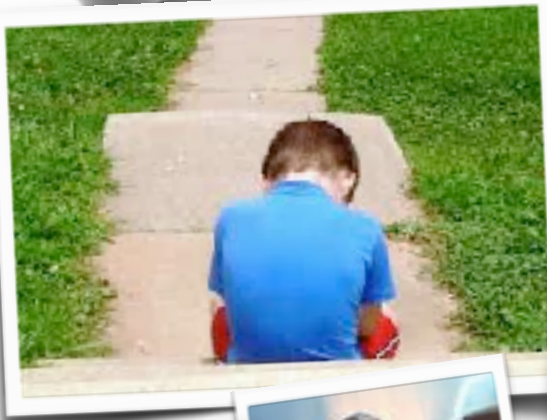


# JOURNEY TO WHOLENESS!



Things your **Mother** never **TOLD** you  
Love and grace in the healing of childhood wounds

**J2W Book 4**

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For further information or to place an order, please contact us at:

**Tel:** +27 (0) 60 825 5780 (as from 1 March 2018)  
**Fax:** 086 681 9458  
**E-mail:** [kanaan@iafrica.com](mailto:kanaan@iafrica.com)  
**Website:** [www.kanaanministries.org](http://www.kanaanministries.org)

**Office hours:**  
Monday to Friday, 9 AM to 2 PM

## **Kanaan International Website**

**Website:** [www.eu.kanaanministries.org](http://www.eu.kanaanministries.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

## *WHAT IS AN INNER CHILD?*

When God created us, He gave us a three-dimensional form ... body, mind, and spirit. We are physical, emotional, and spiritual beings. God took these three-dimensional beings and put them within a time and space "box" ... our universe. God Himself transcends the universe He created and is not bound by this time and space box.

Think for a moment about time as being the pages of a book. The page our book is opened to we call the present. All the pages before this page we call the past. All the pages after this page we call the future. But to God who transcends time, there is no past and future. Every page in our book is for Him the eternal "now".

Turn back to the beginning of "your" book. The first page is about your conception. Jesus was there. A few pages turn and we see your birth. A couple of chapters later is your first day of school. Jesus was there. But to Him, there is no "was" ... He is there with the developing embryo, with the newborn baby, with the nursery school child. That "you" Jesus is present with is your child within. That "you" has physical, emotional, and spiritual reality.

Our physical being is not present as we remember it from childhood pictures. We're no longer that 7 pound newborn wrapped in a fluffy blanket, or that chubby little preschooler with big eyes and baby fine hair. But other vestiges of our physical body do remain. All the memories we've ever had are still within us. Researchers have demonstrated this by touching electrodes to various locations within subject's brains during surgeries under local anesthetic. As one site is touched the subject remembers precisely a 2nd grade classroom and can name all the children seated around him. At another location he describes the bedroom he's playing in at age 4. Each location brings forth specific and exact memories.

The emotional being of the child is also present. We've all experienced at one time or another being flooded with feelings we don't understand. Our adult mind knows that the feelings are out of proportion to the situation at hand, but

we find ourselves unable to exercise much control over them. When you've felt your eyes fill with tears because Mom disagreed with you, when you become enraged because another driver cuts you off, when your voice sticks in your throat because you have to speak in front of a group, you're experiencing the emotional reality of the child you were.

The spiritual being of the child is also present in the adult. That is why sins committed by the child, while understandable, must be removed through confession if they are not to affect the adult. It is also why the adult can forgive wrongs done to the child many years before and experience the spiritual benefits of that forgiveness.

It is this child of the past ... the total physical, emotional and spiritual being that makes up what I call the inner child. As a seed sprouts and sends out shoots which develop in time into the giant elm, so the child is the father of the man. If we cut down the tree we would not still find within it the physical body of that seed because it has undergone a physical transformation. It has become part of the giant elm. Neither would we find the physical body of the inner child within the adult. But we do find his child thoughts, feelings and memories, and the beliefs and distortions that resulted from them. It is this which needs to be corrected and healed ... the child part of ourselves to which we have not before had access.

In Matthew 18:4 Jesus says "unless you change and become like a little child, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven." We need to find again that original child as God created him. We need to remove the distortions and misperceptions, the hurts and the pain and find ourself as God created us ... the one He knew and approved of before forming him in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), the child He looked at and lovingly pronounced good (Genesis).

Jesus says that whoever will receive, accept and welcome one little child like this for His sake receives, accepts, and welcomes Him. For His sake, welcome the one Jesus loved. For His sake, tell her all the things your mother never told you.

## **PART I: REPARENTING THE CHILD WITHIN**

*... I will do better for you than at your beginnings ...  
(Ezekiel 36:11)*

## CHAPTER 1

# THINGS YOUR MOTHER NEVER TOLD YOU

*... You shall forget the shame of your youth ... (Isaiah 54:4)*

For most kids growing up, the smartest people we knew were our mother and father. Moms and Dads knew how to make the stove work and drive the car, how to talk to the lady at the department store to get her to take back the shirt we didn't like, and how to do something called work to get the bills paid. They're the ones we went to whenever we had a question about how something worked, and the ones whose OK we needed whenever we wanted to go somewhere. Mom and Dad seemed to know everything we did and an awful lot about things we were just thinking of doing. To our little eyes and ears, Mom and Dad seemed larger than life. They were the most powerful people in the world. From our vantage point as children, it looked like Mom and Dad knew everything.

Let me tell you why that was a very dangerous belief to hold.

Children aren't very good qualifiers ... they see everything in the extreme. For kids it's all or none, black or white, always or never. In that black and white thinking, we decided that a Mom and Dad who knew how to do so many things must be right about everything ... all the time. Little kids can't conceive of the idea that while Mom and Dad know a lot about many things, they don't know everything. You might think that as we get older, our parents shrink back to normal size and we're able to see them more clearly as they really are. In some ways perhaps we can. But in other very important ways, that original belief that Mom and Dad are always right is still alive and well within us. It has not diminished through the years and by the time we become adults it is so deeply ingrained in us that we believe it without even thinking about it. We no longer ponder the question ... it is alive and well in our unconscious mind. We long ago stopped gathering data about it.

When we hold a belief so strongly that we no longer pay attention to data that confirms or rejects it, that belief has tremendous power in our lives. It's as if we're frozen in our ability to make judgements at age 4 or 5. No new data has been allowed in since then, no questioning of the basic tenet ... Mom and Dad know everything, they are right ... *and what they said about me is true.* No matter

what we've done since then, what abilities we've mastered or talents we've perfected, what we've learned, or how much our friends love us, our inner 5-year-old, that little child of the past who's frozen within us still believes that Mom and Dad were right. We see ourselves as they saw us. We *are* the reflection we saw mirrored in their eyes.

This would not be a problem if we all had good parenting ... a Mom and Dad who could celebrate our existence and rejoice in our presence ... who told us and showed us that we were a delight, not a problem, a gift and not a chore. Even more than loving us, we needed a parent who liked us ... whose eyes, at least on occasion, lit up at the sight of us.

If we'd had that, we'd not be harmed by believing that Mom and Dad were right. Our belief in their omnipotence would not have been so very dangerous. They would have taught us the single most important lesson we needed to learn ... that we had value simply because we WERE. Is this the message you received from your parents?

Would you try something with me for a moment? Close your eyes and envision your mother as she looked when you were a small child. Notice her surroundings ... what room she's in, what she's wearing, what she's doing. Now see yourself as the little child you used to be. Let yourself walk into her presence. Let yourself become that little child and look up into her face. What kind of expression do you see on her face? Is she glad to see you? How do you feel in her presence? Notice what's happening in your body as you do this. Is it relaxed and comfortable or tight and tense? Perhaps some words will come to mind that describe your mother as she felt to you then. Take all the time you need to really let yourself experience what it was like for you to be that small child, to be dependent on this person to meet your needs.

When you're finished, see yourself walk out of that room and walk into the presence of your father. Perhaps he's sitting in the living room, or working out in the yard. Let yourself see him clearly as he was when you were a child. Notice how much bigger he is than you are. Look up into his face. Is he paying attention to you or busy doing something else? Let yourself experience how it feels to be in his presence, paying attention to what your body is trying to tell you. Think of a few words which describe your father as you experienced him.



As you open your eyes and come back into the present, let yourself reflect on what you just experienced. I have done similar exercises with many of my clients and have seen them react in many different ways. People who have done considerable work on their recovery will often reaffirm what they already knew while experiencing it on a deeper level. It's not unusual however, for a person to get in touch with feelings about the experience of having this person for a mother or father that had only been there on the thinking level before.

It's also not unusual for someone to have trouble afterward believing the experience of their feelings. I remember one man who had worked very hard to become a financial success and to develop a position of power for himself. As I took him through this exercise and he experienced himself in the presence of his father, his whole body posture began to change. His shoulders came up and his head kind of ducked down. It almost looked like he was trying to crawl inside himself and disappear. When I asked him about it, he said that was exactly what he wanted to do ... become invisible. Then he said, "but my father didn't treat me badly. There's no reason I should react like this." It was true that his father was not physically abusive to him, but he was often emotionally overpowering ... a strong presence who wanted an equally strong son rather than the sensitive little boy he had. This man had finally become what his father wanted but had to repress the painful experiences of his childhood to do it. Even when he found himself cringing before the remembered image of his father, he had difficulty believing that his feelings were justified.

He is not alone in this. Clients often work hard to remember experiences that have been repressed (repressed is a clinical term for things we forget because they are too painful to remember) and then upon remembering, not believe the memory! If you're having this experience, it can be a source of information as well. Many people with a lot of pain in their past learned how to turn off their feelings as a coping mechanism early in childhood. They are often quite unaware that their childhood *was* painful (the repression again). If you are one of these people, you may need the aid of a therapist to help you reconnect with your past.

Whatever you experience, take a few minutes to record your impressions in the space provided at the end of this chapter. Were your parents able to celebrate your existence and show you that you were the gift, the delight we spoke of earlier? If they did, they taught you that you had value just because you were you. Then every success and every failure, every hope fulfilled and every

disappointment would be viewed through *that* filter. That belief about yourself would be the bottom line which would never be in jeopardy regardless of wins or losses in the outside world. Your inner world would be secure and you would not be devastated when faced with disappointments, hurts or setbacks.

Most of us didn't get that set of parents. Most of us, to a greater or lesser extent, got the *other* set of parents, the ones who due to their own dysfunctional parenting weren't able to rejoice in us.

"Dysfunctional parents" has become a kind of buzz word for the 90's. As Christians, we need to remember that this is the norm for our fallen world. Not one of us had parents unaffected by the fall, nor will we have children who are. The sins of Adam were passed down to his children and his children's children ... right down the line to us and our children. It is no betrayal of our parents or ourselves to acknowledge this. The God who desires truth in our innermost being will use the truth to bring us into a deeper relationship with Himself. What parents will not rejoice over this in heaven even if in their woundedness they are unable to do so now?

This being the case, try not to overreact to the word "abuse". I use it to mean any treatment, from the most heinous overt to the subtlest covert, which has the effect of distorting or misrepresenting to us God's viewpoint.

We may have been physically, sexually, emotionally or spiritually abused. Our abuse may have been overt or covert. Overt abuse is something that was done to us which never should have happened. Overt abuse is easier to define than covert abuse because its right out there in the open. There's nothing hidden about it. Being beaten, raged at or sexually molested are examples of overt abuse. Covert abuse, on the other hand, is something that was harmful to us but which we may not have identified as damaging at the time it occurred. We very likely did not name it as abuse but just accepted it as the way things were done in our family. Conditional love, being overcontrolled, or having to take care of a parent emotionally are just a few examples of covert abuse. We may know about our abuse, be in denial about our abuse, or have memories of painful times we've hidden deep within us. Whether we remember it, have forgotten it, or refuse to look at it, that dysfunctional parenting still has an effect on us today. We are still believing that we are who our parents reflected back to us. We still believe our parents were right.

Julie was a severely overweight woman in her early 30's. She came to me wanting to work on her depression and compulsive overeating. As I tried to lead her into taking another look at her childhood, I came up against a brick wall. "I had wonderful parents", she insisted, "they loved me and I knew they loved me. They never hit me or yelled at me. They gave me everything." Because Julie's parents' abuse of her was covert rather than overt, it was even harder for her to see. But it was certainly clear that Julie was abusively parenting herself. She held down a demanding job she didn't enjoy and which left little time for pleasure. She took every job at church that no one else wanted. She saw herself as having less value and fewer rights than thinner women and subjected herself to starvation diets in an attempt to punish herself into an acceptable body. She wouldn't allow herself to express negative feelings to anyone for fear they would be "hurt". No matter what she had accomplished, she never felt it was good enough. Where, I asked her, had she learned all these abusive behaviors? If Mom and Dad were so wonderful, who had taught her to be so hard on herself? Who had taught her that her value depended on what she did rather than who she was? Who had taught her she wasn't enough?

Jill's dad was an alcoholic. When he wasn't drinking he was silent and unapproachable. When he was drinking he was happy and talkative ... until he passed out. Jill's mom carried the burden of responsibility for the family. She left for work early in the morning and got home, exhausted, at supper time. Jill and her sister did all the housework and cooking from an early age. Jill came into therapy knowing she'd had a hard life. What she didn't know was that she alternately overburdened and abandoned herself in the same way her parents had during her childhood.

Tom came into therapy with two years of sobriety from his alcoholism. He was working a good 12 step program and understood the effect his parents had on his beliefs about himself and his self-image. "I know it's wrong", he told me early in treatment, "but I just can't stop beating myself up. I know I had dysfunctional parenting, but since I'm aware of it, why can't I stop *doing it*?"

That's what this book is about ... how to stop being stuck in the past, believing the image that Mom and Dad reflected back to you and hating that little child who wasn't what Mom or Dad wanted, continually trying to change or cover up your child within to finally make him or her acceptable. It's about finding out the truth of who you really are and getting that truth inside you so you can esteem yourself from within ... for who you are rather than for what you do,

what you own or how you look. The good news is that it really *is* do-able. It takes work and commitment but that's not a high price to pay to really *like* yourself, is it? If you're like most of the people I see, you're tired of faking it, tired of pretending. You may have even perfected that pretense to a fine art, able to fool most of the people most of the time, but are finding you're simply tired of the enormous effort of keeping it up.

You may have wondered ... "Is it really possible to change how I feel about myself ... after all that was so long ago. I'm an adult now. You can't go back and undo history, can you?" I understand those questions ... they were once my questions as well. I had spent years in therapy understanding the past but insight hadn't taken the pain away. My adult life looked fine. I had a family and friends who loved me, meaningful work to do, a deepening intimacy with the Lord — everything I thought I needed. Why wasn't it enough?

The Lord showed me that the problem wasn't in the present. The pain I was feeling was the pain of the child I had been, the child who had never gotten what she needed. Although my adult relationships were good, they had only ministered to the adult part of me. No one had reached the child and that was where the pain was. "Then it's hopeless" I thought. "There's no way I can go back and become a child again."

The Lord showed me that nothing is impossible with God. Throughout one entire year in which I just stayed home and talked to Him, He taught me what I want to teach you ... how to reparent your child within and let the Lord reparent you. You see, we do have access to that child we were. There is a way to reach and touch that long ago part of ourselves. And there is a way to take away the pain.

So the answer is *yes*, it is possible to redo your history. I've never had anyone who did this step tell me that it didn't work for them. I've had people tell me they thought I was crazy. Some have shared that they felt very uncomfortable at first. But no one has ever told me they didn't develop a deep caring for and commitment to that little child within them. Most amazingly, that development changed the way they thought about, treated, and felt about themselves. You *can* learn to reparent yourself ... functionally ... and internalize your own parenting. In other words, you can come to believe the things your mother never told you ... that you are a delight, a gift, and joy.

## ***WHY YOUR MOTHER NEVER TOLD YOU***

Very few parents plan to abuse their children. The vast majority of the time parents mean well. It is simply not possible for them to give what they haven't gotten. Parents who were themselves dysfunctionally parented carry around inside them a little boy or girl who doesn't feel too good about *himself* either. These parents don't have many good feelings inside them to share with anyone else.

Can you remember a day when you felt really great about yourself? Perhaps someone had paid you an important compliment, or you knew you were looking especially good, or you had something you really cared about go just right? Let yourself go back, in your mind's eye, and see yourself at that time. What kind of look do you see on your face? Were you kinder or less kind? More willing to make time for someone else or less willing? Chances are the good feeling you had inside got carried over into your outer life. It's pretty generally true that the better we feel about ourselves, the more we're able to feel good about other people. As a matter of fact, it's almost axiomatic that what we express out in our interactions with others is simply a reflection of what we feel inside about ourselves.

Now let's go back and look at our parents again. Could it be that their treatment of us had more to do with what they didn't have inside them than with *who we really were*?

Let me tell you one reason that last statement may be hard for you to believe. Think about your brain as a computer for a moment. When you open a file, you store information on it. Then you close the file and open other files to store other types or categories of information. You give each file a name to tell what kind of information is stored in it. Now suppose you have a file called "things about me". On that file you store information about things which stem from you or which you have caused to happen. In that file you store things you've done, actions you've taken, and *in the early years, things done or said to you*. Because children are egocentric, *they believe they are the cause of what they receive from others*.

Later in childhood, they open a new file entitled "not about me". In this file they store information about things other people caused. When you want to access information stored in your computer you can retrieve it, but you will always get it back the way it was originally encoded. Things originally written in the file labeled "things about me" can only be retrieved by accessing that disk.

Information in the file labeled “not about me” can only be accessed through that disk. The problem occurs because children only develop their “not about me” file later in life, but *they store perceptions of how significant people in their life feel about them very early*. And it all goes into the “things about me” file!

As a child I couldn’t even conceive of the possibility that Mom’s seeming to not like being with me was more about what she didn’t get when she was a child than it was about me. I couldn’t begin to consider that Dad thinking I was ugly had more to do with his own poor self-image than with what I really looked like. As I grew older and became more perceptive, I was able to gather some new information about Mom and Dad. I saw, for example, that Mom didn’t really feel comfortable around little children or seem to enjoy taking care of them. But guess what I did with this data! That’s right, I stored it in a different file ... a file that was labeled “things about Mom” ... rather than amending the “things about me” disk. So did this new, more adult information ever challenge the “Mom doesn’t enjoy me ... I am not enjoyable” data? No, not a chance. In order for that to happen I would have had to access the old disk labeled “things about me” and delete the original entry.

When I can access and delete the old information and program in the new, I can go from “I am a bother, I am a problem” to “I am not a bother, I am a joy”. What a difference it makes in our adult feeling, thinking and treatment of ourselves when we believe that *it was not our fault*. It was not, it was *never*, about us. We *were* lovable. We *are* enjoyable. Mom just never told us.

Now, how do we begin to get this new data inside us?

To begin, go back through your old family albums and find a picture of yourself between the ages of about 4 to 10. Pick a picture in which you are facing the camera. Pick a picture that you like and that gives you a good feeling about the child in it.

Take your picture to a local developer and have them enlarge the picture to an 8 x 10. To do this they will take a picture of your picture in order to make a negative, and then enlarge it to the right size. If there are other people in the picture, have them cropped out so the enlargement is of you alone.

Our brains have an interesting phenomena called habituation. Simply put, it means we stop paying attention to something familiar, something we’re used to seeing. You’ve probably seen the same snapshots of yourself many times but not

really paid much attention. When you see your enlargement you may find you have an interesting response, as if you are seeing it for the first time. I've had many patients bring in their pictures with tears in their eyes.

I remember a woman named Marita who had been severely physically and verbally abused by her mother. As happens to most victims, she had come to believe that she was responsible for the abuse that had been done to her, thinking that if she had only been a better child, prettier, more obedient, more *something*, this would not have happened to her. We struggled with this misbelief for many weeks. The day Marita came in with her picture she just sat in her chair looking at the face of the child in the picture she held in her hands, shaking her head in wonder as tears rolled down her face. "She's so cute, so sweet. Why couldn't they like her?", she asked me. "There's nothing wrong with her. Why couldn't they like her?"

A little bit of Marita's programming was being deleted. She hadn't been the monster Mom had told her she was. She was a tiny little girl with huge dark eyes and a shy smile. Who wouldn't have loved to have a little girl like that? Marita got her first glimpse of the truth ... she had not been defective, the bad seed that Mom had to beat to get to behave. She'd been a delightful little girl who made you want to take her in your arms and tell her she was terrific.

Julie, the severely overweight woman we met earlier, could never remember a time she hadn't been fat. I really had to work with her to get her to ask her mother if she could borrow the family album. She came into her session some weeks later excited, hardly waiting until she sat down to tell me her news. "I looked at the pictures, like you told me. I couldn't believe it. I can't even wait for you to see the picture next week when it's ready ... I have to tell you. I wasn't always fat! I thought I was. But it must have started in fourth grade because there I was, in third grade, and I looked normal! I looked just like everyone else. I wasn't always fat!" Part of Julie's distorted belief about herself was that she had been born defective, that she hadn't had a chance. Seeing herself as a normal size kid put the first doubts in her head about that perception. She wasn't ready to delete that data but she was ready to question it!

Sometimes a person who has had a great deal of abuse cannot find any picture of themselves they like. It's fairly common for people who have such experiences to turn their anger and hatred upon themselves, blaming the child they were for the treatment they received. I have found this to be especially true for incest and sexual abuse survivors.

I have many patients who have had this experience go back to an even earlier picture. It's hard to look at a two year old and see her as "dirty" or believe he was guilty of "just trying to make Dad have to whip you". I've even had a few people who had to start with a baby picture. I think it's better to use a picture of a child a little older because it's easier to identify that child as yourself. But if you find you have very negative feelings toward your 5 or 6 year old, start with whatever picture you need to start with. The most important thing is that you do start.

Once you have your enlargement, put it in a beautiful frame and place it somewhere in your home where you will see it often. This is your child ... a sacred trust from God. As you do to the least of these, you do to Him. I think putting the picture next to your bed is a good idea because you can see it right before you go to sleep and again first thing in the morning, but any place that honors the child and feels right to you is fine. I had one patient who put his picture on the desk at his office, right next to the pictures of his wife and children, and that worked very well for him. When you buy your frame, buy something that's congruent with yourself as you would like to be, something that your inner child would delight in. If your little girl always dreamed of romantic dresses with embroidered lace, this is the time to indulge her. If a finely made sterling frame suggests quality and worth, give that gift to your child.

That done, it's time to initiate a relationship with this child. In order to do that, you need to separate yourself from the child. For the time being, stop thinking of this child as "you", and think of the child as being separate from yourself ... as one whom God has given into your care. Remember however, that in this relationship, you will always be the adult and he the child.

What *would* you do if someone brought you a small child and asked you to take care of her for a little while. Suppose that they furthermore told you that this child had been abused, perhaps not purposely, but never the less this had occurred. A child who's been abused would naturally be afraid, probably unable



to trust. The one thing you'd want to be sure of is that you did not repeat what had already been done to this child. You would not want to add to the burden of fear and distrust this child already carried. But would you?

My guess is you already have. Let's talk for a minute about what children are like and what is abusive to them.

### YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN

CHOOSE A FEW WORDS, NOUNS OR ADJECTIVES, THAT DESCRIBE YOUR MOTHER AS YOU EXPERIENCED HER WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD. DO THE SAME FOR YOUR FATHER. IF YOU HAD STEPPARENTS, INCLUDE THEM AS WELL. PICK WORDS WHICH DESCRIBE BOTH THEIR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE QUALITIES. THEN CHOOSE A FEW WORDS WHICH ILLUSTRATE HOW IT FELT TO YOU TO LIVE IN THIS FAMILY.

MOTHER \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

FATHER \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 2

# WHAT CHILDREN ARE LIKE

*... He has blessed your children within you. (Psalm 147:13)*

Pia Mellody, in her book *Facing Codependence*<sup>1</sup>, discusses five characteristics she believes all children have in common. I am convinced of the importance of her work and I am deeply indebted to her for developing and sharing this concept with me. In functional families children are accepted with these five characteristics and are affirmed and supported to grow through the developmental issues they present. In a dysfunctional family, parents aren't able to respond appropriately to one or more of these aspects of the child and he is attacked or ignored.

### The Value of a Child

A child is inherently valuable and precious. It is the birthright of the child ... children are born having value. They don't have to do anything to earn or achieve value ... their value is inherent in their very being. Functional parents are able to celebrate the child's value and enjoy the child just as he is. It's interesting, isn't it, that in all the instruction Jesus gives in the gospels, He never once spoke to the children about their needing to change. All His remarks about parent-child interaction were directed to the adults.

The other day I was in a restaurant with a friend and had the opportunity to observe three women in the next booth. One woman had her newborn granddaughter with her and was showing her off to her friends. I expected that they would admire the child for a few minutes and then the conversation would shift to more "adult" topics. But these three women had more recovery on board that I did at that moment. They continued to focus on this little newborn, to delight in her, to adore her. This little baby couldn't do anything. She couldn't be polite, or appreciative, or charming. All she could do was to be exactly who she was ... and these women were delighting in her, just as she was. What a gift they were giving her. They were teaching her that by her very existence, she brought joy to their lives. She was learning she had value.

In dysfunctional families, parents convey that something is wrong with the child ... that the child must *become* something to have worth, that the child needs to shape up or change. One of the questions on the history form that all our new patients fill out is what they had to do in their family of origin to get approval. What a roster of rules to achieve worth *that* is. I hear everything from getting good grades, being a leader, and never talking back, to taking care of Mom or Dad, never showing feelings, and being perfect. There is a place at the end of Chapter 2 for you to write the things you had to do in your family to be valued. A child who is prized for what he does or becomes learns to gather esteem from the outside in. There is a big difference between this outside-in esteem with its relentless quest to earn respect and to please, and a self-esteem based on our relatedness to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Self-esteem only grows when we are valued for what we *are*. It's interesting, isn't it, that when Moses asked God His name, the Lord replied, "I am what I am" ... not, "I do what I do".

Another way a child gathers esteem is to have a parent who shares who *he* is with the child. You know, our parents are our first gods, the first power we know that is greater than ourselves. Children hold their parents in very high esteem. So a parent who will share his experiences, thoughts, and feelings with a child is telling the child that he is worth being intimate with. Can you think of a time when someone you'd admired wanted to be your friend? Can you remember how good it made you feel? Didn't your value climb a little bit in your own eyes? That's what happens to children whose parents share themselves. The child has some of the high value he places on his parents accrue to himself. The mechanism that causes children to give so much importance to their parents seems to operate independently of the characteristics of the parents. Common sense might tell us that only children with loving parents would place such high value on them but this isn't true. It's always been somewhat amazing to doctors and nurses to see a little child in the hospital who has been severely abused by Mom or Dad and who is constantly crying for that very parent to come and get him. But it happens repeatedly. It may simply be a function of our genetic wiring. As a species we're programmed for survival. Humans, compared to other species, have an extremely long period of dependency when we cannot take care of ourselves. It may be that this deep attachment and value we place on mom and dad is there to protect us and ensure our survival. Whatever it's origin, children want their parents attention and approval regardless of whether the parent is a

person we would otherwise like or admire, and sadly, regardless of the child's age. How often we see an adult child still striving to win that recognition from Mom and Dad that will never come.

Parents also convey to a child that he has value by listening to the child share who *he* is ... what he thinks, feels, wants, likes and dislikes. It's a way of saying to a child, "you're important, you're worth my time, I want to know who you are, I enjoy being with you". It's very common to see adults who had perfectly fine parenting in all the areas of physical care. They weren't hit, they weren't yelled at, they always had nice clothes and fine food and parents who wanted them to do well. But they didn't get the experience that by their very existence they brought their parents joy. In those earliest years when the child needed an audience to enjoy and applaud him, the house was dark. These people have a lot of trouble embracing the fact of their abuse. They're the ones who tell you, "but I wasn't abused, I had wonderful parents." They put a double whammy on themselves because they see in themselves all the symptoms we'd expect to be there, but because Mom and Dad were perfect it somehow must be *their* fault. They must somehow be defective. This just hits at the core of a person and is very damaging. They often spend their lives trying to top their last accomplishment, constantly striving to prove to themselves and everyone else that they really are OK.

Were you valued by your parents simply because you were their child, or did you have to earn your value? Did your parents share themselves with you or were they closed and private? Did they take the time to draw you out and hear what was going on in your world? At the end of this chapter write about the ways you were and were not seen as valuable in your family.

### **The Need for Protection**

The second characteristic of children is that they are vulnerable. There are really two concepts involved here. The first is the easiest to understand and involves the need for protection. Because children are vulnerable, they aren't able to adequately protect themselves and need parents to do that for them. There are four parts of us that need protection ... our physical body, our behavior, our thinking and our feelings. Parents protect our physical body by treating it with respect and making sure that other people do the same. A parent who is

physically abusive or who allows someone else to physically or sexually abuse a child is not doing this. We give a child protection in the area of their behavior by setting age appropriate limits for the good of the child. Have you ever seen a child nag a parent about something the child wants to do which is really not safe for them and hear the parents eventually say, "All right, do what you want, but don't come crying to me when you get hurt."?

Parents also affirm a child's vulnerability by letting the child make choices about his behavior that he is ready to make. The child isn't asked to make choices or take responsibility for things that are beyond the capabilities of his age and, just as importantly, is not protected from choices and responsibilities that are age appropriate. The parent neither treats the child as if he cannot be hurt or injured, nor as if he must be protected from everything. We protect a child's thinking and feeling reality by listening respectfully to what the child thinks and feels and by not telling him that he's stupid to think that or making fun of his feelings.

### **I'm Not You.**

The second component to vulnerability is the idea of separateness. When a baby is born, it has no idea that it is separate from its mother. The child doesn't even know that the breast it's nursing from is not part of its own body. That's because children are not born with boundaries. A boundary is the part of the developing psyche of the child which separates "self" from "other" and protects the self. Initially there is no boundary and hence no separation between "me" and "Mom". A child acquires boundaries with age and development if he experiences his parents protection of that separateness and if he sees appropriate boundaries being modeled by his parents. When parents don't have functional boundaries, they can't protect their children and teach them to protect themselves in each of the four components which make up their reality. Let's look at this in each of those four areas.

### **Our Bodies**

Parents without functional boundaries don't really see the child's body as being separate from themselves. This is what allows them to physically or sexually abuse a child. Their unspoken belief is that this is *their* child and they can do whatever they want to do with the child's body. They don't seem to have the

sense that this child is a unique being, created by God for His delight. At the other extreme is the parent who, because of this same lack of physical boundaries, feels everything the child feels. This parent can't bear for the child to experience even normal hurts and over protects the child in order to minimize their *own* pain.

### **Our Behavior**

Parents without functional boundaries cannot separate what the child does from who the parent is. They see everything the child does as defining the parent. Because of this, they try to over control the child so that they themselves "look good". The "think what the neighbors would say" families are from this school. When the child does an unacceptable behavior, the parent experiences inordinate shame. I am not talking here about the normal concern a parent has for teaching a child the values of the family and community. That is indeed the job of the parent. What I am talking about is a parent who acquires and loses his own esteem based on the choices of the child.

My husband, David, experienced that one summer when he was 14 and went with his parents to church camp for the summer. David's father was the pastor in the small town in which they lived and on the camp board. That year David and a few other boys had gone over to the girls' side of the camp after lights out for a little shenanigans. One of David's friends was caught and although David himself was not identified, he turned himself in rather than leave his friend to take the rap alone. Both boys had to appear before the camp board but only one had to appear before his father.

Because David's father did not have a functional boundary with him, his father experienced the transgression as if he himself had done a shameful thing. His lack of appropriate boundary didn't allow David to be separate from his Dad, or to be the age he really was. It wasn't possible for his dad to see that although he had broken a rule and needed to be confronted about that, the behavior was pretty typical for a 14 year old. He wasn't able to experience any joy that he had raised a son who wouldn't walk away in spite of the big temptation to do so and leave his friend to face the music alone. In fact, his father was so mortified that he didn't speak to David for weeks. This kind of excessive reaction to a child's behavior occurs when the parent lacks an intact boundary.

David's mother, on the other hand, did have enough of a boundary to separate herself from her son. She was the one who had stood eye to eye with him the

very next morning and asked him whether he was going to let his friend take the rap all alone. (David says that up to that very moment, that was exactly what he had planned to do!) David's Mom knew what the consequences would be in embarrassment to her husband in this small town, but she was more concerned about the kind of person David would grow up to be than the talk she would have to endure. If she wasn't able to hold herself separate from her son, she would not have been able to parent him so well.

### **Our Thinking**

A parent without a functional boundary can't allow the child to have thoughts which are at odds with his own. For these parents, differences are unacceptable. They tend to tell a child what to think rather than asking him for his opinion.

Our thinking is the way we give meaning to incoming data. A parent without intact boundaries cannot allow the child to construe a different meaning on something than he does, and may attack the child for the meaning he does give. These kids are often called stupid by mom or dad when they are expressing something very intelligently ... just simply different than what mom or dad thinks.

I remember a family session I had with a 15 year old named Brad, his 12 year old sister and their parents. Brad was trying to explain to his father why he had signed a petition to keep a teacher whom his father had publicly opposed. Although Brad's reasons were well thought out and presented, his dad was outraged. To him, his son's position amounted to nothing less than betrayal. In an outburst of fury he yelled "you are my son and you'll think what I tell you to think!". Because Brad's dad did not have good boundaries, he couldn't see his son as a separate person.

### **Our Emotions**

You find the same kind of phenomena here with feelings as you do with thinking. Here though, it is the choices, likes and dislikes, and emotions of the child which must match his parents. This ranges from relatively minor things like whether one prefers this dress or that one, to areas of more importance such as career decisions and marriage partners.



I had a client recently tell me about a conversation she had with her mother about her upcoming vacation to Mexico. Jan had been looking forward to this trip for a long time and was enthusiastically telling her mother about it when her mother said "you don't want to go to Mexico. You have to be so careful there and you can't drink the water and you'll probably get sick. Go to Hawaii instead." Jan replied that she did indeed want to go to Mexico and that she knew how to take care of herself and would be careful. Her mother could not hear this and continued to outline all the reasons why she would enjoy Hawaii more. Jan's mom couldn't see her daughter as a separate person with preferences which were different from her own.

A dear friend told me about a time when she was around 6 years old and supposed to play in her first piano recital. She not only had to play her piece with many people listening but also from memory. As she sat in the back seat on the way to the performance, she said to her mother, "I'm nervous". "You're *not* nervous" her mother crisply replied, "you're too young to have nerves". This mom's lack of boundaries did not allow her daughter to have and to know her own feelings.

When parents don't have healthy boundaries, they abuse their children by under or over protecting them. What did you experience as you were growing up? Did your parents affirm your separateness from them or were they threatened by differences? Were you protected from harm and yet allowed to make your own mistakes? Write about these experiences at the end of this chapter.

### **God is not finished with us yet.**

A third characteristic of children is they are imperfect. Healthy parents are aware that there is only one Perfect One. They are able to take the long view of their children, knowing that becoming like Jesus is a process which will not be complete until He comes again. To the extent that they are able to accept that they are loved by Him as they are, they will be able to pass this on to their children. They will be able to teach their children what is expected of them and how to do things, and that they are wonderful precious people despite mistakes or wrongdoing.

Children whose parents aren't able to do this grow up to do an "either-or" thing with themselves. Either they are terribly hard on themselves or they rebel against rules and standards.

In my practice I see more of the former than the latter. One of the first things I notice about them is that they have a really hard time sharing who they are with another person. For them the message of childhood was "it's not acceptable to be the way you are" or simply "you're not acceptable".

No wonder this child, grown up, isn't about to share who he is. He'd better hide his true self and present what he thinks you want him to be. That's why it's so common for codependents to express that they feel like they're a fake or a fraud. They can't believe other people really like them despite plenty of evidence because they know that there is so much of themselves they never let anyone else see. Deep within they are believing that their friends will tell them the same thing their parents did ... "I cannot accept your imperfection ... it's not acceptable to be the way you are". In truth, we're usually *thrilled* to see other people's imperfections when they show them to us openly. It makes us feel more comfortable. It makes them seem more human to us. It makes us feel that maybe our own imperfections aren't so terrible. I will often share with clients my moments of failure simply to show them that no one stays in recovery 24 hours a day and that it is acceptable with me to be imperfect. Sometimes this makes it easier for them to share and accept the imperfect parts of themselves. We all have and will always have unhealed parts of us. It's wonderful to continue to work on your recovery and it's a joy when a problem area we've identified for ourselves improves, but we will always have issues we need to work on. In this way it's like sanctification ... it won't be complete until we see Jesus face to face. We are *all* imperfect. That's true for me and for you, and for all the people who write books on spirituality and all the people who give lectures and conferences on co-dependency recovery. If I ever meet a pastor, author, or lecturer who tries to tell me, by words or behavior, that this isn't true for them, I run like crazy because I know this person is deluded about their imperfection and is not a safe person. On the other hand, when I meet successful people who don't see themselves as having more value than others, I know they've put their money where their mouths are and are really practicing a good recovery program.

How did your family handle your imperfection? Were you shamed about making mistakes or not knowing how to do something? How did your parents respond

to their *own* imperfection? Did they hide, deny it or blame someone else for it, or did they accept it with good humor? Write about this aspect of your early training at the end of this chapter.

### **Dependency Needs and Wants**

The fourth characteristic of children is that they're dependent ... they can't take care of their own needs and wants. As humans, we need food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, physical and emotional nurturing. Emotional nurturing includes someone spending time with us and giving us attention and direction.

Functional families initially provide all of a child's needs and, as she grows, teach her how to take care of those needs she is capable of handling on her own. They don't begrudge a child care, grumble about how much it costs to clothe and feed her, or shame her about wanting attention. Neither will they do everything for her so that she remains always a dependent child. The message to the child is, "I love and care for you willingly because you have value to me". Did you get this feeling from your parents? A child who does will not only develop a healthy self image but will also learn that it's all right to have needs. She will have learned how to take care of her own needs when she can, and to ask for help with those needs she truly cannot handle on her own.

The Gilbert's are typical of many double income families I see. They both work until about 6:00 every week day and then have to rush to get their little girls picked up from after-school care and hurry home to start dinner. The early evening is filled with getting dinner on the table, getting everyone fed, and the dishes done. The conversation is a flurry of "don't bother me ... can't you see I'm trying to get this done ... not right now ... girls please!" Both parents are tired and are looking forward to getting the girls into bed so they can have a little time to themselves. Saturdays are spent with Mr. Gilbert doing yard work and Mrs. Gilbert cleaning the house and running errands. Sometimes things get so hectic that they talk about Mrs. Gilbert staying home but always realize they would have to give up all the little extras if she were to do that. They want their girls to have some of the things they didn't have growing up like music and riding lessons and a big house where their friends can visit. But along with these things, they're giving their kids something else ... a belief that to need attention is wrong and to ask for it is selfish. They are learning that their needs create problems for their parents. Most of this is not conscious learning. If you

were to ask them, they would tell you that their parents love them and are very good to them. They think the problem is with *themselves* and experience shame about wishing that Mom would stop cooking and listen or that Dad would turn off the TV and let them sit on his lap. They are learning to confuse *needing* and *wanting*, believing that physical and emotional nurturing is a want and therefore expendable.

When they grow up and look for a mate, they won't expect this nurturing from a spouse and will concentrate instead on whether he has a good job and can provide the things it's all right to need. And they may find that they "need" a continual supply of material things like jewelry, new cars and expensive clothes which they have learned to substitute for the emotional and physical nurturing they weren't allowed to want. But these substitutions won't work because nurturing is a need; and they will be in a continual state of need and, once again, believe the problem is with them.

The Carson's, on the other hand, spent a great deal of time with their children and never so much enjoyed them as when they were babies. They loved knowing that they were the babies' whole world and that these little creatures were completely dependent on them. As they grew older, an often heard phrase was "let Mommy do that for you sweetheart" or "just let your ol' Dad handle it". Their four children grew up knowing that Mom and Dad would take care of everything. These four are now teenagers and Mom and Dad are still taking care of everything! These kids' dependency needs were met but their need to be *independent* was not. Mom and Dad never adjusted to their changing needs as their children got older ... their need to make their own decisions and take risks, to make mistakes and try again. These kids think their parents are terrific ... they just don't think too highly of their own abilities. The messages they've received are "you need to find someone to take care of you", "if you don't try, you won't fail", "the world is a dangerous place" and they believe them thoroughly. I hope the Carson's don't sell their 5 bedroom house and move to a condo because dollars to doughnuts, I'll bet you at least a few of those kids end up back at home after an abortive try at being an adult. When parents don't allow a child to be both appropriately dependent and independent, abuse is taking place. How did your needs and wants get met in your family of origin? Which things were OK to need? How did your family handle wants? Were you allowed to be dependent and as you were ready, encouraged to be independent? Write about your experience at the end of this chapter.

### **Children aren't mature yet.**

The fifth characteristic of children is that they're immature. They're kids, not grown-ups, and they simply act their age. Whenever kids are expected to act as if they're older than they are, their immaturity isn't being affirmed or valued. I have many clients who had to take on adult roles when they were only little children. One way this happens is when a physically or emotionally ill parent abdicates his parental role and expects his child to take over. I know kids who were responsible for cleaning the whole house and making dinner while still in elementary school. This is not a child's job! I have a patient who, as a five year old, was completely responsible for raising a younger sibling. You better believe that major abuse was going on for both those children. These are examples of children being asked to act beyond their age by being given jobs which rightfully belonged to the adults in their life.

A child can also be asked to act beyond her age emotionally: A two year old may be expected to happily share her toys with a visitor; a five year old may be expected to go off to kindergarten without tears; a ten year old may be expected to know how to cheer Daddy up when he's depressed; a 12 year old may be expected to listen to Mommy's confidences about her dating or sexual experiences. These children are not being given the right to be the age they are. When they fail at being what they're not, as they inevitably will, they learn that it's not acceptable to be a child, to be immature, to be who they are. They learn they are not acceptable.

I think the very worst way a child can be expected to act beyond her age is when an adult involves her in sexual activity. Children are simply not ready to be sexual in an adult way when they're still children. Having to take on the role of a sexually active adult is just devastating to a child, and it happens to little boys as well as little girls.

The flip side of kids expected to act older than their age is children who are not confronted about acting younger than they are. These kids may be allowed to yell in restaurants, throw tantrums, or have no chores. When parents can't affirm their children in their immaturity and appropriately confront their behavior when it is inappropriate, kids grow up to be adults who are either over-mature and controlled or immature and out of control. You've seen people like the former – adults who look like they have no childlike characteristics – they can't play or be spontaneous, and seem to lack that inner sparkle. The latter type is

often seen in people with addictions. They appear to have too much child on board and no adult. Often called by 12 step members “self-will run riot”, they are “in control of being out of control”.

I believe you abuse a child whenever you can't accept and affirm him in and with these five characteristics. You abuse your inner child whenever you can't accept these 5 parts of *yourself*. Let's look at them again from the standpoint of inner child abuse.

### **YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN**

WRITE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES IN YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN. IN WHAT WAYS WERE YOUR PARENTS ABLE TO AFFIRM IN YOU THESE FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AND PARENT YOU IN A HEALTHY WAY? IN WHAT WAYS WERE THEY UNABLE TO DO THIS?

VALUABLE:

VULNERABLE:

**IMPERFECT:**

**DEPENDENT:**

**IMMATURE:**



## CHAPTER 3 INNER CHILD ABUSE

*Whoever welcomes one little child like this  
for My sake welcomes Me. (Matthew 18:5)*

### **You are valuable.**

Do you truly know that you have value apart from anything you do, own or achieve? You have it when you succeed and you have it when you fail. You have it when you gain weight, when your boss criticizes your work, and when you get angry. There's nothing that can happen to you which can take away your value and there's nothing you can do to create more value for yourself.

Of course our culture doesn't validate that, does it? In our society we believe that people who are beautiful, wealthy and powerful have more value than people who are not, and it is truly hard not to be conformed to this world. But that is what Jesus asks of us. He calls us to a different standard and people are struggling to respond to that call. They're doing it in their prayer closets, small groups, 12 step meetings and therapists' offices ... with their friends, spouses and church families.

A most awful lie perpetrated on our culture is that your value comes from outside yourself for what you own, what you look like, what your job is or who you know. The lie is that you can achieve value if you can only get "it" ... and that you *must* get it or you will be hopelessly and forever "less than". As a culture, we've bought that lie hook, line and sinker. That's why the ad companies are doing such a great job of selling us what we don't need. We're convinced that we *do* need it to have value ... and we treat our inner child much as we were treated. We hold out the reward of value, or liking ourselves like a carrot, enticing the child to try harder and harder to get and achieve, and never giving her the reward.

Look at Marilyn Monroe, the sex symbol of the 50's. She had the looks, the career, the money so many people seek. But she still didn't have the internal experience of her own value. She had all the *externals* and it wasn't even enough to keep her alive. That's the worst part of this sham ... it doesn't work. No matter what you achieve, no matter how much you believe that it will, it won't give you

that missing piece. That missing piece is the internal experience of your own preciousness. It isn't a reward for good behavior. It is your birthright. God gave it to you at your conception. No one has the right to take it from you, not even you, yourself.

If you don't have a sense of your innate value, one way you can begin to work on this is by confessing to the Lord that you have not seen yourself as He sees you. Telling Him you want to bring even your thoughts and feelings about yourself captive and make them obey Him, and asking for His power to be at work within you conforming you to His will is a wonderful way to start. Then make a decision to treat yourself as one who has value.

Remember Zaccheaus? He was the chief tax collector, the rich man who climbed a tree in order to see Jesus as He passed by. Zaccheaus had cheated people out of a lot of money. Let me tell you what I think. I think Zaccheaus needed all that money he cheated people to get. I think he needed it because his self-esteem was based not on who God said he was but on how much money he had. It is as if he was telling himself that his money was all that gave him value. But Jesus knew something about Zaccheaus that Zaccheaus didn't know. He knew Zaccheaus had value just as he was. Jesus didn't wait for Zaccheaus to repent and become something else. He came to him right in his woundedness and said "hurry up, come down here. I want to stay at your house tonight". It was only *after* Jesus affirmed him in that way that Zaccheaus repented. I believe the reason Zaccheaus *could* repent was because in that moment he actually *received* the high value Jesus placed on him. He saw the truth about himself and it changed his life.

What do we tell ourselves our value is based on? If you're telling yourself you'll like you "*when*" ... when you get a raise, when you get into leadership, when your kids get straight A's ... that's child abuse.

Ask the Lord to show you if you've been getting your value outside-in. At the end of this chapter there is a place to write about the things He shows you.

### **We need to protect ourselves.**

You abuse your inner child when you don't offer her adequate protection. I'm seeing a new client who's telling me about the men in her life. Teri's last boyfriend was a funny, romantic, charming alcoholic. He was great with little kids and of course her inner child adored him and worried herself sick when he didn't

come home all night as he was given to do. Teri was hurt when he alternated his living arrangement between her home and another woman's. And it was sometimes difficult for her to support both of them on her salary alone. But when he was there, really there, it was great. Now it makes perfect sense to me that Teri's little girl didn't want to give him up. He gave her the best nurturing she'd ever gotten. He played with her and made her laugh. He also made her cry, a lot, and taught her a lot of negative messages about her value, but she could forget about these as children are likely to do when the fun times came again. I believe Teri was abusing her inner child by not giving her protection and by not setting a limit with her, telling her that this relationship wasn't good for her and would have to stop. Many times our biological children want something that is not healthy or good for them and we have to say, "I know how much this means to you and it's OK for you to be sad or angry, but I can't allow you to do this". It's a very loving thing when someone is willing to risk our anger to tell us something we really need to hear. It's no different with our inner children. Because Teri did not have enough healthy adult on board, she couldn't set these limits for her child. Teri's been used and abused by a whole series of men. Her little girl desperately needs protection which she's not getting. I see this as an issue of child abuse.

Bobbi is also a new client. In her first session she told me, through her tears, that she and her husband were experiencing some sexual dysfunction. There is no gentle touching or caressing with them, just intercourse or nothing. She doesn't enjoy it, but often gives in to her husband's desire for sex because it avoids a fight. In order to do this she just kind of numbs herself out and "goes somewhere else" until he's done. She came to therapy seeking help for her depression, not to deal with the sexual problems which she mentioned only in passing. As I gently talked to her about her inner child and her need to be protected, the tears really came. I explained to her that it was as if she was taking this little girl, putting her in bed with her husband and telling her "I don't care if this hurts you, just lie there and do it and don't say a word". No wonder she was depressed. Bobbi had seen herself as a victim and she had never considered that she was also a perpetrator ... a person who abuses others ... but she saw in that moment how awful it's been for her child within. I think Bobbi's going to do real well. Although she's terrified to confront her husband about the problems in their marriage, she's determined to protect her little girl.

Sometimes even the things we do to help ourselves recover can be part of the problem. Lynda is being treated by a friend of mine for multiple personality disorder. She wanted to attend a workshop being given for therapists as a member of a panel of ritual abuse survivors. She felt she had to go because of the chance that she might learn something that would help her recovery. When my friend Jackie spoke to her the morning of the workshop, Lynda was very upset. She'd had some body memories in the last few days, on top of which she'd had a horrendous fight with her husband and had slept only two hours that night. Lynda was about to put herself (and her inner family) through what would be for anyone, a very emotionally laden experience. The experience of ritual abuse is, in my opinion, the most abject abuse one can suffer. Just hearing about it happening to someone else brings up a lot of feelings for the listener. Imagine how much greater this would be if you were the one who underwent the abuse. And Lynda was not just going to be a listener. She would be "on stage", being asked questions with many eyes upon her. Even though she knew it would be an ordeal, she felt she had to go to help her recover.

So many of us are like this. We'll go to any conference, read any book, do anything to get us well. But we use methods which are themselves abusive to our inner child. People with multiple personalities are not so different from the rest of us. Their inner children are just a bit more separated, more distinct from each other as if they are separated by a solid line while ours are separated by a dotted line. Healing is still the same ... we all have to embrace our inner selves and reparent them in a healthy way. That's why it's utterly impossible, no matter how hard we try or what workshop we go to, to bring healing to ourselves while subjecting ourselves to abuse.

Whenever you allow your inner child to do things that aren't healthy for her, like working too many hours, isolating herself, or being in a relationship with someone who's toxic, you're practicing child abuse. When you don't teach her how to do something but just expect her to know, when you send her into situations that are new and scary without any support or concern for her fear, when you allow someone else to control you, you're abandoning your child. If your likes and dislikes or your behavior is shaped by what someone else thinks is good, if you have to justify what you feel to be able to feel it, or if you've got a wall up so no one can ever hurt you again, that's abandonment of the child within. Abandonment is major child abuse. At the end of this chapter, write about the ways you fail to protect your inner child.

### **We have not yet been made perfect.**

Have you accepted this about yourself? We are all imperfect and will be until Jesus returns. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to be like Him. But when you demand perfection of yourself as a condition for loving yourself as God loves you, you're abusing your inner child.

Kate is a client I've been seeing for about 9 months. She came in severely depressed, really grabbed hold of inner child work, and is doing great. This week she came in looking a little deflated and told me she felt like she'd taken a step backward but really didn't know why. As we talked about her week, she told me that she had papers due in all her classes and while she enjoyed doing the work, she felt terrible that she'd not been able to handle this, her part time job, be wife and mom, and keep up on the housework. She'd done everything but the housework and she felt like a failure. She thought I might minimize how bad her house looked and took pains to describe to me how really awful it was. Because she was a student and used to thinking in those terms, I asked her to give her house a grade and she said it was a C. The way she described it I thought it would be an F and I asked her if she felt sure it was a C. She pictured all the rooms again in her mind and said that C was a fair grade.

Now I've spent many years in school, both as a student and as a college teacher, and I know the grading system pretty well. I don't know of any school where a C is not a passing grade! But not in Kate's book. For Kate, there are only two grades, A and F. It's either perfect or you fail. So when things heated up for her and she couldn't do it all perfectly, she became a failure. What an incredible pressure she put herself under.

As we explored the origins of this belief, she came to see that she was being as demanding of her inner child as her parents had been of her. When she was a little girl she suffered greatly under this burden. Now she was the one imposing that burden. This is one sharp lady though. As soon as she saw it, she got a big grin on her face and just kept repeating "C is a passing grade, C is a passing grade". I think her little girl is off the hook.

Like many of us, Kate had a dysfunctional belief about perfection. She thought perfection was something to strive for and expect of herself. She needed to discover that to expect perfection from herself is abusive. You see, Kate really didn't mind the house being a mess. She knew it was only for two weeks while she got her term papers finished. It wasn't the state of the house that caused her

pain. The pain came from the “you’re bad, you’re a failure” message she had been sending to her child. Of course that would hurt. Kate was able to turn that around as she gave her child a different message. “Yes” she said, the house is a mess, but you’re not. It’s OK and you’re OK. We’ll clean it up next week. I love you”. What wonderful reparenting of her little girl. The message Mom had given her was, “you *are* your house ... your value comes from how clean you keep it”. If Kate was not able to reparent herself, she would pass that message on to her own biological children. If you’re not completely happy with the way *you* parent, look at how you are parenting yourself. If you want to relearn it, start with your own inner child. At the end of this chapter you can write about the ways and the areas in which you demand perfection of yourself.

### **Taking care of ourselves.**

How are you doing at taking care of your needs and your wants? Most of us are pretty good about food, clothing and shelter. It starts to break down from there. How’s your dental care? Do you wait until you have a toothache before you go to the dentist? Do you stay home and take care of yourself when you’re sick or do you go to work no matter how awful you feel? What about your physical nurturing? Can you ask for a hug or to be held without experiencing shame? *Do* you ask? Physical nurturing is a need, not a luxury. How about time and attention? So many of us shame our inner child about wanting attention.

I saw a child for a consultation who was referred to me by her family doctor because she was having stomach aches for which he could find no physical cause. Her mother wasn’t at all pleased about bringing her to see me and felt manipulated by her child. “She’s just trying to get attention”, she told me, “there’s not a thing wrong with her”. This mom really believed that there is no problem with a little girl who is so much in need of attention that she has to create physical pain in order to have the right to ask for it. Mom would have been outraged if I had suggested that she was abusing her daughter. She saw herself as her daughter’s victim because she had to take care of her when she wasn’t feeling well. Actually, her daughter was the victim and will grow up to victimize herself just as her mom is doing now.

What about your wants? How well do you take care of those? Needs are something we must have to survive. Wants are there to bring us pleasure. In terms of healthy parenting, we need to both give to ourselves and set limits for ourselves about our wanting.

On the one hand are people like my client, John. John is one of the nicest people you would ever want to meet. He's kind, he's giving, and he's as co-dependent as they come. He's always generous with others, but just can't manage to do anything for himself. After all, he doesn't really *need* that new fishing tackle or time away with the boys. He'd love to have a weekend alone to himself, but it isn't really that important. John cannot provide himself with the things he desires but doesn't have to have to survive.

At the other extreme is my client, Patti. Patti is in the throes of a spending addition the likes of which you've never seen. She owns a house it would take ten of my friends together to buy. She drives a Rolls Royce, has beautiful clothes, exquisite jewelry, and takes fabulous vacations. Everything she wants, she gets. She's also *terribly* in debt and doesn't know where her next month's revenues are coming from. Her little child within is so terribly scared. She's been given a lot of *things*, but no safety, no security.

For weeks Patti struggled with the realization that she was going to have to sell something to pay her bills. The Rolls was the logical choice, but it just broke her heart and she put it off week after week. As I repeatedly confronted her about how abusive this was to her little girl, she one day grasped at the last available straw and said to me earnestly, "but my little girl *loves* the Rolls, my little girl *wants* the Rolls". "I can sure understand that", I told her. "My son wants a Porsche but he's not getting it either!"

Patti knew how to give her little girl things she wanted but she hadn't learned how to say no. As a result, her inner child got her wants met but her needs were ignored.

How are you providing for your needs and wants? At the end of this chapter write about the areas where you are having trouble taking care of yourself.

### **The immaturity dilemma.**

Are you trying to keep that inner child under such a tight rein that she can't even *be* a child? Does just the idea that you *have* a child within leave you less than thrilled?

Gail was 35 going on 70 when she came to me for help with her depression. She was one of those adults who always like to be in control and was not at all pleased with the idea of an inner child. When I suggested to her that her little

girl needed some time to play, her first thought was "oh no, more work for me". To her this was just one more job she had to do in order to be successful. She had so distanced herself from the child part of herself that she couldn't receive any of her child's joy, aliveness, or spontaneity. She had no idea how to have fun. Recreation for her was some adult activity such as reading or sewing and it was important that she do it well. If I'd asked her to write a 20 page paper on the inner child, she'd have done it with no problem. Remember, this lady *knew* how to work. But asking her to spend 20 minutes lying on the grass and looking up at the clouds made her furious. Not being in control was a frightening idea for Gail and this was the hardest part for her in accepting her child within. She was terrified that this immature little part of herself would jump out at some inopportune time and make her look ridiculous. She had a choke chain around her little girl's neck and it was choking the life out of Gail. Healing for Gail depended on her willingness to embrace the child part of herself and let this little girl out of the closet.

The other side of the immaturity issue is the person who allows their inner child to run wild with no adult on board to supervise. Patty, the lady who didn't want to sell her Rolls Royce, is a good example. Her child was wonderfully free and spontaneous. The problem was with her adult. When her child saw something she wanted, Patti never said no, whether it was clothes, jewelry, activities, or men.

In a healthy parent-child relationship, whether it be between parent and biological child or child within, the parent provides the child with protection, direction and sets limits for the good of the child. In this way the parent gives the child the benefit of the parent's greater experience. A child trying to operate in the world with no parent to do these things is in great jeopardy. Because the child has only a child's ability to plan ahead, delay gratification, and imagine consequences (and these are not typical child abilities), she will often get in over her head and become overwhelmed. This overwhelmed child will then experience pain, anxiety, and or depression and not understand why. If you're letting our child within run the ship, you're probably experiencing some of these effects.

What is your relationship with your inner child? Do you welcome her, accept her, and integrate her into your life, or do you find you have her locked away somewhere? Does she have too much power or not enough protection. At the end of this chapter write about how you allow your child to be part of your life.



How are you feeling right now? Are you experiencing pain? If you are, that's not at all unusual, and it's not all bad. When we realize just how abusive we've been to that little person inside us, we often begin to feel a bit sick ... perhaps some combination of feelings like pain, remorse or fear. You can *use* that pain for instead of against yourself to motivate yourself to learn to do it differently. Remember, too, that your feelings may be overwhelming right now because you (and your parent's before you) *weren't* able to parent that child effectively ... and without parents to soothe, listen, and put into perspective, feelings *are* overwhelming. So right now, soothe that inner child. Tell her that it *is* possible to learn to do it differently and that you are committed to doing that. Tell her there *is* hope, because there really is. There isn't any one of you who can't learn to do loving appropriate parenting of your little boy or girl within. It isn't even hard. It just takes a willingness, a commitment to begin to spend the time with your child and talk to her. You don't even have to have faith that it will work. It works whether you believe in it or not. I've even had clients do it just to prove me wrong! And it worked for them, too. So let's go back to that picture of your inner child and get started.

## CHAPTER 4

# HOW TO BEGIN

*A new heart will I give you ... (Ezekiel 36:26)*

To begin, put your child's picture in a frame by your bed and talk to her 5 minutes in the morning and 5 minutes at night. At first this might be difficult. You may not know this child at all. Some of us are a little uncomfortable starting a conversation with someone we don't know. Your child may be distrustful; after all, your track record with her isn't all that great. It's very important, therefore, since you want to teach her to trust you, that you don't lie to her or make any promise you aren't going to keep.

In your first few conversations, begin to talk to her about her value. This can be really difficult if you focus on what you feel about her rather than the objective truth. Your feelings will necessarily be distorted by the parenting *you* received ... by the distorted image your parents reflected back to you. You see *her* through your parents' eyes. You may be blaming her for not being exactly what your parents wanted. We often do that, holding our child responsible for the abuse we received, believing that if she'd only been different, it never would have happened. I want to encourage you to give that up. It is not the truth. The truth is that she was created valuable and precious. She was not a mistake. She was not meant to be different. God did not leave something out of her. He made her just as he intended.

So, in your conversation with her, focus on what you *know* rather than what you feel. This isn't being untruthful. If you don't love her, don't tell her you do. But you can tell her that you know she was created valuable and wonderful even though you aren't able to experience that yet. You can tell her that you are going to learn to love her because she deserves to be loved. You can tell her that you are committed to protecting her and getting her what she needs. You can tell her it's OK to make mistakes and that you are going to stop expecting her to be perfect. Whatever you tell her, you'll have to go slowly and not demand that she trust you or respond to you before she's ready. Right now is the time for you to just give to her. Look at her in your picture. Take her (picture) in your arms. Look into her eyes. Smile at her. Love her with your words.

See her as separate from you. She is not “you”; she is herself. Some people make up special names for their child, others call her by a nickname they were called at that age, still others call her by their own name. Find the way which is right for you. Whatever you call her, this is your little girl or your little boy, a sacred trust from God. He’s given His treasure into your care. Make a commitment to Him that, with His Help, you will learn to care for her in a way that will bring joy to His heart. Commit this process, commit this journey into His care. He brought you to this place of beginning; trust Him that as you are faithful to do these steps, He will put His love for your little one into your heart.

Don’t even concern yourself for now about the result of your conversations with your child. Simply do them as an act of your will. You can’t create love in your heart ... don’t even try. Just talk to this little one and tell her the truth about herself and her value. Spend those few minutes with her in the morning and before you go to bed. Tell her what the Lord says about her. The important thing here is to keep focusing on the truth ... what you know rather than what you feel. You might feel, for instance, that you don’t have as much value as your pastor’s wife or some other church leader. Those feelings are coming from your child. Confront this misbelief in yourself by telling her that while you *feel* this way, you know it isn’t so. You might tell her, “I know in a lot of ways you’d like to be where Betty is. It’s OK for you to want to have some of the things that she has and I will do what I can to help you to get them. But, honey, that’s not where your value comes from. You have just as much worth as she has right now. I know I haven’t always treated you as if you have and I apologize to you for that. But I promise you that I will work to change that and to start treating you as you deserve to be treated. No one is more special or has more value than you do.”

Confronting those untruths that you’ve been believing is very important. It’s just incredible to me to see the extent to which we continue to believe the lies that we’ve been told about ourselves and the distorted reflections we’ve been given ... *in spite of evidence to the contrary*. One woman who really touched my heart had a mother who was not unlike my own father. Because of her own insecurity and low self-worth she communicated to her daughter in subtle ways all throughout her childhood that she was unattractive. I saw Dana in her mid-thirties and she was absolutely convinced that it was painful for other people to look at her. Dana was lovely! She had beautiful dark skin and long hair and a trim figure. But when she looked in the mirror, she saw the image her mother had reflected back to her and she utterly disbelieved me when I told her it was

a distortion. So I had her check it out with a few people she really trusted (she had never told anyone about this before) and get their feedback. She came into the office just amazed. Because she trusted these people, she couldn't easily say they were lying to her, but she couldn't believe them either. I began to talk to her about the difference between what we know and what we feel and for the first time she began to experience a little bit of doubt ... a crack in her armor. Taking advantage of that, I sent her home to talk to her little girl about how she looked. Now remember, you never want to lie to your child. So Dana went home and looked into her little girl's eyes (a darling little girl!) and told her, "I know I don't see you as you really are. When I look at you, I see you through Mom's eyes. For years I've been mean to you because you weren't what I wanted. I am so very sorry. You didn't deserve that. You're a wonderful, precious little girl and I'm going to learn to love you as you deserve to be loved. Please forgive me."

She continued to talk to and work with her little girl as the months went by. Little by little she began to report some changes. One day she caught sight of herself in a store mirror and smiled back at her reflection. When she got an unfortunate haircut, as we all do from time to time, she looked right into her little girl's eyes and said, "It's OK ... I know it hurts, but it's OK." Previously something like that would have kept her locked in the house for days. One day she was in the ladies' room of a restaurant brushing her hair when another very attractive woman came over and began adjusting her make-up. This woman was everything Dana had always wanted to be. Her heart started to sink under the usual comparisons when all of a sudden she thought about her little girl. If she were this woman, she'd have *her* child. Feelings of love and protectiveness for her own little girl engulfed her. At that moment Dana stopped wanting to be someone else. She wouldn't give up her child for anything. Remember the expression "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". It was true for Dana. As she came to love that little girl, she came to see her as beautiful ... and that forever changed the way she felt about herself as well.

Take another look at what you wrote at the end of the last chapter about your value. Look at the things you had to do in your family of origin to get approval. These are all areas you'll probably need to talk to your child about.

One man told me that to get along in his family he had to be invisible. The old dictum that children should be seen and not heard wouldn't work in that family-children weren't supposed to be seen either. Given years of that kind of experience, it's easy to understand how uncomfortable he gets when he draws

attention to himself. It's hard for him to offer any input at staff meetings even when he has a really good idea, and just as hard when someone tries to pay him a compliment. Something within him just starts to freeze up. That something is his child who's thinking to himself, "oh no, oh no, we're gonna get in trouble!" Yet Jim, like all of us, needs attention. So this was an important area for him to talk about to his little boy because little Jim didn't know that things are different now. Little Jim was reacting as if Mom and Dad still ran the show. Jim had to tell him "I know you get scared whenever I'm thinking of speaking up about anything. And I understand why you would be. It was really scary for you all those years. But, Jimmy, I'm here now, and I'm going to protect you. It's OK for you to speak up. I want you to ... you're worth listening to. You don't have to be silent anymore. You don't have to be invisible."

Jim had to have many of these conversations with his little boy. He became sensitive enough to be able to tell when Little Jim was getting scared and learned to talk to him about it silently right there. He protects his child by not letting him get in over his head at the same time he encourages him to be noticed. By looking at the things he had to do in his family of origin to have value, he identified some areas where his child needed to be reparented.

Go back now to your own writing and remember how it was in your family. Look at what you've written about how you parent your inner child. What are the conditions you set down for yourself ... the "if you's" and "when you's" that you have to meet before you feel you're deserving. Talk to your child about these things. As you read the next chapter on God's perspective, make a note about aspects of His viewpoint to talk about to your child.

Make a commitment to your child to begin to parent him in a healthy way. Say the things in your talks that you yourself long to hear. Before you begin, ask the Lord what He would say to your child. Ask Him to give you the ideas. Ask Him to show you the truth.

Then, day by day, talk to your child about these things. Tell him about how things are different now. It will take him some time to believe what you're saying — to trust you. He'll want to see if you really mean it or if this is just a new fad you've picked up that you'll forget in a few days. He'll be looking to see if you *really* want to know him. But if you keep at it, you *will* develop a relationship with this child. You'll find yourself becoming very protective of him and of really caring about him.

That caring will make it harder and harder for you to abuse him or allow anyone else to abuse him. Eventually, as your child begins to trust you, he'll begin to talk back to you and tell you things you don't know. People are always astounded when that happens.

One man who was an extremely dedicated and selfless high school teacher had his little boy say to him "you don't care about me ... you just care about the others". Wow! Talk about being hit between the eyes. And yet he needed to hear this. He really had been putting his child a distant last.

Sometimes the things your child will share with you are memories that you've long forgotten. Sometimes they're feelings. Many times a person will know he's tense and upset, and not know why ... or that he's hungry and it's not about needing food. At these times your child can shed a lot of light on what that's about which can enable you to intervene for yourself in a healthy way instead of staying stuck in the feelings or practicing an addiction. One woman in such a situation asked her child what she was hungry for. Her little girl started to cry and said, "I'm so alone, I'm so alone". This woman who isolated herself when things weren't going well needed *friends*, not food. She was able to do for her little girl what she hadn't been willing to do for herself and began to get into recovery from her eating disorder.

So begin now. Take your child in your arms and look into his eyes. Talk to him, day by day. There is so much you need to say to him. Tell him there is no one else just like him. In time you will come to mean it with all your heart. One day, you'll find yourself realizing that you really are a wonderful, valuable person. You always were ... your mother just never told you.

## **JOURNAL ...A NEW HEART**

USING YOUR JOURNAL RESPONSES FROM THE END OF CHAPTER 3, IDENTIFY THREE OF THE DYSFUNCTIONAL RULES OR INJUNCTIONS YOU'VE BEEN GIVING YOUR INNER CHILD IN THE AREAS OF HIS VALUE, VULNERABILITY, IMPERFECTION, DEPENDENCY AND IMMATURITY. FOR EACH OF THESE, WRITE A NEW REPARENTING DIALOGUE WHICH SUPPORTS AND AFFIRMS YOUR CHILD WITHIN. I WILL USE JIM'S AND JACKIE'S DIALOGUES WITH THEIR INNER CHILDREN FROM CHAPTER 4 AS AN ILLUSTRATION.

**JIM:**

**AREA:** Value, Vulnerability

**DYSFUNCTIONAL RULE:** You don't deserve to be listened to.

### **REPARANTING DIALOGUE:**

"I know you get scared whenever I'm thinking of speaking up about anything. And I understand why you would be. It was really scary for you all those years. But I am here now, and I'm going to protect you. It's OK for you to speak up. I want you to ... you're worth listening to. You don't have to be silent anymore. You don't have to be invisible."

**DANA:**

**AREA:** Imperfection, Value

**DYSFUNCTIONAL RULE:** You are defective. No one could love you the way you are.

### **REPARANTING DIALOGUE:**

"I know I don't see you as you really are. When I look at you, I see you through Mom's eyes. For years I've been mean to you because you weren't what I wanted. I am so very sorry. You didn't deserve that. You're a wonderful, precious little girl and I'm going to learn to love you as you deserve to be loved. Please forgive me."

## CHAPTER 5

# SCRIPTURES FOR THE CHILD WITHIN

*Allow the little ones to come to Me ... (Matthew 19:14)*

Many people have told me how difficult it was for them when they first began to talk to their child within to have anything positive to say. They became acutely aware for the first time that they did indeed have a lot of negatives inside, sentences that began with “if you’d *only*” or “why can’t you *ever*”. That’s one of the advantages in using Scripture to talk to your little boy or girl. You talk to him about what you know to be true, rather than about what you feel. As you do this, positive feelings for your child will develop.

In Scripture, God shows us His perspective on the five characteristics of children. Because we’ll always be His children, they are true for us today. That’s one of the reasons Jesus gave us the image of ourselves as children before a Heavenly Father – to try to give us a picture of how God sees us. Let’s take a look at what He says.

### **We are valuable**

The greatest testimony to our value lies in the price Abba was willing to pay to bring us back to Him. The entire Old and New Testaments are the story of His persistence, His forgiveness, His unwillingness to be apart from us. How extremely important we must be to Him.

I tell my little girl (her name is Max):

“He’d do anything for you, Max; you matter *so* much to Him. He says that if He didn’t even spare Jesus, wouldn’t He give you all things with Him? Didn’t He say that He’d give men and peoples in exchange for your life? He says you’re precious, do you know that? He says you’re precious in His sight and honored. Think about that. He loves you so much, Max. You know, even before he formed you in the womb, He knew and approved of you. He *liked* you. You’re so special to Him. He calls you His temple; imagine that. He says, ‘My temple is holy and that temple you are.’ Listen to this, Max. He says, ‘Can a mother forget her nursing child? Yes, she may forget, but I will not forget you. I have carved you on the



palm of each of my hands.' Think about that, Max. He's imprinted your picture on His hands! He carries you everywhere He goes."

(*Isaiah 43:4; Jeremiah 1:5a; 1 Corinthians 3:18-19; Isaiah 49:15-16*)

There are many many such verses in Scripture. Search them out and personalize them for your inner child. Don't be afraid to apply them to yourself; they are for you. Another important means for teaching your child her value to Him comes when He speaks to her Himself. We'll talk about that in the next chapter.

### **The Lord affirms our vulnerability**

Do you remember my saying that vulnerability involves two concepts, separateness and protection? God affirms our separateness by giving us a free will; we decide what to think and feel and what we will do or not do. God affirms our vulnerability by providing the protection for us that we, as His children, cannot provide for ourselves. Scripture tells us over and over about God's willingness to do this kind of parenting of us. Here are some of the passages I read to my little girl, with my interspersed comments:

"You shall cry and the Lord will say 'Here I am'." (Wow! That's all you have to do, Max, just cry and He'll come. You never have to cry alone again. And He won't tell you just to be quiet. He really cares, Max.)

"I will bring you when you're blind by a way you know not. I will lead you in paths that you have not known. I will make darkness into light before you and make the uneven places into a plain. These things I will do for you and not leave you forsaken." (He can do that, Max, even when your eyes are so full of tears you can't see, or when it's so dark that you think you're lost. You know how sometimes you think there's no way out? *He* will make one ... a way you don't know about. He not only says He *can*, He says He *will*. It's a promise, Max.)

"Be not afraid, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Fear not, for I am with you." (Did you hear that, Max, *wherever* you go.)

"The Lord God is my strength, my personal bravery, my invincible army. He makes my feet like hind's feet and will make me walk (not stand still in terror but to walk) upon my high places of trouble." (Listen to that, Max. *He* will be your courage. Do you know what a hind is? It's like a deer. You'll be able to walk as nimbly as a deer even up on those high cliffs and tight places you sometimes get into. He'll be an *army* for you.)

"When I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light for me." (He *will*, Max, He'll be your light!)

(*Isaiah 58:9b, 42:16; Joshua 1:9c; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Micah 7:8b*)

### Until the Perfect comes

We truly are a most imperfect people. Like a parent in a functional family, the Lord teaches us and tells us what is expected of us, and that we are wonderful precious people despite mistakes or wrongdoing. He holds us accountable for our behavior while not condemning us for doing wrong.

I tell my little girl:

(I know you want to be good and please God, and I'm glad you do. But you're always going to make mistakes; that's just how we are. Even Paul who wanted more than anything to be like Jesus said, "...not that I have attained this, or have already been made perfect. I do not consider that I have made it my own." So no beating yourself up when you make a mistake, OK, Max?)

"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." (See, Max, I told you no one is perfect. And do you hear what He says? When you tell Him what you did wrong, He'll not only forgive you but take your sin as far away from you as the east is from the west. They're *outta there*, Max.)

"But if anyone should sin, we have an Advocate; one who will intercede for us, with the Father." (See, Max, even when you do something wrong, Jesus is there for you. An Advocate, that's someone who's on your *side*.)

"Confess your faults to one another, your slips, false steps, your offenses, your sins." (Look at that, Max. James says that in his letter to *Christians*. He must know that even people who really love Jesus like you do make mistakes.)

"When a man is guilty in one of these he shall confess the sin he has committed. He shall bring his guilt or trespass offering to the Lord for the sin he has committed." (This comes from a book called Leviticus, Max, that's where God gave the Law to the Israelites. Even way back then God knew we needed a way to be forgiven for the things we do wrong. He *knew* that no one could be perfect

except Jesus. And you know what else, Max? Now Jesus is the offering. God not only gave us the way, He even provided the sacrifice. That's how much He loves you, Max.)

*(Philippians 3:12a, 13a; 1 John 1:8-9; Psalm 103:12; 1 John 2:1b; James 5:16; Leviticus 5:5)*

### **The Lord who provides**

When parents affirm their children's dependency in a healthy way, they both provide for the needs of the child while at the same time teaching her to take care of herself. They don't shame her about having needs and wants, nor do they give her everything she asks for. If we grew up in a dysfunctional family, the Lord may be the first healthy Parent we've ever known.

I remind my little girl about this:

"He will feed His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms, He will carry them in His bosom and will gently lead those that have their young." (You're that little lamb, Max. Picture that in your mind. Jesus is walking with all His sheep and you're the one in His arms.)

"When Jesus saw the throngs, He was moved with pity and sympathy for them, because they were bewildered, harassed, distressed, dejected and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." (See, Max, He's not angry with you when you're helpless and upset. He isn't ashamed of you. He *cares*.)

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father keeps feeding them. Are you not worth much more than they?" (He likes to take care of you, Max. That's what He's trying to tell you. You're not a burden to Him. You're a *joy*.)

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (There it is again, Max. He *wants* to take care of you. Just run up and jump into His lap; He'll catch you.)

*(Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 9:36, 6:26, 11:28)*

## Jesus and the children

The Lord doesn't ask us to act older than we are and confronts us when we behave as if we're younger than we really are. He provides for us a healthy balance between affirming our immaturity and helping us to grow up in Him. A special picture of His love for us in our immaturity is the portrait painted for us in Scripture of Jesus with the children.

I read these verses to my little girl:

"Jesus said, Leave the children *alone!* Allow the little ones to come to Me, and do not forbid or restrain or hinder them, for of such as these is the kingdom of heaven composed." (He really loves children, Max. They could come to Him any time they wanted. And He's just as available to you, Max ... *any time you want.*)

"Jesus took a little child and put him in the center of their group; and taking him in His arms, He said to them, Whoever in My name and for My sake accepts and receives and welcomes one such child also accepts and receives and welcomes Me." (You see, Max, how important kids were to Him. *He* didn't think of them as the bottom of the heap. They're as important to God as Jesus himself.)

"For He knows our frame; He earnestly remembers and imprints on His heart that we are dust.: (Just dust, Max, just dust. Jesus *knows* you're just a kid. He remembers; and it's *just fine* with him that you are.)

"For even though by this time you ought to be teaching others, you actually need someone to teach you over again the very first principles of God's Word. You have come to need milk, not solid food." (Paul's saying that, Max. He's telling the Hebrew church that they needed to grow up. They're acting like babies when they're really older than that. Jesus may tell us that sometimes, too, but it won't *ever* be because He's tired of kids. And if he does tell us that, it will be because He *knows* we can do it. He'll never ask us to do *anything* we don't know how to do.)

"Whoever will humble himself and become like this little child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Jesus said that, Max. That's what he thought about kids. That's how he feels about *you*, Max.)

(*Matthew 19:14; Mark 9:36-37; Psalm 103:4; Hebrews 5:12-13; Matthew 18:3*)

This is just a small illustration of how marvelous Scripture is in giving you a way to start talking to the child within you. It's a way to get the truth of who your little one is inside you. If you have a lot of abuse in your background, overt or covert, you will need to rely on what you know for a while until your feelings catch up. On the following pages there is room for you to write down the scriptures which especially speak to the heart of your child within. Keep in mind that God tells us in Isaiah that His Word will not return without producing any effect, but will accomplish His purpose and prosper in the thing for which He sends it. As you begin your conversations with your child, ask Him to put His love for her in your heart, to show you His picture of her. Ask Him to make this the purpose for which He sends out His Word. He will do this as you talk to your child, telling her the things that your mother never told you.

Once you've begun, let's look at another way to reparent your child within.

### **SCRIPTURES FOR MY INNER CHILD**

IN THIS SECTION, CHOOSE SOME SCRIPTURE FOR EACH OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN WHICH WOULD ESPECIALLY SPEAK TO YOUR CHILD WITHIN. PERSONALIZE THE SCRIPTURES YOU CHOOSE WITH LOVING, AFFIRMING WORDS FROM YOU TO YOUR CHILD. YOU CAN USE THE SCRIPTURES IN CHAPTER 5 OR THE APPENDIX, OR CHOOSE ONES FROM YOUR OWN READING.

**SCRIPTURES ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S VALUE:**

**SCRIPTURES WHICH SHOW GOD'S WILLINGNESS TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD:**

SCRIPTURES WHICH SHOW YOUR CHILD HE (SHE) IS A VALUABLE,  
PRECIOUS PERSON DESPITE MISTAKES OR WRONGDOING:

SCRIPTURES WHICH ILLUSTRATE THE LORD'S DESIRE TO PROVIDE  
FOR YOUR CHILD:

SCRIPTURES WHICH AFFIRM THE LOVE OF GOD FOR CHILDREN AND  
THEIR VALUE TO HIM AT THE AGE THEY ARE:

## **PART III : SPIRITUAL REPARENTING**

*Call to Me and I will answer you, and tell you great and wonderful things you have not known. (Jeremiah 33:3)*



## CHAPTER 6

# LEARNING TO HEAR THE LORD SPEAK

*Did I not tell you that if you would believe,  
you would see the glory of God? (John 11:40)*

When I began learning to hear the Lord speak to me (no easy task for someone who likes to do all the talking), the first thing I heard Him say was “let”. Just that ... “let” ... “let”. “Let what, Lord?” I asked him. “Let Me love you”, the response finally came. “Let You love me”, I thought. “Who’s stopping You?” It seemed to me that if the God of the universe wanted to love me, He was certainly powerful enough to do it without *my* help.

Little by little, with no small opposition from me, He began to show me that this wasn’t true. I had many misconceptions about Him in my head that blocked my ability to receive His love. Because I couldn’t receive it, I wrongly assumed He just wasn’t giving it to me in the same proportions as He was giving it to other people.

How devastating this was! Here was the One who by His very nature was perfect love. If He couldn’t love me, who could? Because I knew that God was loving, the fault could only lie with me. You see, I was still believing the image of myself I saw mirrored in my parents’ eyes. In that picture, I was defective. God must see within me the same terrible defects that I saw. Not only was I seeing myself as my parents saw me, *I was seeing Him as I saw them.*

Remember how babies are born without experiencing any sense of separateness, any differentiation between “self” and “other”? Our parents are our first gods. When they are not able to love us in a healthy way, we receive from them not only a distorted view of our self, but also a distorted image of God. This distorted experience of God can be at odds with our correct *information* about Him from Scripture. We can know the truth and still not be set free because we only know it intellectually and not experientially. Paul realized this when he prayed for the Ephesians that they would “come to know through experience for yourselves the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge”.

How do we get this truth, the truth of how He feels about us and who we are to Him inside us? How can we come to know with our hearts what we already know with our heads? “Let” ... “let” ... *How?*

The Lord took me on a journey of learning to hear His voice and when He had taught me to hear him, He began to reparent me. He did with me what I later learned to do with my inner child. He looked into my eyes, and spoke. He talked to me about myself and how He felt about me. Day by day, over and over, He told me about my preciousness to Him, His desire to protect me and to provide for me. He loved me as much in my imperfection and my immaturity as when I did something well. I came to know that simply by my existence, I brought Him joy. And I began to get the truth of who I was inside me.

I have since taught many people what He taught me, how to hear His voice and let Him correct the mistaken perceptions we have of ourselves and of Him. As we learn how to let Him be Abba to us, He shows us the image of ourselves that He sees. As we listen to Him, He reparents us. Like finding your child within and learning to parent her in a healthy way, it only takes time and commitment, and, of course, the cooperation of the Lord. Will He cooperate? Are you one of those people whom He’s chosen to hear His voice? You are if you’re His. This isn’t a special gift that He reserves for just a few. I know it’s taking a risk to believe that. But take it, trust Him on this. He tells us that His sheep hear His voice. His sheep. Not some of His sheep or His best sheep, but simply, His sheep hear His voice.

One of the people I taught was a client who had some pretty serious problems with anxiety and depression. Anna suffered just about every form of abuse that can happen to a child, physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, and it had taken a heavy toll. She had many fears, including driving, and being alone, which often escalated into panic attacks. Surely this was the last person one would expect to be able to hear the Lord. Yet no one ever needed to more than she. When a person suffers such profound abuse as Anna, therapy and even inner child work will not be enough to mitigate all the effects. There remains some portion of the effect of that abuse that only on-going Parent to child communication can alleviate. So I taught Anna how to listen and held my breath.

A short time later Anna came in for her weekly appointment and told me about some heavy anxiety she’d had during the week. Panic attacks are extremely uncomfortable; and Anna, when she had anxiety, would become even more

anxious, worrying that she'd have a panic attack. This often happens to anxiety sufferers. Fear of the anxiety creates more anxiety which creates more fear, etc. How to break into this vicious circle is the concern of everyone who treats anxiety disorders.

When Anna begins to feel a lot of anxiety, she has learned to go into her bedroom and talk to her little girl. On this occasion, before she began, she asked the Lord to speak to her. As she lay on her bed, she heard Him tell her, "You're Ok, my little Annita. No harm can come to you. I am holding you in the palm of My hand. You are safe, I am holding you. Rest now, just rest. I have you. You are safe."

"Do you think that was really Him?" she asked me shyly. "What do *you* think, Anna?" I asked her in typical therapist fashion. Anna's shy smile spread over her face. "Well," she said, "He called me Annita. My Dad used to call me that a long time ago. I haven't heard that name since I was nine. It's Spanish for 'little Anna'." Anna wanted my confirmation but in her heart of hearts, she *knew* Who had spoken to her. "What happened to your anxiety?" I asked her. "I don't know," she told me, "I fell asleep." She fell asleep! Anxious people *do not* fall asleep! Here the Lord reparented Anna by affirming her *in* her vulnerability and imperfection rather than attacking her as her mother had done.

As she continued to listen to the Lord and He continued to talk to her, I noticed other changes in Anna. When she came into treatment she was one of the most negative people I'd ever seen. No matter how good something appeared, she could always find a flaw in it. Now I saw this begin to change. There began to be a quiet confidence about her, a groundedness that hadn't been there before. It wasn't so easy for her to get thrown off balance.

Probably the most amazing change in Anna had to do with her inner voices, the "parent tapes" we all have within us. You know that voice. It's the one that says "how could you be so stupid" or "you can't do that". We all internalize our parents' messages and people who had dysfunctional parenting hear a critical, doubting voice in their heads. Since no parents are perfect, I think we all have this to some degree and Anna had it to the max. Her inner voice was full of put-downs and dire warnings. No wonder she was negative and fearful.

I hadn't really noticed it happening and one day it just caught me by surprise. Anna was telling me about having to go to a wedding which her whole family would be attending. Anna is the only member of her family who has gotten into

recovery. Her mother continues to be abusive to Anna and the rest of the family defends Mom and refuses to see any problem. So this wedding was going to be a stressful occasion. I wanted to know what kind of thoughts she was having about going and had her say out loud what she was telling herself in her head. This time her inner parent was saying, "It's OK, you're going to be just fine. I know you can do it, it's going to be all right". This was not Anna speaking to her inner child. This was not the Lord talking to her. It was her own internal parent. She had *internalized the Lord as her parent* and replaced her old critical parent messages with His loving, supportive parenting. That is really incredible! Anna was over 40 years old. In spite of years and years of disempowering and demeaning verbal attacks, in spite of many more years of the same by her internal critical parent, she now has a nurturing inner parent. Anna hears in her head an encouraging, confirming voice. She has gotten the truth inside her.

All of Anna's problems with anxiety are not gone. Some of the anxiety comes from traumatic events in her childhood that she has not as yet fully remembered and which will eventually need healing. Until the Lord began reparenting her as she listened to Him speak to her day after day, and until she had the means to talk to and comfort her inner child, remembering and reliving these experiences was just too frightening. Now she is ready and the memories are beginning to come. When they do, the Lord talks to her about them, and she, in turn, talks to her little girl. Sometimes she needs the Lord to confirm that what she remembered really happened. Because she has learned to hear Him, He can do this for her.

Sometimes people who hear me talk about Anna start to hurt inside. The pain comes from the belief that Anna must be special, that God must love or approve of her more than He does them. I know that feeling so well. That hurt child within us feels "not chosen". We believe God does do these things, but for other people, special people. Truly, truly, this is not the case. *You are the one He wants to speak to. He will do for you what He did for Anna. He will do it because He wants to, because you are the joy of His heart.* Not just other people, you. Let yourself believe it. Let yourself hope.

Hope — that's the second thing the Lord began to talk to me about. It got so that I almost hated to hear the word. He told me that hope was necessary for everything He wanted to do for me. He told me that without hope he could do nothing. He said that hope was a precursor to faith; hope had to be there first and from that hope, faith could grow. He could work without my having faith

that He would do what He said He would do, but He couldn't work if I didn't have hope that He would do it. He urged me, reminded me, exhorted me to hope.

What I didn't realize then was that hoping was the one thing I wasn't willing to do. Anything else, but not that. You see, growing up in my family was very painful and there was nothing I could do to change that. Children are pretty adjustable little creatures. They will tailor-make themselves to fit whatever situation or kind of family they find themselves in. Some kids will become very very good to try to win their parents' approval. Others will become very very rebellious to guarantee getting their attention. One child will work hard to shine in school while another will become the class clown. All the many ways a child might adapt himself to the family system in which he lives are simply attempts by that child to lessen his own pain and make life more bearable. If one thing doesn't work, he'll try another. If *nothing* works, the child will give up. This phenomena of giving up when nothing works is known in psychology as "learned helplessness". It is a particular kind of depression which is the result of learning that nothing one can do helps. There is no way the child can act upon his environment which will cause that environment to become more comfortable for him. This phenomena is not limited to families in which children are openly and violently abused. It's just as common in families where the abuse is hidden and covert; families, for example, which take excellent physical care and provide for all the material needs of the child but just can't enjoy or accept the child as he is. Simply not being liked by one's parents causes a child tremendous pain. You know by now that not liking a child is about the parent, not about the child, but the child doesn't know that. So he tries everything he knows to get his parents to like him; and generally he fails. He fails because it's the parent that needs to change, not the child, and changing parents is not within the abilities of a child.

Like so many other children, I learned that I was absolutely powerless to change the dynamics in my family. All of my efforts to lessen the pain of growing up in this family were useless. The only thing I could do to protect myself, the only thing I had any control over was my own hope. I wouldn't hope it would get better and nobody could make me. That wouldn't stop the pain, but at least I wouldn't be fooled. At least I'd have my eyes wide open. At least I'd see the pain coming. In a world of leasts, a little girl will take what she can get. What I could get was control, and I took it. I would not hope.

None of this was conscious, you understand. I still had lots of denial about how painful it really had been to grow up in my family. I didn't know I'd *chosen* to give up hoping, as an act of self-protection. All I knew was that God was asking me to do something that I thought I was already doing, and if I wasn't doing it, I didn't know how to do it. Like Anna's circle of anxiety, my vicious circle of hopelessness created more hopelessness.

I could not solve this problem myself. But as the Lord continued to talk to me, as He continued to meet me each morning, my view of Him began to change. I came to realize that He wouldn't ask me to do something I could not do. He would not set me up to fail and then blame me for failing as my family had done. If He said to hope, there must be a way. So I began to pray His Word back to him.

I'm a strong believer in the power of prayer and an especially strong believer in Scripture as a most powerful prayer. After all, God Himself says that His Word will not return to Him void, without accomplishing that for which He sends it. So I began to pray Paul's prayer for the Roman church, that the God of hope would fill me with all joy and peace as I trust in Him, that by the power of the Holy Spirit I would overflow with hope (Romans 15:13). And God began to fill me with hope. Oh, I didn't experience it as filling. I experienced more like a trickle if I experienced anything at all. But every so often I'd notice that I really was hopeful about this or about that. It's only in retrospect that I can see Him turning me from a confirmed pessimist into an optimist. But He did. And He will do it for you, too. If you think hope might be a problem for you, speak to the Lord about that. Ask Him to show you ways that He can build your hope.

One of the ways the Lord built up my hope was through the book, *Come Away My Beloved*<sup>2</sup> by Frances Roberts. It is a devotional book, written as if the Lord Himself were speaking to each reader. A friend of mine who already knew how to hear the Lord told me about it many years ago and suggested that if I were to ask Him for a page number, the Lord would pick a passage just for me. In the very same instant that the words of denial and disbelief were forming on my lips, a page number came to my mind. Still not believing that this was anything more than my own mind speaking to me, I agreed to go out and buy the book. As soon as I turned to my page and began to read, I knew this page held special meaning to me. Only Someone who knew me well could have done that.

Some years later I was teaching an adult Sunday School class on prayer and used the book in the same way there. Of the ten or so participants, every one of them heard a page number. As I had each person read the page the Lord had chosen for them, an amazing thing became apparent. Not only did every person listening find the page the Lord had given them spoke directly to their exact circumstances, but also that *no one else's* page did. This wasn't an occurrence of generic blessing. The God to whom all hearts are open and no secrets hidden spoke directly to each and every one.

I used that book for quite a while. On one occasion as I looked up the page the Lord had given me, I was startled to find it was blank. That really felt like rejection to me. "Why, Lord?" I asked. "We will write on this page together", He told me. You know, this wasn't what I wanted to hear! I'd fallen into a comfortable pattern. I didn't want God to change it. It was fine with me just the way it was.

Are you like that? Do you hate it when the Lord takes something away from you in order to take you another step along the path of intimacy with Him? Every change to me feels like I'm losing something. I'm not really all that fond of change to begin with, but I wasn't in charge of this one so I went along in spite of my lack of enthusiasm. The Lord told me to write three things on that page. These were my new names, He told me. Terrific, I thought deflatedly. I wanted more. (I am very hard to please!) Yet each of these names have come to have special meaning in my life.

Soon after I'd first come to know the Lord, I found a passage in Isaiah which says "And your ears will hear a word behind you saying, This is the way; walk ye in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left." (Isaiah 30:21) That's what I wanted, a turn right, turn left relationship with the Lord — a Voice which said "this is the path, walk in it". So I began to pray that passage.

Are you ever like me? Do you sometimes pray for something and at the same time not expect to get it? I prayed that verse many many times, wishing that such a thing were possible but not really believing that it was. So when the Lord gave me that blank page and those three new names, I wasn't happy. I wasn't seeing that as an answer to my prayer, because it hadn't come in just the way I had envisioned. In giving me those names; however, the Lord was showing me a part of the path He had set for me. Over and over in Scripture, we see God giving someone a name which foretells the role God has given them. In this way He affirms them in their immaturity. God remained Abram, Abraham, the father

of a multitude. Jacob He renamed Israel, contender with God. The Lord was showing me a picture of myself that wasn't yet true but which He intended to make true. Abraham wasn't yet the father of a multitude when God gave him that name, but that's what he became. One of the ways God builds our faith is to show us what will be when as yet it is not, "declaring the end and the result from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done". (Isaiah 46:10) He did this for me to build my hope and I fought Him all the way because hoping was so painful, because hoping made me so vulnerable. Patiently He kept at it until I became willing to risk my fragile hope on His goodness, to bet everything I had that it really was He who spoke to me, that what He told me was really true. "I believe. Help Thou my unbelief." Do you know, I've never been sorry. Often doubting, yes. Often afraid. Often having to pray, again and again, "I believe. Help my unbelief." But never, ever sorry.

It is sometimes hard to believe, isn't it, that the God of the universe would actually speak to us. We believe it in theory. We know Jesus would have died for us had we been the only one in the world, but in practice? Won't we sound awfully grandiose to claim that the Lord actually talks to us?

Catherine Marshall didn't think so. The Lord had been talking to her for years. Catherine was the wife of Senate Chaplain Peter Marshall and author of many best selling books including *A Man Called Peter* and *Christy*. Her last book, *A Closer Walk*<sup>3</sup>, was compiled from her journals by her second husband, Leonard LeSourd, after her death. It's a marvelous testimony to the ongoing relationship between Parent and child in which the communication goes both ways! Catherine wrote to the Lord and the Lord wrote to Catherine. When I read her book in 1986 I was delighted because the Lord was doing the same thing with me.

It began for me when I was going through one of the major healing points in my life. I stayed home for an entire year and just talked to the Lord. I used my journal as a way of keeping track of where I'd been and where I was and began to address my writing to the Lord. As soon as my family would leave in the morning I would go into my bedroom, take out my journal and write "Dear Jesus". Although I had begun to hear Him now and again as He gave me a page number to read or an image to reflect on, my hearing was still very limited.

One morning as I was writing to Him, I heard in my mind the words, "Dear Misty". Somehow I knew that I was supposed to write them down. Even as I was doing this, I began to hear another couple of words, and as I wrote these, another.



Almost holding my breath and afraid to move, I continued to write what I heard. Before long, I had my first love letter from the Lord. And what a letter it was. The next day another letter, and the next and the next.

I don't think I could have survived that year without those letters. Not just because I was in pain. Not just because I needed counsel and direction. Not just because there were hurts of the past that needed healing. I don't think I could have survived without them because I needed *Him*. I needed Him. Not the idea of Him, not a belief in Him, but Jesus Himself. I needed God in the most real way imaginable. Nothing else would do. No one else would do. There was a hunger in me which only God could fill. And fill it He did.

Is there a hunger in you, too? Have you found that nothing else will do? Do you want Him to meet you alone in the garden, to walk and talk with you? Did you hear that old hymn and say "If only ... if only He *could*". Do you want to believe with all your heart that He can? Then do. Do.

I didn't know in that first year that this was not a special gift just for me. I had to learn a lot more about Jesus. No, not *about* Him. I had to learn to *know* Him before I realized that, a knowing which could only come through experience. In that year, and in all the years since, in days and hours spent with Him, I have come to know Him, and through Him, myself. It came in that time spent alone with Him when I could look into His eyes and see myself not as I knew me, but as He created me. As He revealed Himself to me, I began to see His awesome humility. The greatest Power in all the world comes to our door and knocks. And *waits*. It's the Christmas story all over again. Once again, He gives up his power. Once again He gives up His rights. And waits. He gives *us* the control, He gives us the choice to open the door, or not to. For some, just knowing He's there is enough. Is it enough for you?

He says, "If anyone hears and listens to and heeds my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will eat with him and he with Me". (Revelations 3:20) *Anyone*. Not a chosen few. Not anyone else but you. Anyone.

In my experience, inner child work in which you reparent your little boy or girl within, combined with Spiritual Reparenting — learning to let God speak to you so He can reparent you — is the most powerful package of healing I've ever seen. As the Lord affirms our value and rejoices in us as we are vulnerable, imperfect, dependent and immature, we come to know the truth about ourselves and to

get the truth inside us. You truly can come to love yourself in a healthy way. You can experience yourself as a joy and a delight. You can know the wonderful peace of just being, of not having to become anything. As you enjoy and appreciate the creation, you will have greater and greater love and appreciation for the Creator who, when He made you, smiled and said "it is good". It is good. You *are* a delight. Your mother just never told you.

## CHAPTER 7

# WHY IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE

*But to as many as did welcome Him, He gave the privilege to become the children of God. (John 1:12)*

Spiritual Reparenting is simply prayer. It's a prayer in which we speak to the Lord and He speaks to us. It's not hard for us to believe that we can and should talk to Him. But many of us have trouble with the part where He responds to us. We have trouble believing God would really speak to us. This disbelief is a prime reason that we can't hear Him speak. We don't believe and so we can't hear. We don't hear and so we don't believe. This cycle of disbelief can become a vicious circle which perpetuates itself. Let's look at some of the factors which affect this cycle.

Do you remember the learned helplessness phenomena I was talking about earlier? If you grew up in a dysfunctional family that you couldn't change, you probably have a fair measure of this on board. All of us who consciously or unconsciously tried to make it better for ourselves and failed have to deal with the resignation in our lives. Resignation ... just accepting things as they are ... knowing there's nothing you can do ... giving up. This giving up is not limited to making changes in our family of origin. It permeates everything. It's an unconscious expectation that no matter what the problem or situation, there's *nothing you can do!* And because it's unconscious, you can't even fight back against it. You can't attack a problem you don't know is there.

### **Giving up before we've started.**

Resignation becomes a foundational component of the lives of children whose parents could not love them in a healthy way. It is so much a part of that foundation that these kids give up before they even try. They just *know* the goodies are not for them. On the surface it may look like they've escaped this syndrome. They may be outwardly successful. They may have many of the

trappings of having made it. But in some area, in some way they may not even be aware of, they gave up short of the goal, not even expecting it to be any different today than it was in childhood.

Meg was such a person. She was the principal of a Christian elementary school and well respected in her church and community. She and her husband, Jake, had a pretty good marriage and were the parents of four boys the ages 20 to 26. Although both Meg and Jake held advanced degrees and valued education highly, none of the boys had gone to college. They'd gotten mediocre grades in school and never seemed to have any direction in their lives. There had been some problems with drugs at one time and now a difficulty in choosing a field of employment. None of these problems were earth-shattering. But they did cause Meg and Jake a lot of pain and guilt as they wondered what they had done wrong. It was this question that brought Meg into therapy. As we worked through Meg's family of origin issues, we observed the ways she tried to cope with the dysfunction in her childhood home. Meg's mother had a kidney disorder which necessitated periodic hospitalization throughout Meg's childhood. During Mom's frequent bouts with her disorder, the children were expected to play quietly so as not to disturb her rest. Meg was the youngest of four girls all two years apart and the one who needed her mother the most. When Meg would try to go in her mother's room, the older girls would chastise her in loud whispers ... "*Don't bother Mom. Do you want her to have to go back to the hospital! You're making her sick!*" When Meg was twelve, her mother died. Meg learned in her family of origin that you have to try as hard as you can to do the right thing, but that it will not help anyway. She unconsciously expected disaster to strike even though she consciously did everything she could to prevent it. It wasn't until early in her second year of therapy that Meg came to realize the effect this had on her parenting of her four boys. "You know, on the surface I did everything right. Jake and I spent time with the boys and did things as a family. We helped them with their homework and joined in their activities. I never berated them when they got bad grades or punished them for a poor report card. I thought I was being loving and accepting but you know what, I was accepting because I *expected* it. I never really thought they would be successful and I never knew it!" Meg had resigned herself to defeat long before the battle had ever begun and her children played out her unconscious expectations.

Richard is another example. He grew up with a mom who was extremely controlling and a dad who was generally absent. Richard learned in his family of origin that Mom would get her way, no matter what. Richard fought her in

the early years but learned eventually that he might as well save himself the trouble. Mom was going to win and Dad wasn't going to help. Now if this learning had been conscious, Richard could have said to himself, "that's how it was then with Mom and Dad. There was nothing I could do about that. Now I'm an adult. Mom and Dad are no longer here. I can do it differently now." But this learning was not conscious. It operated in a powerful way in Richard's unconscious mind, motivating his choices and affecting his perceptions.

Richard became very successful in his computer business. He married a woman he loved very much and had two beautiful children. As he became increasingly successful in his business, he began spending more and more time away from his family. In time his wife had an affair in an attempt to get the attention she was no longer getting from him. This really wasn't her style and her guilt led her to leave many clues for Richard, almost as if she wanted him to find out and confront her about it. But Richard never saw what was right under his nose. He had learned in his childhood home that there was no point seeing what he didn't like because there was nothing he could do about it anyway. He had learned resignation.

How does this kind of resignation affect our ability to hear the Lord speak to us? Simply by creating deep within our unconscious minds the belief that there's nothing we can do to get what we want. We may want to hear the Lord, even long to hear Him, but are so deeply resigned to not getting what we want that we cannot even bring ourselves to try. What I'm attempting to do for you is to make this resignation conscious. If it's conscious you can fight back against it. You can tell your child within that things are different now. You can talk to her about the difference between how things used to be for her and how they are now. You can encourage and exhort her to take the chance that she really can have what she wants because the Lord loves her so much. He longs to speak to her. The amount of talking you'll need to do with your child depends on how deeply resignation is a part of your childhood learning. The better relationship you have with your child, the better will be your ability to generate hope within her that things can be different.

### **With hope all things are possible...**

Hope ... that's the next thing we need to talk about. Remember how important hope is to this entire process? The Lord talked so much to me about hope because it is so essential. If we've never heard the Lord speak, if we've never had this experience, we might not even have considered that such a thing was within the realm of possibility. It's awfully hard to have hope about something you never even thought was possible. There's an interesting relationship between hope, experience and possibility.

Rob is a former client of mine who I'd been seeing for about a year. Like Anna, he had problems with anxiety. The more anxiety he had, the more he tried to do everything "right", and the more compulsive he became. Compulsivity is an unconscious defense against recognizing our vulnerability and imperfection. It occurs when parents are unable to accept these two normal characteristics of children. We had done a considerable amount of work on this issue, yet Rob was still afraid that if he let up on himself he would get into trouble. I had some hesitancy about teaching him how to let the Lord speak to him because I was afraid it would be another source of compulsivity to him ... another thing he'd have to do right. But the Lord wasn't worried and He picked the timing.

"You know, there's something I've been wanting to ask you", Rob said with the lopsided grin which I'd come to recognize as embarrassment. "You sometimes say 'the Lord told me' ... I've wondered about that. Do you mean He actually *talks* to you?" "OK", I thought to myself. "He opened the door ... lets walk through it." So I taught him what the Lord taught me and he was off and running. Every morning the Lord would spend time with him, soothing, calming, giving direction for the day. "Trust Me", He told him. "Trust Me." Rob began to trust and relax.

The Lord had used my experience of hearing Him to give Rob hope. If I could hear Him, it must be possible to do so. If it was possible, there was hope that he, too, could hear. God used that hope to establish a channel of communication with Rob. He built on that hope and created faith. Scripture tells us in Romans 10:17 that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God". The word here referred to is not "logos" ... the Word of God in Scripture, but "rhema" ... the word which one speaks to tell of Christ. Without hearing who Jesus is and what He had done in the lives of others, there cannot be hope, there cannot be

faith. Rhema is also the personal word of God spoken through the Holy Spirit to each of us. Let me tell you, nothing builds faith faster than having the Sovereign Lord speak directly and personally to you about your own unique circumstances!

How then can you hear and develop the hope which leads to faith? One excellent way is by reading of other people's experiences. *A Closer Walk*<sup>3</sup> by Catherine Marshall, a book I mentioned earlier, is the marvelous story of Catherine's journey in hearing the Lord. This book is so special because it allows us to eavesdrop not only on what Catherine says to the Lord but what He says to her.

Morton Kelsey, an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst, learned to hear the Lord when He awakened him, as He had Samuel, from sleep during the night. Unable to fall back asleep and becoming increasingly tired, he asked his therapist if he had any idea why he was awaking in the middle of the night. His therapist suggested that perhaps God might be wanting to speak with him. Although he was highly skeptical of such an idea, Morton Kelsey was just weary enough to check it out ... after all, he had to start getting some sleep! The following night when he awakened as usual, he rose, took his journal, and asked the Lord what He wanted. To his utter amazement, the Lord spoke back to him, the first of many nightly conversations they would have. Nearly every night for 28 years, the Lord awakened Kelsey to talk and Kelsey recorded these late night sessions in his journal. Of them, he says in his book, *Adventure Inward*<sup>4</sup>, "Out of them have come a great clarity in seeing what is amiss with me and an impetus toward change within my life. Out of these...have come most of the ideas for my sermons, articles and books. They have been a wellspring of life and wisdom for me." In case you're wondering why the Lord had to wake him in the middle of the night, Kelsey asked the very same question. "Couldn't You pick a more reasonable time?" he wanted to know. "I can never get your attention then", the Lord told him. "You are so busy that if I want to break through with love and concern for you I must make you uncomfortable and get you up in the middle of the night when you wouldn't think of doing anything else." If Morton Kelsey had not had a therapist who knew how to listen to God, he might have simply assumed he was suffering from insomnia!

As you read and hear about other people's experience of listening to God, you will grow in the hope and faith that this is not only possible for others but something the Lord desires for you as well. As you begin the process of listening for yourself, ask the Lord to bring into your life a few people who are also beginning to hear Him speak. As you share your own experiences and listen

uncritically to what the Lord is saying to them, faith will build in all of you. The Lord will bring such people into your life for mutual encouragement and so you can help each other in the process of discernment. When you first hear the Lord speak to you, you may be very excited and want to tell everyone about it. I encourage you not to do this. Not everyone will be ready or able to hear you. Just as there are safe people with whom you can share other intimate areas of your life, so there will be those with whom you can and can't share this most special experience. The very best way to find these people is to ask the Lord to provide them. He may give you friends you already know, or pick the very last people you'd choose for yourself, but He will knit your hearts together in His love in a way that will amaze and bless you.

### **An error in our perceptions ...**

A misbelief about what God is really like is another important reason many people find it hard to believe that Jesus will really speak to them. Unless we've had some healing, we see God as we saw our parents and expect from Him what we received from them. If you still have a lot of denial about what it was like to grow up in your family, it is even more likely that you will have a skewed image of God.

When Ted began therapy, he had his physician father on a pedestal. "He was great", Ted told me. "Even though he had a busy practice, he always made time to coach my little league team and help me with practice. He'd even work with the other kids whose dads didn't have the time. How many guys do you know who have a father like that?" Ted held an idealized image of his Dad, yet his view of God was of an autocrat who could never be pleased with even the most profound effort. Ted always felt as though he's let God down and avoided contact with Him due to the shame he felt in His presence. As we worked together in therapy, we came to see that although Ted's father had been actively involved in Ted's life, that involvement had not been pleasant for Ted. Dad did coach his little league team and had driven Ted unmercifully. Every error, every less than perfect play, was the subject of endless criticism at the dinner table. Just the look of disgust on Dad's face when he was thrown out at the plate or when he didn't catch on as quickly as Dad would have liked was enough to deeply shame his son. Ted's father even used his work with the other kids as another "incentive" to get Ted to do better, embarrassing and shaming his son in front of his friends.



As Ted came out of his denial and began to remember his childhood as it really was, he was able to see where his image of God had come from. It was his father who had been impossible to please, not God. Ted realized he really didn't know what God was like; he had avoided any intimate contact with Him out of his shame and fear. Perhaps this God was Someone who really *did* care about him. Perhaps this God was different from Dad. As he worked through his childhood issues, Ted decided to take the risk and find out.

We're all like Ted in a way. Since there are no perfect parents, we all, to a greater or lesser degree, received less than we needed. Whatever was lacking, whatever was missed we unconsciously expect to continue to do without. We project our parents' view of us on to the Lord, expecting Him to respond to us as they did. Remember those five characteristics of children; valuable, vulnerable, imperfect, dependent and immature? Wherever Mom and Dad were unable to affirm these parts of us there are areas in our relationship with God which need healing.

Think them through for a minute and see if this is not true for you. Look back at what you wrote about concerning these areas. If Mom and Dad weren't able to take joy in your presence just because you existed, you are probably not able to imagine Jesus doing so either. I've had so many clients who had excellent head knowledge about their value to God but couldn't take this knowledge to their hearts. They had to keep *doing* for God because in their heart of hearts, they thought being wasn't enough. So many of us feel that we have to become something in order to bring a light to our Savior's eyes. Those of us with a heart for God struggle with wanting to give Him something, to bring Him pleasure, denying Him the very thing which would do that ... ourselves, just as we are. We learned all this at our parents' knees and this misbelief keeps us from embracing our specialness to God.

Do you believe in your innermost being that nothing changes in Jesus' heart for you when you make a mistake, even when you should have known better? Do you think He'll love you more when you're a more mature believer? Do you really believe that He enjoys taking care of you, protecting you, even to counting the hairs on your head? Most of us can receive such a small portion of all that God has for us because of our misbeliefs about what He is really like. He will correct those beliefs if we're willing to come to Him as a child, saying, "Show Abba to me, Jesus. Talk to me Lord."

Along with our misbeliefs about what God is like, we also have mistaken beliefs about how God sees us. We behold ourselves in the eyes of God and avert our own eyes in shame. We don't know and can't believe that the disappointment or disapproval we see on His face is an illusion. How can we ever learn that this reflection is not the "me" He sees? He is so much more merciful, so much more gracious than we ever give Him credit for. Look at how He spoke about His friend, Abraham, the man who in Old and New Testaments is renowned for his faith. In Genesis we are told that when the Lord told Abraham his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky, Abraham believed Him and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that Abraham, "did not weaken in faith when he considered the utter impotence of his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old. No unbelief or distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God." Wait! Abraham didn't weaken or waver? Hold on. What about Ishmael? Abraham has sex with another woman for the purpose of conceiving a child and God says he didn't *weaken*? As my daughter would say, "give me a break!" In our house Ishmael would definitely be considered to have wavered! And yet God says he hoped in faith. Abraham's value remained constant to God in his imperfection and immaturity.

What about David? He committed adultery and had his lover's husband killed and yet God calls him a man after His own heart. Do you see how God, as the perfect Parent, affirms our value in our vulnerability, imperfection, dependency and immaturity? Do you see the utter generosity with which God sees us? A man after His own heart. That's how He speaks about us, too. In spite of all our mistakes, all our failings, there's a conversation going on right now in heaven. Jesus is telling His Father about how wonderful you are. Father God is telling Jesus how much joy to bring Him. You've got to tune in to that conversation. You've got to hear it with your own ears and so believe. They're willing to tell it to you if you are willing to listen.

### **A Western World View**

We often forget the effect that our culture has on how we perceive and interpret reality. Culture is a little bit like the water in a goldfish bowl. The goldfish are immersed in the water but are so used to it that they no longer take account of it. For us, our Western world view is like that water. We often forget to account for its particular viewpoint. Yet this Western world view is another reason you

might have trouble believing God can and wants to speak to you personally. Pastor George Eckart, director of the healing team for the 120 Fellowship at Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena, suggests that this world view assumes everything which happens can be rationally explained according to the natural laws of science. As a result of this belief, we fail to perceive supernatural reality when we encounter it ... we just don't see it happening.

Agnes Sanford, that wonderful woman of God to whom the Lord first taught inner healing, was the wife of an Episcopal priest during World War II. In her autobiography, *Sealed Orders*<sup>5</sup>, she tells of one of the young men from her parish who was the only survivor of a particular skirmish. During the fighting he heard a voice saying "jump". He jumped, and was saved. A bomb had fallen where he had stood. Because he jumped out of the way, he was the only one of his group who was not killed. As Agnes was telling this story, she was asked why God had only spoken to this young man. Didn't He care about the others? Was this man in some way special? "Oh", Agnes replied, "I believe He did speak to all the others. But he was the only one there who'd learned to hear His voice." He had been taught to do this, as had all the young men of that parish, by their pastor. They'd been trained to perceive supernatural reality – God interacting with our world in ways beyond the natural laws He established.

There are those who suggest that ideas and beliefs such as these are a "seduction". I don't agree with them. We are living in a period of a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is not the only such period in history. There have been other people who have had the privilege to live in such a time. Yet the times are not many and we are tremendously lucky to experience this in our lifetime. How sad it is that our Western world view keeps many people from experiencing all God has for them.

### **"Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen..."**

One more reason we don't allow God to speak to us is that we simply don't know how to do that. Isn't it incredible that we go through so many years of school, grade school, high school, college, and no one ever teaches us one of the most important things we need to know? Ours is a very secularized country, yet even in our churches we are taught so little about how to pray and listen to God.

Communication problems are rampant in this age. Most of the couples I see in and out of my office don't know how to talk to each other. We've lost the art of being intimate with each other; telling one another what we think, feel, want, and believe and hearing these things from them without judgment. We've almost given up the hope of intimacy, of communication with each other. Many many of us have already given up the hope of this intimacy and communication with the Lord ... *but it doesn't have to be that way*. We're wounded people, the children of wounded people. We need to be reparented. We need another chance to be children. We need a chance to grow up again. We need to hear the things our mother never told us.

## CHAPTER 8

# HOW TO BEGIN

*My determined purpose is that I may know Him.  
(Philippians 3:10)*

People have been hearing God speak to them long before I came along. Not just biblical people ... plain, ordinary people like you and me. One of these people was my mother-in-law, the wife of a Danish Lutheran pastor. Long before I came into the family, before I was even born, Bestemor (the Danish name for grandmother) had heard the Lord speak to her. A few years after her first child, my husband, had been born, another son arrived. But this child, Paul, was born with an irreparable heart defect and lived only a few months. He was buried in the little graveyard between the parsonage and the church. Bestemor said there is nothing that compares to the agony of losing your own child. Over fifty years later, I can still hear the pain in her heart as she spoke of the baby who didn't survive.

The first year after Paul died was very hard for Bestemor. As much as she wanted to retreat from the world, she had a husband and another child to care for. Yet on Paul's first birthday, not even this seemed like it would be enough. She felt as though she just couldn't go on. There on the wooden floor of the parsonage kitchen she knelt and cried out to the Lord, "I can't, Lord. I just can't anymore". As she knelt there she heard a voice telling her to go out to the baby's grave.

It was the middle of one of the coldest winters in Minnesota. On top of all the sleet and snow there had come a black frost that seemed to turn all the world to mourning. "He can't want me to go out there", she thought. "What good would that do?" Nonetheless, she rose from where she knelt, put on her boots and coat and went outside. With a heavy heart she trudged through the snow toward the graveyard, and there she saw it. On the baby's grave, coming up through the black tinged snow bloomed one single flower. "And then I knew", she said, "that even though he died, he was alive. I would see him again." And she knew she could go on.

I tell you that story to tell you this. God spoke to Bestemor when she most needed to hear His voice. She didn't follow any formula. She didn't sit down with a pencil and paper as I'm going to suggest you do. But God spoke to her nevertheless. For each of us He has an individualized plan. There is no one right way to hear Him speak. One pastor told me he hears the Lord speak to him in the shower. He's certain to listen for at least as long as it will take him to get clean! I will tell you some things that worked for me, that seemed to help other people I've taught to hear Him. But don't deify the process. Don't turn it into a formula. It's a Living God we're seeking. Let Him lead you. Do all the steps or skip some of them. Do it front to back or back to front, it doesn't matter. It is still God who controls the process. He will speak to you because *He wants to* ... not because you do it right.

A good way to begin is with the book God used to build my hope in hearing Him, *Come Away My Beloved*<sup>2</sup>, by Francis Roberts. Ask the Lord to give you a page number. I know you'll be tempted to believe you simply made up the number you hear, but don't surrender to that temptation. In an attitude of prayer, read what the Lord has to say to you. Whatever you hear, believe it is from the Lord. Remember that an omnipotent God knew what you would hear before you heard it.

At the same time as you begin doing this, start journaling to the Lord. Just sit down at whatever hour you pick for your quiet time and write a letter to Him. Tell Him whatever is on your mind; what you think, what you hope, what you feel. Tell Him about your fears, the things you're ashamed of, the things you wouldn't tell another living soul. As best you can, try not to censor anything. You're talking to your Father here, but a different kind of father than you've known before ... one who won't shame you, attack you or abandon you. Lay out your heart before Him.

### **No holds barred.**

Many people have told me that this sounded so easy when I first explained it, but they had a much more difficult time doing it than they ever imagined. Gail was one of those people. "I realized", she said, "that I really didn't know how to be intimate with the Lord. I thought I wanted intimacy but I found that I was really uncomfortable telling it straight, just the way it was. I wanted to clean up my feelings and my reactions to people before I presented them to Him. I didn't

want to put them down on paper just the way they were. It was like leaving evidence of my imperfection and all the defects in my character. I guess I thought God might nail me with them!" Gail hadn't been aware of how much she was experiencing God as she'd experienced her earthly parents. It wasn't until she put her relationship with Him to the test of total honesty that she came to see that she was afraid of God.

Robin was a client of mine who had a son born with very serious handicaps. She and her husband, Joe, had wanted a son for such a long time. Now they had one but this wasn't the child they had imagined. This little boy would never play baseball or climb a tree. He would need constant physical attention and would probably never be able to care for himself. Robin and Joe were devastated. They were also angry — at God. In time Robin came to believe that she had resolved her anger. She knew God caused all things to work together for good to those who love Him. So she tried to love Him even harder so that this devastation might somehow lessen. She continued on in her relationship with the Lord until she began this process of writing to Him and came up against a brick wall. "I couldn't write", she said. "Every time I began I would somehow find myself face to face with my anger. It just frustrated the heck out of me because I thought it was behind me. But time and time again as I tried to talk to Him about other things, there it was! I couldn't get past it." Robin couldn't get past her anger because she had never expressed it to God. She had been brought up in a family where Mom and Dad were always right and talking back to them was a cardinal sin. She knew it must be a terrible sin to be so angry at God it felt like hate and an even bigger sin to express it. She'd repented of this sin over and over, asking God's forgiveness for her anger. But the anger remained.

When we begin this journaling process, we embark on a journey of intimacy with God. The first part of that intimacy is sharing ourselves, our thoughts, our feelings, and our desires, just as they are, with Him. It's a process that doesn't allow for the holding back of any feeling. There's no room to hide any thought or secret desire. And that's a hard thing to do. Robin had to write to the Lord over and over about her anger. She had to tell it like it was, with no holds barred, to see if He would reject her or punish her. She had to discover if her God was big enough to handle even this. She had to find out that there is nothing that can separate her from the love of God, nothing that it is unacceptable to tell Him. Her unexpressed feelings had stood as a block between them, making their relationship superficial. As she took the risk of honesty with Him, He met

her right at the point of that risk. He showed her that her raging at Him required more trust and faith than her angry silence demanded. When she was silent she was being "good" and her faith was in that goodness. When she cried out to Him in anger, she was vulnerable and her trust was in Him. As He did with Job, God rewarded that trust and blessed her with a deeper relationship with Him than she'd ever thought it possible to have. It wasn't until she had emptied herself day by day of her rage at God that He could fill her with the good things He had for her.

When you begin to write to the Lord, you may find that you, too, come up against feelings you never knew you had or which you thought you'd resolved. You may experience shame about parts of yourself, shame about what you really want or what you feel. Don't let that stop you. It is this very shame, this very sense of our own "badness" that we most need to bring to Him. It's this very shame He most wants to heal. The greater the dysfunction in your family of origin, the more likely it is that this may be an issue for you. Those of us who had parents who weren't able to affirm us in our imperfection have learned to hide parts of ourselves from everyone, even from God. Don't expect to be able to change this all at once. It's a process which will continue all your life. Day by day and year by year you will develop the capacity for greater and greater intimacy with God as you share who you are openly with Him.

The second step in this process is to ask Him to write back to you. You may feel some hesitation about doing this. Many clients have expressed a fear to me that God won't respond to them or that all they will hear is their own voice. They believe God will do this for other people but not for them. I think that's part of the codependent's feeling of being "not chosen". Let me assure you that you are already chosen! You would not be reading this book had not a sovereign God drawn your attention to it. The Lord doesn't set us up to fail or to frustrate us. He doesn't dangle a carrot before us and then yank it away when we get close. It was someone else who did those things. Your inner child might be remembering some of those times, remembering people who did do these very things. He may very much need you to listen to his fears and feelings about this before you begin. You can reassure him about what you know God is like and tell him about how He's different than those other people. You can assure him that no matter what happens, you won't abandon him. Then keep that promise!



## **Is that you, Lord?**

It might help your child to know what God sounds like when He speaks to us. Although once in a while the Lord speaks in an audible voice the way we speak to one another, most people find this to be the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time we hear what Scripture calls a "still, small voice". This is the voice of God within us communicated to us by the Spirit of God. It resembles the "sound" of the words in your head when you are reading something. Read this last sentence over and see what I mean. Do you hear the words as you read them? This is the closest approximation I've been able to find to what hearing God is like. "But isn't that my voice?", you might ask. I know this can be confusing before you've begun to hear the Lord but the confusion clears up once you've had a little practice in listening. Yes, it can be another voice than His. That's why the process of discernment is so important (we'll talk about how to do that later on). But don't let this frighten you or keep you from asking the Lord to speak to you. It isn't as difficult as it may first seem. The Holy Spirit speaks God's words to our *spirits*. It is this spiritual energy that gets translated into words. The "hearer" within us is like the telephone you have in your home. Many people may call on that phone and their words will all come through the same instrument, yet they are different people giving different messages. In the same way there is within us an instrument through which we hear from within. Whether it is the voice of God or of another spirit, the internalized voice of our parents or our own inner voice, it comes through this same instrument. Just as you learned at an early age that though the ring of the telephone is always the same, you could identify the different callers, so you will learn how to discern who is speaking to you through this internal circuit. The voice of God sounds much like your own inner voice but it comes without you thinking it. As First Corinthians tells us, 'we have the mind of Christ and do hold the thoughts, feelings and purposes of his heart'.

## **It gets easier.**

Some people first hear only a word or two, some hear a few sentences and some whole pages. Whatever the Lord says to you, write it down as He is saying it. This is the second part of your journal. Each day you will have your letter to the Lord and His to you. I have found this process of writing down what He says as He is saying it occupies enough of our minds to free up our spirits for listening. I think of this process as "taking dictation". A secretary taking dictation simply

writes down what he hears. He does not expand on it or let his thoughts wander to consider the implications of what his employer is saying. He doesn't stop to think about whether he likes or agrees with what's being said. His only concern at that moment is to listen and accurately record the thoughts of the person speaking. So it is with us. Spiritual reparenting ... listening to God ... is a discipline and like all disciplines, yields a harvest of fruit to those who have been trained by it. It became such a joyous and comfortable thing for me that I inwardly rebelled when the Lord wanted me to do it differently after a time. Remember I told you I don't like change! It was my work as a therapist that finally made me willing to go along as I realized I couldn't very well say, "please excuse me for a minute" and whip out pen and paper whenever I needed the Lord to tell me something in session! As usual, the Lord was right, and I'm very grateful I had to learn to simply hear, for now I'm able to hear Him anywhere. (I know the Lord was thinking of me when He said, "behold, it is a stiff necked people"!) Even so, that discipline of "taking dictation" trained and schooled my ability to hear God and the record of His words to me in those many letters I greatly treasure.

That's the process as simply as I can describe it to you. Increase your hope that you can hear Him. Ask Him to speak to you. Lay out your heart before Him with nothing held back. Listen to Him share His heart with you.

Keep in mind that as you continue in this process, your ability to hear Him will increase. Whatever job you have, I'll bet you're better at it today than when you first started. I'm a better therapist now that I was when I saw my first patient. I'm a better mother to my youngest child than I was to my oldest. So it is with listening to God. He speaks just as clearly the first time He talks to us, but we improve in our ability to listen. Do you recall the many times in the gospels that Jesus says "he who has ears, let him hear!" That is what you're doing. You're developing the ears to hear. As we are learning to listen to God, we also need to learn to discern His voice from the other voices we could hear. In the next chapter we'll talk about what those other voices might be and how you can tell them apart.

## CHAPTER 9

# DISCERNMENT

*None of those who take refuge and trust in him  
shall be condemned or held guilty. (Psalm 34:22b)*

Discernment is simply the process of learning to know who's talking to you. And guess what, you're not going to do this perfectly either. "What! I'm going to be deceived! No, no, no, I'd better not get into this!"

I think I can say categorically, yes, you will sometimes mistake the Lord's voice for another. You will believe something is from the Lord and it won't be. But truly, don't be so afraid of that. It is painful when you realize that has happened. But God, true to His word, uses those very mistakes to teach us and bring us even closer to Him. I don't think you can get there without being willing to endure the pain of error. Through our mistakes and errors, God causes us to look at areas in our lives where healing is needed. He causes those very errors to work together and fit into a plan for good for those whose desire it is to love God and are called according to His purpose. Ultimately our trust must be in *His* character, *His* desire to communicate with us rather than in our own abilities to hear no matter how well schooled and developed they become. We have to be willing to come to Him as a child, immature, imperfect and dependent. Scary, I know. Especially for those of us for whom childhood was painful and our only relief came in growing up and not being dependent any more. But He is a different kind of Father and that really is our purpose, isn't it, to come to know Him as He really is, and to see ourselves as He sees us.

### Parent Tapes

So let's begin by talking about the two "voices" most commonly mistaken for the Lord's. The first of these is the voice of our "internalized parent".

There is a mechanism within us that allows us to internalize the significant people in our early lives. When we internalize something, we make it a part of ourselves almost as if we literally swallowed it and made it part of our own bodies. In God's perfect plan, parents were supposed to be nurturing and

affirming of their children. God provided, through the process of internalization, a way for us to take this affirmation within us and make it part of our inner selves. If everything had gone according to that perfect plan, there would have been no problem. But, because of the fall of man, sin came into the world. One of the components and consequences of that sin is that parents have not been able to love and affirm their children as God intended. Because of their own dysfunctional parenting, they were not able to parent us in a healthy way. When that happens, the process of internalization works against us by causing us to take in and make a part of ourselves those unhealthy, disaffirming messages. I call these inner parental messages "parent tapes" and the "speaker" of them the "internalized parent". Your internalized parent can be one of the voices you hear in your head.

Your internalized parent will say the same kind of things your parents (or other significant childhood influences) always said. They will present to you a view of yourself replete with all the foibles and failures of childhood. No matter how you've developed or grown, those internalized parents will always see you as they saw you then, through the lenses of their own history. In fact, it doesn't even matter how *they* may have developed and grown since you were small! They may have matured, learned, and changed. But it is not the person they are now who composed those tapes in your head. They're based on what they mirrored back to you then.

Although the kinds of things said to us are very important, there are other ways to show a child how one feels about her. The look on a parent's face can give a powerful message even when no words are spoken. Body language can say, "I wish you weren't here" or "I'm disgusted with you". People who find they have punitive or shaming parent tapes which aren't consistent with what they remember being said to them need to look at what messages they got non-verbally. Looks and attitudes are covert in nature. They can be harder to bring back to awareness than the more overt, verbal communication. Remember too, that it is our *perception* of what occurred that was taken in and stored within us. Maybe the look on Mom's face meant, "I'm so worried about that mess at work", and in your normal childhood egocentricity you interpreted it as "you're in my way". That's the message which got inside you and you may find yourself as an adult with an internalized parent to whom you're just too much trouble. That's the parent you have to deal with now. That's the one whose voice you may confuse with the Lord's.

If you had a mom or dad who shamed you whenever you made a mistake, your internalized parent will never let you get away with not being perfect. If your parents taught you to put your own needs last, your internalized parent will be right there to find fault whenever you think of being good to yourself. So as you begin to listen, pay attention to the attitudes and beliefs of the voices you hear. Are they consistent with what God tells us about His nature and character in Scripture? Or are they more consistent with what you *think* God wants to say to you based on your image of Him from childhood?

The more work you've done on your recovery, the easier it will be for you to identify your internalized parent tapes because you will have worked through much of your denial about how things really were in your family. You will have let yourself remember those messages you heard or read on your parents' faces. If you're just beginning this process, don't despair. You can learn to view the past without needing to deny or distort it. As you do, you will become more conscious of that little voice in your head which is so good at pointing out your deficiencies, real or imagined.

Linda was telling me during her last therapy session about how, already late, she missed the street she was supposed to turn on and had to turn around and go back. "You're so stupid", her internalized parent said. "No, it's just a mistake", she said to her child. Disputing dysfunctional parent tapes is an excellent way of dealing with an internalized parent. If you hear a voice as you try to listen to the Lord speak to you and it sounds just like your most secret fears, question whether it might be your internalized parent instead of Him.

### **The Father of Lies.**

A second voice you might hear is that of a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. Satan and all his followers are the enemies of God and seek to circumvent God's will in every area. It would be foolish for us to believe that he would not attempt to prevent the development of such intimate relationships between the Lord and His children. Scripture tells that Satan is a liar and the father of lies and all that is false, but that he masquerades as an angel of light. He brings lies but pretends to bring truth. He offers us destruction masqueraded as instruction. In scientific research there is a phenomena known as type one or type two errors. A type one error is believing something when it is false. A type two error is not believing it when it is true. Satan will settle, happily, for either one. If he

can get you to believe you hear the Lord when it really is *His* whisper, fine. If he can convince you not to believe the Lord spoke to you when He *did*, that's fine, too. And if he can get you so confused you become double-minded, so much the better!

Remember that the one speaking to you will always reveal his nature. Thus, one good plan is to look at the fruit of any conversation. Does it produce peace, joy and gentleness? Galatians tells us that this is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Does it produce kindly goodness and uprightness of heart? Ephesians says this is the fruit of the Spirit of Light. When Satan speaks to us, we experience *his* fruits of fear, doubt, anger, self-hatred and shame. Jesus builds within us healthy self-valuing by telling us how much He values us. Satan strips away our self-worth by condemning us for the very things Jesus has already forgiven. He wants us to believe that it is God who condemns us so that, like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we will hide from Him in shame. Jesus came to take upon Himself our shame and to set us free for a relationship with him.

But doesn't God also convict us of sin, you might ask? Does He not also discipline us for our good? After all, Scripture does tell us that for the time, no discipline brings joy but seem grievous and painful. This is true. But the pain of that discipline lasts only as long as it takes to conform to God's will. It only lasts as long as we are in rebellion against Him. The moment we turn and say, "Yes, Lord", it is over. As for conviction, it is even less painful. When God convicts us He gives us, right there, the grace we need to see our fault and the strength to change it. His conviction is a joyous thing because with it comes the power to do it differently. The feelings which accompany it are heartfelt remorse and renewed hope. The condemnation which comes from Satan brings with it defeating shame, self-hatred and hopelessness. Looking at the fruit it brings is one way to discern the voice of God from the enemy.

### **Taking a chance.**

I remember a time the Lord told me to stop praying. Because I was brought up on the "you are what you do" brand of child rearing, I naturally had tried to "do" whatever it would take to "become" what I thought God wanted. So I worked very hard at everything, including prayer. Then the Lord told me to stop. Stop working so hard, stop trying so hard, and stop praying. Stop *praying*? Doesn't Scripture tell us to pray without ceasing? This wasn't consistent with Scripture

so surely it must be the enemy. Better to be safe than sorry. After all, I could make a good case for why I should continue to pray, but it would be pretty hard to defend myself if I didn't pray and later God said, "that wasn't Me. You just believed what you wanted to believe. You're simply lazy".

What an enormous risk it would be for me to believe it was the Lord I'd heard. There would be no risk in believing it wasn't. Except ... I might miss taking the next step along the road the Lord had set me on. Except ... what He'd said resonated deeply within me. Except ... in my heart of hearts I felt I would be choosing safety over Him. I'd chosen safety a lot in my life and the Lord had been working with me on that for a long time. Maybe it was better to risk being sorry.

The fruit of that risk was enormous in my life. Through it the Lord taught me about His desire to give to me and care for me for no other reason than the joy it brings Him. The fruit of that conversation and my foot-dragging obedience to it was a level of trust and assurance I'd never known before. Satan does not want me to have that. But God does.

In order to get there I had to walk through a frightening time. I had to endure my doubts and insecurities. I began to see how much I'd relied on rules and not on grace. I did not like what God was showing me! It was not a quick process, or an easy one. It was a struggle, through which God untaught and retaught things I'd learned in childhood. I felt like I was climbing Mt. Everest; but, through it all, I built spiritual muscles that have served me well ever since.

In all things, God tells us to count the cost. I think the rewards are more valuable than life itself, but the pursuit of them may take you through your own dark night of the soul.

And what if I had been mistaken (as I have been!)? The Lord, as our perfect Parent, would never taunt us or ridicule us for making an error. He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. He knew the desire of my heart was to be one with Him. He would not have rested until He'd sought and found me, and set me back on the right course. He would have corrected me with gentleness because that is His nature. As you listen to the Lord, hold the picture of God as revealed in Jesus in your mind. If what you're hearing isn't consistent with that, I would encourage you to seriously question who you are hearing.

Why isn't it possible then, if one is very careful, never to be deceived about who you are hearing? To answer that question, let's consider the difference between the way God spoke to people before and after the coming of Jesus.

Before Jesus dwelt on earth among us, God only spoke to a few people, men like Abraham, Moses and the prophets. After Jesus came, ordinary people could hear the Lord. When God spoke to Old Testament prophets, it was by open revelation ... in an audible voice, in a cloud, or through an Angel standing before them. In contrast to this, we hear a still, small voice inwardly. An Old Testament prophet would be stoned if he were once wrong. A mistake would prove him to be a false prophet. But when Paul is writing to the Corinthian church he tells them to pay attention to what each person has heard and to "weight and discern what is said". (1Cor. 14:29) Paul's implication is that there is room for human error. We will not be able to hear God perfectly. The more we are able to accept that we are imperfect in our ability to hear Him, the more we will be able to partake of and receive the fullness He has for us.

Dr. Robert Wise, pastor of Our Lord's Congregation Church in Oklahoma, and author of many books including *When There is No Miracle*<sup>6</sup>, teaches his congregation how to listen to God. Because he knows that every one of us has imperfect hearing, he has his parishioners keep one portion of their journals in which they write down the things they heard which did not happen. I think that's marvelous. Here is a pastor who values his people in their imperfection and immaturity. He tells them right up front that some of what they hear will be inaccurate, and he prepares them to expect that.

With time and practice we will become more mature, but we will always be imperfect. As you work to accept these parts of yourself, you will not only be able to receive more and more of what the Lord has for you, but you will also be helping your child within to heal from the harmful effects of believing she must be perfect and fully mature to be acceptable.

### **The Company of Saints.**

What then do you do if you know some of what you hear will not be accurate? Is there anything to be done other than simply accepting this as inevitable? There most definitely is. **The most important is never to attempt such listening in isolation.**



Anyone who seeks spiritual maturity apart from the company of sisters and brothers is ripe for deception. In our counseling center, many clients come to us specifically for spiritual direction. Others who have asked the Lord to provide them with a spiritual director have found this person from among both clergy and lay leaders. There is ample New Testament precedent for such a relationship in the establishment of elders and deacons, and in Paul's direction to older women to be guides to the younger. Richard Foster, in his book, *The Celebration of Discipline*,<sup>7</sup> gives much attention to this special shepherding relationship.

Equally important is the counsel of the two or three like-minded others whom the Lord brings into our lives for discernment and mutual encouragement. These people are your lifeboat. Even though you may all be at about the same level of experience in listening to the Lord, a group which has covenanted together to this purpose will bring to it a variety of spiritual gifts and abilities. If, in addition, you pray together as a group with and for each other, the Lord will be present among you and the Holy Spirit will be there to guide you into all truth. As you come together in this way, there cannot help but become apparent attitudes and character traits which the Lord wants to sanctify. As you obey God by humbling yourselves before each other and having a teachable heart, He will use this little group as a refiner's fire to bring greater godliness into your life.

In such a covenanted relationship, I would seriously question any word or leading about which any member of the group had a major reservation. It is important to pray through together any such question rather than to act quickly on your own. As St. Teresa of Avila explained, "The good or the evil does not lie in the vision but in the one who sees it and in whether or not she profits by it with humility. For if humility is present, no harm can be done, not even by the devil. And if humility is not present, even if the visions be from God, they will be of no benefit."<sup>8</sup>

I most strongly urge you to begin this process by asking the Lord to put such people in your life and to acquaint yourself with the other voices you may hear when to come to listen to God. Discernment becomes easier, as well, when you become aware of certain other elements which are often present when the Lord speaks to his people. In the next chapter, I'll share some of these with you.

## CHAPTER 10

# SIGNPOSTS

*Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure  
to give you the Kingdom. (Luke 12:32)*

One of the often present characteristics when the Lord speaks to us is that there will be a theme which repeats again and again. It's as though He's letting us know that this area will be our major focus for the coming weeks or months.

His talking to me about hope was one such theme. His conversations with Rob about trusting Him was another. Over a period of time, He continues to bring us back to this familiar place. Through different circumstances and different examples, He draws us again to seeing the role this particular issue has played in our lives. He often stays with a theme long past the point where we want to hear another word on the subject! He knows, though, what we need to learn and where our attention needs to be addressed.

This doesn't mean that, during a given period, this theme will be the only thing about which the Lord speaks to us. But the thread of such a teaching will intertwine through many other conversations and we will be led back to it again and again. This gentle repetition is a sign of His infinite patience with us, His willingness to take all the time in the word to let His teaching sink deep into our spirits and take root.

The use of imagery is another indication that is the Lord speaking to us. Many times He will give us a mental illustration to go along with what he wants to impress upon us. One day he showed me, in my mind's eye, the image of a branch weighted and pulled down by the fruit upon it. I saw the branch working and struggling to produce more fruit which only pulled it down further. The branch seemed to ask, "Why am I falling when I am trying so hard to produce fruit to please you?" Then the Lord spoke to my heart. "I am the true Vine and My Father is the vinedresser. Apart from Me you can produce nothing of value. Abide in Me. You cannot be your own source, no matter how hard you try. Do not weight yourself down with burdens which only cause you to break as surely as the weight of the fruit causes a weak branch to snap off the vine. The branch does not tell the vine how much fruit it should bear, or that one fruit is preferable

to another. Does the branch of the apple tree tell the vine that it wants to bear pears? Abide in Me, receive My Spirit and rejoice that you will bear exactly the kind and amount of fruit which will please My Father. Is this not the desire of your heart?"

A client of mine, Fred, had the habit of being very hard on and unforgiving of himself. As he was listening to the Lord, he was given the image of a dark cross casting a pure white light beam upon him, the only light in the darkness. Jesus told him to see this, the Lord, sacrificed for him in love, embracing the agony of the cross for the joy that was set before him, the joy that was Fred. Smiling at him, even through his sins, being the light in him. When Fred erred, he was simply to ask forgiveness and then to forget, remembering instead of his faults the Lord's joy, the Lord's smile, and the beam of light.

When the Lord gives such an illustration as this it takes His teaching deep into our spirits by giving an image that captures and crystallizes the essence of His words. Many people have shared such images as these with me and I have come to recognize them as an often present element of communication from God.

Another interesting phenomena that many people have reported to me is that as they listen to the Lord, they hear him say things to them which are contrary to what they thought He'd say. I have often had clients bring me something the Lord had written to them only to tell me, "I know this wasn't really the Lord." They say this because what they heard is different from what they expected to hear. Yet as I read what He said, it was so evident to me that this was precisely what He *would* say to them!

Many times we hear what we don't expect because we're not used to being treated so kindly, respected so greatly, esteemed so highly. When the God who values us beyond His own life responds to us, it is so far above anything we could ask or think that we have trouble believing it truly is He. His thoughts are so far above our thoughts and His ways above our ways that we can't imagine them before we see and hear them.

Anna, when she first went into her bedroom to listen to the Lord during an anxiety attack, expected Him to scold her. She thought He would tell her to grow up and stop acting like a scared little mouse. She was expecting to be told that her fears were a sign of her little faith. How could she have expected the affirming, protective words she did hear? She had never before heard anything like that in her life. She'd had no experience with this kind of parenting.

If what you're hearing sounds "too good", know that you're not alone. Catherine Marshall, in *A Closer Walk*<sup>3</sup>, records the following communication with the Lord in which she questions this very thing. "Lord, there are doubts in me this morning, that what I am writing down here is really You speaking and not just my wishful thinking." He responded by telling her that proof in the world of the spirit doesn't come in the same way as in the material world. The real proof, He tells her, is "a sureness and a joy and a knowledge of My benediction on you yesterday that you have not known in a long time".

The way the Lord responds to us often seems too good because we've been without this kind of parenting for so long. We've become like dried out plants which have long gone without enough water. You know how it is when you water a house plant which has become dried out. The water we give it just sits on the surface at first. It takes time for it to penetrate the hardness of the soil and seep down to the roots. But a well watered plant is entirely different. That water we give it immediately begins to sink down deep. The soil is conditioned to receive it and the roots welcome it. We, too, need time with that living water to let it penetrate our dryness and disbelief. So just let what God has said to you sit with you a while. Give it time to do its work. Know that it is softening the ground in you to receive more and more of the goodness the Lord has for you.

### **Seeing things that are not as though they are.**

Another hallmark of the Lord's involvement is some prior leading that He gives us before the fact. I have found this to be a strong sign of His presence. I remember an occasion where the Lord told me that a very difficult time was coming for me. There would be a painful period to endure. Over the next few weeks He spoke a great deal to me about this, counseling me on how to deal with it and encouraging me that I would be able to fight the battle and ride out the storm.

I did subsequently encounter a somewhat difficult period and I congratulated myself on how well I was handling it. I thought I'd gotten so much better in my ability to handle adversity. Then the real storm began! It was everything the Lord had said it would be. I don't know how I would have handled it if He had not prepared me for it; for in my darkness I could hold on to this light – the Lord had seen it coming. He knew all about it. I wasn't alone. I wasn't lost. He knew intimately and exactly where I was. He had confirmed this to me before the fact and to this I held tightly until the storm had passed.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of becoming a grandmother for the first time. My husband and I were eagerly awaiting the birth of the little boy who would bear his name. When we got the call that the birth was imminent, we flew to the hospital and arrived about half an hour after our new little David was born. Everything had gone amazingly well for a first birth. Mom and Dad had gone through the whole experience without so much as an aspirin between them and little David was the most alert baby in the nursery. We watched him for a long time with our noses pressed against the glass, rejoicing over this perfect child. As we turned to go home, I heard the Lord say to me, "we're not out of the woods yet". Do you know, after all these years of hearing the Lord, I did not believe it was Him! There was absolutely no indication that there was anything wrong with this baby. What was wrong with me, I wondered, that I needed to create a crisis when there was none.

Early the next morning I got a call from David's other grandmother. When she had checked on David that morning, she'd been told that they had done a spinal tap on him late the previous night. The Lord's words came back to me. He had tried to prepare me. He had told me that all was not well. He had offered me a twelve hour head start on intercession for this little one.

Luckily our little David is just fine now. Either he didn't have meningitis as the doctors feared, or the tremendous prayer battle on his behalf knocked it out before it took hold. But this experience certainly did remind me of the graciousness of God in giving prior leading when we've learned to hear His voice, and the importance of such leading in letting us know who we are hearing.

### **Thy word is a light unto my path.**

On some occasions the Lord may confirm to us what we have heard from Him through a Scripture. Additionally, he may use Scripture to instruct us through a difficult time. Although this is not what I would call a common occurrence, I want to share it with you because it is an important indication that what you have heard is indeed from the Lord. The Lord has done this for me on only a few occasions, but each was a time when it was tremendously important for me to know that what I was hearing was accurate. I will share two of these occasions with you.

A number of years ago one of my sons was having a difficult time growing up. He had been the most delightful toddler with a smile that lit up his whole face. Now he was a seventeen year old with a frown which darkened his entire countenance. Although I considered the possibility that he might be experimenting with drugs, he denied it and I had no evidence to the contrary. Yet things kept getting worse. We reached a crisis a short time later when he was involved in an automobile accident and we found that he had a positive drug screen. Is there anything that brings more terror to a parent's heart than this kind of news?

My son had not been into drugs for very long, and he hadn't gotten into the heavier drugs; but, as a parent and therapist, I knew that this was only a step along an inevitable road to disaster. So we did what every parent would do. We talked to everyone, looked at all the treatment options, talked some more, looked some more, and prayed. And we found a treatment program that we thought would be the best for him. Yet it meant a year to a year and a half of our son living apart from us, in the custody of those running the program. No parent does this lightly. After many prayers, tears, fears and doubts, we were convinced that this was the right decision for him. We put him on the waiting list and went home to pray for a short list. Two weeks later they agreed to make room for him.

When I got that phone call, I felt like my heart had fallen into my stomach. My human wisdom told me this was best; but what if I was wrong? I really needed a word from the Lord. The Lord told me to turn to Leviticus 24:12. "Leviticus!" I thought. I wanted reassurance. I wanted comfort. Wasn't Leviticus just a bunch of rules? What comfort would there be for me there? With a heavy heart I turned to the verse the Lord had given me and read with amazement the following words. "... and they put him in custody until the will of the Lord might be declared to them." I had never seen that verse before or knew it existed. But there could be no more specific word from God to deal with my exact circumstances. I knew then with utter certainty that this was the right thing to do, and that God was in it; and I left my son in His hands.

Through a long and stormy course of treatment, I clung to that word. There wasn't a shred of evidence on a human level that this decision was working out well. That's why I needed it so much; it enabled me to look with eyes of faith when what I saw before my mortal eyes was chaos. It gave me the courage to stand firm through countless pleas from the child I adored.

It took a period of years before I could see the fruit of that decision. Today I rejoice to see my son, who has just finished his college degree, with the open and joyful countenance he had as a child.

The second occasion I want to tell you about was my Dad's death from emphysema. He did not know the Lord. Mom and I stayed at the hospital with him those last few days although he had few periods of consciousness. I had a couple of opportunities to be alone with him; and as I sat by his bed holding his hand, I talked to the Lord about my Dad and interceded for him. By that time I had learned to hear the Lord pretty well most of the time, but I've found that at times like those I hear Him even better because of the many people praying for me.

"It's all right", the Lord told me. "I have heard your cry. Your Dad is ready to come and I am ready to receive him. I have prepared a place for him. Everything is going to be all right." "Well, Lord", I told Him with a wry smile, "that isn't really scriptural, is it? But how I rejoice in the way You've built my faith and trust in You because even though I don't have a biblical leg to stand on, You've told me and I believe You. And this is enough for me. But this is my Dad, Lord. This is my Dad. Could you give me a scripture?" "Psalm 18:6", he said.

I didn't have any idea what Psalm 18:6 said. There I was, in a Catholic hospital and no bible in the room, probably the only room in the hospital without one. I didn't find out what the verse said until the next day when a friend called and I asked her to read it to me. These are the words the Lord had given me. "In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried to my God; He heard my voice out of His temple, my cry came before Him into His ears." The Lord had again reassured me in a critical time with the comfort only He could give, comfort I did not question. How very glad I was that I'd learned to hear Him speak to me. These were not the only two occasions when He gave me Scripture to confirm the accuracy of something He said, but they were two very special times for me.

So, use everything He's provided us; the helps to discernment, spiritual direction, the group covenanted together to this purpose, and your own very important learning through experience to guide you in this process. Yet remember, too, the word of Paul in his letter to Corinthians, "Now we see in a mirror dimly but then (when the Perfect comes), face to face. Now I know in part, then I will understand fully, even as I have been fully understood."

We *can* only know in part now. We *can* only hear imperfectly. Our understanding will remain imperfect until the Perfect One comes again; yet even while this is true, the God I seek fully knows and understands me.

He understands my imperfection. He accepts my immaturity and dependency. He loves me as I am. He is our very best safeguard and our greatest asset, the Lord Himself. Our best protection is His desire to communicate with us. Our greatest hope is His heart which He wants to give to us. He came into our world of time and space. He gave up the glory that was His in heaven to enter into the life we live. Paul says that the life we now live we live best when we live it by the faith of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

It's the same now as it was then. He is still giving Himself for us. We still live by His faith and by His faithfulness. That's what you can rest in. That's your firm foundation. Jesus. Trust Him, not yourself – not your intellect, nor your reason, nor your goodness. Jesus. He is all you need.

My prayer, for you and for me, comes from Ephesians, the first and third chapters.

Dearest Father,

God of our Lord Jesus Christ and Father of glory, grant to each of us, Your children, a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of You. Cause the eyes of our hearts to be open to see Your light, so that we can know the hope to which You have called us, the riches of Your inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of Your power in us who believe. Enable us to come to know through experience for ourselves the love of Christ which far surpasses mere knowledge, and become people wholly filled and flooded with God Himself. Amen.

Draw near to the throne of grace, dear friends. Bring your child and come. Let your Father tell you all the things your mother never told you!



# PRIESTLY BLESSING

*Numbers 6:24-26*

*“Y’varekh’kha YHVH v’yishmerekha.*

**May YHVH bless you and keep you.**

*Ya’er YHVH panav eleikha vichunekka.*

**May YHVH make His Face shine on you and show you His favour.**

*Yissa YHVH panav eleikha v’yasem l’kha shalom.*

**May YHVH lift up His Face toward you and give you peace.**

In this way they are to put My Name on the people of Israel, so that I will bless them.

