

Getting Healthy - Introduction

There is a basic principle in farming that we can learn from. It is the principle of good health. Simply stated, whenever something is healthy, it will grow. It is therefore the farmer's task to prepare the ground, sow the seed and provide water when needed. When these simple tasks are performed, whatever is sown will always grow.

This principle in nature is exactly the same in the kingdom of God. Consider this parable that was spoken by Jesus:



And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

Mark 4:26-29

Here we can see that when the seed is scattered the crop begins to sprout and grow, although the farmer does not know how it happens. Paul, in another place, used a similar illustration:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

1 Corinthians 3:6, 7

We learn from this that although people have a responsibility to do their part, it is God that causes us to grow.

What prevents us from being healthy?

There is also another side to health and growth, illustrated by another parable of Jesus:

"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is

he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Matthew 13:18-23

We can see by this parable that the condition of the ground has a significant effect on the fruit that is eventually produced. *What do you think? What was the problem with the 3 pieces of ground that did not produce fruit?*

1. Wayside/path -
2. Stony places -
3. Thorns -

It is obvious that the ground in this parable is a picture of our hearts. When there is something wrong in our hearts, it becomes difficult to grow. In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon encourages us this way:

Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth are vanity.

Ecclesiastes 11:9, 10

When our heart is in right standing with God, then we begin to think the way that He does and our desires become His desires. Have a quick look at these passages of scripture and discuss them:

- Psalm 37:4
- John 15:7
- John 7:38
- Hebrews 10:22
- 1 John 3:21, 22

But Solomon warns us of two things that can distort our judgement and will therefore hinder our growth:

1. Put away *evil* from your flesh - or in other words, we must not allow sin to become established in our hearts. How does sin distort our judgement?
2. Remove *sorrow* from your heart - the word sorrow in this passage literally means vexation. In other words we must get rid of the things that vex or trouble us and not allow them to become established in our heart. What type of things can cause us sorrow and therefore distort our judgement?

Conclusion

These two, evil (sin) and sorrow (vexation) are the two main things that prevent us from becoming healthy and mature believers. In the next few lessons we are going to explore some of the sources of these problems and look at practical ways to get rid of them.

Getting Healthy - the health words (part 1)

In our last lesson we talked about two things that prevent us from becoming healthy and mature believers. Today we will deal with the first one: sin. The book of Hebrews encourages us this way:

"...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..."

Hebrews 12:1

In the same way an athlete can be weighed down by the wrong clothing, so we can be weighed down by sin. The acts of our past can be like old clothes that not only drag on us and make our journey more difficult, but can sometimes cause us to stumble and fall. But how can we deal with what we have done to others in the past?



I believe the way to deal with sin is in understanding the concepts of three important words. Look up the passages of scripture for each one and discuss the implications of each one.

1. **Confession** - 1 John 1:9; James 5:16; Matthew 3:5, 6; Romans 10:10;
 - a. What does it mean?
 - i. To own, acknowledge or avow, as a crime, a fault, a charge, a debt, or something that is against one's interest, or reputation.
 - b. Why is it important?
 - i. It brings the issue out into the open, which means that it can then be dealt with
 - ii. It causes you to take responsibility for your actions
2. **Repentance** - Matthew 3:1, 2; Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; 2 Corinthians 7:10;
 - a. What does it mean?
 - i. To feel pain, sorrow or regret for something done or spoken;
 - ii. To think differently or afterwards; to change your mind
 - b. Why is it important?
 - i. It is the beginning of the process of change (Acts 3:19)
 - ii. It leads to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10)

3. **Restitution** - Luke 19: 8-10; Numbers 5:6, 7
 - a. What does it mean?
 - i. The act of returning or restoring to a person some thing or right of which he has been unjustly deprived
 - b. Why is it important?
 - i. It clears you of wrong deeds (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)

Assignment: Here is an exercise that will help you to be free of the penalty and guilt of any sin, no matter how big or small.

1. With pen and paper write down anything that comes to mind that you have done and in which you are guilty.
 - a. Make sure you take time over this.
 - b. If you feel that someone else may be partly to blame, take responsibility for your part.
 - c. Remember that this is something for you only to see.
2. Confess each sin that you have committed to God and ask Him to forgive you.
 - a. Make sure that you do this out loud but in a private place.
3. Write across the paper this reference: **1 John 1: 9**, which says:
If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
4. Finally destroy the paper.
 - a. By doing this final act, you are accepting that God has forgiven you of your sin and that they are paid for.
 - b. Whenever you feel guilty about your past sins, you can remember the day when God forgave you.

Conclusion

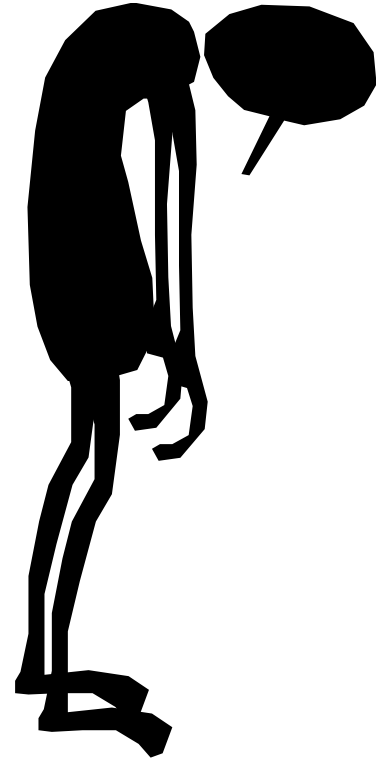
We will consider the second thing can prevent us from becoming healthy and mature believers in our next lesson.

Getting Healthy – the health words (part 2)

In our last lesson we considered how sin can prevent us from becoming healthy and mature believers. In this lesson we want to look at what Solomon encouraged his readers to remove from their hearts: **sorrow**.

...Therefore remove *sorrow* from your heart,
And put away evil from your flesh, For
childhood and youth are vanity.

Ecclesiastes 11:10



What does he mean by the word "sorrow"?

1. This word can also be translated as vexation, anger, grief, indignation, provocation, sore, spite, wrath.
2. Have a look at and discuss these three examples: Proverbs 12:16; 17:25; 21:19
3. To "...remove sorrow from your heart..." meant to erase from your heart anything that causes you to be vexed, anything that provokes you or stirs up wrath, any bottled up anger or grief. Why is this important? Because sorrow of heart will distort your ability to make good decisions.

Here is a typical example. A young lady grows up with a father who never shows her the love and attention that she needed. Although she constantly would look to him to affirm her sense of value and need for love, he simply neglects and ignores her. As a result, she feels that no man would ever love her or give her attention. By the time she is 16 she begins to get attention from men who find her attractive. She is so desperate for attention that she accepts anything that comes her way until, at 18, a 22 year old college student asks her to move in with him. Because she is so "vexed" and heartbroken by the lack of her father's interest, she feels that no one would ever marry her and decides that this young man may be her only chance for love. Her decision is influenced by the trouble in her heart and therefore distorts her judgement.

What can I do about it?

Jesus made an amazing statement about abiding (or continuing) in His word:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:31,32

Knowing the truth about your problem is the key to being set free. Therefore the key to removing sorrow from your heart is in three stages:

1. Identify the thing that is causing you sorrow
2. Discover the truth about that which is troubling you
3. Apply the appropriate responses

How does this work in practice?

1. Identifying sorrow requires
 - a. Openness - you must not hide your feelings about the problem any longer. It is often necessary to open up to a trusted friend or spiritual leader in order to get to the root of the problem.
 - b. Honesty - you must seek the truth about the situation and not accept or believe a lie.
 - c. Confession - you must actually get the thing out in the open by saying specifically what you believed to have happened in order to deal with it.
2. Discovering truth requires
 - a. God's word - as the guide that determines what is actually true
 - b. Good counsel - from those who know the truth. If you get advise from those who have the same problem you may get the wrong answers
3. Appropriate responses require
 - a. Willingness - to do the right thing
 - b. Understanding - of what the truth actually is. If you believe a lie, you must counter it with the truth until you believe the truth.

Dealing with sorrow of heart can be a bit more complicated than dealing with sin. Sometimes it is the direct result of your own sin, but often it comes from the sins that have been committed by others toward you. For example, if you have been told that you were "stupid" all your life, you would first need to understand that every person has been given a measure of ability by God (Romans 12:3). This means that your abilities are given for a specific purpose and do not define you. A person who can grasp things quickly is no better than

one who is slower. This is the truth! Then you would need to *forgive* those who called you stupid.

Assignment: Here is an exercise that will help you to remove sorrow from your heart:

1. With pen and paper write down anything that comes to mind that causes you to feel vexation
 - a. Make sure you take time over this.
 - b. This will include people who have hurt you in any way as well as negative feelings about yourself.
 - c. Remember that this is something for you only to see, but you may need to share this with someone that can help you with the problem.
2. Apply the truth to each thing that causes vexation
 - a. You may need help to discover what the truth is
 - b. You may need help to actually believe the truth that is set before you.
3. Forgive anyone who may have offended you
 - a. We will speak more about this in our next lesson
4. Finally destroy the paper and mark the date that you destroyed it.
 - a. By doing this final act, you are accepting the truth about the problem and bringing it to an end
 - b. Whenever you feel troubled about the problem you can remember the day in which you dealt with the problem

Conclusion

Remember that this assignment is a process that can take a bit of time. Stick with it and be diligent until you are no longer vexed! The process is worth it. In our next lesson we will deal with forgiveness.

Forgiveness

I always had a problem with the saying "forgive and forget". When someone has murdered a loved one or has been cheated out of their livelihood are they supposed to just forget it? Do we expect people to act as if the offence has never happened? Does God forget?



What do we mean by forgiveness?

Definitions:

- Forgive - to pardon; to remit, as an offense or debt; to overlook an offense, and treat the offender as not guilty. The original and proper phrase is to forgive the offense, to send it away, to reject it, that is, not to impute it, [put it to] the offender. But by an easy transition, we also use the phrase, to forgive the person offending. (Webster)
- Pardon - To forgive; to remit; as an offense or crime. Guilt implies a being bound or subjected to censure, penalty or punishment. To pardon, is to give up this obligation, and release the offender. We apply the word to the crime or to the person. We pardon an offense, when we remove it from the offender and consider him as not guilty; we pardon the offender, when we release or absolve him from his liability to suffer punishment.
- Remit - To forgive; to surrender the right of punishing a crime; as, to remit punishment.

Questions to consider:

1. Does true forgiveness mean that you act as if the offence never happened?
2. Does it mean that you forget that it ever happened?
3. Does God forget?

Let's consider the parable that Jesus told when He was asked about forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35

- Who does the King represent?
- What did the King do when he found that one of his servants was unable to pay his massive debt? (v. 25)
- What did the servant do? (v.26)
- How did the King respond? (v. 27)

- What did the servant do when he found that one of his fellow servants was unable to pay his debt? (v. 30)
- What did the King do when he heard what had happened? (vs. 32-34)
- Did the King forget?

In 1 Samuel 24 we have an amazing example of something that many never consider to be forgiveness. David was being chased by Saul, who wanted to kill him for treason even though David had done nothing to him. Saul entered a cave where David and his men were hiding, but did not know that they were there. David had the opportunity to kill the man who was clearly sinning against him and threatening his life, but he restrained his servants and did not allow them to rise against Saul. Instead he cut off a corner of Saul's robe to prove that he was close enough to kill Saul but chose not to. After Saul left the cave David came out and called to Saul. Here are a few important things that he said:

- ...my eye spared you - David chose not to take the matter of revenge and retribution into his own hands (v. 10)
- ...I have not sinned against you - David knew that he was innocent! (v. 11)
- ...you hunt my life to take it - David knew that Saul was guilty! (v. 11)
- ...Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you - David left judgement to God (v. 12)

David chose not to deal with Saul himself, even though he was innocent and Saul continued to pursue him. He protected himself by staying out of Saul's way and was determined to let God be the judge of the matter. This is a very interesting example of what it means to walk in forgiveness. Although Saul was guilty, he gave up his right to punish and overlooked his offence.



What does the bible say about forgiveness?

- We are commanded to forgive - (Luke 17: 3, 4)
- If you forgive you will be forgiven - (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Un-forgiveness can hinder your prayers - (Mark 11: 22-26)
- Forgiveness comes through Jesus - (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1: 14)
- Jesus gave us our greatest example of forgiveness - (Luke 23:34)

Why do I need to forgive?

- By forgiving you are no longer carrying the burden of judging the offender and avoiding bitterness, resentment and anger
- By forgiving you are leaving the matter to God and can therefore go on with your life
- By forgiving you are admitting that you too have sinned in times past and are in need of pardon
- Forgiveness is for you!

How can I do it?

When it comes down to it, forgiveness is something that we simply must do. However, several of the things that we have discussed in this lesson should make it easier to forgive.

- Remember what forgiveness really is
- Remember that Jesus forgave us
- Remember that if you will be forgiven if you forgive
- Remember that the person who offended you is a flawed human being and lower your expectations
- Remember that forgiveness is for you

Assignment: Here is an exercise that will help you to forgive

1. With pen and paper write down the name of anyone that you believe has offended you
 - a. Make sure you take time over this.
 - b. Remember that this is something for you only to see, but you may need to get help from a close friend or spiritual leader
2. Try to determine how much of the problem is of your own making
 - a. Blaming others for your own problems will not help you
3. Ask God to give you the desire to forgive and to give you the ability to forgive (Philippians 2:13)
 - a. Remember what forgiveness is
 - b. Remember that Jesus forgave you
 - c. Remember that you also need forgiveness
 - d. Remember that the offender is a flawed person just like you
4. Say out loud that you forgive the person, speaking their name
 - a. By doing this you are actually dealing with the problem and ending it.
5. Finally destroy the paper and mark the date that you destroyed it.



- a. By doing this final act, you are accepting that you have forgiven the person and bringing it to an end
- b. Whenever you feel troubled about the person you can remember the day in which you forgave them

Conclusion

Forgiveness is not just a one time thing. Jesus taught his disciples to forgive often, and so must we (Matthew 18:21-22). Once you release a person you begin to develop the habit of forgiving and it becomes easier. Do it now!

Selfishness - (part 1)

Does it seem as if people are being encouraged more and more to become self centred these days? "I did it my way!" "Look out for number one!" I've even heard twists of the scriptures like "Do unto others before they do unto you!" or "God helps those who help themselves!" It seems that even in church our focus can sometimes be on what we can get God to do for us instead of how we can serve Him. In order to become mature believers we must deal with this important topic.



What does it actually mean to be selfish?

Definition: Regarding one's own interest chiefly or solely; influenced in actions by a view to private advantage.

We read in the bible that selfishness will be one of the increasing characteristics of many people in the last days:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

2 Timothy 3: 1-4

We have a perfect example of both selfishness and selflessness in Genesis 13 between Abram and Lot. We read that the two of them had left Egypt, moved to the south of Judah and could no longer stay together because their possessions were so great that the land could not support them.

- What unselfish offer did Abram make to Lot?
- How did Lot respond?

But what is wrong with a little bit of selfishness? After all, shouldn't we all look after number one? Is it not a natural thing to do things our own way? Discuss.

Here is what the bible says that our attitude should be toward each other:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2: 3, 4

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19: 18

Jesus said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22: 37-40

If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you do well;

James 2: 8;

Jesus was our example of unselfishness. Have a look at these three passages and discuss them:

- Romans 15: 3
- 2 Corinthians 8: 9
- Philippians 2: 5-13

The problem of self seeking was one that Jesus had to deal with even among his disciples. In Matthew 16 beginning with verse 13 we read that when he was on his way to Jerusalem he asked his disciples what people were saying about who he was. When he asked them their opinion, Peter said that he was the Christ (Messiah) from God. As Jesus began to tell them that of his suffering and death on the cross, Peter rebuked him, saying that this was not going to happen.

How did Jesus respond to Peter in verses 23-25?

Why do you think he addressed self denial?

Conclusion

Jesus lived a completely unselfish life and expects his disciples to do the same. However, the difficult part is to actually live it. In our next lesson we will consider how to do it, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How Much Do You Remember?

In the introduction, what was the basic principle in farming that we can all learn from?

In the parable of the sower, what was the problem with the 3 pieces of ground that did not produce fruit?

1. Wayside/path -
2. Stony places -
3. Thorns -

In Ecclesiastes 11: 9, 10 Solomon warns us of two things that can distort our judgement and will therefore hinder our growth. Explain what he meant by these two phrases:

Removing sorrow from your heart -

Putting away evil from your flesh -

When dealing with sin in our lives why is confession so important?

Give me a reason why I need to forgive