).
- a. 2 Samuel 6:12-15 - at first he was angry and wondered how the ark could be moved, verse 9. Later on he moved the ark in the way prescribed by God.
 - b. 2 Samuel 12:1-13 (see Psalm 37 and 51) - "I have sinned against the Lord;" he confessed his sins.
 - c. 2 Samuel 24:10 - "I have sinned greatly in what I have done."
9. What common reactions do people have when told they have sinned against God? Often they deny it, get angry, blame others, say "everybody else is doing it" etc.; in short we try to deflect our responsibility in sinning against God.
10. What should their reaction be? Admit they are wrong and change.

David was not a sinless man, but he was a man after God's own heart. A man after God's own heart will not minimize his sin, or try to redefine what constitutes sin, or blame someone else for what they have done. Instead they will seek forgiveness and change their behavior.

11. Have you sinned against God? Romans 3:10. Everyone has. This goes back to the first point in the introduction of this lesson. Sin is even more common than tooth decay.
12. What did the Jews ask on the Day of Pentecost? Acts 2:37. They had just been convicted of killing the Son of God and He is now at the right hand of God. The question they asked, "What shall we do?" implies a hope in something they could do in order to be forgiven. Fortunately for them Peter did not answer; there is nothing you can do. Instead he told them there was something they could do.

Only by getting in Christ can one get out of sin. The book of Acts tells us what we must do to become a member of Christ's body.

13. What did the apostles tell those in sin to do, in the following passages?
- a. Acts 2:38 - repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.
 - b. Acts 3:19 - repent and be converted (return).

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- c. Acts 8:36-38 - believe, he was baptized.
 - d. Acts 16:30-33 - believe in the Lord Jesus, he and his household were baptized.
 - e. Acts 17:30 - repent.
 - f. Acts 18:8 - heard the word, believed, and were baptized.
 - g. Acts 22:16 - be baptized calling on the name of the Lord.

14. What are we to do after obeying the Gospel when we have sinned?

- a. Acts 8:18-24 - repent and pray to the Lord for forgiveness.
- b. 1 John 1:8-9 - confess our sins (admit what we have done and take responsibility).

15. What are we to confess and pray for? Our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Let me stress that the difference in people is not whether they have sinned, but what they do when they have sinned.

16. What was the difference between Judas and Peter? Both Peter and Judas had sinned—Peter in denying Jesus three times and Judas in betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. However, Peter repented and returned while Judas felt remorse and hung himself.

17. Why are the following ways not proper ways to handle sin?

- a. Anger at others - cannot blame others for what we have done.
- b. Redefine sin - God's definition of sin does not change. Today we hear of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, alcoholism as a disease, and other sins described in politically correct terms. God is not politically correct nor does He allow us to edit His word.
- c. Hope God will forget about it - man may forget but God does not; time does not erase sin. Remember, to God one day is as a thousand years and a thousands years as one day, 2 Peter 3.8.
- d. Give in to temptation - the temporary pleasures of sin will result in eternal damnation.
- e. Blame someone else - back to point (a); we cannot blame others for what we do.

What Should I Do...

WHEN I HAVE A RECURRING SIN Lesson 3

In speaking to Cain, God said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it,” Genesis 4:7. This one passage sums up our battle with sin. Satan will use whatever device he can to cause us to sin. It is up to each of us to master our minds and bodies and to know how to possess our vessel, 1 Thessalonians 4:4.

On many occasions I have talked with people that have sinned, repented, and then gone right back into the very sin they had confessed. We may wonder why a person would continually commit a sin they denounced a little while earlier. There may be numerous reasons. Some sins are habit forming. A person addicted to drugs is physically and psychologically addicted. They are used to feeling a certain way and want to recapture that feeling. A police officer was telling of a person on meth. That person just wanted to feel the way he felt the first time he used the drug.

Some sins are totally behavioral in nature. A person that cannot or will not control their anger has allowed their anger to control them. This may again be habitual in nature.

Here are some common reoccurring sins: drug addiction, fornication, adultery, gambling, pornography, acting to hurt others out of anger, pride, gossip, etc.

1. List some other sins that tend to be reoccurring: **A partial list would include gossip, laziness, lying, envy, drinking alcohol, neglecting one’s family, wasting time, etc. Perhaps we should realize the difference in needing a little down time verses habitually wasting time.**

Read James 1:2-15. Trials and temptations are a part of life. God has not built a hedge around us. We live in a day when one can turn on his or her television and see almost any sin mentioned in the Bible. Our neighbors may tempt us with profanity, drugs, immodest clothing, and so on. We do not live in a monastery but in the world. At the same time we can take comfort in what the Bible says.

2. Are our temptations and trials peculiar to us? 1 Corinthians 10:13a. **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man” so we cannot claim it is different today. It may be more prevalent today but they are the same sins. David had to deal with lust due to seeing Bathsheba on the roof top. Men today may have to deal with lust due to going to places like the shopping mall.**

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3. Our open society may tolerate and even encourage some sins, but they are not new, or are they? List sins you think are peculiar to our time. **The internet has made pornography more accessible. Different types of drugs may be used today. Couples living together without being married is more common today, as is premarital sex.**
 4. According to James 1:2-3, what can we learn from our trials? **Patience, which is the same thing as long suffering.**
 5. Explain the benefits of trials mentioned in verse 4. Does this mean we should place ourselves in the position of being tempted? **Trials teach us how to deal with problems in our lives, develop greater faith, and makes us more complete in the long run (Christ like). Sometimes we talk about a young person that was “faithful” until they went off to college. At that point we say they must have lost their faith. Perhaps they never really had the faith to start with. The reason they came to services was because it was easy and convenient to do so. Once on their own and facing the challenges of getting to services on their own, they failed. It is when we face challenges and do the right thing that we really know whether we have faith or not.**
 6. What role does prayer have in helping us to overcome some reoccurring sin? **Through prayer we can ask for wisdom, how to apply the law of God in a particular situation.**
 7. The writer uses the word “faith” in verse 6. How important is our mindset in overcoming sin? There is a difference in knowing what God says and being committed to following God. The battle of living the Christian life is often not over what the Bible i.e. “The body of doctrine that has been delivered” but our commitment to and trust in God’s word or our personal conviction to do what the Bible says. Satan will often try to make us doubt and question God’s wisdom and promises. Therefore the battle of doing right and resisting sin is not always settled by a “What saith the Lord” but is my mind set toward doing God’s will.
 8. Why will doubting cause us to sin? verses 7-8. **He will be unstable in all his ways. Unsettled or not determined to do the right thing. We have to make up our mind who we will serve. Once that commitment is made, our course is set. The problem arises when we want to serve God part of the time.**
 9. Some people may be tempted by one thing and another tempted by something else. One person may become an alcoholic and another drawn to pornography. Would it be right to blame God for our urges or tendencies? verse 13. Be ready to explain your answer. **We all have weaknesses and have the ability to overcome them (Genesis 4:7); all of us have temptations (1 Corinthians 10:13a). The vilest of people make the decision to give in and sin. James 1:13 tells us that God does not create in us the evil desire—we do that. Whatever unlawful urges we may have can be controlled by us.**
 10. James 1:14-15 gives what I call the progression from temptation to sin. Is it wrong to be tempted? **No, all of us are tempted at various times. The very fact we have freedom of choice means we face temptations. The problem occurs when we allow the temptation to lead us further along the path to sin.**
 11. When does temptation lead one to sin? **Desire, followed by enticement (or lust) and the next stage is sin. Lust is unlawful or inordinate desire, or that which is not approve of by God. Jesus addresses this in Matthew 5:27, 28. There is a difference between seeing a pretty lady and realizing she is pretty and lusting after her.**
 12. What is the end result of sin? **Sin results in death, specifically spiritual death.**
 13. Consider the following scenario. A young man sees a pretty young woman. He notices she is pretty and thinks about meeting her. Later on he thinks more about the woman and starts to lust after her. Can he control his thoughts or is he simply a victim of his own desires? **We can control what we think. That is the point of resisting temptation.**
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14. Consider the above scenario with one change. This time the young woman is immodestly dressed. He stares at her and starts to lust for her. What should he have done, and what responsibility does she have in this case? **He could have looked the other way, not allow his mind to go in that direction. She is also responsible for the way she dresses. My point is that we may face “things” beyond our control but how we respond is under our control.**

15. Consider the following passages and what they teach about the sources of temptation in our lives.

- a. 1 Corinthians 15:33 - **evil company, one’s companions, friends, peers, are all potential sources of temptation.**
- b. Proverbs 1:10 - **in this case “sinners,” those involved in sin, will try to get us to sin with them.**
- c. Genesis 13:10-11; 18:20 19:30-35 - **Lot pitched his tents toward Sodom and Gomorrah; God described those cities as being sinful and wicked. We know they were involved in homosexuality; the last verse shows that although Lot’s daughters were out of Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities were not out of them. They were immoral. The place we live can have a great influence on us and our family.**

16. In order to change one’s action there must be a change in the mindset. How can Philippians 4:8-9 help? **We are told to think on things that are noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtue, and those things that are praiseworthy. To meditate on these things, if we think on those things, the sinful things will not have a place in our mind and we will find many things lose their appeal. We won’t have time to think on other things.**

17. One area that the Bible warns us about and yet is often overlooked is the use of our tongue. The Bible speaks about talebearing, malicious gossip, backbiting, coarse jesting, and other sins. What does James 3:2ff tell us about our tongues? **No one can tame the tongue, and it can do a lot of damage. By tame we mean to control it without effort. A dog can be trained to rollover or sit up. It will do so by rote and without thought. We cannot do so with our tongue. Only by constantly being on guard and keeping it in check will we keep it in check.**

18. What does the writer mean in 1 Corinthians 10:13b in the following statements:

- a. *who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able* - **God knows our level of resistance to temptation.**
- b. *but with the temptation will also make the way of escape* - **we must take the way of escape but there will be one there for us.**
- c. *that you may be able to bear it* - **we can overcome our temptations; it may not be easy but we do not have to sin.**

In order to resist sin and particularly sin that a person may be prone to commit, a person must realize they have a problem. It may be due to their friendships, and those need to be changed. It may be due to their environment. An alcoholic that is trying to resist drinking cannot go back to the bar and expect to resist temptation. Yet they may feel compelled to do so for the companionship. Therefore, they must change their friendships, and that will take care of their environment. There must be a change in the mindset. To change one’s actions there must be a change in the way one thinks. As one changes their behavior, their mindset changes. It is a never ending process; we cannot afford to let down our guard. In warning us about the destructive nature of our speech, James says one cannot tame it. The second we think we have overcome our temptations and let down our guard is the second we are prone to sin. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall,” 1 Corinthians 10:12.

What Should I Do...

WHEN I CANNOT FORGIVE MYSELF

Lesson 4

Guilt is a heavy burden for anyone to bear. Fortunately God is merciful and willing to forgive those that will do His will. One of the consequences of sin that is often overlooked is the remembrance of the sin. A young lady gives in to temptation and commits fornication. If she is a Christian, she can repent and receive forgiveness from God. However, she may feel the shame of her actions for a long time. A man may be tempted to gamble. In the process he loses all he has, including the wedding ring he gave to his wife. Afterward he may feel remorse and change his ways. His wife may be able to forgive him, but he may not be able to forgive himself.

We should understand that sin is wrong—it is against God, many times against our fellow man, and harmful to ourselves. It leads to a feeling of worthlessness, depression, anger, self-loathing, and other destructive behavior.

It is important for us to first receive forgiveness from God, learn not to commit the sin again, and put it behind us. One problem we may have in doing this is the feeling that we are the first and only one to ever have done something wrong. Peter denied Jesus three times before His death. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband killed, and then married her. Yet both repented and served God.

1. Define the following words: (All definitions are from Dictionary.com)
 - a. Guilt - The fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, etc. A feeling or responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc.
 - b. Forgive - To grant pardon or remission of a crime or violation. To cease to feel resentment against.
 - c. Forgiveness - An act of forgiving, state of being forgiven. Disposition or willingness to forgive.
2. Is forgiveness conditional? See Luke 17:3-4. Yes, we are to go to the one that sinned against us; and we can only forgive as someone repents. This is different than holding a grudge or simply having an attitude of forgiveness.
3. What do you think Jesus meant with the phrase “take heed to yourself” in Luke 17:3? The only person we can control is ourselves and our responsibility. We can do little about the person that has sinned against us and will not repent. We also must be careful of developing hurt feelings and holding a grudge.
4. In order to love our neighbor we must be able to love ourselves. Matthew 22:39 In this context it is necessary for us to have the proper self image. Some people believe that Christianity is self deprecating, but such is not taught in the Bible. There is a difference in humility and self degradation.

5. Read Acts 22:19-20 and answer the following questions.

a. What had Paul done to Christians before his conversion? **He had Christians put in prison and beaten. He was on his way to Damascus to have Christians put in prison when he was struck blind by Jesus.**

b. Whose death had Paul consented to? **Stephen and perhaps other Christians.**

We may wonder how Paul could have forgiven himself. Why did Paul not wallow in self-loathing? Looking at Paul's own words will help us to forgive ourselves.

6. According to Philippians 3:13, what had Paul done? Therefore what do we have to do?

Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. We must not allow our past to ruin our future. This is different than learning from our mistakes and growing so as to do better.

7. Who is the law for and not for in 1 Timothy 1:8-10? **"For the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murders of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers." In other words, the law is given for bad people, sinners.**

8. Paul describes himself in 1 Timothy 1:13a while persecuting Christians. Define the following words: **(All definitions are from Dictionary.com)**

a. Blasphemer - **to speak impiously or irreverently of God, to speak evil of, slander.**

b. Persecutor - **to pursue with harassing or oppressive treatment, esp. because of religion, race, or beliefs; to annoy or trouble persistently.**

c. Insolent - **boldly rude or disrespectful.**

9. What had Paul obtained and why? **Mercy, because he did it ignorantly in unbelief. Here is a person that needed God's grace and mercy, and he received it in the Gospel of Christ.**

10. I think we have established the fact that Paul was a sinner and had done something that could have been a stumbling block. What did Jesus count Paul as, and what was Paul commanded to do? 1 Timothy 1:12. **"He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." We know Jesus selected Paul to go and preach to the Gentiles.**

What are some things we have to do to forgive ourselves?

a. Repent, for without repentance there can be no forgiveness.

b. Get busy in serving God. While repentance may mean to cease sinning, we must also change our way of thinking and acting. Peter describes it this way, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," 1 Peter 2:1-2.

c. A person may have a problem forgiving himself because he either has not truly repented or he is afraid he may go back into the sin.

d. Move on with your life. Do not beat yourself up over that which you have already corrected.

11. Thought question: A man that has been involved in homosexuality comes and says, “I don’t see how God could forgive me.” How would you respond? **God was willing to forgive those that crucified Jesus, Acts 2. Jesus died for the ungodly, those that were enemies, Romans 5:8. We tend to rank sins but with God all sin results in death. We are no better or worse than those that crucified Jesus on the cross. They were pardoned of their sins when they obeyed the Gospel. Why would He not forgive us?**

12. What is the one sin that cannot be forgiven? 1 John 5:16-17. **Sin that is not repented of. All sin will result in death if not forgiven. No sin will result in death if forgiven. Therefore, the sin leading to death is the unforgiven sin.**

That means all other sins can be forgiven. We should not question the love or mercy of God. If our God can forgive us, we should be able to forgive ourselves. This may be hard if we knew better before we committed the sin. While Paul could say he persecuted Christians in ignorance, Peter could not.

13. What was Peter told he would do? Mark 14:29-30. **Peter was told he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster would crow.**

14. What was Peter’s reaction? verse 31. **I will not deny you.**

15. What did Peter do? Mark 14:71-72. **He cursed and denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.**

16. What lesson might Peter have learned from this experience? 1 Corinthians 10:12. **To not be over confident or place our confidence in ourselves.. We need to be careful and think we would never commit “that” sin.**

While it is wrong to sin, and we must avoid it at all cost, we can learn from our past.

17. How might our past help us deal with those in sin? **We may understand the temptation, the guilt they may feel, and how hard it may be to give up the sin. Also it takes courage to repent.**

18. How might our past help us deal with those that find it hard to forgive themselves? **We can tell them that they are not alone. Their sin is no worse or better than the sins of others.**