

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 1: Introduction



1. Why this Title?

With such a strange title to the course, perhaps we ought to begin with some words of explanation. In March 1996 a number of senior leaders from our related churches went to visit *Rey de Reys Church* in Belgrano, Argentina. In March 1998, I too had the privilege of going there. We all came back having been powerfully impacted by the revival we found going on there.

We also came back with a discipleship course entitled '*Enemies of the Soul*', on which this course is based. We express our profound appreciation to the Senior Pastor of that church for permission to use their material, which we have now adapted considerably.

But why this strange title?

Enemies ...

Jesus had enemies and told us to expect them too! (John 15 v20) But enemies come in all sorts of shapes and sizes.

Three types of enemies can be found in the following verses. What are they?

Philippians 3 v18

Ephesians 6 v12

1 Peter 2 v11



Do these three enemies ring true in your own experience? Which one tends to be the biggest for you?



Behind all of these enemies lies our chief enemy: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5 v8) Make no mistake, he is out to destroy us and will use any means he can – he doesn’t play ‘clean’!

However, the good news is that *God has a plan* for dealing with all these enemies, as the following passages show.



Read:

Psalms 110 v1-2

Colossians 2 v13-15

In this course we want to help you – and to get you to help others – identify these enemies and learn how to deal with them more effectively.

... of the Soul

OK, so we have got enemies. But what on earth is 'the soul'?

How would you try to explain to someone what 'the soul' is? (Try not to get all religious or theological!)



Most people tend to use the word 'soul' quite incorrectly, seeing it as some sort of invisible 'thing' within us. Even a well-known English dictionary defines it (wrongly!) as "the spiritual part of a person". But actually, the Bible tends to use the word as a way of speaking about 'our very life' – what we might these days call 'me'.

Christians have often got bogged down over the years, disagreeing about the distinctions between body and soul; or body, soul and spirit; or even body, soul, mind and spirit. But in fact, there is considerable overlap in the way all these terms – and others, such as heart, flesh, 'the inner man', etc. – are used in the Bible. The key issue for us to grasp is this:

*The Bible does not see human beings as a composite of various 'bits' (which is a very 'Greek' view of people) but as an **integrated whole**. It sometimes looks at that whole – me! – from different standpoints when it wants to highlight different issues. But whatever word it uses, it is always thinking of **me**.*

Because all of these aspects *are* me, the devil opposes *all of them* – not just what we think of as the ‘spiritual bits’ (which is probably what most people think of when they speak of their ‘soul’). Your soul is *you*. And that is what the devil is out to get! Not just your relationship with God, or your ‘Quiet Times’, or your worship – (i.e. the ‘spiritual bits’ again) – but *you*. And we deliberately chose to keep this rather old-fashioned word, ‘the soul’, to bring that home to us.

*In looking at ‘Enemies of the Soul’, then, we are going to be looking at those deep challenges to **our very life** that God has given us in all its aspects to enjoy and grow in, and that the devil would dearly love to destroy.*

It is obviously vitally important therefore that we learn to recognise just what our enemies are. Failure to recognise, understand, or face up to them can bring disastrous consequences.

Can you think of examples from the Bible when people failed to recognise such ‘enemies’ within?





2. Why this Emphasis?

So why are we studying all this? Is it just another good idea that the leaders have had?

No! This course very much takes us back to our roots. In the very ‘genes’ of our churches is a commitment to men and women being discipled across the whole of their lives. For many people this has found expression through ‘personal pastoring’, at the heart of which always lay three things:

a) **Care**

God wants all his sheep to be cared for – in fact, the Bible says he is very angry when they do not receive the proper care! (See Ezekiel 34)

Jesus was deeply moved when he found there was no one caring for the sheep (Matthew 9 v35-36).

His followers were also called to care for the sheep (John 21 v15-17).

Read:

Matthew 9 v35-36

John 21 v15-17



Care will be the atmosphere of 'Enemies of the Soul'. Your small group, along with its leaders, is not there to catch people out! But rather, to care for its members over the coming months, especially when difficult issues get highlighted in one or another's life.

b) Accountability

God wants all his servants to be accountable, both for their lives and their ministries, their successes and their failures.

Accountability was an integral part of –

- • Jesus' teaching (see the Parable of the Talents, Matthew 25 v14-30)
- • Jesus' practice (see Luke 9 v1-2 and v10)

Accountability continued in the Early Church, in areas such as –

- • ministry (Acts 13 v1-3 & 14 v26-27)
 - • beliefs (Galatians 2 v1-2)
 - • personal life (James 5 v16)
-

Accountability will be a key factor of 'Enemies of the Soul'. If you share a need or an area of difficulty one week, the group will pray for you – and then check up on things at the next meeting (hopefully by phone even before that!) to see how you are getting along. (Knowing someone will ask us about something is a great provocation to keep going for it!)

Why do you think that we are not very good at keeping ourselves accountable to others these days?



c) **Discipleship**

The Senior Pastor of Rey de Reys Church has a powerful saying:

*“Anointings of the Holy Spirit **soften the heart;**
but it is discipleship that **changes us.**”*

Enemies of the Soul is unashamedly a *discipleship* course, with an intent to *change you!*

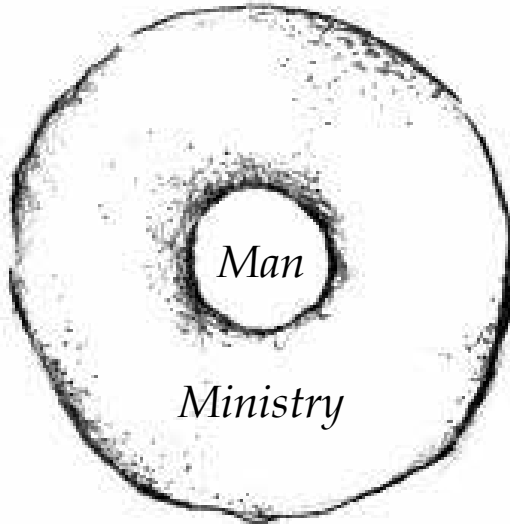
There are three things to note about discipleship:

- • First, discipleship is an *ongoing* thing, which God wants for all of his children. Its *means* will change as we grow in our faith, but the *process* will always be there. Discipleship was both the first (Mark 1 v14-18) and the last (John 21 v19) call of Jesus on the lives of The Twelve.
- • Second, discipleship is an *all-pervasive* thing. Even a quick skim through the gospels shows that Jesus disciplined every area of his followers’ lives, not just the ‘spiritual’ bits. *Inner attitudes* (e.g. thoughts, desires, ambitions, appetites, emotions, fears, temptations) and *outward actions* (e.g. speech, behaviour, moods, anger, family life, home, money) all came into its orbit.
- • Third, the New Testament’s focus in discipleship is always: *man before ministry*; that is, what you *are* for God before what you *do* for God – although we often try to reverse the order!

For example, look at 1 Timothy 3 v1-7. Of the sixteen qualifications for being an elder, how many are to do with character and how many are to do with ministry?



God is always after 'the man' more than 'the ministry', although we frequently reverse the order! We have sometimes described this as '**The Doughnut Principle**'. When eating a doughnut, we always go for the outer bit; but God goes for the middle!



Discipleship will permeate everything in 'Enemies of the Soul'. We all come to this course as people who are still in the process, still needing big areas to be changed in us. Even those of us who have been Christians for years will find God unearthing things that have lain unchallenged or undealt with!

What three things lie at the heart of this course?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Which of these do you feel you especially need to grow in?





3. Why Male and Female Groups?

A number of reasons led us to design this course to be studied by separate men's and women's groups:

a) **'Practicality' Reasons**

By having all the men together one night and all the women together on another, we can overcome that perennial problem – babysitting! – and also the knock-on problem of lack of continuity when fathers and mothers have to take it in turns to go to meetings. We felt that this course was so important that we wanted to make it possible for every member to be at every session.

b) **'Difference' Reasons**

Men and women are different! This goes right back to how God created the human race: "So God created man (i.e. humankind) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1 v27)

God delights in difference, not unisex.

It is not very 'politically correct' in the West to stress this difference these days; but to see men and women as basically the same, but just packaged differently, is a profound mistake. They often approach things differently; they generally find their significance and fulfilment in different things; they communicate

differently (did you know the average man speaks 10,000 words a day, while the average woman speaks 25,000 – honest!). The Bible tells us that *God delights in difference not unisex.*

Even secular research is now starting to find significant evidence of men and women being profoundly different. Consider, for example, the following quote from Professor George Fink, Director of the Medical Research Council's brain metabolism unit in Edinburgh.

"You cannot get away from it. The concept that the male and female brain are the same at birth died a long time ago. There is plenty of evidence on the anatomy of the human brain that there are major differences between the sexes."

*There are major differences between the sexes
– or, to use the Bible's language,
"male and female he created them".*

Studying 'Enemies of the Soul' in separate male and female groups will allow us to make the most of these differences, rather than blurring them, and to deal with the different ways that men and women often respond to various issues of discipleship.

c) 'Honesty' Reasons

Experience has shown that men and women are far more honest in sharing their weaknesses and difficulties in single-sex groups than in mixed sex groups. If 'Enemies of the Soul' is to be successful, then openness and honesty has to be a key.

The experience of other churches, in both Britain and other nations, that have used an 'Enemies of the Soul' course, is that separate male-female groups have been a significant factor in the course's success.



4. What Areas Will we Look at?

We will be focusing very much on the ‘internal’ enemies of the soul – those things that lie deep within us, that are still part of the very fabric of our life, and that rise up to try to spoil and stifle the very life of Christ within us.

Here is a chart of some of the major areas that we will be covering over the coming months. On your own, (and therefore absolutely honestly!), put a tick in the boxes that represent where you feel you are at in each of the areas at the present time.



| | 0 Very poor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Not a Problem |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|---|-----------------------|
| Bitterness | | | | | | |
| Friendship with the world | | | | | | |
| Love of power | | | | | | |
| Self | | | | | | |
| Greed | | | | | | |
| Gossip | | | | | | |
| Jealousy | | | | | | |
| Fear | | | | | | |
| Laziness | | | | | | |
| Pleasing others | | | | | | |
| Pride | | | | | | |
| Irritability and anger | | | | | | |
| Sexual sin | | | | | | |
| Unbelief | | | | | | |

We may come back to the chart from time to time for you to see what sort of progress you are making.

Now, do you feel free to share with the group just one of these areas that you feel needs working on? To do so will show you that we are all in a place of need and will help to set an atmosphere of vulnerability with one another that is a crucial aspect of this course.



5. There is Hope!



You may be feeling very discouraged at this point! Perhaps there are an awful lot of low numbers on your chart. So now we need to be reminded that... there is hope! (And if you have a lot of high numbers, then you probably have a rude awakening coming!)

No matter how long or how short a time you have been a Christian, no matter how few or how many times you have failed, no matter how big or how small the issues facing you might seem ... there is hope!

This has always been true, but it is especially true in these days when God is moving powerfully by his Spirit to change us and prepare us for the big harvest that is coming.



Read the following verses and summarise very briefly what hope and encouragement each passage brings:

Matthew 12 v20

Romans 6 v14

Romans 7 v21-25

1 Corinthians 10 v12-13

Titus 2 v11-14

Hebrews 2 v18

Hebrews 4 v14-16

Revelation 12 v10-11



Let's end this introductory unit by praying that God will open up our hearts and lives to him in new ways and to new depths over the coming months.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 2: Bitterness



1. Introduction

“What a place to begin!” you might be thinking.
“Couldn’t we start on a happier note!?”

The reason we are beginning here is because bitterness, in one of its many forms, is a foundational ‘enemy of the soul’. Leave this enemy unchallenged, and you can be sure it will stand at the door to let many other enemies in too. Or, to use a Biblical image: leave this root in the ground, and many things will grow from it.

Read Hebrews 12 v14-15 and
write out verse 15



A definition: *Bitterness is the result of choosing to respond resentfully to a situation or circumstance that comes our way.*

All of us – without exception – will face hurts, pain, discouragement, rejection and injustice many times in our lives. The challenge to us is:

*will we let these circumstances make us **bitter** or **better** people?*

*will we fellowship with our **feelings** or with our **God**?*

What do you think we mean by the two sentences in the box above?

Can you think of any incidents in the Bible where people responded to their circumstances in the right way and the wrong way?

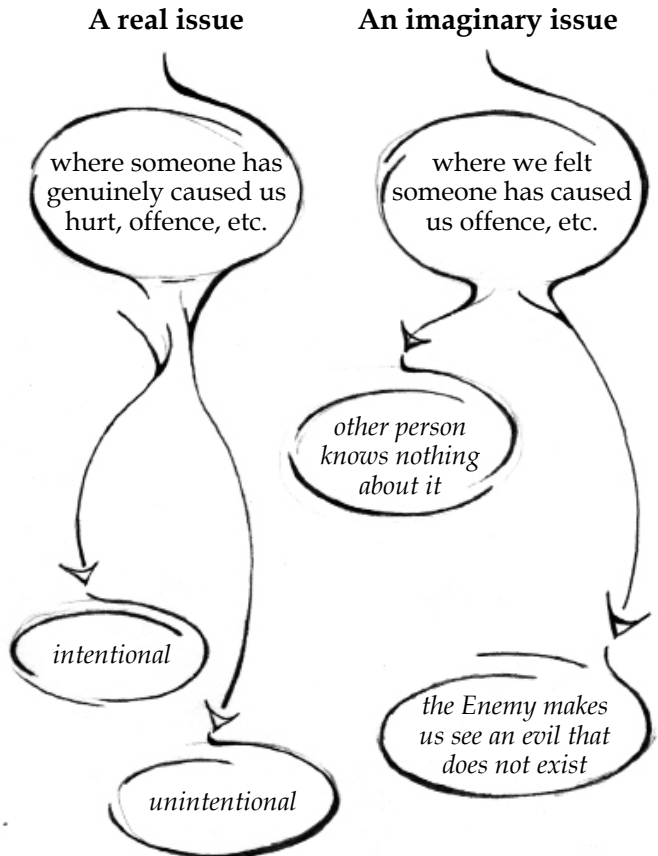


| Fellowshipped with feelings and become bitter | Fellowshipped with God and became better |
|---|--|
| | |



2. The Origins of Bitterness

Bitterness arises essentially from two sources:





3. Signs of Bitterness

Bitterness may be outworked in different people in different ways, but the following are some of the common ways it may find expression:

- irritability
- annoyance when someone is spoken of well
- inability to rejoice with those who rejoice
- becoming angry easily
- avoiding certain people or situations
- explaining away another's success or good fortune
- jealousy
- holding grudges
- inability to forgive
- wanting to take the law into your own hands
- working to undermine others in some way
- pain
- serious difficulty in prayer

Consider quietly for a few moments which of the above list have you personally experienced when you have felt bitter about someone or something?

Can you share with one another any situation where you have experienced any of these?

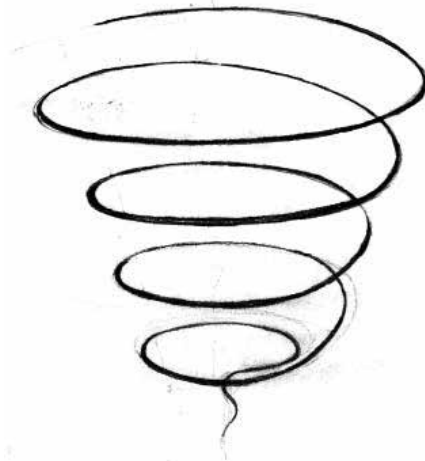




4. The Growth of Bitterness

Because bitterness is a root, it *grows* – over weeks, months and even years – unless we deal with it by ruthlessly digging it out.

Bitterness is a downward spiral, which leads to the bitter person becoming more and more bitter as they become obsessed with, and destroyed by, their own bitterness and its consequences. We can describe this as *the bitterness spiral*.



Write the following words on to the bitterness spiral in what you would consider to be their descending order of intensity and harm:

*disappointed – resentful – embittered – begrudging
offended – hating – hurt – upset – frustrated*

However, bitterness not only grows in *me* if left unchecked; it can also spread to others. As we share our unresolved responses or emotions with others, it can produce sarcasm and cynicism – often much prided in British humour, but actually quite ungodly things.

If we do not understand that bitterness is a deep sin and a profound enemy of the soul, we will never tackle it with the ruthlessness that it requires, and it will do both us and others harm.

5. The Consequences of Bitterness



Bitterness has many devastating results. Three of the major ones highlighted in the Scriptures are:

1. It *spoils* our fellowship with God.
See Genesis 4 v3-7; 10-14.
2. It *stains* the Body of Christ.
See 1 Corinthians 11 v17-18; 27-30.
3. It *suppresses* our spiritual growth.
See Hebrews 12 v15.



6. Bitterness: Two Case Studies

Men's Group Case Study: Jacob's Sons

Read:

Genesis 34 v1-31



Rape is always a tragic event which no one can treat lightly. However, after the rape of his daughter, Dinah, Jacob refused to nurse bitterness. He was able to find forgiveness towards the offender and took steps to deal properly with the situation (in a way in which the later Jewish Law would, in fact, specify – Deuteronomy 22 v28-29). Simeon and Levi, however, did not deal with their bitterness but allowed it to grow, with tragic results.

The following points from the story are often characteristic of the way *men* mishandle their bitterness:

1. Bitterness can cause a desire for revenge (v7).
2. Bitterness can cause us to act deceitfully (v13ff).
3. Bitterness can cause us to act without restraint (v25).
4. Bitterness can cause us to justify ourselves (v31).

5. Bitterness can cause us to take more than is rightfully ours (v27ff).
6. Bitterness can affect others around us, especially our family (v30a).
7. Bitterness can have long-lasting effects (v30b).

Women's Group Case Study: Ruth and Naomi

Read:

Ruth 1

Suffering does not *automatically* make a person stronger or better. Rather, the way you *respond* to it determines whether the hurt will make you *bitter* or *better*.

Ruth and Naomi were two women who both went through suffering but who responded to it in different ways. *Ruth* could leave the past, stand on her commitment to her mother-in-law, and positively move forward to replace bitterness with love. She gained a reputation of living a life of honesty and integrity. In contrast, *Naomi* became bitter – and acknowledges this about herself: “Call me Mara (‘Bitter’)” [Ruth 1 v20].

The following points are things we can learn from the mis-handling of bitterness:

1. Bitterness can cause a loss of perspective on life (Contrast v1 & v21).
2. Bitterness causes negative attitudes followed by self-pity and low self-esteem (v12-13).
3. Bitterness causes feelings of hopelessness (v12).



4. Bitterness can cause us to feel that God is unfair (v13).
5. Bitterness affects the whole personality (v20 – Hebrew names describe what the person *is*.)
6. Bitterness can cause us to see circumstances as punishment (v20).
7. Bitterness can cause us to become angry with God and blame him for our circumstances (v21).



7. Seven Keys to Dealing with Bitterness

When we find that we are drifting into bitterness, we need to remember the following seven keys. All of these are to do with *choice*, not *feelings*!

1. ***Acknowledge that what you are feeling is sin***

Don't make excuses! Acknowledge it for what it is. See it as a wicked root that needs to be dug out at all costs before it grows and chokes you and those around you.

2. Refuse to justify yourself

Don't 'rehearse' the reasons for why you feel the way you do, reliving the scene over and over again. Even if there *is* just cause, your *response* of bitterness is still sinful. Resolve "not to give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4 v27).

3. Bring your feelings and emotions to God

Tell God honestly how you feel – he knows it anyway! Remember: emotions are not a 'no-go' area with him. They themselves are neither good nor bad; it is the *attitude* behind them that is the problem. As you tell God how you feel you can find "grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4 v16).

If we do not bring our feelings and emotions to him, but rather suppress, deaden or deny them, they can lay buried deep within us for months or even years, waiting to burst out one day, and causing much damage to ourselves and to others.

4. Forgive others who are involved

As we will see later in this unit, forgiveness is so important. Do it, not because you *feel* like doing it (you probably won't!), but out of gratitude for God's forgiveness of you in Christ, even when you didn't deserve it. If necessary, keep on forgiving until it is done with.

5. Approach the other person, if appropriate

Often bitterness is something simply that we need to deal with ourselves. But sometimes we need to go to the other person. If so,

- ask forgiveness of them for anything you may have contributed to the problem;
- share honestly your heart and why you were hurt – but this is not an opportunity for ‘dumping’ on the other person! The point is not for *you* to feel better at *their* expense, but for the issue to be resolved.

6. Realise bitterness harms you more than them

Bitterness always does more harm to the person feeling bitter than to the source of our bitterness. Bitterness doesn’t travel through the airwaves! While it obviously can affect others, the essential harm is towards yourself – and for that reason if no other, it is worth dealing with quickly.

7. Trust in the sovereign purposes of God for your life

Commit your cause to God and let *him* work things out, especially if you have felt unfairly dealt with. Believe that he can always turn difficult and hurtful situations into good. (See Romans 8 v28)

*In short, the key to dealing with bitterness is:
towards the other person: forgiveness
towards God: trust*



8. Seven Keys to Helping Others who are Bitter

1. See if you have caused, or contributed to, the bitterness. If so, seek forgiveness from the other person and make amends.
2. Be understanding, but not excusing. Letting someone off God's hook because their circumstances are difficult or because you feel sorry for them does not help them in the long run.
3. Do not 'buy into' their bitterness yourself. If you do, cynicism and criticism will spread through you to others.
4. Pray for the person concerned in quite specific terms.
5. Look to see if God would give you an opportunity to bring "a word in season", but without getting 'preachy'.
6. Help them to see what the unresolved bitterness is doing to them.
7. Set an example personally of a trusting heart in a sovereign God in your own circumstances.



9. The Spirit of Reconciliation

What lies behind bitterness is often the lack of a spirit of reconciliation; that is, an *unwillingness* to put relationships right – at least, at any cost to myself! However, this contrasts starkly with how God has dealt with me in Christ.



Read:

Romans 5 v9-11

Paul tells us in this passage that not only have we been *justified* by Christ’s death – that is, pronounced ‘Not Guilty!’ and put into a right *legal relationship* with God – but that we have also been *reconciled* to God – that is, brought into *friendship* with him as the obstacles to that friendship (our sin) have been removed.

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| Relationship | Friendship |
| Not guilty | Not distant |



Question:

When did God reconcile us to himself? (v10)

This same spirit that characterises Christ’s attitude to us *must* now characterise our attitude to others; indeed, if it does not do so, then we must ask ourselves if we are walking in the same spirit as Christ.

In Ephesians 4 v32 Paul writes: “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, *just as* in Christ God forgave you.”

‘Just as’ means:

- in the *same way* **How?**

- to the *same extent* **What?**

- for the *same reason* **Why?**

But what if we choose not to forgive, but rather to hold on to our unforgiveness and bitterness? The Bible has some rather challenging things to say to this!

Read:

Matthew 18 v21-35

What sort of attitude do you think lay behind Peter’s question?

What does Jesus’ answer imply?



Key Points from the Parable

In this parable of Jesus, several key points stand out about this attitude of unforgiveness of the servant and his *lack of a spirit of reconciliation*:

1. It is unreasonable

The servant accepts the King's forgiveness, but is not ready to extend forgiveness himself.

2. It is unrealistic

The servant is looking for a level of perfection in others that he recognises he himself does not have.

3. It is unredemptive

His action in throwing his fellow-servant into jail literally 'locks him up' and prevents him from taking any action to rectify the situation.

4. It is undermining

His attitudes and actions affect the rest of the servants who are "greatly distressed".

5. It is unwise

He forgets that it is the King who exercises ultimate judgement over everyone, and that the principle he operates by is: "Do not judge or you will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you yourself will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7 v1-2)

If only the servant could have seen the *enormity* of the debt *he* owed, he would have seen how ridiculous it was to hold on to the petty debts of those around him.

In the light of such clear teaching from Jesus, why do we still keep hold of our offences at times and refuse to be reconciled?

What does the Bible say about getting reconciled with someone in Matthew 5 v21-24?



10. How to Get Clean



Here are some final points on how to get cleansed from bitterness and a spirit of a lack of reconciliation.

1. **Recognise that a refusal, or even an inability, to forgive is *SIN!***

In fact, in Matthew 5 v21-22 Jesus sees it as *murder of the heart*. Such strong words from our Master have to be taken seriously! Stop excusing it, and start dealing with it. Resolve not to give the devil any opportunity in this area.

2. **Forgive, and keep on forgiving, until the business is finished with.**

It doesn't matter if you have to do it 'seventy times seven' times. Keep doing it until the issue is dead. Don't leave half-finished business in this area, or the devil will always come back to it.

3. Take a low posture with the person concerned.

Put the blame on *your* attitude rather than any actions or words *they* might be responsible for. Remember this particularly if you go to discuss an issue of offence with someone.

4. Don't just talk with the person – pray with them.

It is very hard to cling onto bitterness or a spirit of a lack of reconciliation when you are both kneeling before the Lord. Everything takes on its true perspective at the Cross.

5. Ask God to fill you with his love, hope, and trust in his sovereign power and purposes.

“And we know that in all things God works for *the good* of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8 v28) Believe this, not just for others, but for yourself, even in the situation you feel you are facing or struggling with.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 3: Friendship with the World



1. Introduction

Throughout church history, Christians have often fallen into one of two extremes in their attitude to 'the world'. Some have become so like it (perhaps in their hope of winning it) that there has been little difference between them and the non-Christians around them; others have adopted the 'hermit' approach, withdrawing from life for fear of contamination from it – rather like the Stylites (5th to 10th centuries AD) who spent their whole life sitting on top of platforms on poles. The higher the pole, the more holy the man!

*If we are going to be true and effective disciples of Jesus, neither of these approaches is what he is looking for. He wants **us** in the world, but **the world** out of us.*

In this unit, we are going to look at one of the Enemy's best tactics against Christians – friendship with the World.

2. What in the world is "the World"?



The Greek word for "the world" – *kosmos* – is used in three main senses in the New Testament:

1. **"The Created Order"**, e.g., Acts 17 v24
2. **"People"**, e.g., John 3 v16
3. **"The World System"**, that is, the whole range of life – from that which is lived simply *without reference to God* (e.g., Matt 16 v26; 1 Co 7 v29-31), to that which is lived *in direct opposition to him* (e.g., 2 Pe 2 v20).

Jesus does not want us out of the world (senses 1 & 2); but he does want the world (sense 3) out of us!

The Bible has some very strong things to say about Christians getting involved in the world in this third sense, and it is this third sense that we are considering throughout this unit.

Read:

James 4 v4; 1 John 2 v15-17

If you are a Christian, then you are part of a people who, by their very nature, have been called out of the world – in fact, the word 'church' in the Greek of the New Testament means 'the called out ones'.



God calls us to come out of **the way of life** offered by this world and to stop pursuing it in order to pursue his Kingdom. **We cannot pursue both!**



3. A Jealous God

God wants us *for himself* – not because he is selfish or somehow needs us, but because he knows that this is what we were made for. **He sees our pursuing anything other than him as idolatry.**

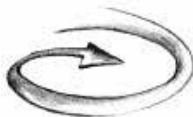
Read:

Exodus 20 v3-5; Exodus 34 v12-14



What are some of the things in the world today that can so easily become idols for people?

Can you share with the group one thing that you recognise can easily become an idol for you?



4. Characteristics of "the World"



The original meaning of *kosmos* in Classical Greek was "harmonious order", "arrangement" or "organisation". Behind life as we encounter it, there is a *planned system* at work. It is governed by certain principles, which are not always apparent on the surface but which are always at work:

1. *It focuses on 'self'*

Adam and Eve went wrong when they began to focus on themselves and their perceived needs, rather than on God. (See Gen 3 v1-5) This is first and foremost why "friendship with the world is enmity with God." (Jas 4 v4)

2. *It is hostile to God*

This too goes right back to the beginnings of the human race's turning from God.

What two hostile responses to God can be found in the following passages?

Genesis 3 v10

Genesis 4 v3-8



3. It is lived without reference to Christ

See Eph 2 v11-12. This is the very essence of humanism – living without reference to Christ. We must understand that such humanism pervades *everything* in our society – work, leisure, education, science, commerce.

4. It is controlled by the devil

Through the Fall, Satan took advantage of man’s sin, and the door this threw open to him, in order to introduce on to the earth the system he had set himself to establish against God (see Isaiah 14 v12-15 & Eze 28 v12-19).

The Bible describes him as “*the prince of this world*” (John 12 v31) and “*the god of this age*” (2Cor 4 v4). This does not mean he *owns* the world (Psalm 24 v1 tells us who does), nor that he has any *legal claim* to it (John 10 v1 tells us he is a thief and a robber); rather it means that this world system has made him its prince and god by deciding to follow him and his ways.

This world system, therefore, is not neutral, but a wicked spiritual kingdom. If we do not grasp this, we will find ourselves constantly deceived and enticed to give ourselves to the wrong things.

This viewpoint is summed up in the following quotation from Watchman Nee’s book, “*Love Not the World*” –

“Satan well knows that, generally speaking, to try to ensnare real Christians through things that are positively sinful is vain and futile. They will usually sense the danger and elude him. So he has contrived instead an enticing network, the mesh of which is so skilfully woven as to entrap the most innocent of men.”

The statement in the box and Watchman Nee’s quotation are challenging to many of our attitudes. How do you find yourself responding to them?



5. “Don’t go overboard!”

For most of us, the more ‘overt’ sins are not the things we need to watch. Most of us are unlikely to get drawn in to murder or robbery. Because of this, the enemy is wise in how he uses his tactics, going for the sideways, more subtle attack.

One of the chief of these can be through the urging of others “not to go overboard” – and, sadly, it is not just non-Christian family who can be found saying such things!

- Don’t go overboard! ...
- Stay balanced! ...
- Don’t go too far! ...
- Don’t get too fanatical! ...
- Enjoy life! ...
- Stay normal!

But what this really means is: don’t get serious about the things that *God* says we should get serious about;

be a ‘committed’ Christian by all means, but don’t cut yourself off from pursuing possessions, position, prestige and so on. In short, continue to love the World after all!

Of course, this is not always so blatant, nor does it happen overnight. It happens through the process of “seepage and creepage” – good things gradually seeping out and bad things steadily creeping in.

Beware of the seepage and creepage principles!

Peter once tried to encourage Jesus to be ‘normal’ and not to push things too far. Look what happened:

Read:
Matthew 16 v21-26



Why do you think Jesus said what he did to Peter (v23)?

How would you sum up the principles that Jesus teaches here?

How do you find yourself (honestly!) reacting to this?

6. “On special offer this week!”



“On special offer this week ... ” is a familiar sign in our stores. However, the World has three things on special offer permanently. They always seem such ‘good buys’ at the time; but when you get them home, they appear as what they really are, and you discover you have been conned!

Let’s look back at our key passage once again:

Read:

1 John 2 v15-17

What three phrases does John use in these verses to summarise “everything in the world” (v16)?



- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

All three of these are but the ongoing original sins of Adam and Eve.

How do these three issues find expression in Genesis 3 v6-7?

What was the clear consequence of pursuing these?



Little has changed, has it? The fruit offered by the World always looks so good on the outside; but once we have bitten in to it, its true value is seen for what it really is.

Because these three issues are always on special offer, and have been since the beginning, let's take a closer look at them:

1. ***“The cravings of sinful man”***

Or, as the old Authorised Version of the Bible puts it, *“the lust of the flesh”*.

The first offer of the World is: *“Do what you want to do, satisfy your own desires, irrespective of whether it pleases God or not; it won't matter.”* (Gen 3 v1-5)

The word translated *“cravings”* in 1 Jn 2 v16 comes from a root word meaning ‘to set your heart upon’, and hence, to long for, earnestly desire, or lust after. *“Sinful man”*, or *the flesh*, is the Bible's term for life lived without reference to God. In other words, this verse is saying this to us:

Anything that we set our heart upon and go after, other than God, is worldliness!

As we set our hearts on things that are not in God's heart for us, as we do what we want or according to how we feel, Satan lures us into the trap – and before we know it, we are caught!



Let's read one of Paul's lists of such “cravings of sinful man” in Galatians 5 v19-21.

As you read it, what do you notice about the examples that he chooses?

Can you think of any examples of men or women in the Bible who followed “the cravings of sinful man”?

2. “The lust of the eyes”

While the NIV uses a different English word here, the word “lust” is exactly the same in Greek as the word “cravings” we have just seen. We are dealing, then, with the same issue; but its focus now is not so much what we *feel* or *want*, but what we let ourselves *see*.

Our eyes can be the entry point for many sins to rush in through (see Matthew 6 v22-23). In the light of this, what is the key word in the following verses?

Genesis 3 v6

Genesis 3 v7

This is an area of great challenge to us in the West, where so much of life appeals to “the lust of the eyes”. Through our eyes it gets us to want things we do not have, or should not have, or simply do not need. This principle operates in a whole range of areas, from the apparently innocuous (e.g., advertising, fashion) to the obviously sinful (e.g., sexual imagery).

Can you share with the group one of the areas that is a challenge to you personally? Have any of you found things that help in this battle?



3. “The boasting of what he has and does”

Or, as the AV puts it, “the pride of life”. Once again, this is as old as Adam and Eve, who not only liked the look of the fruit, but saw it as “desirable for gaining wisdom” (Gen 3 v6). There was something they could get out of it. Worldliness is about approaching life for what *I* can get out of it; about seeking to attain things for personal achievement, not the glory of God – all of which is a kind of boasting.

It is all too easy to pursue things in life, deceiving ourselves that it is for God's sake and God's glory, when in fact it is for ourselves.

This whole area presents a profound challenge to us if we are serious about discipleship! The world we live in promotes self-advancement and personal success as things that are natural and right, and holds them in high esteem. Success is measured by the place you were educated, the size of your salary, the newness of your car, the place you went on holiday, and so on. **This is humanism at its best**, and is a far cry from Biblical Christianity, which calls us to “live humbly with your God” (Micah 6 v8) and to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6 v33).

How can we translate this principle into practical ways in our daily lives and workplace?

*A key to all these three areas – Do not simply ask: “Is this bad or good?” Ask, “Is this building **God's Kingdom** ... or my own ... or the devil's?”*





7. Signs of Worldliness

What we definitely do *not* want to do is to produce a list of do's and don'ts for Christians. In that direction lies Pharisaism, and it is the life of the Spirit that we are after. As we learn to "live in the Spirit" (Galatians 5 v16), we learn to avoid those things that are wrong or unhelpful, and to pursue those things that are good.

The following, then, simply gives examples of *the sorts of things* that should set alarm bells ringing in us to warn that friendship with the world is beginning to invade our territory. Things like:

- a desire for more and more material things
- endless buying of the latest fashion items
- inability to control my appetites
- watching TV or films with increasingly lowering moral standards and values
- going into places where sin is blatant and not feeling awkward about it
- inappropriate dress that pays little attention to its effects on the opposite sex
- lowering my standards in relationships with the opposite sex
- finding excuses for missing meetings
- missing tithes and putting the money to personal use
- conversations with fellow Christians that never include sharing about the Lord



Please remember that this is not a check list of my spirituality! It is designed to show us *the sort of things* that show worldliness is encroaching. No doubt you could add many different examples of your own.

Consider quietly for a few minutes which of these examples, or other similar issues, are danger areas for you. You may then want to share one with the group.



8. Fantasy Land

Most of us in the West are familiar with Adventure or Theme Parks (like Disneyland). Often built around imaginary worlds, they allow us to escape from the real world for a few hours through the entertainment they provide.

While many Christians would not engage in overt worldliness, they nevertheless have their secret “Fantasy Lands” that they visit in their imagination where they carry out their worldliness. They would never dream of committing sexual immorality in real life, but in the secrecy of Fantasy Land it happens quite often; they would never dream of making a sharp deal in real life, but in fantasy Land they are the best at the game; they would never dream of buying a lottery ticket, but in Fantasy Land they lavish the fortunes of their winnings on themselves.

While some of these Fantasy Lands may not be overtly sinful in themselves, they take us into an unreal world where Jesus is not Lord and his purposes for our life are not trusted.

Jesus wants our Fantasy Lands under his control too; what we do there reveals our heart as much as doing it in the real world. Moreover, to live in Fantasy Land is to say that we do not trust God for his help, blessing and provision in this world, which he has promised to give (e.g., Matthew 6 v28-33).

What secrets does Paul give in Romans 12 v1-2 that help to deal with Fantasy Land?



*What Fantasy Lands still exist in **your** life?*



9. The Christian's Response to the World



Read:

John 17 v11 & v14

What two little, but key, words in these verses describe the Christian's relationship to the world?

(v11)

(v14)



What do you think the difference is?

Let's look at some key issues that help Christians to maintain the proper distinction. The Christian disciple has settled the issue of –

1. **Belonging**

We do not belong to the World, but to God (John 17 v14; Col 1 v13).

2. **Living**

We choose not to walk the way of Adam and Eve, but to live "no longer for ourselves" (2Cor 5 v15) nor for the World (Gal 6v14).

3. Pleasing

We have set our hearts on pleasing God, whether people like us for doing so or not (John 15 v18).

4. Understanding

We understand that the World is “a world under sentence of death” (*Watchman Nee*), being destined one day to pass away (Rev 18).

5. Investing

We understand that, because the World is destined to pass away, it is folly to invest in it, but wise to invest in spiritual treasure that is going to last for ever (Matt 6 v19-21).

6. Influencing

We are resolved to ‘salt’ the World, not be contaminated by it (Matt 5 v13), and ‘light’ the World, not be hidden from it (Matt 5 v14-16).

7. Journeying

We live in this world as pilgrims, saying with the Psalmist, “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have *set their hearts on pilgrimage...*” We are citizens of another place (Philippians 3 v20) who do not want to get distracted on the journey. Even our very body is only a ‘tent’ (2Cor 5 v1)!

8. Serving

We have settled the issue of whom we are really serving – myself? my career? my family? my boss? Or God? – for we acknowledge that “no one can serve two masters” (Matt 6 v24).

9. Denying

We recognise that there are things that we must simply say ‘No’ to – even though they may not in themselves be bad – for the sake of the Kingdom; for at the very heart of Christianity lies a denial of self (Matt 16 v24-25).

10. Responding

We are constantly seeking to respond, not to the flesh, but to the Spirit, and give ourselves to the process of being trained and changed by him, recognising that it does not come naturally (Gal 5 v16).

Which of these ten areas are potential weak areas for you?



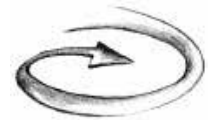


10. And Finally ...

Of course, the best solution to wrong friendship with the World is right friendship with God! The more we focus on *him*, the less we will *want* to focus on other things, for they will seem so insignificant by comparison.

Above all, we all need to go out and have an adventure with God! For it is only as we step out with God that we discover the excitement of his Kingdom and its principles – and that, almost as a by-product, God provides us with what we need anyway! (Matt 6 v33).

Pray for one another in your group that you will all have adventures with God, and so give the devil as little opportunity as possible.



Enemies of the Soul

Unit 4: The Love of Power



1. Introduction

The teacher with the class, the tradesman with the wrench, the manager with the targets – at every level of society, people exercise power over others, and often love to do so. To have some hold or influence over another, to have them fearful or dependent, grateful or in need, to have them doing what we want or in debt for what we have done, is to be able to shape their destiny, to play God for a little while; and that is why we enjoy it so much.

The love of power is not a neutral thing, but rather utterly demonic in its origins. In the following passage, Isaiah uses the ancient king of Babylon to serve as a picture of the devil himself:

What are the key phrases in Isaiah 14:12-15 that speak of the love of power?



If we do not grasp that the love of power is demonic in its origins, we will never deal with it in ourselves with the ruthlessness that it requires.



2. The Rot Sets In

The devil did not keep this love of power to himself, however. Cast out of heaven, he turned his attention to the human race and, through Adam and Eve's disobedience, quickly found a way in to ruin human lives and relationships.

As you read the following verses from the early chapters of Genesis, note the areas in which the love or abuse of power begins to creep in:

Gen 3 v16

Gen 4 v3-9

Gen 6 v11-12

Gen 11 v1-4

Gen 14 v1-4

Gen 19 v1-11



Centuries have passed by; but our basic instinct for the love of power has changed very little. Jesus came into a world where people loved to exercise power – the Romans (military), the Sadducees (political), the Pharisees (religious), the tax collectors (financial), the men (social). He exposed all these abuses of power, and taught instead the way of the Kingdom.



3. A Wrong View of Power

Jesus taught that a worldly view of power will be characterised by its focus on a number of things:

1. ‘Lording it’ over others

Read:

Matthew 20 v20-28



A more literal translation of v25 would read: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles *lord it down* upon them and the ‘great’ *wield power down* upon them.” In other words, the worldly person spends all their energy getting to the top and, having done so, now causes others to feel the full weight of their authority coming *down* upon them.

Let’s be aware that whenever we are in a position which involves such things as giving orders, having others work for us, being in a place of authority or influence, that this can feed our pride, giving us a sense of importance that is quite unreal.

Think: *Are there areas – in my job, family, circle of friends etc. – where I have been ‘lording it down’ over people, or where this could be a real danger for me?*



You may want to share some of these and pray for one another.

Sadly, it’s not just in the world where such attitudes can be found. They can also creep over into the church, particularly if certain roles, giftings or ministries are wrongly valued, or if we see the church as much an area for ‘advancement’ as the secular realm.

Can you see how such a wrong view could creep into church life? Have you ever wanted to do something in the fellowship for the prestige or recognition it would give? Be honest!



‘Lording it down’ over people is a characteristic of the world. Jesus says: I don’t want this among my followers!

2. Desire for Recognition

Read:

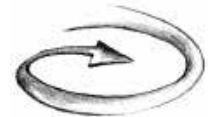
Matthew 23 v1-12



The religious leaders of Jesus’ day loved the power they wielded over the ordinary people – and they wanted them to know that! Note:

- how everything was done for show (v5a)
- the great attention they gave to their outward image and appearance (v5b)
- their need to be treated as ‘special’ (v6)
- their love of recognition and honour (v7)

How are some of these things worked out in our society today? Which, if you are honest, are a danger for you?



3. ‘Do as I say ... not as I do’

Another characteristic of people who exercise power in a worldly way is that they generally have different standards for others than they do for themselves. The Pharisees were particularly good at this!

Read:

Matthew 23 v1-4



What ‘heavy loads’ did they put ‘on men’s shoulders’?

Can you think of anywhere in the gospels where we see examples of this?



Think: *Is there any of this in me? Do I operate by the principle 'Do as I say', not 'Do as I do'?*

When people make rules for others that they themselves do not keep, it is a sure sign that power is being exercised in a worldly way, as a means of control and/or personal advancement.



4. The Love of Power: Two Case Studies

Men's Group Case Study: Absalom

Read:
2 Samuel 15 v1-12

Absalom was a man who lived with unresolved issues and uncontrolled ambition. He almost got away with both, thanks to the weakness of his father King David in the area of parenting.

When Amnon (David's first son) raped his half-sister Tamar and David did nothing about it, Absalom (David's third son) took his revenge by having Amnon butchered at a party – after two years of



simmering hatred and plotting (2Sam 13 v21-23). Again David did nothing, allowing his son to escape to a self-imposed exile with his grandfather. When he returned three years later, the issue was not raised or dealt with.

This failure of David to father his son properly allowed Absalom to grow up thinking he could get away with anything and use anyone for anything. It culminated in an attempt to depose his own father, take the throne for himself, and a dreadful civil war. (Our attempts to get power are never without effect on others!)

Note the following points from our passage that are characteristic of those who love power:

1. His focus is on looking good (v1).
2. He is dedicated and will pay any price to get what he wants (v2).
3. He feigns interest in the affairs and concerns of others (v2b-3a).
4. He points out the weaknesses and failings of those he wants to undermine (v3b).
5. He sows ideas into people that focus around himself (v4).
6. He flatters others (v5-6a).
7. He is a heart-stealer (v6b).
8. He can operate to a long-term plan (v7).
9. He can dress things up in 'spiritual' language to cover his real aim (v7-8).
10. He abuses other people's trust (v9).
11. He operates secretly (v10).
12. He uses other people for his own purposes (v10-12).



Pause for a few moments and search your own heart to see if any of these things are at work in your own life – in your family, at work, in the church... Ask God to root out anything of the spirit of Absalom in you...



Women’s Group Case Study: Jezebel

Read:

1 Kings 16 v29-32; 18 v4, v17-40; 19 v1-4; 21 v1-16

Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, Priest-King of Tyre and Sidon, was an ardent worshipper of Baal. In a political marriage designed to cement an alliance between Israel and Tyre, she became the wife of Israel’s evil King Ahab. Jezebel brought her Baal worship, with all the corrupt sexual practices of a fertility religion, with her, which led her into direct conflict with Elijah, the prophet of the Lord. While she clearly experienced the living God’s power, and Baal’s powerlessness, on Mount Carmel, she never repented, continuing to pursue her own love of power.

From her life we can learn that –

1. *love of power* has a domineering influence (16 v31-32)
2. *love of power* affects every area of life – our family (22 v51-53), our worship (16 v31-33) our nation (18 v17-19)
3. *love of power* is rarely satisfied but presses on for more, regardless of its effects on people, directly (18 v4 & v18; 19 v1-4) or indirectly (21 v8-10 & v25)
4. *love of power* often manipulates others and works behind the scenes (21 v4-8)
5. *love of power* never ultimately triumphs (18 v39-40), but always rebounds on ourselves (2 Kings 9 v30-37)

The story of Jezebel personifies the Bible's teaching that we will always reap what we sow (Galatians 6 v7).

5. Examples of the Abuse of Power today



Perhaps you are thinking: this is all well and good; but *I'm* not the sort of person who loves or abuses power. Well, it may be closer to home than you think! Consider the following, for example:

- doing favours for people to have them in your debt in some way
- helping people out so they will be obliged to help you back
- giving gifts to make others appreciative of you
- using our looks, charm or personality to win people over to our way of thinking
- using 'moods' to get what we want
- using our persuasiveness to get our own way
- flattering people to make them favour you
- disciplining people into 'you' rather than into Jesus

Think: *Can you recognise any of these in yourself at times? Are there other similar issues for you?*





6. Power or Authority?

It is possible in life to have power but no authority – like the man who withdraws cash from the bank with a gun in his hand! Equally, it is possible to have authority but with no power – rather like the British monarch who holds a key position but can actually *do* very little.

Jesus amazed both his friends and opponents because he carried *both* power *and* authority. Both were handled in a godly way and for godly purposes.

Read:

Mark 1 v21-28

In what ways did Jesus' power and authority come together in this story?



God is not against us exercising power or authority – he gave mankind the ability to do that right from the beginning (see Gen 1 v28-30). The Old Testament shows just what can happen when there is no proper exercise of power and authority (for example, Judges 21 v25); and the New Testament speaks of God's authority being delegated to appointed people both in the world (Rom 13 v1-7) and in the church (Hebrews 13 v17). Thankfully, we have a living example of how it *should* be done – in Jesus!



7. The Servant Ruler

One of the titles of Jesus in the Bible is “The Servant”. In a world where servanthood spoke of the complete absence of power, Jesus – the Son of God! – deliberately chose to reveal himself as a servant, just as Isaiah had prophesied he would some seven hundred years earlier.

Read:

Isaiah 42 v1-4; Matt 20 v25-28; Philippians 2 v5-11

Perhaps the most startling incident in Jesus’ life which demonstrates the servant principle so clearly, and the complete disregard he had for position or power, is when he washed his disciples’ feet.

Read:

John 13 v1-17



(v3-4) What was it that enabled Jesus to do this act of serving?

(v6-8) Why did Peter object so much to what Jesus was doing?

(v14-17) What key principles come out in these verses?

Jesus here sums up a key principle that lies at the heart of God’s Kingdom: *we rule by serving*. This is completely contrary to how the World operates, where serving is seen as something menial, as something that marks you out as weak, uneducated, poor, not having ‘made it’ in life. In God’s Kingdom, however, it is the one who serves that rules; indeed, the one who will not serve has no place in that Kingdom.

Can you think of people in the Bible who ended up ruling in situations through their willingness to serve? And of people who were the very opposite?

In the Kingdom of God there is no place for the love of power. It is the one who serves who rules.

| People who served and therefore ruled | People who would not serve and therefore could not rule |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| | |



8. The Greatest in the Kingdom



In every area of his life, Jesus set us an example of how to rule through serving. He showed us whom God considers to be ‘the leader’, ‘the greatest’, ‘the first’, ‘the best’. Let’s sum up some of the key principles he taught about how you become “the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven”.

1. Act as Servants, not Lords

Read:

Matthew 20 v25-27

No matter what our position in life or in the church may be, the *spirit* in which we are to operate at all times is one of *servanthood* not *lordship*.

Ephesians 6 v5-9 illustrates this; but what would its modern equivalent be?

The greatest in the Kingdom will always adopt a servant spirit, no matter what their role. They will put the needs of others first, do all sorts of thankless jobs, even anonymously at times – because in doing so they will be following the example of their Master.



2. Act for Others, not Yourself

Another mark of the Kingdom-servant is that he or she will put themselves out for other people. Their watchword will always be –

Your good at my expense.

Paul, great leader of the church though he was, constantly put others before himself, even to his own personal loss or cost.



Read:

2Cor 12 v7-13

‘Looking after Number One’ tends to be the motto of most people today. Where we see it creeping over into our own life, we need to repent of it quickly and take deliberate steps to rectify this by putting ourselves out for others.

3. Act with Humility, not Pride



Read:

Matthew 18 v1-4

God wants us to keep our heart towards him like that of a young child towards its parent: dependent, trusting, uncomplicated, knowing it does not know everything, ready to be guided and corrected.

Our world constantly encourages an attitude of pride, whether directly or indirectly. It tells us to let people know we have done well, and to do so in no uncertain terms. “Nobody else will blow your trumpet; so you may as well do it yourself. It’s the only way to get on.”

Christians will recognise that such an attitude has nothing to do with the Kingdom. They will stay humble, because they *know what they are really like*. They will recognise their weaknesses, limitations and inadequacies before God, and therefore will not

look for honour or esteem, even – especially! – when they hold some position of influence or esteem.

Think: Does the way that I behave (at work, at home, with the church) speak of humility or pride?

4. Act as Wise, not Foolish

When God does give us opportunity to exercise authority in some area or other, he expects us to do so wisely and not foolishly. Failure to do so will always blow up in our face, sooner or later.

Read:

1Kings 12 v1-20

Where did King Rehoboam go wrong?



What was the consequence of his lack of wisdom?

Reflect quietly for a moment: Are there any areas in my life at the moment where I am in danger of acting unwisely, and therefore being least in the Kingdom?



5. Act as Givers, not Takers

Most people in our society today are ‘out to get whatever they can’. The posture of our hearts, however, should always be to be givers and not takers. Such an attitude will prove a good correction to the temptation to pursue or use power in an ungodly way.

When we adopt this ‘givers, not takers’ attitude, God will ensure that we never lose out, no matter how it may seem initially.

Read:
Matthew 19 v16-30



What did the young man find difficult to give up? (v22)

What does Jesus promise in v29-30?



9. Responding to Those who Abuse Power

It's one thing to have a right attitude to power ourselves; but what about when people around us abuse their power? How should we respond then?

The Bible has lots to say about this – and through people who knew what they were talking about! The New Testament was written by people who lived under regimes that abused their power – whether spiritual power (as in the case of the Pharisees) or political power (as in the case of the Herod's or Rome). It is always worth remembering that when Paul 'appealed to Caesar', it was not to some pleasant, fair-minded ruler, but to the mad Emperor Nero whose favourite pastime became burning Christians and throwing them to lions! Paul's trust was not in a fickle man, but in a sovereign God.

Here are some keys from the Scriptures to handling those who abuse their power:

1. Love Them!

Read:

Luke 6 v27-36

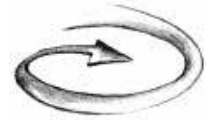
The passage speaks for itself!



2. Pray for Them!

Luke 6 v28 says, “ ... pray for those who ill-treat you.”

Can you think of occasions in the Bible when people did just that?



3. Ask God for Wisdom

In God’s timing, it may be *you* that God has raised up to begin to challenge the issue; but wisdom demands that you look for *God’s* way in.

Esther was such a person in the purposes and timing of God. Note how she approached the matter:

Read:

Esther 4 v12-16



4. Dare to be Courageous!

Having prayed about things and sought God’s heart, there are times when we simply have to launch out and stand out. (But *do* make sure that God is in it first!) Few abuses of power have been changed in history without the courageous intervention at some point of men and women of conviction.

Note the (post-prayerful!) courage in the following situations, in both men and women, young and old:

Read:

Exodus 6 v28 – 7 v7; Nehemiah 2 v1-5;

Esther 5 v1-7 and 7 v1-4

What danger did each of these individuals face?



5. **Trust God!**

Let's be honest: sometimes we pray about situations and they just don't change. The abuse of power, the injustice, the wrongdoing, the unfairness still remain. Like Jeremiah, we feel like crying, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jer 12 v1).

At such times, we need to trust in a sovereign God, who understands the end from the beginning, who is never ultimately opposed, whose plans and purposes are always worked out in the end – although frequently not to our time schedule.

The proper response of the believer at such times is *prayerful trust and dependence*.

Read:

Romans 8 v28-39



Are there any areas in your own life at the moment where you need to pray for one another, as you wait for God's righteousness or plan to be worked out?



10. Final Encouragements

Let's end this unit by reading and praying around some key verses from the New Testament that speak of God's blessing on those who root out this enemy of the soul – the love of power – from their lives and who set their heart instead on Kingdom Servanthood.

Matthew 19 v30 "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

Matthew 20 v26-27 "Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave ... "

Matthew 25 v23 " Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things."

Luke 14 v11 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 22 v26-27 " ... the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves ... I am among you as one who serves."

Philippians 2 v5-6 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ..."

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 5: The Self Syndrome



Introduction

To look after ourselves is a godly and God-given drive. Keeping ourselves clean, warm, healthy, out of danger – all these things are good and a part of the way God made us. However, the human race was not far into its history before this proper focus on self began to get terribly distorted. As Adam and Eve shifted their focus from God to themselves and their perceived needs, sin came in and began to ruin everything (Genesis 3). From that point on, *'The Self Syndrome'* became part of our very genetic spiritual make-up.



Read:
Genesis 4 v1-16

Cain failed to deal with the “sin ... crouching at your door” (v7) and so allowed jealousy, anger and disappointment (v4-5) to grow, to the point where he murdered his own brother. When asked by God where Abel was, his reply was: “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*”

This attitude – *'The Cain Factor'* – has characterised the human race ever since.

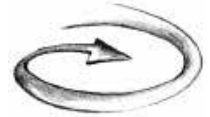
Can you think of typical areas in life today where this attitude of “Am I my brother’s keeper?” gets expressed? And then ... what about in your own life?



“The Cain Factor” is profoundly instinctive to human beings. If we do not understand this, we will not be able to deal with it in the ruthless way it deserves as an ‘Enemy of the Soul’.

In this Unit, we are going to look at five expressions of ‘The Cain Factor’, or ‘The Self Syndrome’. Each can exist in its own right; but there can also be a progression from one to the other, and failure to deal with one will often lead to opening doors to others.

At the end of each section, take time to pray through the issues raised with one another.



1. Self-will



The Self Syndrome is rooted in the issue of self-will; that is, putting what *I* want/like/feel/decide, above everything and everyone else – even God – and holding on to this with dogged determination.

1. **Where it comes from**

As we saw in Unit 4 ('The Love of Power'), Isaiah used the ancient King of Babylon as a 'type' or picture of the devil himself. In that Unit we noted his grasping after power; now let's look at the passage again, but focusing on his self-will:



What phrases in Isaiah 14 v12-15 demonstrate Satan's self-will?

This passage settles the issue: self-will is not an occasionally embarrassing character trait, but a demonic challenge to the heart and purposes of God.

2. **How it spread**

The devil was quick to draw others after him in exerting their self-will against God – with disastrous consequences.



Read:
Genesis 3 v1-7

What subtle ways did the devil use to get Adam and Eve to exercise their will over against God's will?

What was the consequence of their exercise of self-will?
(Genesis 3 v21-24)

Self-will always tries to convince us we are right; but it always leads, ultimately, to a place of separation from God and his purposes for our lives.

3. Who it touches

In short – everyone! None of us, from oldest to youngest, escapes its grasp. In our society today, however, it can often be overlooked, explained, or even encouraged. Consider some of the ways it can find expression:

- I want it
- I want it *now* ...
- No one's going to tell me what to do ...
- Well *I* think ...
- It's my right
- Who does he think he is?

Can you think of other phrases from situations in life where self-will gets expressed?



4. Biblical examples of self-will

Read the following Bible passages and note in what ways, and for what reasons, self-will found expression:

Exodus 7 v14-16 (etc!)

Judges 14 v1-3

1 Kings 21 v1-16

3 John 1 v9-10



Can you think of other examples too?

5. **Self-will and me**

So just how much self-will is left in me? The answer probably is: more than we think! And certainly more than Jesus wants to see there!



Think: *How do I respond when someone –*

- *over-rules me*
- *cuts across what I would like or what I think*
- *challenges an area of my life*
- *tells me I was wrong*
- *says 'No!'*

Can you share some of your responses with the group?

6. **Some steps for dealing with self-will**

1. Ask God to show you your self-will.
2. Ask him to start cutting across it – but be ready for the action!
3. When self-will rises up, bring it consciously to Jesus and ask him to help you.
4. Pray for more of the servant attitude of Jesus to be in your heart (Philippians 2).
5. Be ready and willing to *change!*



2. Self-effort

Self-will, when not dealt with, can often produce in people the tendency to do things by self-effort: the resolve to *do it ourselves*. “Not a bad thing,” you might be thinking? Let’s look and see.

1. Self-effort and other people

Consider the following phrases:

- “I can manage, thanks.”
- “I can do this by myself.”
- “I don’t need help, thank you.”
- “I’ll show them!”

How do these phrases reveal an increasing measure of self-effort? Can you think of other similar ones?



While all these expressions are common in our society, we need to acknowledge that they are symptoms of the disease of self-effort; they are Enemies of the Soul and need to be rooted out from our lives.

Of course, the trouble with self-effort is: *it can look so respectable!* That’s what made it so hard to nail the Pharisees in Jesus’ time! Even today we can dress up our self-effort under that well-known guise of “I just didn’t want to trouble you!” or “But it was no bother.”

2. Self-effort and God

Self-effort can also spill over into our relationship with God, as we try hard to please him, win his favour, or get him to answer our prayers. Once again, the Pharisees were masters at this, and, as a Pharisee himself before his conversion, Paul had also lived that way.



Read:
Philippians 3 v4-11

What characterised Paul’s life before he became a Christian?

What was his attitude to the same things now?

3. Why self-effort is wrong

Self-effort is wrong for two main reasons:

1. It denies our dependence on God

It says: “I can do this without your help.” While we as Christians are quick to tell others that they will never get *in* to the Kingdom that way, many of us fail to see that this is exactly how *we* then try to get *on* in the Kingdom!



How do Christians today sometimes fall into self-effort? Can you share with the group what you recognise as your own weak spots for falling into self-effort in your relationship with God?

2. It denies our dependence on one another

We need to recognise that living life by self-effort is a denial of the very way that God has made us and has designed the Body of Christ to operate. (See 1 Corinthians 12 v21-27) It also robs others of the opportunity to bless and to serve. It is The Cain Factor at work once again, but from the other end: “I do not want you to be my keeper!”

Excluding others from the privilege of serving me is to put myself on a pedestal of separation and to claim a self-sufficiency that belongs to God alone.



3. Self-righteousness

Those who live by self-effort invariably fall into the snare of self-righteousness, as they congratulate themselves on what they have achieved, how they have behaved, or what sort of person they are. Inevitably, their assessment is wrong, and obvious to all except the one concerned.

1. Characteristics of self-righteousness

Read:
Matthew 23 v1-39



Self-righteousness is characterised by a focus on:

- telling others rather than doing it yourself (v2-4)
- externals rather than internals (v5-7 and v27-28. Note Jesus' challenge in v25-26)
- the letter rather than the spirit (v16-22)
- the minor rather than the major (v23-24)
- the past rather than the present (v29-30, 34-36)
- others' faults rather than your own (Matthew 9 v10-11)
- self-congratulation rather than self-assessment (Luke 18 v9-14)

In short, self-righteousness always promotes you, while pulling others down – another expression of 'The Cain Factor'.



Which of the above points do you recognise are a danger area for you?

2. Self-righteousness affects us all

We need to recognise that the inclination towards self-righteousness is there in all of us! It is part of the human condition. Think back to Cain again. His problems began when he felt it was unfair that God had not accepted his 'righteousness' – his offering – but had accepted his brother's (Genesis 4 v3-5).

Even godly people can fall into self-righteousness. Take the example of Job. We often think that the book of Job is a story about *suffering*. But it isn't! It's a book about self-righteousness and how a godly man was helped to break through it into all that God wanted to give him.

Read:

Job 32 v1-3

What key phrases sum up both Job and his friends?

How does God break Job out of self-righteousness at the end?
(See, for example, 38 v1-3; 40 v1-2, 7-8; 42 v1-6)



3. ***Dealing with self-righteousness***

1. *Recognise* that it is something that affects us all – even mature Christians at times.
2. *Repent* quickly when you see it and don't excuse it!
3. *Resolve* that you will be the sort of person who tells their failures as well as successes, defeats as well as victories, weaknesses as well as strengths.
4. *Resolve* that you will let your pastor and your friends in to 'the secret place' where they can help you to see and deal with issues.
5. *Remember* that while we pursue our own self-righteousness, we cannot receive that perfect righteousness that is God's gift to us in Christ!

Unless we deal ruthlessly with this Enemy of the Soul, there will always be something in us that is unteachable, resistant to the Spirit, and hard of heart – as well as simply getting up people's nose!



4. Self-deceit

Self-will, self-effort, self-righteousness – all these head in one direction: that of *self-deceit*.

1. *What it is*

Self-deceit is when we interpret or misrepresent facts in order to encourage ourselves to think that things are not as they really are. The process may be deliberate, or unconscious; but the outcome is the same: we are ensnared in The Self Syndrome once again. *I* have become the rule and measure of all things.

Self-deceit can find expression in many ways; for example, in our conviction that –

- our *way* is right, when it isn't (Proverbs 14 v12)
- our *life* is pure, when it isn't (Proverbs 30 v12)
- our *works* are acceptable, when they are not (Luke 18 v10-14)
- our *doctrine* is correct, when it is in error (2 Timothy 4 v3-5)
- our *passion* is burning, when in fact it has 'gone off the boil' (Revelation 3 v1-2, 15-17)

By its very nature, self-deceit is hard to see in ourselves. That is why it is vital we are open and accountable to others, valuing their observations and trusting them to see what we might be missing. Such friends are our 'blind spot' driving mirror and should be highly valued.

Think: *Are you keeping yourself accountable to someone in a real and regular way? Is it accountability in name only, or in reality?*



2. How it operates

Let's read again two of our key passages from Genesis and see what we can learn from them about how self-deceit works.

Read:

Genesis 3 v1-13; 4 v3-16

Here are some of the ways in which self-deceit operates:



1. It gets us to doubt what God has clearly said. (Genesis 3 v1-3)
2. It gets us to consider other alternatives to what God has said. (Genesis 3 v4-5)
3. It gets us to try to cover up what we have done. (Genesis 3 v7)

4. It tells us it is OK to hide from God. (Genesis 3 v8-10)
5. It gets us to shift the blame from ourselves to others. (Genesis 3 v12 & 13)
6. It gets us to feel we have a right to be angry with God. (Genesis 4 v6-7)
7. It gets us to lie about our true intentions. (Genesis 4 v8)
8. It gets us to excuse our responsibilities. (Genesis 4 v9)
9. It convinces us we are ‘hard done by’. (Genesis 4 v13-14)
10. If not dealt with, it can exclude us from the presence of God (Genesis 4 v15-16)

Can you think of others in the Bible who allowed themselves to be lured into self-deceit, and why each of these happened?



| Who got deceived | Why they got deceived |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| | |

3. **Guarding against self-deceit**

Let us be in no doubt: the potential for self-deception in all of us is great. If that were not so, the New Testament would not have warned against it so tirelessly. It tells us to beware of being drawn into self-deceit by –

- **other people**
e.g., Matthew 24 v23-25; Romans 16 v17-18
- **a godless life-style**
e.g., Titus 3 v3; 1 Corinthians 6 v9-11
- **ourselves**
e.g., 1 Corinthians 3 v18

How, then, can we seek to watch against this ‘Cain Factor’ of self-deceit, with its enticements to put our own thoughts, desires and views first?

1. Recognise that self-deception is a powerful thing, and that you are not somehow immune to its temptations. (1 Corinthians 10 v6-12)
2. Stay in close fellowship with others. Remember: it was when Eve got separated from Adam that the devil took his opportunity. (Genesis 3 v1)
3. Keep yourself genuinely accountable in areas of both life and doctrine. (1 Timothy 4 v16)
4. Remember that absolute honesty and openness is the key. When we start to hide things or keep things from others, there is a fertile field for deception to be at work. (John 13 v21-30)
5. Read the Word of God regularly and put it into practice, without excusing yourself or explaining things away. (James 1 v22-25)



5. Self-pity

Of all the aspects of *'The Self Syndrome'* we could have examined (and we have only looked at a few!), perhaps the most *paralysing* is self-pity. It is also one of the most *difficult to deal with*, because, by its very nature, it *feels justified* in its hurt or grievance. For these reasons, we need to take this Enemy of the Soul most seriously.

1. Signs of self-pity

Self-pity can express itself in many different ways, but here are some of the most common ones:

- a moaning outlook on life
- complaining about other things or people
- focusing on how something affected you
- turning conversations around so that they centre on you or your problems
- sulking or sadness to get others' attention
- feeling you have been given a 'bad deal'
- thinking that nobody has been through what you have been through
- feeling 'Nobody cares/understands'
- an inability to rejoice with others
- depression

Think: Which of these do you recognise can be in your own life at times?



2. The sin of self-pity

We will never be able to deal with self-pity unless we face up to it squarely for what it is – **Sin!**

Sin, at its heart, is a pre-occupation with *oneself*, rather than with God; and self-pity is the ultimate pre-occupation with oneself.

*Unless we acknowledge that self-pity is sin,
we will **nurse** it rather than **curse** it!*

Our self-pity may sometimes (though not always!) be *understandable*; but it is never *acceptable*. It is *always* sin. Whatever its cause, it remains pre-occupation with self, and therefore closes the door to God's way of escape – his Holy Spirit and the strength, help and comfort he brings.

*Consider the following Bible characters. Discuss whether their self-pity was **understandable**, and why each one – regardless of the circumstances – was **sinful**.*

Cain (Genesis 4 v13-14)

Moses (Numbers 11 v10-15)

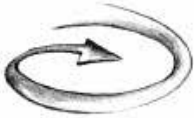
Naomi (Ruth 1 v20-21)

David (2 Samuel 19 v1-8)

Job (Job 3 v1-26)

Jonah (Jonah 4 v1-3)





3. **Why self-pity does not help us**

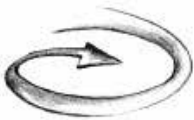
Discuss together the following comments:

1. It puts the focus on us, not on God, who is the only one who can help.
2. It leads us to dwell on others' failings rather than on our own.
3. It causes us to be fixed in failure and disappointment, rather than in recovery and rebuilding.
4. It robs us of the opportunity to exercise faith in God and to see his power at work.
5. It causes us to think that God does not care.
6. It blinds us to the fact that God is sovereign.
7. It can draw us into ever-deepening depression.

4. **Dealing with self-pity**

Dealing with self-pity requires steps to be taken in three areas – towards *ourselves*, towards *God* and towards *others*. We must acknowledge it as *sin to be repented of*, focus again on *God* who is for us and not against us, and take *positive steps towards others*.

As we unpack these three steps further, take time time to discuss them together, adding any other insights from your own experience.



a) **Towards ourselves**

1. *Acknowledge your self-pity for what it is; confess it to God and repent of it. Keep doing it until it is done!*

2. *Receive God's forgiveness* for anything that you may have done wrong or contributed to the situation.
3. *Forgive others* who may be involved or who may have let you down, hurt you, disappointed you etc. Keep forgiving until it is forgiven!
4. *Get prayer and help* from someone else if the self-pity will not shift, as it may be a stronghold that needs breaking in prayer.

b) Towards God

1. *Reflect on the nature and character of God*, as the Bible reveals him. Meditate on passages such as Exodus 34 v6-7. Let this be your focus rather than how you may feel at the moment.
2. *Remember that God is absolutely committed to you* as your loving and perfect *Father*. Even his disciplines are for your good! (Hebrews 12 v5-13)
3. Understand again that *nothing comes your way unless God permits it*. He is a sovereign God who works all things together for good (Romans 8 v28). With him, tests and afflictions simply make us stronger (James 1 v2-4,12).
4. Allow yourself once again to be *confronted by God*. Often, we want to withdraw when things aren't going well or our way; but this is the very time we need to press more into God, not less. It was an encounter with God that ultimately changed things for Job (Job 38-41, especially 42 v5), not endless introspection or counselling.

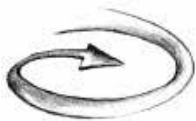
c) Towards others

1. Resolve your conversations will stop *focusing on you* and will start to show interest in others.
2. Take some positive steps to *put others first* in some tangible, practical way.
3. Focus on your *responsibilities rather than your rights*.
4. Begin to *pray regularly and positively* for God’s blessing on others, particularly on any with whom you may be struggling.



Conclusion

In this Unit we have looked at five expressions of ‘The Self Syndrome’, five outworkings of ‘The Cain factor’. The New Testament shows that ‘self’ is one of our greatest Enemies of the Soul and calls on us to deal with it ruthlessly – as ruthlessly as men dealt with our Lord Jesus when they crucified him on the cross.



Let’s end by reflecting on some New Testament verses that encourage us to do this, and then let’s turn that into prayer together:

*Romans 6 v6: ‘For we know that our old **self** was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with ...’*

*Galatians 2 v20: ‘**I** have been crucified with Christ and **I** no longer live, but Christ lives in me.’*

*Galatians 6 v14: ‘May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and **I** to the world.’*

Enemies of the Soul

Review of Units 1-5



Introduction

Our memories are amazing machines: they seem to have the ability to remember all sorts of irrelevant trivia and events, and to forget the things that are important! Even more so, they can forget the things that have challenged us and require change of us. That's why, every five units through *Enemies of the Soul*, we are providing an opportunity to stop and remind ourselves briefly of the things that God has been saying to us, and to check with one another on progress we are making.

Of course, going over the same ground is not always our favourite pastime – think of how we groan when TV shows yet another 'repeat'! If that's how you find yourself approaching this review, we would ask you to check your thinking right now, or you may miss something that God might want to do for you.

While this *Review Unit* is designed to be brief, it is nonetheless designed to be thorough. *Your* openness and *your* honesty will determine its value!

Stop and pray together that God would help us to be honest and open as we share together, and that he would bring to mind anything that we need to share with one another.





Unit 1 – Introduction

1. What do we mean (briefly!) by “the soul”?

2. What three particular emphases did we say lay at the heart of *Enemies of the Soul*?

C ...

A ...

D ...

3. How are you personally, and your group, making progress in these three aspects? Do you need to sharpen up on any of them in order to serve one another better?

4. What do we mean by “The Doughnut Principle”? Why is it so important?

5. One of the reasons for having separate men’s and women’s groups was to enable us to be **honest** with one another. Is your group – and are you – functioning at a level of growing honesty?





Unit Two – Bitterness



1. Can you remember our definition of bitterness? (It's in the Highlight Box on page 2 of that unit if you've forgotten.)

2. What do we mean by “the bitterness spiral”? Why is it so important to understand this principle?



3. Look back again to section 3 on “Signs of Bitterness” (and to any you may have added yourself). Have any of these crept back in? If so, let's get them confessed now.

4. Why is reconciliation so important in the Body of Christ? If there is anyone that you recognise you need to be reconciled with, resolve right now that you will do it as soon as possible.

5. Do any of the group have any testimony of change in this area that you have not already shared?

Unit 3 – Friendship with the World



1. What do we mean, briefly, by “the World”?

2. Read Exodus 34 v12-14 and note once again God’s ruthless intolerance of any idolatry.

How are **you** getting on in dealing with things that have been idols for you? Any updates for the group?



3. What do we mean by “the seepage and creepage” principle?

4. Read 1John 2 v15-17 and remind yourselves of the three expressions of worldliness there. Are there any victories or struggles you can share with one another?

5. How are you handling your “Fantasy Land”?

6. How are you doing in finding and pursuing your “adventure with God”?

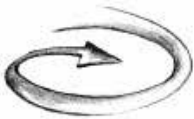


Unit 4 – Love of Power

1. We noted three characteristics of a worldly view of power:

- 'Lording it' over others
- Desire for recognition
- 'Do as I say ... not as I do'

Can you share testimony of any changes for the better in these areas? Are there any that are still a real struggle for you?



2. We also looked in this unit at the concept of "Servant rulership".

What do you understand by that phrase? How are you growing in this area?

3. We saw five responses to those who might abuse their power over us:

- Love them!
- Pray for them!
- Ask God for wisdom
- Dare to be courageous
- Trust God!

How are those of you doing who might be facing this sort of situation at the moment?



Unit 5 – The Self Syndrome

What do we mean by “The Cain Factor”?



1. Self will

Check again where you are at with this question we asked:

How do I respond when someone -

- *over-rules me*
- *cuts across what I would like or what I think*
- *challenges an area of my life*
- *tells me I was wrong*
- *says ‘No!’*

Can you share with the group how you are getting on in this area?

2. Self effort

Remember: we said that self-effort is wrong because:

1. It denies our dependence on God
2. It denies our dependence on one another

Are you aware of any self-effort trying to creep back into your life, either towards God or your brothers and sisters in Christ?



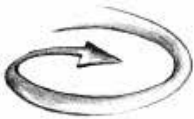
3. **Self-righteousness**

Let's review the characteristics of self-righteousness that we saw in Matthew 23 v1-39:

Self-righteousness is characterised by a focus on:

- telling others rather than doing it yourself (v2-4)
- externals rather than internals (v5-7 and v27-28. Note Jesus' challenge in v25-26)
- the letter rather than the spirit (v16-22)
- the minor rather than the major (v23-24)
- the past rather than the present (v29-30, 34-36)
- others' faults rather than your own (Matt 9 v10-11)
- self-congratulation rather than self-assessment (Luke 18 v9-14)

Give one another an up-date on any area that you feel you still need to keep an eye on in this area.



4. **Self-deceit**

What do we mean, briefly, by self-deceit?



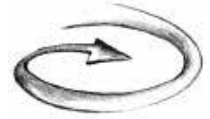
Why is openness and honesty a key in this area?

*How open and honest do you feel **you** have been in this course so far? If you recognise that you have not been, or that you find it hard to be, why not ask the group to pray for you now?*

Remember: without genuine openness and honesty, and an expectation of the Holy Spirit coming to *change us*, this course will be just another Bible Study!

5. Self-pity

Are there any issues that you are facing at the moment that are causing you to fall into self-pity? If so, share them now and pray for one another.



Finally, there is hope!



Remember how we finished *Unit 1* on this note:

*No matter how long or how short a time you have been a Christian, no matter how few or how many times you have failed, no matter how big or how small the issues facing you might seem ... **there is hope!***

We really do believe this! And we believe that God is moving powerfully by his Spirit in these days to prepare his people for the revival that is coming. *Enemies of the Soul* is written to be part of that preparation; but its effectiveness will depend on how *you* respond to the Spirit through it.

Never mind your failures; never mind the disappointments; God is *for you!* (And so is the group that you are part of!) The key is to be honest and to keep an open heart; as you do so, the Spirit can come in and do his work. This is our hope!

So now, as we get ready to move on to the next Units in the course, let's encourage one another with that hope; let's keep reviewing where we've been, and encouraging one another concerning where we want to get to!

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 6: Greed



1. Introduction

Greed – a nasty thing that characterises other people! That’s probably how most of us think, anyway!

- “If only *society* wasn’t so greedy ...”
- “Why can’t *our country* give away more?”
- “It’s *the speculators* who affect things ...”
- “*Those people* who gamble ...”
- “*Those at the front* eat everything first ...”

In this unit, we aim to show how greed sits close to all of us, how it really is an *Enemy of the Soul*, and how it affects far more of our life and attitudes than we probably think.

Greed may be defined as an excessive or uncontrolled desire to have, or consume, more.

But more *what*?

*Without turning the page, write down what is the **first** thing you think of when you hear the word ‘greed’?*



Probably most of us have focused on either *money* or *food*. These are certainly key issues in the Bible in this area, as we will see; but the principle of greed can operate in other areas too. Indeed, Jesus warns us to be careful of “all kinds of greed” (Luke 12 v15).



2. Areas of greed

Here are some of the areas in which the Bible says greed can be at work:

- money
- possessions
- food & drink (often called ‘gluttony’)
- power, position and influence
- sex (often called lust)

Can you think of people in the Bible who exhibited each of these areas of greed – or other similar ones?

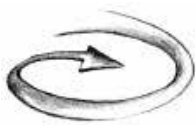
| Who? | What area of greed? |
|------|---------------------|
| | |





3. The disguises of greed

“For you it’s *greed*; for me it’s *need!*” That’s often how we can think, isn’t it? But this is generally self-deception! The Bible tells us that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2Cor 11 v14); so it shouldn’t surprise us to find him masquerading his attacks also.



Discuss the following ways in which greed sometimes attempts to disguise or justify itself.

- This is not greed – just a claim for justice. (e.g., Luke 12 v13)
- I need more to be able to give more. (e.g., Acts 5 v1-2)
- We only want it so we can serve the Lord better. (e.g., 2Kings 5 v19-27)
- I have to make a decent profit out of it. (e.g., Ezekiel 22 v12; Nehemiah 5 v1-8)
- I just want the gifting in me to be honoured. (e.g., 1Peter 5 v2)
- That money could be put to better use with me. (e.g., John 12 v4-6)
- It’s not for me – it’s for the home/ family/ children. (e.g., Haggai 1 v2-4)
- I deserve to enjoy the fruit of my labours. (e.g., Luke 12 16-19)
- It’s just that I have a big appetite. (e.g., Ecclesiastes 6 v7-9)

Think: Can you think of any other similar ‘disguises’ of the greed principle at work today? Which of all these do you recognise can be a danger area for you?



4. The reality behind greed

As with the other *Enemies of the Soul*, we need to grasp that greed is not just a minor character flaw, but an expression of demonic challenge to the heart and purposes of God.

1. Greed – its demonic origin

Read:

Isaiah 14 v12-15

What was it that Satan was greedy for?

Consider the following verses (some of which we have looked at earlier in the course); but this time, write down the **greed** aspect that was involved in each.

Genesis 3 v6

Genesis 6 v1-5

Genesis 11 v1-4

Genesis 13 v5-7

Genesis 19 v1-5

What the devil has, he is happy to share! His greed pervaded the human race, and still does.



2. Greed – a characteristic of the fallen world

Paul’s letter to the Romans was a careful, and quite profound, explanation to them of the key features of the gospel. He begins by setting the scene, as he outlines some of the characteristics of the fallen world that Jesus came to save.



Read:

Romans 1 v18-32

What issues does Paul note here are characteristics of a fallen world that lives without God?

*Why do you think **greed** is included in such a list of very serious offences against God? What is the implication of this for us?*



5. Greed – an expression of many sins

Greed is not simply an issue in its own right; it is an expression of many other, often deeper-rooted, sins. Here are ten of the ways that it is seen in the Bible:

1. Idolatry

Read:

Colossians 3 v5 (see also Matthew 6 v24)

Why do you think that Paul describes greed as *idolatry*?

What are the implications of this for us?



2. Covetousness

Greed often involves covetousness – the eager desire to have what belongs to someone else; and often, the desire for *you* to have it and for *them* not to.

Read:

Exodus 20 v 17

1Kings 21 v1-16

What parts did both Ahab and Jezebel play in the outworking of Ahab’s covetousness and greed?

Why should they have known that this was sinful (Exodus 20v17)?



3. **Materialism**

Materialism is the *pursuit of and preoccupation with* material possessions. It is the attitude that says, “Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (quoted in Isaiah 22 v13 & 1 Corinthians 15 v32), for this material world is all there is.

Materialism is a powerful force in our society – indeed, almost a god – and Christians are not exempt from its temptations and pressures.

Materialism provokes greed; greed feeds materialism.

Only a ruthless attitude can break this vicious circle.

While the Bible is not opposed to our having material possessions, it warns strongly against the dangers of materialism:



Read:

Deuteronomy 8 v6-14

1 Timothy 6 v6-10

4. **Egalitarianism**

Egalitarianism is the sin of seeing ourselves as equal to everyone else. It is clear from the Bible that we are all equal in our standing before God as his children through faith in Christ; but this does not mean we will all be equal in terms of our standing or function in society or in the church, or in terms of the resources we will have.

Failure to understand this can produce greed, for it leads us to believe that we have the right to everything that everyone else has, irrespective of circumstances or history.

God is compassionate – but not communist!

Read:

Matthew 20 v1-16



In what ways is greed expressed in this parable?

What attitude does the landowner demonstrate?



5. Lack of self-control

Self-control is a key aspect of Christian life-style (Acts 24 v24-25). Where we lack it, it is generally because of unrestrained greed and self-indulgence in some area of our life, and a failure to rule our appetites or desires.

Read:

Matthew 23 v25-26

2 Timothy 3 v1-5

Why do you think Paul describes these people as "having a form of godliness but denying its power"?

6. Lack of contentment

The Bible tells us we should learn to be content with what God gives us each day. When we are not content, it opens the door to our doubting his love for us, grumbling and anxiety; and it provokes the sin of greed in us to feel we deserve more.

Read:

Hebrews 13 v4-6

In what two areas do these verses say we should learn to be content?



*What is the significance of the promises made in this passage **in the light of their context?***

7. Lack of trust, and dissatisfaction

Greed can often signify a lack of trust in God’s provision for us. It is as if we are saying, “God, you have not given me enough; and unless I take steps myself to change things, I am stuck with this! And I don’t like it!”

“God helps those who help themselves” may be a very popular saying; but it is a thoroughly unbiblical saying, indicating lack of trust in the Sovereign God.

Contrast this attitude with the trust and contentment reflected in what Paul writes in Philippians 4 v10-13.

Think: *How trusting and contented are **you** at this time? Is this reflected in the way you live?*

When we are short of contentment and trust, we quickly fall into dissatisfaction – either with God or with others.

The writer of Ecclesiastes looks back on life and notes the foolish attitudes displayed by many as they blindly pursue one thing after another, yet find their satisfaction in none of them. In contrast, he says that true satisfaction is found only in God and in his purposes.

Read:
Ecclesiastes 5 v8-15

Note the areas of dissatisfaction that are expressed in this passage and how the writer seek to bring things into true perspective.



8. Selfishness

Greed is another aspect of ‘The Self Syndrome’ that we looked at in the previous unit. Greed puts *my* needs before those of anyone else. It *nurses* ‘The Cain Factor’ rather than *curses* it.

What key phrases in the following passages indicate the selfish element of the greed that was manifested?

Genesis 13 v10-11

1Kings 21 v1-4

Ezekiel 34 v7-10

Matthew 23 v25-26

2 Timothy 3 v1-5

As Christians we are called to lay aside selfish ways and anything that expresses selfishness or ministers to it.



9. Foolishness

Perhaps this strikes us as a rather odd sin; but the Bible has much to say against foolishness (180 references to it!), which it sees as the result of *wrong choices* which neglect to take God into account.

The greedy person – whether greedy for wealth, food, or possessions – is foolish because he fails to take into account what God says about how pointless it is to accumulate the things of this world.

Read:

Luke 12 v13-21

What does Jesus say is foolish about greed in this parable?



10. *Impropriety*

There are some things that are quite simply *improper* and *inappropriate* for God’s people, for God is holy and he wants us to reflect that holiness in every aspect of our lives. Can you imagine God being greedy or grasping about anything? Then why should we be either?

*God’s heart is to **give**, not to **get**. Greed is the very opposite of this and therefore is simply improper and inappropriate among us.*



Think: Look back over these ten expressions of greed and reflect on which are danger areas for you.

Can you share some of them with one another and pray for one another?



6. The dulling effect of greed

In the light of all we have seen so far, it should not surprise us to discover that the Bible says that greed has a dulling effect on us. Consider together the following aspects of this dulling effect:

- spiritually
See Ezekiel 33 v31-32
- socially
See Luke 16 v19-21
- commercially
See Amos 8 v4-6

Greed chokes the seed!:

*“The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, **making it unfruitful.**” (Matthew 13 v22)*

Think: *We can all see how greed dulls the conscience of society. But what about our own lives? Have you experienced times when greed has choked the seed in you? Are there things trying to choke the seed at the moment?*



7. God’s judgement on greed



By now it ought to be evident to us that greed is simply *not* on God’s agenda! But to make this absolutely clear, let’s read some verses in which various aspects of his judgement on greed are spelled out.

Note the end result of greed in the following passages:

Romans 1 v28-32

1 Cor 6 v9-11



Ephesians 5 v3-5

Colossians 3 v5-6

If greed is included in the list of things that receive God's judgement, then it is clearly an Enemy that needs ruthlessly removing from our lives.



8. God's keys for dealing with greed

So far we have majored on discovering more about this subtle 'Enemy of the Soul' and how it cunningly seeks to spread in our lives. But now let's turn to God's antidote for dealing with greed, for God does not simply point out issues to us; he always provides a way of escape from them.

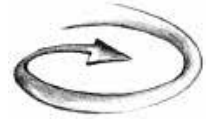
1. Repentance

This always has to be our starting point, as we stop making excuses and face up to the truth as God sees things. Typical excuses in this whole area of greed include:

- It's not too bad really.
- I'm not as bad as some others.

- I’m in control of it.
- It’s just that I have a big appetite.
- But I could do so much for God if I had more.
- I know God understands my heart in this.

Can you think of others?



*We will never get free of greed unless we face up to it and recognise it for what it is. As we **own up** and **open up** the Holy Spirit can come in and change us.*

2. Seeking first the Kingdom

Negative things are always best dealt with by focusing on the positive and opposite instead. The best antidote to seeking first *my* kingdom, therefore, is to seek first *his* kingdom.

Write out the following verse:

Matthew 6 v33

What do you think Jesus means by this?

Now read the following two passages and contrast the two different attitudes expressed in them.

| Mark 10 v17-31 Seeking first my kingdom | Matthew 6 v25-34 Seeking first His Kingdom |
|--|---|
| | |



Which do you feel is more characteristic of you?



3. Stewardship

Being a Christian is not just about ‘getting saved’, but about acknowledging Jesus’ lordship over the whole of our lives. When we receive him as Lord, everything we have and are passes into *his* ownership. Nothing is ours any more; including our money and possessions. He owns it; we simply *administrate* or *steward* it on his behalf. Once we grasp this, we can see the futility of being greedy – why should the one who has everything want any more? And why should the one who has everything need our help to provide for us?

Moreover, faithful stewardship of the material resources God entrusts to us is an essential prerequisite for being entrusted with spiritual resources. How we handle money, possessions etc. can open or shut God’s opportunities for us in the Kingdom!



Read:

Luke 16 v10-15

What principles does Jesus underline here?

What does the Pharisees’ reaction reveal about them?

Getting a revelation of the principle of stewardship is a key to seeing victory over the Enemy of greed and materialism.

4. A light touch

Once we have begun to see the principle of stewardship, we can begin to develop ‘a light touch’ towards material things and the drive of greed to get more. If God provides something – praise him! If he takes it away, praise him as well!

Having a light touch towards money, property and possessions frees us from the greed and fear that materialism thrives on.

Read:

Job 1 v6 – 2 v10



In what ways did Job demonstrate 'a light touch' in this story?

What did you notice about Satan in the story?

It is as we grasp that God is in complete control of every area of our lives that we can live out 'the light touch' principle.

5. Giving

God's Word encourages us to give generously. Besides honouring God, *giving* is a powerful restraint on *getting*.

Tithing (giving one-tenth of your income to God) is a good place to begin. Long before the Jewish Law was given, the great saints of the Old Testament were tithing – apparently quite instinctively; for example, Abraham (Genesis 14 v20 & Hebrews 7 v1-4) and Jacob (Genesis 28 v22). Later the Law would give guidelines for tithing.

In the Old Testament the tithe was actually seen as *belonging* to God (Leviticus 27 v30), and so to fail to pay your tithe was to rob him! Yet to give the tithe would only lead to your blessing! (Malachi 3 v6-10).

In addition to this basic tithe, there were many other opportunities to make free-will gifts and offerings of all sorts and on all occasions. There was plenty of chance, then, to choose to restrain greed in your life!

Giving continues to find a high priority in the New Testament. Read and reflect on the following passages:



Read:

Matthew 5 v40-42

Mark 12 v41-44 (note v44 in particular!)

2 Corinthians 8 v1-5, 13-15; 9 v6-15

*When struggling with giving,
remember God’s wonderful mathematics:*

***With God,
nine-tenths goes further than ten-tenths!***

6. Abstinance and fasting

Where the greed is directed towards physical things, two practical *disciplines* that can help us are abstinance and fasting. Besides their restraining value, these disciplines often open up the purposes of God too.

Abstinance

Abstinance is denying yourself a particular pleasure for a period of time for the self-discipline and preparation it brings. Examples from the Bible include: abstaining from certain foods (e.g., Daniel 1 v8-17), alcoholic drinks (Numbers 6 v1-4), things that could cause another Christian to stumble in their faith (1 Corinthians 8 v4-13) – even sexual relationships between a man and wife for a period of time! (Exodus 19 v14-15; 1 Corinthians 7 v3-5).



Think: *Are there things in my life at the moment that have become uncontrolled pleasures and which I need to embrace with the self-discipline of abstinance?*

Fasting

Fasting is going without all food for a period of time in order to devote yourself to prayer more wholeheartedly. Fasts in the Bible could be:

- individual (2 Samuel 12 v16) or corporate (2 Chronicles 20 v3)
- regular (Leviticus 16 v29-31) or for specific needs (Joel 1 v13-14)
- for short or long periods – one day (Judges 20 v26), three days (Esther 4 v16), forty days (Luke 4 v1-2)

For Christians, fasting is no longer a law; if it is practised, it must be as a matter of the heart. But Jesus seemed to expect that his followers would want to fast (Matthew 6 v16-18; 9 v14-15), and it was certainly a practice of the early church when seeking God (e.g., Acts 13 v2).

Think: Do I avoid the practise of fasting because I cannot control my greed?



7. Trust in God

As with all our Enemies of the Soul, a major key to seeing the power of greed broken is *trust in God*. If we can grasp that the Sovereign God, Creator of the whole universe, is my loving, heavenly Father, then I will not fear that he will fail to provide for me. I will be able to trust him for what he knows I need, rather than to pursue the path of greed and materialism that characterises our society.

Let's finish by reading once again a passage that encourages us to trust him, and then let's pray together that our trust in him will grow.

Read:

Matthew 6 v25-34



Enemies of the Soul

Unit 7: Gossip



1. Introduction

All of us know what gossip is – it's the idle talk that *other people* pass on. Of course, we are never guilty of it ourselves. Sure, you may find us...

- sharing concerns for prayer
- mentioning things in confidence to people
- alerting people to issues that might crop up soon
- checking out the truth of a rumour we have heard
- sharing our perspectives on someone

But gossip? Never!

Yet gossip plays a bigger part in our lives than we like to admit, and probably finds a more acceptable place among us as God's people than it should. All of us, at some time or other, have listened to it, spread it, been a victim of it. In fact, there will have been times when we will even have enjoyed it. (See Proverbs 18 v8)

The trouble is, we live in a gossip-ridden society which says gossip is OK. In fact, it even pays people fat salaries to do a professional job of it for us!

Can you think briefly of where and how?

While gossip is part of the fabric of our society, the Bible tells us that gossip and its bedfellows have no place among God’s people.

Read the following passages, noting some of the different aspects of ‘gossip’ and God’s attitude to it:

Exodus 23 v1-3

Psalm 101 v5

2Corinthians 12 v19-21

James 1 v26

Romans 1 v28-32

What does the inclusion of gossip in such a list of sins indicate?

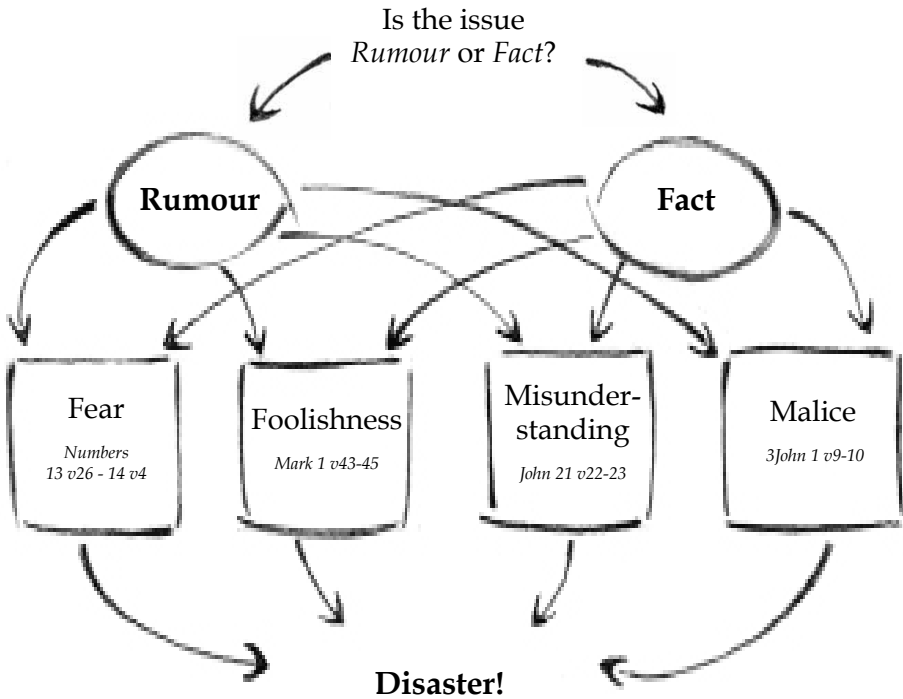
There is no place for gossip in the Kingdom of God!





2. The Gossip Path

While gossip may take a number of paths, and may have a number of causes, its end result is always the same, as the following diagram shows:





3. The Gossip Family

While we are focusing primarily on gossip, it is part of a wider family of sins of the tongue, all of which the Bible condemns and all of which should be kept in mind as we go through this unit. Here are some of them.

Write down the particular issue that each of the following verses highlights:

Mark 7 v20-23

Luke 12 v1-3

Acts 11 v1-3

1Corinthians 5 v8

Colossians 3 v8-10

1Timothy 5 v13

What other 'relatives of the family' could you add to this list?

Which of these, if you are honest, are the biggest issues for you? Can you share one of them with the group and then pray for one another?





4. Motives behind Gossip

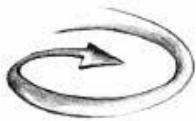
Gossip and its relatives are clearly wrong then. So, why do we do it?

Consider the following ten motives that can sometimes lie behind gossip and try to see how each one might lead to gossiping:



- unforgiveness or bitterness
- jealousy
- malice, or spitefulness
- prejudice
- fear
- wanting to look good yourself
- pride
- lack of self-control
- lack of love
- a critical spirit

Can you recognise any of these at work in yourself at times?



*When tempted to gossip, ask yourself: “**Why** am I doing this?”*

When we’ve seen the sin, we won’t want it in!

5. What the Bible says about Gossip



What does the Bible say about gossip? Actually, lots! – especially in the Book of Proverbs. Let's read some passages that highlight key issues about gossip. As we do, note any positive contrasts made as well.

1. *Its offensiveness to God*

Ephesians 4 v29-32

Numbers 12 v1-15

2. *Its damage to others*

Proverbs 11 v12-14

Proverbs 16 v27-28

Proverbs 26 v17-28

3. *Its judgement on us*

Proverbs 13 v3

Matthew 12 v33-37





6. Gossip – A Case Study

Let’s dig a bit deeper into a passage about gossip. But before we do, a bit of Old Testament history!

In 538BC God’s people returned to the Promised Land from their exile in Babylon to begin the task of rebuilding the temple, the city, and the nation. Initial enthusiasm soon gave way to weariness and despair when things didn’t go quickly or according to plan, and over the coming years the work ground to a halt. Ezra and Nehemiah would prove to be key men in stirring up the people to this task again.

One of the major problems that both men faced was the opposition of people who had remained in the land during the exile and who had intermarried with other peoples sent there by the Babylonians. They had vested interests in things staying as they were!

Let’s look now at one of the incidents where the power of gossip sought to oppose God’s purposes.



Read:

Nehemiah 6 v1-16

In what ways does gossip and its relatives find expression in this passage? What were Nehemiah’s techniques for dealing with it?

*God wants us to train ourselves in **stopping** gossip, not **spreading** it.*

7. Why Gossip is Always Wrong



The main reason why gossip is wrong is the simple reason that God tells us not to do it! However, behind God's commandments there are always good reasons. Here are just some of them, with Bible passages to back them up:

1. It flouts the Law of Love (1Peter 4 v8)
2. It takes God's place as Judge, who alone knows all the facts (James 4 v11-12)
3. It reveals our own foolishness (Prov 10 v18-21)
4. It uncovers the nakedness of others (Gen 9 v20-23; *see later*)
5. It demonstrates a lack of wisdom (Prov 8 v12-17)
6. It ducks my own responsibilities (Matthew 18 v15)
7. It grieves the Holy Spirit and destroys the unity he brings to the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4 v29-32; Philippians 2 v1-4)

Can you think of other reasons why gossip is wrong?





8. Revealing and Covering

1. God's right to reveal

If *anyone* has the right to gossip, it is God! After all, he knows everything about us – and all of it is true! He also knows how shocked others would be if *they* knew what *he* knew!



*Let's stop for a moment and ask ourselves this: What is there in my life that I would prefer others **not** to know about?... (You don't have to tell us!)*

Whatever it was that went through your thoughts, God has the right to make that known! However, when we turned to Christ and trusted in him, his cleansing sacrifice for us on the cross 'covered' our sins completely, and as a result God pronounced us "Not guilty!" He discharged us from the heavenly courtroom, and chose not to make the evidence known nor to bring it up again.

(For further reading on this doctrine of 'justification' – being pronounced not guilty and put right with God – see Romans 3 v9-26 and 5 v1-11.)

If God has done this towards us, why should we feel we can behave any differently towards others?

What are the key phrases in the following verses?

1Corinthians 13 v5

1Peter 4 v8



2. ***Our responsibility to cover***

If God has chosen not to *reveal* our sin but rather to '*cover*' it with the blood of Jesus, then this surely needs to be our approach too. Let's look at an example of where someone failed to do this, and see what we can learn.

Read:

Genesis 9 v20-27

Why do you think Noah ended up drunk? Was it something deliberate?

What attitude towards his father does Ham reveal?

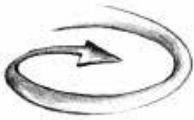
What does the action of Shem and Japheth demonstrate?



God wants us to learn how to '*cover*' one another's faults and weaknesses. Proverbs 17 v9 says, "He who covers over an offence promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."

To *cover* is not the same as to *conceal*, which implies knowing, or being part of, some sinful issue. It is to acknowledge that we are all weak, that we all fail, and that we all need grace extending to one another at some time or other.

Our aim must always be to **restore** not to **reveal**, to **cover over** not to **open out**.



When **would** it be right, then, to reveal something you have discovered about someone?

To whom should this be revealed and how?

Is “confidentiality” a sacrosanct principle?



9. Gossip Today

Gossip is still as much a “choice morsel” (Proverbs 18 v8 & 26 v22) today as it was in Noah’s day; and it is a morsel enjoyed by both men and women (although no doubt each sees it as the special preserve of the other!).

While gossip is common to both sexes, it is often for different reasons. We can summarise this in the following way:

*Men tend to gossip to give a **report**;*
*women tend to gossip to establish **rapport**.*

In other words, *men* tend to report the supposed ‘facts’ in gossip. For them, it establishes the ‘pecking-order’ of things, keeps people in their place by reporting negatives about them, and feeds the frequent male need for one-upmanship.

However, *women* tend to gossip, not so much to establish facts about one another, as to establish a rapport with the person with whom they are sharing the gossip. As they share it, it builds something between them as they share the “choice morsel” together.

Can you recognise something of the truth in the last two paragraphs, as a general principle?

Do you recognise any of this in yourself at times?

How might understanding what goes on when we gossip help us to deal with this Enemy and to overcome it?



10. How to Recognise Gossip



Sin is always easier to avoid if we can see it coming, and gossip is no different.

Here are some of the signs that gossip is heading our way:

- conversation that you would be uncomfortable with if others overheard
- anything that is putting a ‘slant’ on a person or situation
- conversation that puts others down, especially in comparison to yourself
- desire to get information out of someone that you do not have and do not need

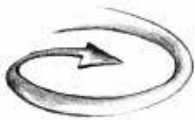
- negative conversations about the boss at work or leaders in the church, especially when we have not been to them with positive and constructive comments

What other signs could you add to this list? (Those that come from your own experience will probably be the most powerful!)



11. How to Deal with Gossip

Discuss the following ten points together:



1. Recognise that gossip is *sin*. Resolve to stop making excuses for it, explaining it away, or showing why there is good reason for it *on this occasion*. It is an Enemy of the Soul; so, *curse it, don't nurse it!*
2. Ask for forgiveness, where appropriate, of those you have gossiped against.
3. Avoid the general influence of the 'gossip nature' of our society, by taking care with what you read, watch, or listen to (e.g., magazines, newspapers, TV programmes, conversations etc).

4. Train yourself to look for the good and the positive in everyone and everything (Philippians 4 v8) and then speak it out as often as you can – especially where you have been negative in the past. Keep speaking the positive until it has broken the power of the negative!
5. When something is passed on to you that should not have been, resolve not to pass it on to anyone else. Proverbs 26 v20 says, “Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.” Hand over to God in prayer whatever has been passed on to you – and leave it there!
6. Lovingly challenge one another when conversation starts to turn to gossip. (“Oops! We’re starting to gossip! Let’s stop now!”)
7. Avoid spending time with those you know are gossips and whose influence is a negative factor on you. (Sounds hard, but if they stop their sinning, people will soon flock back!)
8. Resolve personally that you will only ever speak the truth, and that even that will be done with wisdom. (Remember: not everybody needs to know everything!)
9. Make your speech and conversations a subject for prayer at times, like David did (Psalm 141 v3-4).
10. Think before you speak! (See Ecclesiastes 5 v2)



12. The Positive Power of the Tongue

1. Little ... but large

Read:

James 3 v1-12

What three pictures does James use in this passage to show the powerful effect that a little thing like the tongue can have?



Why are these three pictures so appropriate?

Why does James say it is inappropriate – for our tongues to be used negatively?

*The tongue is such a little thing – but can have such a powerful effect. The challenge to us is: will we use it for **the work of the devil** or **the work of God**?*

2. Positive ways to use the tongue

As we come to the end of this unit, let's turn our attention to the positive ways God's Word says our tongues can be used. Here are seven from the New Testament:

1. Worship (Revelation 19 v1-9; Eph 5 19-20)
2. Exercise of spiritual gifts (1Cor 14 v26-31)
3. Mutual encouragement (Eph 4 v29; Acts 20 v1-2)
4. Teaching the Word of God (Acts 2 v42; Colossians 3 v16)
5. Evangelism (Acts 2 v14-15)
6. Prayer (Acts 2 v42; 4 v24-31)
7. Speaking the truth (Eph 4 v15; Matt 5 v37)

The more we give ourselves to these activities, the less we will want to give ourselves to gossip and all its relatives.

3. **Some final words of wisdom**

We have seen throughout this unit how much the Book of Proverbs has to say about gossip. Let's end, therefore, by noting what Proverbs says about how powerfully the tongue can be used for good.



Read the following verses and write down the phrase which describes the positive use of the tongue or the end result of using it well.

Proverbs 10 v11

Proverbs 10 v20

Proverbs 10 v21

Proverbs 12 v18

Proverbs 12 v25

Proverbs 15 v1

Proverbs 15 v4

Proverbs 16 v24

Proverbs 18 v20-21

Proverbs 25 v11

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 8: Jealousy



1. Introduction

Jealousy – I wonder what the very *first* thing is that you think of when you hear that word?

Without looking further ahead, write down briefly how you understand the concept of jealousy.



Probably most of us have associated it with that extremely unpleasant emotion demonstrated (by *other people*, of course) when they see something they want and don't, or can't, have it!

But in fact, jealousy carries a much wider meaning than that – not only in the English language, but also in the Hebrew and Greek in which the Bible was originally written. So let's begin this unit by digging around the word for a little while, as this will then help us later.



2. Jealousy – Good and Bad!

a) *What the dictionary says*

English dictionaries define the word *jealousy* in at least four different ways. All of them are found in the Bible:

1. suspicion or fear of being replaced by a rival
(e.g., 1Samuel 18 v6-9)
2. resentment or vindictiveness towards someone (e.g., Genesis 30 v1)
3. possessiveness and watchfulness in the protection of something (e.g., Galatians 1 v13-14 NB our word 'zealous' is exactly the same in the Hebrew and Greek texts as the word 'jealous'.)
4. the demand for exclusive loyalty (*obsolete except in Biblical usage, my dictionary says!*)
(e.g., Exodus 20 v3-6)

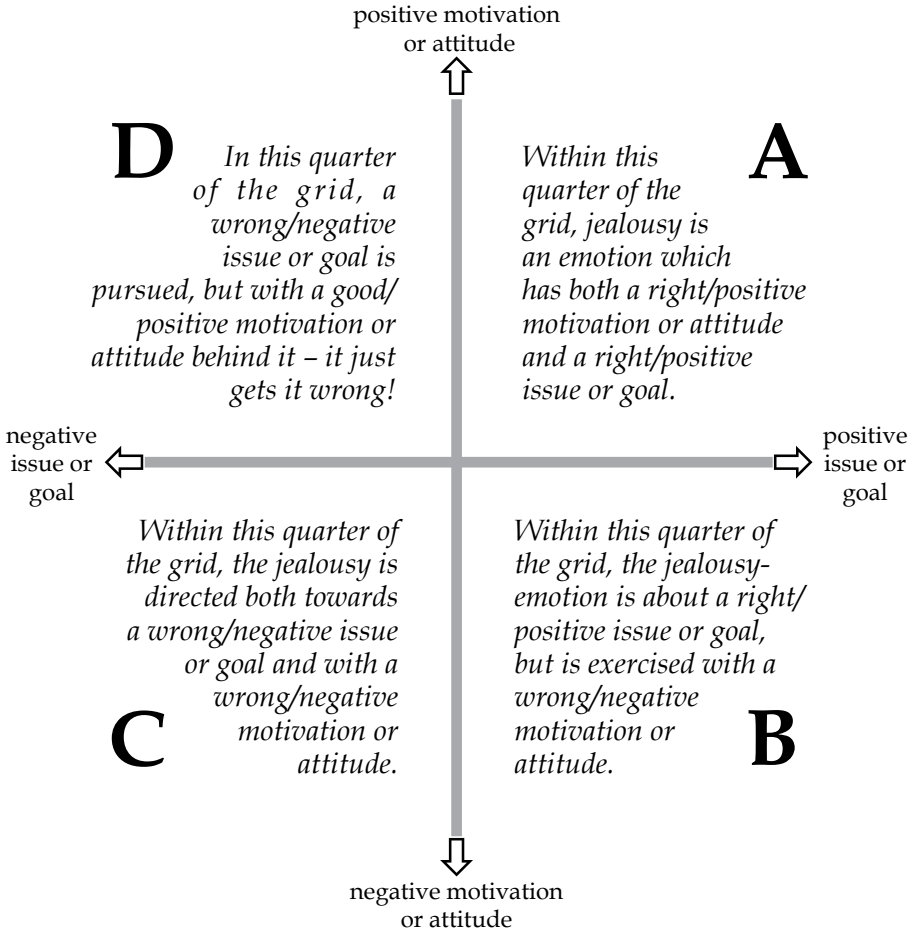


What all this shows us is that jealousy has a wide range of meanings. Its underlying idea, however, seems to be –

*The intense effort and emotional energy that goes out towards a goal, whether a person, an idea, or a cause. The right goal and attitude makes it a quality to be **desired and pursued**; the wrong goal and attitude makes it a sin to be **despised and pruned**.*

b) The jealousy axis

In other words jealousy can be a good or a bad thing! The key is: what is the *motivation* or *attitude* behind it, and what is the *issue* or *goal* into which the energy or emotion is poured. The following chart seeks to express this:



Here are a selection of Bible verses about 'jealousy'. (You will also find the words 'envy' or 'zealous', which are all from the same Hebrew or Greek word.) Consider which quarter of the axis each of these would come in, and then write the answers below (A,B,C,D) together with any other comments verses on to your grid. There is space below for any other comments or explanations you may wish to note.



Exodus 34 v14

Isaiah 14 v12-14

Philippians 1 v15-17

Galatians 1 v14

Exodus 20 v3-6

Philippians 3 v6

Acts 5 v17-18

2Cor 11 v2-3

From all this we can see that jealousy is an emotion that can be both right and wrong! But before we focus on the *wrong* expression of it, let's summarise what the Bible has to say about *right* expression of it. This will serve to contrast the wrong attitudes that can rise up within us, as well as be a provocation to our faith that there are higher things to aim for!

c) Jealousy – an admirable quality!

Here are some of the areas where the expression of jealousy is an admirable quality. As we go through them, try asking yourself whether these are the issues that make you jealous or not! – and if not, why not?!

Write down the key phrases or key issues highlighted in each verse or passage:



1. God’s jealousy

God’s jealousy for his own character, Exodus 34 v14

God’s jealousy for his people’s affection and worship,
Deuteronomy 6 v4-5,13-15

God’s jealousy for his people’s welfare, Zechariah 8
v1-3

God’s jealousy for righteous judgement, Deut 29 v19-
21 (Remember: zeal = jealousy)

2. Our jealousy for God

Numbers 25 v1-13

3. Our jealousy for the things of God

1Cor 12 v31 (“eagerly desire” = literally, be jealous/
zealous for)

4. Our jealousy for the family of faith

2Cor 11 v2

5. Our jealousy for our partner

Song of Songs 8 v6-7 & Proverbs 6 v32-35

[N.B. The jealousy expressed in this final point is not an attitude towards our partner that cannot bear to let them out of our sight or let them do anything without us! It is a loving jealousy that comes from an understanding of marriage as a permanent covenant relationship between husband and wife, where each freely gives their love in a self-sacrificial way (Ephesians 5 v22-33), and where each therefore has the right to expect covenantal faithfulness from the other. Such jealous commitment to one another provides the surest basis for a happy and lasting marriage.]

So much for the positive aspects of jealousy then. If we were to live *these* out, we probably wouldn't need to go any further in this unit! Sadly, for most of us, this is not the case – at least, not as often as we would like it to be. Other aspects of the jealousy axis come into play, and it is to these that we now turn our attention.

d) The negative side of jealousy

The leaders of the early church were very clear that there was no place for the negative aspects of jealousy, or envy, in the Body of Christ; rather, they are wicked *Enemies of the Soul* that need rooting out.

In the following passages, note what Paul sees jealousy as an expression of:

1Corinthians 3 v1-9

Romans 13 v11-14

Jealousy and envy are zeal gone bad. As such, they need amputating from the Body of Christ!



e) Jealousy’s Sister – Envy

Closely associated with jealousy, but slightly different to it, is *envy*. Envy is the feeling of grudging discontent aroused by the possessions, achievements, or qualities of another, provoking in us the desire to have those things ourselves – preferably while seeing the other lose them!

We might distinguish between the two in this way:

*Jealousy desires to **have** the same thing as someone else; envy desires to **deprive** them of it. Jealousy wants it **as well as** them; envy wants it **instead of** them.*



3. Causes of Jealousy

Read the following passages and note what were the causes (in general terms) of the jealousy in each case:

Genesis 26 v12-15

Genesis 30 v1

Acts 7 v9 & Genesis 37 v3-4

1Samuel 18 v6-9

Acts 5 v17 & 13 v45



Matthew 20 v1-16

Philippians 1 v15-17

What other causes could you add to this list from your own experience in life? Share these briefly with the group.



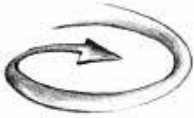
4. Signs of Jealousy



Of course, it's easy to see all of this in *other people*, isn't it? But what about *us*? Surely *we* aren't like that, are we? Well, let's ask whether we are ever characterised by any of the following:

- saying "It's not fair!"
- annoyance at the success of others
- irritation when others are spoken well of
- speaking unkind words about others
- explaining away some success, blessing or promotion someone else has received
- trying to shape the outcome of something in order to keep the other person 'down'
- seeking to discredit another in some way
- spoiling something belonging to someone else
- over-attention to improving our appearance or home
- avoiding someone who has been blessed
- dissatisfaction with something God has blessed *you* with when you see what he has blessed *them* with.

Which of these – or other similar feelings – do you recognise rise up in **you** at times? Can you share these with the group? [Remember: we live in a society that is jealousy-ridden (think of advertising!) so it would be surprising if we were not affected!]



Pray with one another in two's or three's: confess these feelings for what they are – sin, and Enemies of your Soul! – and ask God to bring a real breakthrough to you in these areas and to help you **change** by his Spirit.



5. The Roots of Jealousy

How do you get the sort of fruit you want? (No, not by going to the supermarket!) You have to plant the right sort of fruit tree, put it into the right sort of soil, and feed it with the right sort of things. The wrong tree, in the wrong soil, fed with the wrong things will produce bad fruit. It's this picture that is in Paul's thinking in the following passage:



Read:

Galatians 5 v16-26

Jealousy and envy are clearly seen here as 'fruits of the flesh' rather than 'fruits of the Spirit', and as such they need removing from our lives.

Simply removing the fruit does not stop the tree from growing - it might even lead to more fruit! To stop the tree producing fruit, we need to get to its roots.

So, what are some of the roots of jealousy?

Here is a list of ten things that can be the roots of jealousy. At the end of the list, we will give you the opportunity to share any that you recognise in yourself.

1. Inferiority

Unresolved feelings of inferiority will often cause us to feel we may be abandoned, overlooked, passed by etc., and that others are getting a ‘better deal’ than I am. Comparison with others only increases that insecurity and fear, and feeds the fruit of jealousy.

2. Past hurts

Unresolved issues from the past – things that never really got dealt with properly – can create feelings of mistrust and fear – a good soil in which jealousy can grow, but in which trust and vulnerability struggle to survive.

3. Disappointments

Disappointments, in either relationships or material provision, can cause us to become jealous when we see others getting what we wanted and did not get.

4. Imaginary disappointments

We can sometimes so get our imagination running that we create whole scenarios that have nothing to do with reality – either in our own life or in those around us. We can imagine how much they have got, how much they have been blessed etc, without knowing anything of the difficulties and hardships that they too are going through. (Believe it or not, *everyone* has them!) Such thinking is again a rich soil from which the fruit of jealousy can grow.

What would you say, briefly, are the keys to dealing with each of the above four points?

5. **Lack of contentment**

Paul could write: “... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances” (Php 4 v11). A failure to be content with ...



- who I am
- how God has made me
- what gifts God has given me
- what circumstances I am in
- what resources have been released to me

... will always produce in us the temptation to look to others and compare ourselves with them. The more we look, the more we will see to be jealous about.

*Note that Paul **learned** to become content – it didn't come overnight!*

6. **A competitive spirit**

While God wants us to be the very best that we can be in him, there is a competitiveness in the human race that is both unhelpful and ungodly. Trying to outdo or outperform the other person is gross worldliness. It shows we have not understood the gospel of *grace*, and that we have failed to understand that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1Samuel 16 v7)

7. **A spirit of 'fairness'**

We live in a world that tells us that everything should be 'fair'. Therefore, if you get more than me, it is 'not fair'; if you are asked to do something and I am not, it is 'not fair'. Such a spirit carried in our hearts is a rich soil for the fruit of jealousy. This is the spirit behind the story told by Jesus in Matthew 20 v1-16.

God is not fair - but he is just, and he does what is always right! The language of 'fairness' is the language of humanism and of lack of trust in our Father God.

How do you find yourself responding to the highlight box?



8. **Pride**

Pride tries to tell us that we are better than we really are and that we deserve better than we get. A person of our gifting/significance/importance/holiness etc should have got what the other person got.

Who knows me well enough to honestly tell me whether I tend to come across as proud or not? ... Resolve to ask them before the next meeting.



9. **A hard heart**

A hard heart is a dangerous thing – and a subtle thing, for we do not always recognise when it is growing within us. This is why it is so important to be in relationship with others whom we trust to point it out when it starts to happen.

A hard heart causes us to focus on things that are wrong in people, and therefore to despise what God is doing for them, with resultant jealousy or envy.



Read:

Matthew 13 v1-9, 18-23

What insights are given here into how to keep the ‘soil’ of the heart soft?

What else helps us to keep a soft heart in us?

10. Lack of trust in God

Ultimately, the biggest root of jealousy must surely be a *lack of trust in God*. If we have understood who God truly is, if we have grasped what the Bible teaches he is really like – kind, compassionate, forgiving, abounding in love and faithfulness, generous, a perfect Father who provides for his children – then how can we doubt that he is not providing the very best for what we need at this stage in our lives and our walk with him?

When we experience or express jealousy, we are saying, “God, you don’t know what you are doing; you have given *them* something you ought to have given *me*; you got it wrong there!” Such a God would not be the God of the Bible, but a cruel and horrendous twisting of the truth.

We need to take time to meditate on those Scriptures that show us what God is really like, and ask him to help us open up our heart to these truths, rather than to the deception of the Enemy. Here are some you could start with:



Read:

Exodus 34 v5-7; Psalm 103 v8-17; Matthew 7 v7-11

Such a God will not leave us with just cause for jealousy!

Now look back over the ten points we have just covered. Can you share with the group which one(s) you recognise are the danger areas for you as potential roots of jealousy in your own life?



6. Some Consequences of Jealousy



If the roots are bad, it should not surprise us to find that the fruit will be bad also. Here are just *some* of the consequences or fruits that jealousy can bear:

1. *Within us*

- fear
- hatred
- striving
- loss of perspective
- loss of authority and anointing
- loss of peace, through chasing after things that are not yours
- isolation and pre-occupation
- depression
- addictions

2. *Around us*

- anger and arguments
- division and 'party spirit'
- damage to the Body of Christ
- suspicion



- striving to keep up with others
- poisoning of other people's hearts and attitudes
- debt
- theft

Which of these have you personally experienced or struggled with in times of jealousy? Are there any that you need prayer for at this time?



7. Excuses, Excuses ...

As we have seen many times in this *Enemies of the Soul* series, the way out of the grasp of our enemies is to recognise them for what they are – *sin!* Until we come to this point, God is unable to bring the release and transformation to us that he wants to do. Sadly, it seems to be part of fallen human nature to make excuses for our sin (see Genesis 3 v8-13).

*Excusing what the Bible describes as clearly godless behaviour, is only to deceive ourselves. (See 1Cor 6 v9-10). The way out is to **own up**, not **cover up**.*

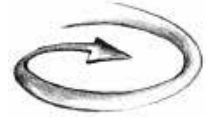


Which of the following excuses, if you are honest, can you recognise you have used in this area of jealousy? (There may also be others you can add.)

- It's only because I feel so strongly about this
- It's because I love them so much
- It's for the good of the others/the church/the business

- They just can't see how greedy/blessed/well off they are!
- If the situation were more fair, I could respond better
- Everyone is jealous sometimes!

Share honestly with one another in twos or threes what you feel is the excuse that you most readily fall in to and pray for God to break in and bring change.



8. How to Get Out



Hopefully, we have been seeing God's steps for coming out of this *Enemy of the Soul* throughout this unit. In this final section, we look to sum up some key points.

1. Confess every aspect of jealousy you have seen in yourself as *sin*. Stop excusing it and start taking the axe to the roots.
2. Review Section 5 on "The roots of jealousy". Get prayer for those issues that are a binding and recurring problem to you; keep bringing the axe to those roots in prayer until they are dead.
3. Pray for a *grateful attitude* to develop in your life. Take every opportunity to speak out that gratitude.
4. Pray 1Corinthians 13 v4-7 over your life at regular intervals.

5. Ask God to help you grow in your trust of him as the one who knows how to run your life – without making mistakes!
6. Focus on *the Cross* – Christ’s ultimate expression of love. He did not jealously hold on to what was his, or strive for what was not the Father’s purpose for his life, but rather emptied himself of everything for us. (See Philippians 2 v5-11)
7. Grasp that God has a fantastic purpose for *your* life – why waste time wanting his purpose for others?
8. Start praying positively for the person about whom you have been jealous and speak positively about them at every opportunity. Ask God to *bless them richly* – then rejoice when he does!
9. Keep taking all your fears and uncertainties to God in prayer, and leave them with him. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1Peter 5 v7)
10. Last – but certainly not least! – go back to where we started in this unit: ask God to build a *right jealousy* into your life about the things that *he* says we should be jealous for.

“It is fine to be zealous (jealous), provided the purpose is right.” (Galatians 4 v18)



Let’s end by praying together that God would make us more and more into zealous men and women of God – jealous for the things for which he is jealous, and ruthless in dealing with every Enemy of the Soul that arises!

Enemias of the Soul

Unit 9: Fear



1. Introduction

The fact that there are over 450 references to 'fear' or 'being afraid' in the Bible seems to indicate that this would not appear to be an insignificant problem to the human race! In fact, none of us goes through life without experiencing fear. Some of that fear is natural, God-given and might even save our lives. Other fears are unnatural, paralysing, even Satan-sent; as such, they are truly *Enemias of the Soul*. In this Unit we want, not only to identify what some of those fears might be, but to call out to God together and see his Spirit deliver us from them so that we can be free to serve Christ as he intended us to be.

2. Natural Fears



Let's begin by taking just a few minutes to think about some of those *natural, God-given* fears.

What sort of fears would you say are natural and God-given, and why may such fears be good for us?



3. Unnatural Fears



But let's turn now to think about some *unnatural* fears.

1. ***Natural to the World ... but to us?***

Here is a list (to which you can add) of some of the things that the World would say it is quite '*natural*' to fear; but should we agree with that viewpoint?

- death and dying
- sickness
- spiders (or whatever!)
- being in the dark/in the open/in a confined space/alone etc
- losing our job
- losing people (especially family and close friends)
- whether the children will ‘be OK’
- not finding a partner
- what people think of us or might want from us
- not having the right image
- being found out
- loss of reputation
- doing it wrong, or failure
- being rejected
- loneliness
- the future
- *you may like to add your own points:*

In what sense are all of these seen as ‘natural’ by the World? Should we see them in the same way? If not, why not? But why do we at times?



2. Some special fears to some Christians

Sadly, there are some fears that seem to be peculiar to Christians at times – although they should not be! Some of these include:

- sharing my faith with non-Christians
- getting a spiritual gift ‘wrong’
- not seeing a particular prayer answered

- not coming up to expectations (God's or the church's)
- our children not walking with the Lord
- losing my faith
- committing the 'unforgivable sin'
- you may like to add your own points:

Why do you think such fears can grip God's people at times?

3. Now stop and think ...

Before we go any further, look back over the fears we have been thinking about. If you are honest, which of these do you recognise in yourself?

Share whichever of these you feel able to with the group in two's or three's, and pray that God will bring some real deliverance to you during this Unit.



Remember: *what we hide or cover up, we keep in the darkness, and the devil retains power over it; what we expose, we bring out into the light, and God can then bring release.*



4. Why do we get Fearful?

So, *why* do these unnatural fears find a place in our hearts still? The following are four key reasons:

1. **Because we doubt God’s love**

Read:

1 John 4 v16(b)-18

How would you sum up what John says here about fear?

What do the following verses add to this matter of our trusting God’s love?

Romans 8 v31-32

Matthew 6 v25-34

The more we fill our hearts with God’s love, the less room there is for fear.



2. **Because we doubt God's sovereignty**

When we speak of God's sovereignty we mean that he is *absolutely in charge of everything!* Nothing slips by him unnoticed; nothing catches him on his 'blind side'; nothing takes him unawares. Even the bad things that come our way are shaped in his hands and used for our good and his purposes.

Read:

Romans 8 v28-39

What does this passage teach us about the sovereignty of God and how we can trust him, rather than be afraid?

*Can you think of people in the Bible who had genuine cause to be afraid, and yet who **chose** to trust God instead?*



| Who? | What? |
|------|-------|
| | |



The more we understand that our God is sovereign, the less we have to fear of anything coming our way without his permission.



3. **Because we doubt God’s faithfulness**

In the following passage, note how God calls Abraham *not* to be afraid, because of his faithful promises to him.

Read:
Genesis 15 v1-6

*How do Abraham and Sarah go on to get this **wrong** (Genesis 16 v1-2) before they get it **right** (21 v1-7)? What swung things round for them?*



A faithful God does not need to be met by a fearful people. Nor does he need to be ‘helped out’!

4. **Because we do not trust enough**

Read:
Matthew 8 v23-27

To what did Jesus attribute their fear in this situation?

Do you think the disciples’ fear was ‘reasonable’? If we do, what does that say about us?



*The answer to all these sources of fear comes down to this: **We must get to know God better!** The more we get to know **him**, the less we will fear **them**.*

What are some of the ways that help us to get to know God better?



5. Some Roots of Fear

While fear may have *broad causes*, such as those we have seen in the previous section, it can sometimes be rooted in *specific issues* from way back in our lives. Here are some of the more common ones:

- parents who were themselves fearful and modelled fear for us
- parents that we were afraid of
- an event that traumatised us when younger and that we have never faced up to
- a profound and unexpected change in life
- a loss in the past (of a job, a position, a loved one) that we did not come to terms with at the time
- threats from others
- a period of poverty, loneliness or isolation
- cumulative bad experiences over a lifetime that make it hard for us to trust
- involvement in occult practices



Let's stop for a moment and reflect: Are there any issues, from this list or from your own thinking, that the Holy Spirit is bringing to mind, for which you have not yet received prayer or found release? ... If there are, there is no reason why the group cannot pray for you right now.



6. Some Results of Fear

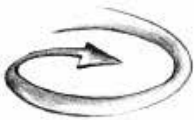
As we said at the beginning of this Unit, the sheer number of references in the Bible to 'fear' show us what a problem this can be for people; but it also is a fair indicator of how serious a weapon it is in the devil's armoury.

While there can be many consequences of fear, here are some of the more common, but not in any order of importance. While the list is long, we have left many out! You may simply wish to read straight through the list.

1. It leads us to act without faith and therefore to sin. (e.g., Romans 14 v23)
2. It paralyses faith. (e.g., Matthew 25 v24-27)
3. It risks removing us from the sphere of God's best and God's blessing. (e.g., Exodus 14 v10-14)
4. It makes us think that God will never want the best for little me. (e.g., Isaiah 41 v14)

5. It causes us to focus on punishment and the trouble or embarrassment that will come our way if things go wrong. (e.g., 1John 4 v18)
6. We open ourselves to the danger that Satan will bring on us what we fear. (e.g., Job 3 v25)
7. Our thoughts or imaginations can run riot (“But what if ... ?”) and our emotions become uncontrollable or our energy drained. (e.g., 1Samuel 18 v5-15)
8. It hinders my pursuit of God’s heart and God’s holiness. (e.g., 1Chronicles 13 v7-14)
9. It causes me to focus on things that simply do not matter at the end of the day (e.g., my image, my appearance, my dress). (e.g., Matthew 6 v25)
10. It can cause ill-health. (e.g., Daniel 8 v26-27)
[N.B. The word translated “appalled” can also mean ‘devastated’ or ‘terrified’. Here it was a positive ‘fear of God’ from his vision that caused him to be ill. More often, sickness comes from fear as a negative thing.]
11. It can cause me to take on responsibility for things that are not my responsibility. (e.g., 1Samuel 13 v7b-10)
12. It causes us to run from God. (e.g., Genesis 2 v10)
13. It can cause us to lie. (Genesis 12 v10-13; 18 v15)
14. It can keep us from our destiny in God. (Genesis 46 v2-3)

15. It can keep us as a 'secret believer'. (Judges 6 v25-27)
16. It can keep us from speaking out God's word boldly. (1Samuel 3 v15-18)
17. It can lead us to be swayed by pressure and opinion. (1Samuel 15 v24-26)
18. It can entice us to become involved in the occult in an attempt to know or manipulate the future. (1Samuel 28 v4-9)
19. It can lead us to become sorry for ourselves, introverted, and depressive. (1Kings 19 v1-4)
20. It can cause us to worry about what people will think or say. (e.g., Ezekiel 2 v 3-8)



Look back over this list. While you certainly will not have time to discuss them all, are you aware of any of them having a hold in your life at the moment? ... Are you aware of any of them being 'weak-spots' for you, even if they are not operative right now? ...

Take time to reflect for a few moments, and then pray for one another in two's or three's. Don't miss this opportunity by telling yourself that "people will think I am silly!"



7. Some Ways out of Fear

The phrase “Do not be afraid” is a very common phrase in the Bible (82 times in the NIV English translation, for example). If God is so keen on saying this to his people, it *must* be because it is possible to respond!

Here are some of the ways that the Bible says will help us to come out of fear or – better still! – help us to stop falling in to it in the first place. Read carefully through the list, adding any brief comments that you might wish to, and then be prepared to share with one another at the end of them. Don’t get stuck on any points for now!

1. Recognise that *fear doesn't change a thing!*
Train yourself to pour the energy that has gone into fear into more positive things instead, such as prayer, positive action, serving etc.

2. *Acknowledge the fears in your life* and see them as God sees them – that is, as *sin*. Remember: this is always the starting point for release and redemption. Don’t excuse them as *natural* or *understandable*. Instead, acknowledge that you have a lack of faith in that area, and ask God to help and change you.



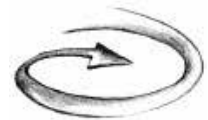
3. Remember that God is **always** with us! Hebrews 13 v5 says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Speak this truth to yourself often, and pray it out into specific situations.
4. Remember that God knows absolutely everything about your life. Your times are in his hands (Psalm 31 v15) – even the very hairs of your head are numbered! (Matthew 10 v30)
5. Seek to make **God** increasingly the focus of your life. The more we focus on him and magnify him, the smaller other things become by comparison. Focusing on our fears only magnifies them.
6. Meditate regularly on Scriptures that speak of God’s complete protection and provision against fear. (e.g., Joshua 1 v6-9; Psalm 23 v1-6; Psalm 27 v1-6; Psalm 46 v1-11; Psalm 91 v1-16; Isaiah 41 v10-14; Isaiah 43 v1-4; John 14 v27)

The most powerful Scriptures for doing this with are those that God has used to speak to us personally in some way. Add any of your own in the margin alongside.
7. Speak Scripture into specific situations of life as they arise. For example, if going into a difficult or dangerous situation, speak out and pray out the truth of Joshua 1 v9; if fearful of death, speak out John 14 v1-3 etc.

8. Ask God to help you **change your thinking patterns**. Romans 12 v2 says: “ ... be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Catch hold of your thoughts when they start running wild and bring them to God for his Spirit to change them. Don’t allow yourself to wander down the paths of imagination or old ways of thinking.
9. Learn to see with your **heart** not with your **eyes**. If we look only with our eyes as God’s children, we will always find something to be afraid of! (e.g., Numbers 13 v26-30)
10. If you are unable to conquer your fear by things like repentance, prayer, and the power of the Scriptures, then you may well need others to pray with you for *deliverance from a stronghold of the enemy*. Spiritual strongholds grow when habitual thinking and/or actions increasingly dominate our life to the point where they control us rather than us controlling them. As a rough rule of thumb, you can “crucify” flesh, but not spirit. If you cannot “crucify” or get rid of your fear (or whatever) by ‘spiritual disciplines’, then it may well be a stronghold for which you need prayer and deliverance to see it broken.

Do any of you have a testimony of how any of the above points have helped you in the past?

Do any of you need help now by having the group pray for you now?





8. The Best Fear of All

Having said all of this, there *is* a fear that is well worth having! In fact, a fear that will ensure that other fears are kept at bay. This fear is what the Bible describes as *the fear of God*.

There are two extremes to be avoided in thinking about the *fear of God*.

The first is to see it in such a way that we become afraid of God in the way that a child might be afraid of a drunken or abusive father. That is clearly not the sort of Father that God is, nor the fear he wants us to have of him!

The second is to water *fear* down to mean little more than an old-fashioned way of talking about respect. God certainly wants our respect – but far more than that!

So, what *does* the Bible mean by *the fear of God*?

1. What is the Fear of God?

Let's try to answer this together by looking at just some of the Bible verses that speak of the fear of God. (There are almost 150 references to it in all!)

Write down what aspects come out in each of the following passages drawn from across the Bible – in terms of *how* the fear of God is demonstrated or responded to, or *what* the fear of God is like or produces:

Exodus 18 v17-21

Leviticus 19 v14

Deuteronomy 10 v12-13

Joshua 4 v20-24

2Samuel 23 v1-4

2Chronicles 17 v10

2Chronicles 26 v3-5

Job 31 v13-23

Psalms 2 v10-12

Psalms 118 v4

Isaiah 8 v12-15

Isaiah 11 v1-5

Jeremiah 5 v20-25

Amos 3 v8

Malachi 3 v5



Mark 5 v30-33

Luke 12 v2-5

Acts 9 v31

2Corinthians 5 v9-11

Revelation 14 v6-7



The passages you have looked at all bring out different aspects of *the fear of God*; but perhaps we might summarise it all like this:

*The Fear of God is to do with recognising **who** God is, **what** he is like, and **how** he could treat us – if he wished to! When we have truly encountered God, we will be so in awe, so staggered, so overwhelmed, that we will just not want to offend him and will therefore live with him accordingly – with him and with others. But we will also have grasped that this fear is amazingly wrapped in love! For those who do not respond appropriately, however, there is only “a fearful expectation of judgement.” (Hebrews 10 v27)*

2. What does the Fear of God do?

The fear of God is not just some static concept; it actually has real value and real outcomes! Here are just some of the things that the Bible says the fear of God brings to us:

1. It helps us to hate evil. e.g., Proverbs 8 v13
2. It keeps us from sinning. e.g., Exodus 20 v20
3. It keeps us from self-deceit.
e.g., Psalm 36 v1-2
4. It brings God's wisdom into our lives.
e.g., Proverbs 9 v10
5. It is the start of all true knowledge.
e.g., Proverbs 1 v7
6. It brings us God's insights and secrets.
e.g., Psalm 25 v12-14
7. It brings God's protection and provision.
e.g., Psalm 33 v16-19; 34 v7-11
8. It brings us into God's compassion and love. e.g., Psalm 103 v13-18
9. It replaces in a healthy way all other fears.
e.g., Luke 12 v4-5
10. It causes us to give first place to God alone.
e.g., Genesis 22 v9-12

How do you find yourself responding to this concept of 'the fear of God'?





9. Conclusion

God does not want his children ruled by fear! The Bible tells us that his “perfect love drives out fear”. The World may say that it is ‘natural’ or ‘understandable’ to have fears at times; but Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14 v27) It is as we grow in grasping his peace in our hearts that our fears are dealt with – whatever they might be.

*With Jesus, **occasions of fear** can become **opportunities for faith**. He is the one who makes the difference.*



Let's end by praying for one another, that we would not be a fearful people but a people who look to him to transform every fear into faith.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 10: Laziness

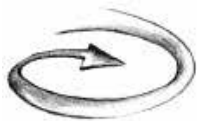


1. Introduction

“Laziness!? You must be joking! Others might have time to be lazy; but me? If only you could see how busy my life was! Chance to be lazy would be a fine thing!”

Our guess is that most of us begin this unit with those sort of thoughts! Laziness exists – but only in other people. And certainly not in me!

Which is all rather strange. For the Bible has an amazing amount to say about laziness (or idleness) – which is rather surprising if it is an issue that is relevant to so few of us! Perhaps what lies at the heart of this is that, first, we excuse much laziness in ourselves (though not in others!); and second, that we fail to see laziness with the seriousness that the Bible sees it – as straightforward *sin*.



Let's stop and pray at this point that we would be really honest before God as we look at this issue. Let's ask him to 'disarm us' of our excuses and show us the true nature of our heart. Let's pray with the Psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139 v23-24)



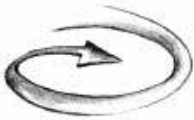
2. Examples of Laziness

All of us have our different expressions of laziness (some more obvious than others!) But here are some of the more common ones:

- hiding behind the newspaper when we come home from work rather than helping our spouse
- not getting around to particular household chores or putting off 'jobs' around the house
- not taking care of my appearance/personal hygiene
- lying in bed too long
- being late (for work, church meetings etc)
- watching too much TV
- not getting round to praying or reading the Bible
- skipping meetings
- not getting round to doing things I have meant to do or been asked to do (on time!)
- not turning up to things I have committed myself to
- not replying to letters or phone calls
- 'liking my comfort' ...

What others could you add?





Now be honest: which of these is the area of laziness that you personally have to watch?

What we need to face up to is this startling truth:

Laziness and following Jesus are simply incompatible.

Remember: Jesus came as *The Servant* (Philippians 2 v6-7). He delighted to serve, serving even to his own cost and at the end of long and tiring days.



Read:

Matthew 12 v15-21

Matthew 14 v13-14

What stands out about Jesus' Servant-Heart in these two passages?

Jesus said that servanthood was not just for him; his followers were to be characterised by *servanthood for the benefit of others* too.



Read:

Matthew 20 v20-28

Matthew 23 v1-12

What characterised the people in these two passages?

1. _____

2. _____

What Kingdom principles are taught in these two passages?

1. _____

2. _____

*If you have been **called as a son**, you have also been **appointed as a servant** (e.g., Acts 26 v15-16). Having served, our attitude should not be, “Give me a break!” but rather, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.” (Luke 17 v10)*

Where servanthood is not our heart, attitude or action, we are highly likely to fall into the sin of laziness. At the heart of this Unit lies a desire, not simply to stop us being lazy, but to see us turned into better servants. (Equally, busy-ness, in itself, is no guarantee of servanthood. I can be busy – but busy for my own benefit!)

Is my heart to be a servant? Am I ready to pay the price – especially when it cuts across my comfort? Will I be busy – for others, and not just myself?

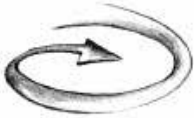
Of course, part of the trouble is that we are just so good at making excuses ...



3. Excuses for Laziness

- I'm just so busy I can't get round to it
- I get so tired these days/ I haven't been well recently/ It's my hormones!
- It's not the right moment/ convenient right now
- I'm waiting for the right circumstances
- The Lord hasn't spoken to me about it yet

- I feel I need to pray about it more
- Thursdays are a bad night!
- But I do plenty anyway!
- No one else does it; why should I?
- "There is a lion outside!"
(See Proverbs 22 v13!)



Honesty time! What would you see as the excuse (not necessarily from this list) that you fall back on most readily?

As we have seen throughout this course, stopping excusing ourselves and starting to face up to our sin is always the key that opens the door to freedom.

Am I prepared to stop excusing my laziness and to face up to it for what it is – sin?



4. Why Laziness is so Wrong

1. It is a sin against God

The Bible tells us that God is a God who 'works'. It is part of his very nature to be a 'worker'.

From the following examples, note some of the different areas in which God has shown himself to be at work:

Genesis 2 v1-3

John 5 v16-17

Romans 8 v28

Galatians 2 v8

Colossians 1 v16-17



From all of this, it is obvious that God did not stop working when creation was completed. His work continues to this very day.

We are made in the image of God, and as such we are called to reflect called his character and nature – including the aspect of work. Note how work is done, or seen, in the following passages:

Genesis 2 v15

2Chronicles 31 v20-21

Ecclesiastes 2 v24-25

Ephesians 2 v10

2Timothy 2 v15



Whenever we fail to reflect the heart and character of the Father, we sin. Laziness is not a characteristic of God; so how can it be a characteristic of us? We were designed, not to be lazy, but to work. Laziness is, quite simply, a sin against the God who made us

Two points to note before we move on:

1. Being ‘unemployed’ is not a sin!

For particular reasons, you may not be in gainful employment at the moment (although God is well

able to provide you with a job at the right time!) Being unemployed is not a sin! But take care not to fall into laziness at this time (an easy and well-known potential feature of unemployment). Set your heart on being diligent – whether in seeking a job or serving the church or the neighbourhood in some voluntary way.

2. Having a day off is not a sin!

Even God ‘rested’ on the seventh day after the work of creation! This was not because he was ‘tired’ from his efforts (how could *God* get tired!); but because he was establishing a principle of *rest* for us to follow.



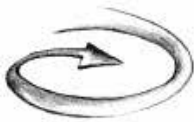
Read:

Genesis 2 v2-3

Exodus 20 v8-11

Hebrews 4 v1-11

Having time to rest is not a sin! Indeed, for those of us who are ‘workaholics’, work is the sin – not resting!



Do I find it hard to take proper rest – physical and spiritual – in a purposeful way? If so, this is as big a sin as laziness!

2. It is a sin against ourselves

Laziness is not only a sin against God, it is a sin against ourselves. As we saw in the section above, work (purposeful activity, not frantic action!) is an aspect of life that God has given to us. It is part of how we can find fulfilment in life, and part of how God works out his purposes and destiny for us. If we do not respond to this, then, just like any other aspect of life God has designed for us, we are missing out.

Read:

Proverbs 19 v24

Proverbs 10 v4



How do these two proverbs show that laziness has an affect on us ourselves?

How else can laziness affect us personally in everyday life?

3. It is a sin against others

There is a famous saying, “No man is an island.” In other words, whatever we do (or do not do) affects other people. Laziness is no different. When we are lazy it does three things.

1. It makes us unreliable

God designed us all to be inter-dependent. But if we are lazy, then no one can depend on us. Our laziness robs other people of what we could be giving to them, and closes the door to other opportunities.

Read:

Matthew 21 v28-32

How did the second son demonstrate his unreliability?



Laziness (or however else we might dress it up!) can lead us to sin against others by failing to do for them what we should be doing. The servant nature of our faith does not let us withhold from others through our laziness.

2. It robs the Body of Christ

Read:

1Corinthians 12 v12-26

How is laziness incompatible with Paul’s understanding of how the Body functions?



Can you think of practical examples of how laziness can rob the Body of Christ?

3. It is an irritation!

Proverbs 10 v26 is a rather graphic picture of just how irritating a lazy person can be – and one we can no doubt all identify with!



Am I aware of any areas where my laziness has been affecting others – at home, or work, or in the Body of Christ? What action am I going to take to change things?



5. Some Consequences of Laziness

Any sin has consequences; and the sin of laziness is no exception – though by its nature it tries to convince us otherwise! If we can only see the potential seriousness of this matter, then it will help us to give serious attention to it, rather than laughing it off as a little character weakness or as ‘nothing to do with my faith’.

1. Practical consequences

Note down, from the following passages (all drawn from what we call *The Wisdom Literature* of the Bible), some of the *practical* or *material* consequences of

laziness.

Proverbs 19 v15

Proverbs 20 v4

Proverbs 24 v30-34

Ecclesiastes 10 v18

What might some modern equivalents of these things be?



The condition of my room/home/kitchen/garden/car, the amount of time I lie around in bed, the student “essay crisis”, etc, may be far more of an indicator of what I am really like than I would like to acknowledge!

If I am lazy with what God has entrusted to me practically, how can I expect him to entrust spiritual treasures to me? (See Luke 16 v10-12)

2. **Spiritual consequences**

The practical consequences of laziness may be serious; but the spiritual consequences of laziness can be devastating! The old saying, “The devil finds work for idle hands” is undoubtedly true!

Here are just some of the spiritual consequences of laziness that the Bible describes:

1. **Spiritual sleep**

All of us know what an enemy (as well as a friend!) sleep can be! We may be ready to sacrifice all sorts of other things, but rarely our sleep. So often, sleep is at the expense of things like prayer and Bible

reading, getting to meetings, arriving at work on time – rarely things like eating or going out with friends. (It’s funny how we can make time for what fires us or what we want to do!)

But there is a sleep that is even more dangerous – though the love of natural sleep can frequently be a doorway into it – and that is *spiritual sleep*.

Spiritual sleep arises, almost imperceptibly, when we are too lazy to give ourselves to spiritual disciplines, and when our relationship with God and sensitivity to his Spirit become dulled as a result. Such dullness makes us always makes us very vulnerable.



Read:

Revelation 3 v1-3

Revelation 3 v14-22

What challenge do these two passages bring to us?

See also:

Isaiah 56 v10

Jonah 1 v4-6

Matthew 13 v24-25

Mark 14v32-38

2. Living in unreality

In Unit 3 (“Friendship with the World”) we saw how it is possible to create “Fantasy Lands” where we can carry out our worldliness in secret. (You may want to look back to Section 8 of that Unit to refresh your memory.)

Laziness can often be a doorway to such “Fantasy Lands”. By giving ourselves to idle thinking and failing to take a grip on ourselves and our circumstances, we can drift into unreality, with *unreal hopes for ourselves* and *unreal expectations of others*. God does not want us to live in the futility of

our old thinking (Ephesians 4 v17) but in the power of renewed and wholesome thinking (2 Peter 3 v1).

Has laziness caused me to drift back into living in unreality? To settle back in the futility of my old ways of thinking rather than pursue the wholesome thinking that God desires from me? Is there anything I need to share with the group at this time so that they can pray for me?



3. Sexual sin

Read:

2 Samuel 11 v1-27

What phrase in v1 is the sign that ‘the rot is setting in’ for David?



What (separate) little words in v2-4 show the downward spiral that David entered?

David was a godly man, in fact a man described as “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13 v14). But he made the mistake of thinking that a time had come when he could ‘take things easy’. Having established himself as king and fought many battles against his enemies, he thought that *the* battle was over. *It never is!* His yielding to the life of ease and comfort produced within him a lazy attitude that was a fertile field in which the devil could offer him the bait – bait which he took.

The lazy person’s mind will always be a fertile field for the devil and his temptations – especially in the area of sexual fantasy and sin.

Has laziness caused me to begin to slip in this area? If so, find someone to share it with quickly.



4. A ‘gossip’ mentality

Read:

1 Timothy 5 v13



Idleness had led people with time on their hands to gossip and busybody. When we are not properly busy with our own affairs, it is tremendously easy to want to sort out the affairs of others.



Stop and think for a moment: have I been gossiping and busybodying? Are there things that I need to repent of? Is this a weak spot in my life that I need to watch?

5. Conclusion

Laziness has clear spiritual consequences then, and the Bible is full of warnings to us to take care in this area. But it also includes things that can help us to stay awake spiritually. In Ephesians 5 v8-10, for example, Paul calls the Ephesian Christians to ‘stay awake’ and gives them some keys how to do it.

What are some of the keys to ‘staying awake’ that Paul gives in Ephesians 5 v8-10?



6. Some Steps out of Laziness

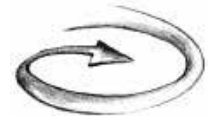


The previous passage has shown us that God has made provision for us to keep out of laziness. But here, to conclude this Unit, are ten practical steps that may help us.

1. **Be honest**

As we have seen often in this course, the way out of anything is to acknowledge it for what it is – *sin*! We will never change in this area of laziness until we begin to see it, not as our little weakness, nor as our right, but as *sin* before the Living God who is never lazy.

Are there issues and areas of laziness that I need to own up to, rather than excuse? If so, why not confess them right now – especially if you have not shared them so far?



2. **Be accountable**

As we have also seen before, accountability is a key factor in the Kingdom of God. Committing myself to share with another my areas of weakness, and then both my successes and failures in those areas in an ongoing way, is a powerful tool to overcoming sin and changing.

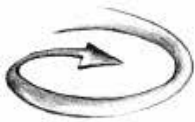


Have I shared honestly, openly, and in an ongoing way, the areas of my life that are subject to laziness? Am I keeping accountable in quite specific ways for change in those areas?

3. Develop self-discipline

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1 v7)

God wants to give us a spirit of self-discipline; the key question is: do *we* want to give ourselves to it? For most of us, self-discipline does not come overnight, nor easily. But little of worth in life is achieved without it (think of footballers or athletes).



Are there areas in my life where I need to be imposing self-discipline to see victory? Am I drawing my pastor in to these issues to help me?

4. Develop a ‘servant’ mentality

Servanthood lies at the heart of the Kingdom. Jesus came as the Servant; he calls us to be servants too. If we can grasp that God wants this servant mentality to permeate everything that we are and do, then we will begin to see that there is little room for laziness.



How much of my life at this time truly reflects that I am a servant? How do I respond when I am asked to serve, or when an opportunity for serving arises – especially at an inconvenient moment?

5. Develop an ‘investment’ mentality

The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25 v14-30) shows us that God expects us to *invest* what is entrusted to us.

Matthew 25 v24-25 To what does the servant attribute his lack of activity?

Matthew 25 v26 What does the master see was the underlying cause however?



Am I looking to develop an ‘investment mentality’ towards the talents, gifts, and abilities that God has given me? Or do I excuse my laziness and lack of action?

6. Seize the opportunity

Read:

Ephesians 5 v15-16

We are to “make the most of every opportunity”. This is not just a verse about evangelism – but about life! God does not want us to let things drift through our fingers; to spend hours wondering whether we might or whether we should. Such dithering is a fertile field for laziness! We need to develop an attitude that “goes for it”! Do it anyway!



Am I fearful of ‘seizing the moment’? Do I need to pray for boldness to step out with God?



7. Be devoted to your responsibilities

Some responsibilities we choose; some we are entrusted with; some are simply dumped on us! But if we can grasp that God is always God, and that nothing slips by him unnoticed or without his permission, then we will see that the responsibilities that come our way are those that *he* has given to us. Whether we have chosen them or not, whether they are practical or spiritual, we should work at them with all our heart. Such an attitude ‘digs out’ the sin

of laziness from our lives and prepares us for other responsibilities.



Read:

Colossians 3 v22-24

*Are there responsibilities in your life at this time that you need to grasp hold of again with new resolve, seeing them as things that **God** has sent your way? Stand with one another in prayer in these areas.*

8. Warn one another!

One of the greatest services we can render to one another is to help one another to see when things are creeping up on us (especially in our 'blind-spots'). This is not something we need to leave to the leaders all the time! The Bible expects us all to play our part; and done with sensitivity and out of relationship, such warnings can be life-changing and even life-saving. How much better to spend our time together warning and encouraging one another, rather than moaning!



Read:

*1 Thessalonians 5 v14
Ecclesiastes 4 v13*

9. Set a good example

While Pharisaism – the deliberate outward show of piety for others to notice – is abhorrent to God, there is nevertheless a real place for setting a godly example for others to follow, especially young or new Christians. Demonstrating diligence in how *we* do things can be a real help and example to others that they in turn can follow.



Read:

*2 Thessalonians 3 v6-13
Hebrews 6 v11-12*

10. Live in the light of Jesus' Return

Jesus taught, clearly and often, that he would return to this world to complete the final stage of God's plan of salvation at "the end of the age". When that will be, no one knows (Matthew 24 v36); but we are told to be *constantly ready* for it, and are warned of the dangers of not being so. Laziness is clearly incompatible with such a calling on us.

Read:

Matthew 24 v36-44

Matthew 25 v1-13

Am I personally living in the light of Jesus' return? Whether serving or relaxing, at work or at home, am I always ready?



7. Conclusion

These are exciting days in which we are living, as we see tokens of the coming revival among us. They are days for us to hear again the call of Joshua:

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... " (Joshua 24 v14-15)

There is no room for laziness if we are truly going to "serve the Lord". Rather, these are days for self-discipline, diligence, ordered lives, and spending ourselves for him. Those who give themselves to such things will find they are not disappointed!

Enemies of the Soul

Review of Units 6-10



Introduction

Our memories are amazing machines: they seem to have the ability to remember all sorts of irrelevant trivia and events, and to forget the things that are important! Even more so, they can forget the things that have challenged us and require change of us. That's why, every five units through *Enemies of the Soul*, we are providing an opportunity to stop and remind ourselves briefly of the things that God has been saying to us, and to check with one another on progress we are making.

Of course, going over the same ground is not always our favourite pastime – think of how we groan when TV shows yet another 'repeat'! If that's how you find yourself approaching this review, we would ask you to check your thinking right now, or you may miss something that God might want to do for you.

While this Review Unit is designed to be brief, it is nonetheless designed to be thorough. Your openness and your honesty will determine its value!

Stop and pray together that God would help us to be honest and open as we share together, and that he would bring to mind anything that we need to share with one another.



Unit 6 - Greed

1. *We defined greed as an excessive or uncontrolled desire to have, or consume, more.*

But more what? What were some of the different aspects of greed that we looked at, or that your group added?

2. *What did we see were some of the ways that greed can disguise itself?*

3. *Who and what lies behind greed? What does this tell us about how we should regard it?*

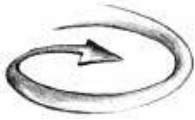
4. *We saw that greed can be an expression of many other sins -*

- idolatry
- covetousness
- materialism
- egalitarianism
- lack of self-control



- lack of contentment
- lack of trust, and dissatisfaction
- selfishness
- foolishness
- impropriety

Which of these are still the main danger areas for you?



If you are studying this in a group, you could perhaps break down into two's, share the area of struggle (or victory!) and pray for one another.

5. *We saw some of God's keys for dealing with greed:*

- repentance
- seeking first the Kingdom
- stewardship
- having a light touch
- giving
- abstinence and fasting
- trust in God



Share with one another which of these areas you still find to be the most challenging.



Unit 7 - Gossip

1. *In our introduction to this Unit, we noted the following about gossip:*

“All of us, at some time or other, have listened to it, spread it, been a victim of it. In fact, there will have been times when we will even have enjoyed it.”

Think: Have I fallen into any of these again recently?



2. *We looked at a number of motives behind gossip - things like: -*

unforgiveness or bitterness, jealousy, malice, or spitefulness, prejudice, fear, wanting to look good yourself, pride, lack of self-control, lack of love, a critical spirit.

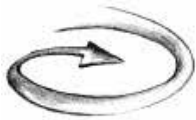
Which of these did you recognise was the ‘danger area’ for you? Have you seen signs of change in that area?

3. *What did we mean by “God’s right to reveal” and “Our responsibility to cover”?*



4. *What are some of the ways that we can recognise that gossip is 'going on'?*

5. *We said that one of the best ways to combat gossip was to use the tongue in a positive way. What were some of the positive uses of the tongue that we looked at?*



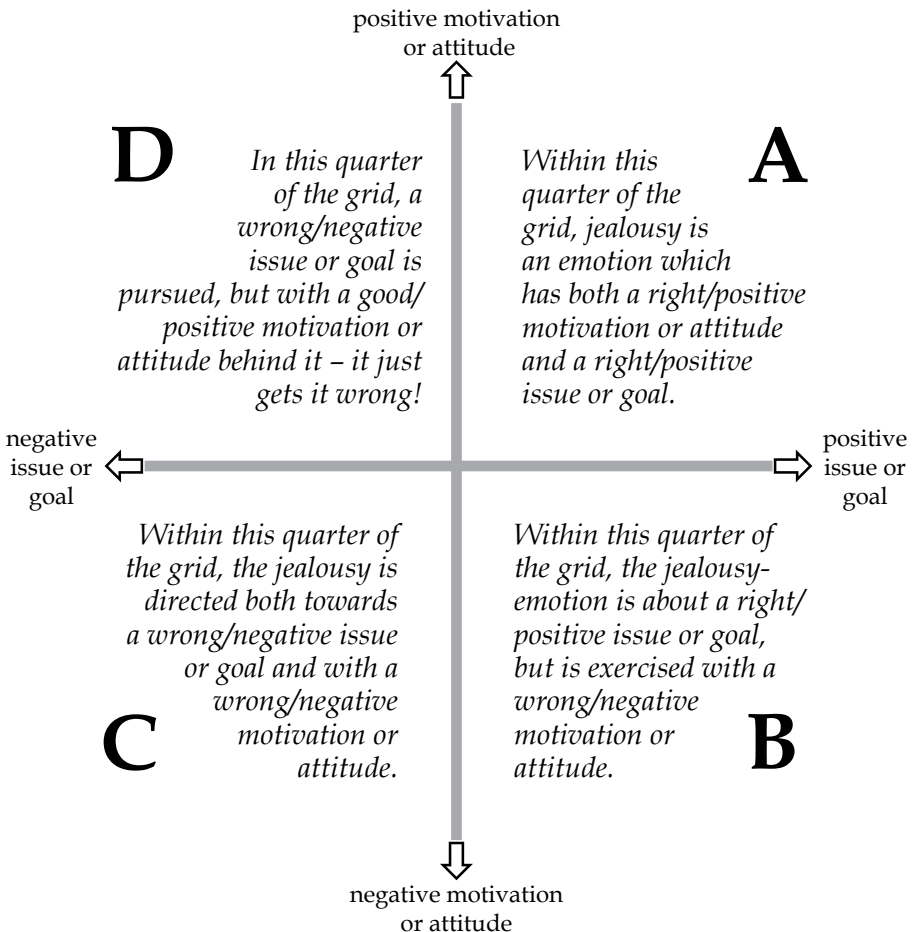
How are you doing in each of these areas?

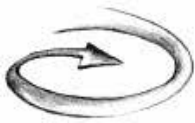


Unit 8 - Jealousy

- Remember that we said that jealousy is an emotion that can be both right and wrong. We used the jealousy axis to put this across.

Can you think, briefly, of examples of each type of jealousy, either from the Bible or from life today?





When jealousy arises in you, in which quarter does it still tend to come? Pray for God to help you in that area.

2. *Look again at these signs of jealousy:*

- saying “It’s not fair!
- annoyance at the success of others
- irritation when others are spoken well of
- speaking unkind words about others
- explaining away some success, blessing or promotion someone else has received
- trying to shape the outcome of something in order to keep the other person ‘down’
- seeking to discredit another in some way
- spoiling something belonging to someone else
- over-attention to improving our appearance or home
- avoiding someone who has been blessed
- dissatisfaction with something God has blessed you with when you see what he has blessed them with

Which of these is still the big area of challenge for you?

Try to share honestly with one another and pray in two’s or three’s for one another.

3. *What ways have you discovered for dealing with and getting out of the snare of jealousy?*



Unit 9 - Fear

1. *We said that some fears are natural and God-given. What sort of things did we mean?*

2. *What sort of fears did we say are often seen as 'natural' from the world's point of view, but should not be seen so by us?*

Are you aware of any such fears still hanging on in your own life?



3. *We saw four reasons for why we can sometimes get fearful:*

- because we doubt God's love
- because we doubt God's sovereignty
- because we doubt God's faithfulness
- because we do not trust enough

Which of these do you still recognise within yourself? How do you think you could you make progress in that area?

4. *What did we see was the best 'fear' of all?*

*What did we say this meant, and how should it help us
in our life?*



Unit 10 - Laziness

1. Which particular areas of laziness did you identify in yourself when we looked at this issue? Are there practical steps that you need to take to bring about change in these areas? Why not keep accountable to someone else in the group over this.

2. What relevance does seeing Jesus as 'The Servant' have to this issue of laziness?



3. Why is laziness a sin -
against God

•
against ourselves

•
against others



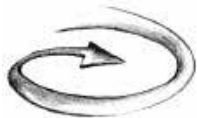
Review of Units 1-10

As we come to the end of this Review Unit, let's pause and reflect on what we have covered in this course so far.

At the end of Unit 1, you filled in a chart to indicate how you felt you were doing in each of the areas we were to cover. Complete this chart again now, as a measure of the progress you are making.

Where have you made real steps forward? Where is there still real need for change?

Pray for one another that you would continue to make progress in these areas of practical discipleship.



Enemies of the Soul

Unit 11: Pleasing Others



1. Introduction

Why on earth have a Unit called '*Pleasing others*' in the *Enemies of the Soul* series? Aren't we supposed to please others? Didn't Jesus please his Father? Well, of course, the answer to both questions is 'Yes!' which highlights to us immediately an issue we need to get clear before we can go any further. And that is, that there are two quite different senses in which we can use the phrase 'pleasing others' – one good or positive, and one bad or negative.

So, try to define what we mean by each sense of the phrase 'pleasing others':

Positive

Negative

In this unit, it is the *bad* or *negative* sense that we are considering, as this is truly an *Enemy of the Soul*.



We may define this *bad or negative sense* in the following way:

Pleasing others is the sin of doing something – or not doing something! – in order to win the recognition, approval or favour of another, or to avoid their disapproval, criticism or persecution. It is seeking to be popular at any price.

Before we go any further, reflect quietly on whether you can recognise any of this within yourself at times. Ask God to open up your eyes to see any weakness in this area.



2. Popular at Any Price?



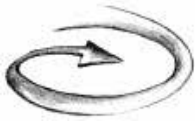
“Popular *at any price.*” That phrase in our highlight box sums up the theme at the heart of this Unit, the *Enemy* that we want to root out.

1. **A culture of ‘popularity’**

We live in a culture where being popular is often the be-all and end-all of life, and where not being popular is almost the worst thing that could happen to you.

The price that people are willing to pay for such popularity can be enormous –

- saying the right things (whether they are believed or not)
- being seen in the right places
- knowing the right people (and letting others know you know!)
- wearing the right type or brand of clothes
- not wanting to be appear to be ‘different’ from the crowd
- making our work the most important thing in life so that we can be noticed and ‘get on’



What other things could you add?

But these sort of attitudes should not characterise those who belong to the Kingdom, as Jesus himself demonstrated.

2. Jesus – popular, yet not popular!

There is no doubt that, at one level, Jesus was an exceedingly popular person – especially among the ordinary people of his day. Just look at the following examples, one from each gospel, and note how they reveal his popularity.



Read:

Matthew 9 v10-13

Mark 12 v37(b)

Luke 8 v19

John 12 v12-13

Jesus was popular with the ordinary people because he made relationship with God accessible in a way that the religious leaders did not.

Yet there is another side to the coin. Let’s look now at some examples where Jesus refused to soften or compromise his message, even if it cost him his popularity.

How do the following passages show Jesus' complete disregard for popularity or pleasing people when it 'came to the crunch'?

Matthew 23 v13–17,23–28,33

Mark 15 v1–5

Luke 13 v14–17

John 6 v60–69



Jesus would never compromise his message for the sake of popularity, no matter what the cost might be.

3. **What about us?**

But not only did Jesus completely disregard what people thought or did not think about *him* or what *he* said; he challenged *his followers* to adopt the same sort of attitude too.

Consider the following stark statement, drawn from Luke's record of the Sermon on the Mount where, besides the more familiar phrase "Blessed are you ..." recorded by Matthew, Luke also adds some "woes". Each 'woe' is a point-by-point counterpart to the 'blessed' in the first part of the sermon.

Read:

Luke 6 v26

Now look back to v22, where the just as striking "blessed" can be found!

What do you think that Jesus meant by this?

How do you find yourself responding to this teaching of Jesus, and to the comment in the highlight box above?





3. Some Reasons Behind Man-Pleasing

Pleasing others and seeking to be ‘popular’ (in this negative sense that we have been looking at) may happen for either *positive* or *negative* reasons.

Consider the following examples and add some of your own to the list:



| Positive | Negative |
|---|---|
| to curry favour with someone to ‘win points’ to gain advantage to have people indebted to us | not to offend fear of what they may think fear of being laughed at fear of rejection |

From this, we should be able to see that the reasons behind pleasing others can be quite wide and varied.

1. **Examples of man-pleasing in the Bible**

The following examples of trying to ‘please others’ also reveal a wide range of reasons behind them.

Read each passage and note what the person concerned was trying to achieve through doing it.

2 Samuel 15 v1-6

John 19 v4-16

Acts 12 v1-4

Colossians 3 v22-24

Can you think of other examples in the Bible?

It is important to note that every example of man-pleasing in the Bible is either spoken against, or ends up with disastrous consequences. Such an attitude is clearly not characteristic of the Kingdom of God.

2. **Excuses for man-pleasing**

Of course, it is sometimes all too easy to make excuses for *why* we are trying to please others. Our reasons can even be 'spiritual' at times!

Look at the following incident where even Peter, one of the key leaders of the early church, fell into the trap of pleasing others – no doubt for 'good reasons' – and had to be pulled up short by his fellow apostle Paul for doing so.

Read:

Galatians 2 v11-14

Why do you think Peter took the action he did?



Why do you think Paul stood up to him so firmly on this matter?

What other reasons can sometimes be given to excuse ‘man-pleasing’?

3. Exhortations about man-pleasing

The Bible is full of exhortations to us not to fall into this trap of ‘pleasing others’. Let’s stay with Paul a little longer and look at some of the exhortations he gave and the example he set personally in this matter.

Read:

Galatians 1 v10

1 Thessalonians 2 v1-6



Now let’s look at a longer passage. As you read it, contrast the approach adopted by the religious leaders before the Roman Governor with that of Paul. Note your observations in the box below.

Read: *Acts 24 v1-27*



| Religious Leaders | Paul |
|-------------------|------|
| | |



4. Roots of Pleasing Others

The roots that lie behind this sin of wanting to please others can often be complex. But here are just some of the key ones.

As we go through them, ask God to speak to you about any that are a root in your own life.

1. ***Insecurity about who we are in Christ***

If we have truly grasped who we are in Christ, then why should it matter what anyone else thinks about us? If we have *his* approval, why is it important to have the approval of others?

Yet, if we are honest, it often matters a lot to us.

Why do you think that might be?

We must ensure that we have a good grasp of the Bible's teaching that underlines who we are in Christ and God's complete acceptance of us – whatever we may have been in the past, whatever we look like, whatever we wear, whatever we get right or wrong, whatever others might think of us. Remember,



God's opinion of us is worth ten thousand other opinions!



What do the following passages tell us about God’s opinion of us and our security in Christ? How should these affect the way we live?

2 Corinthians 5 v17

Ephesians 1 v3–6

1 Corinthians 1 v26–31

Romans 8 v31–32

2. Failure to settle the issue

Sometimes we fall into the trap of pleasing others because we have simply not settled the issue of who is Lord of our life. So, when pressures come along, or temptations arise not to say or do the right thing, we find ourselves blown with the wind and going along with the crowd.

Peter learned by hard experience the pain of not settling the issue ahead of time. (See Mark 14 v66 –72) But he changed! In the following passage, he encourages us not to be fearful of anything and shows that honouring ‘Christ as Lord’ is the key that settles every issue.



Read:

1 Peter 3 v13–17

What struck you as the key phrase in that passage?

3. Avoiding the cross

Pleasing others becomes a very natural response when we adopt a lifestyle of always ‘avoiding the cross’ – the very opposite of what Jesus said we should do.



Read:

Luke 9 v18–26

What three things does Jesus say are key aspects of following him in verse 23, and what might that mean for us today?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____



What do you make of Jesus' stark words in v24–26?

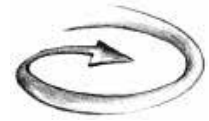
When we are not ready to 'die' to ...

- what people might say or think about us
- what people threaten to do to us
- being the odd one out in our viewpoint or standpoint
- the consequences of disagreeing, etc

... then we will always be in danger of falling into being a 'man-pleaser'.

*What are the situations where **you** find it easier to avoid the cross than to embrace it, to fudge the issue rather than to 'die'?*

When we are tempted to avoid the cross, remember this:



1. Let people think what they want!

Jesus did! He cared little about people's viewpoint (eg, John 6 v41–43); what mattered to him was pleasing his Father (John 8 v29).

2. Let people say what they want!

Jesus did! He was secure enough in his Father's estimate not to need the praise or affirmation of people around him (John 5 v41–44).

3. Let forgiveness operate!

Jesus did! He knew that forgiveness is far more powerful than anyone’s accusation or opinion. (Contrast Luke 23 v34 with v35–39)

4. Let God be God!

Jesus did! Rather than defend himself against false opinion or accusation, he simply entrusted himself to God, knowing he would vindicate him at the right time. (See Luke 23 v46 and 1 Peter 2 v23)

4. Fear of man

Fear of man is perhaps the richest soil in which ‘pleasing others’ can grow its roots, and therefore the Bible has some very clear warnings about it.



Read:

Proverbs 29 v25

Why do you think the Bible describes ‘fear of man’ in this way?

Unless we face up to it squarely, fear of man will also prove to be a snare to us, as it did for some in the Bible.

1. Biblical examples of the fear of man

Look up the following verses and note how the fear of man prevented people from doing what they should, and the consequences of it.



Read:

Genesis 12 v10–20

1 Kings 19 v1–5

Matthew 25 v24–30

John 9 v18–23

John 12 v42–43

Contrast all these with how Nehemiah handled a situation in which he could have bowed to the pressure of the fear of man, but did not.

Read:

Nehemiah 6 v1-8



2. Examples of the fear of man today

- not speaking out about our faith for fear of being laughed at
- not putting in a clear Christian viewpoint when friends or colleagues are discussing a current issue
- keeping quiet when something clearly wrong is being planned or talked about
- ignoring some unrighteous practice in the workplace

What other scenarios can you think of?

Which of these do you personally find the most challenging? Are there any of them that you are facing at the moment? If so, get the group to pray with you about it, and report back next time.



3. The solution to the fear of man

As we saw in Unit 9 ('Fear'), the answer to every fear is the fear of God – the best fear of all! Once we have a right understanding of who God is, then it should make him bigger in our vision than any other person or obstacle that could otherwise seem overwhelming.

Read:

Matthew 10 v26–33

Note both the challenge, and the encouragement, in these verses.





5. A Consequence of Pleasing Others: Hypocrisy

When we give ourselves to a lifestyle that is always out to please others, it opens a doorway for a sin that seemed to draw forth more condemnation from Jesus than almost any other in the New Testament – hypocrisy.

1. What it is

We may define hypocrisy as –

an outward pretence masking an inner reality

Our English word ‘hypocrisy’ comes from a very similar Greek word that was originally used in the literary and dramatic field to mean an orator or actor. An actor is someone who ‘plays a part’; in fact, in Greek theatre actors held masks in front of their faces – happy or sad – to help them ‘play the part’ and to indicate their emotions to the audience.

From this original meaning, the word developed to mean anyone who ‘played a part’, who pretended, who concealed his true thinking or motives, anyone whose outward pretence masked an inner reality. It was this ‘mask-wearing’ that Peter was accused of in Galatians 2 v13.

How do you think ‘pleasing others’ can gradually lead to hypocrisy – ‘mask-wearing’?



2. How it grows

Let's remember: no one sets out to become a hypocrite! It is the sort of thing that creeps up on us and takes over our lives when we do not give attention to the sensitivity of our hearts as we should do.

Note what the following verses reveal about the heart:

Read:

Proverbs 4 v23

Proverbs 26 v23–24

Jeremiah 17 v9

Acts 5 v1–3



If the heart is so deceitful, as a result of the sin within us, then we need to take this seriously. One of the best ways to keep a check on our heart is to be in an open and honest relationship of accountability with at least one other believer.

Am I in such a relationship at this time?

Are there things that I have been hiding in my heart and that I need to share as quickly as possible?



3. Who it hits

The short answer is – anyone! And it is one of the most unlikely groups of people in the New Testament that brings this home to us.

The Pharisees, for whom Jesus had some very harsh words at times, were the front-runners in hypocrisy in New Testament times – so much so that Pharisaism has become synonymous with hypocrisy. But the striking thing to remember is this:

The Pharisees started out in life as a renewal movement!

While uncertain of their exact origin, we do know that their roots go right back to Israel's return from exile in Babylon. During that exile, God's people had reflected on how they had ended up there. They came to the conclusion that it was because they had disobeyed God's Word; and they resolved it would never happen again.

To ensure they did not break God's Word 'by accident', the scribes and rabbis began to set up a wide range of other 'by-laws' and regulations around it, for example by defining exactly what was meant by 'labour' when it said "Six days you shall labour". Could you dig your field or cook a meal? Could you carry a mat, or a pin in your cloak? Little by little, these regulations became as important as, if not more important than, the Law of God itself, and keeping them became the mark of your spirituality. The Pharisees were lay-people who set themselves to keep every one of those minute regulations.

Needless to say, it soon degenerated into legalistic formal religion and outward show – for no one can keep God's laws by self-effort (Romans 3 v20; Galatians 3 v11). And when we cannot keep up with what we profess to be keeping up with, we cover it up with hypocrisy.

But remember: these people did not set out to become legalists or bigots. They were a renewal movement that went wrong! What a challenge to us.

4. What it does

Let's take a look at the effect that hypocrisy can have by looking at an occasion when Jesus challenged the Pharisees in very strong words.

Read:*Matthew 23 v1–39**What expressions of hypocrisy come out in this passage?**What words of Jesus about these hypocrites strikes you most?***5. What about us?**

When we –

- are one thing in our Christian meetings but something quite different in the world
- go along with the crowd, whatever we might really think or believe
- do things just to ‘keep in with the crowd’ or to ‘keep the peace’
- judge others for doing what we know we ourselves sometimes do

– we are being hypocrites. For hypocrisy is a fairly certain consequence of living a life that tries to ‘please others’ or to be ‘popular’.

Ask God to show you right now if there are areas where – perhaps even unwittingly – you have fallen into hypocrisy. If so, confess it, ask for God’s forgiveness, and resolve to go back and start doing it differently.





6. So, Whom Can We Please?

1. God!

First and foremost, we can set ourselves to please God! If we set our hearts on pleasing him before anyone else, then we will not go far wrong.

Write down the key phrases from the following verses:

John 5 v30

2 Corinthians 5 v9

Galatians 1 v10

Colossians 1 v10

1 Thessalonians 2 v4

2. Others!

Perhaps this seems a strange thing to say at the end of a Unit where we have been encouraging you *not* to please others! But of course, there is a *proper way* to look to please people. Such scenarios include wanting to –



- genuinely bless people, without thought of personal honour or reward (eg, Matthew 5 v16)
- avoid putting an unnecessary obstacle in anyone's way (eg, 1 Corinthians 10 v31–33)
- make a sacrifice for the sake of someone else's good (eg, Romans 15 v1–3)
- let our work be a testimony to how God has changed us (eg, Titus 2 v9–10)

There are no doubt many others. But the key is always to remember the need to *avoid being popular at any price*. For such a way of pleasing others is truly an *Enemy of the Soul*.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 12: Pride



1. Introduction

One of the surprising things about the Argentinian version of *Enemies of the Soul*, upon which this course was initially based, was that there was no Unit on *Pride*. This was hard to believe! Their course had come out of heart-searching encounters with God; so how could there be such an omission? For Europeans and North Americans in particular, it was inconceivable that a discipleship course could miss out such a topic – and one about which the Bible has much to say at that.

So could it be that *some* sins, while *universal* at one level, at another level are more *rooted*, *expressive* and *problematic* in some societies than others? Do we in the West have to face up to the fact that our society and its way of life are deeply proud, right down to the very roots, in a way that some others are not? For if this is so, then we had better pay pretty serious attention to the topic in this Unit, for pride has probably got a hold of us in a way and to depths that we never even thought it had.

So before we go any further, let's stop and pray that God would reveal what is in our hearts in this area.





2. What Pride Is

Just as we saw when looking at *Pleasing Others*, the word *pride* can be used in both positive and negative senses. Without looking ahead, how would you define each of these?

Positive

Negative



Our focus in this Unit is on the *negative*, and rather more common, sense of the word – another *Enemy of the Soul*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines this negative sense of pride in the following way:

*“Unduly high opinion of one’s own qualities,
merits or abilities.”*

The Hebrew and Greek words used in the Bible for ‘pride’ and other closely-related words are sometimes translated differently in our English Bibles. These words include (with the number of times they appear in the NIV translation):

pride (69)
 proud (44)
 arrogant and arrogance (58)
 boast and boasting (85)
 haughty and haughtiness (16)
 conceit (2)

With such occurrences, this is clearly no insignificant theme. And life itself tells us it is no insignificant occurrence, for all of us know what it is like to come up against someone who is *proud* or *arrogant* or *boastful*.



In fact, let's do something dangerous! Stop and think (absolutely privately!) of anyone you know who would fit into this category. It might be someone from work or college, a neighbour or family member – even a member of the church! So, who is it? What are they like? (No, don't tell us!)

The point of doing that is this: it's so easy for all of us to pick out *others* who are proud or arrogant, and who 'get up our nose'. They are all around! But the truth is: *pride is probably a lot closer to us than we like to think!* So let's take a deeper look at this issue.



3. The Origin of Pride

Where did pride come from? Well, according to the Bible it really was one of the 'original sins' that set the whole ball rolling in the wrong direction. Its origin was none less than the devil himself.

In the following passage, initially a prophecy about the King of Tyre, Ezekiel sees behind the pride of this earthly king to the pride of the devil at the beginning of time.

Read:

Ezekiel 28 v12-19



What are the key words about pride in this passage?

Why do you think this pride arose?

With such an origin to pride, it should not surprise us to find that the devil was quick to sow this inclination and sin into the world and into the hearts of humankind as part of his attempt to ruin and destroy them.

Pride is still one of the devil's prime tools for seeking to undo men and women and to spoil their relationship with one another and with God.

4. Examples of Pride in the Bible



Pride can be a wide-ranging feeling, expressed about a whole number of different areas of life. Here are just some of them found in the Bible:

1. ***Pride in our status or position in life***

There is nothing like holding some position of power or influence to fill us with self-importance and consequent pride. Look at the following examples, and note the particular aspect of pride that comes out:

Exodus 5 v2

2 Kings 5 v8-12

Ezekiel 28 v1-2

Daniel 3 v8-15

Matthew 23 v5-7

3 John 1 v9



Note that the examples we looked at were drawn from both secular and religious spheres, the world and the church!



*Are there times when I am proud of a position I may hold, whether in the world or in the church? Do I like people to know that 'I am in charge'? How would others answer those questions about **me**?*

2. **Pride in our achievements**

Sometimes pride expresses itself, not so much in the position we hold, as the things we have *done* or *achieved* in life – whether through our family, our learning, or our job.



Read:

2 Kings 20 v12-13

Daniel 4 v29-30

Luke 12 v16-19

Esther 5 v9-13

What does this last passage also reveal about how Haman felt inside despite all his proud achievements?



3. Pride in our physical abilities

Physical strength, good looks and physique, success in competition, are all much-sought-after qualities today. But there is nothing new in this! The Bible has lots of examples of people who prided themselves in these areas.

Read:

1 Samuel 17 v4-11 and 41-44

What was Goliath proud of, and what sort of attitude towards others did this feed?

Read:

Daniel 1 v3-5

Why do you think the king wanted to be surrounded by such people?



4. Pride in our skills and abilities

Sometimes pride can grow because of certain skills or abilities that we have developed. Here is an example of a man who became proud of abilities he should rather have been ashamed of (!), and whose pride had ensnared and blinded him without his even knowing it.

Read:

Acts 8 v9-11

What things fed this man's pride?

*What did his pride prevent him from seeing?
(See v18-23)*



5. **Pride in our learning**

For some people it is not their physical strength or their innate or learned abilities that are the source of pride, so much as their learning or academic achievements. Oxford, the home of the writer of this series, is notorious for this! But it is nothing new.



Read:

Isaiah 10 v12-13

Acts 17 v16-18

Ecclesiastes 1 v12-18

(Note in this final example how the writer sees that his rather proud claims about his learning had not really got him very far.)

6. **Pride in our spirituality**

The spiritual dimension of life seems to have a particularly wide field in which one can develop one's pride! In the following examples, note what aspects of spirituality in particular were the source of pride.



Job 33 v8-10

Matthew 6 v1-2

John 8 v33

Romans 2 v17-24

Luke 18 v9-14

7. **Pride in our national achievements**

So far, all the examples we have looked at have been examples of *personal* pride; but it is possible for *nations* to be proud too, as the following examples show.

Read:*Isaiah 13 v19**Jeremiah 48 v29–30**Ezekiel 28 v1–5*

NB: There is, of course, a proper pride that one may take in one's nation, leading us to support it, work for its good and pray for its blessing (1 Timothy 2 v1–4). But pride that promotes our own nation at the expense of others, or that focuses on our self-achievement with disregard of God and his ways, is something that God finds abhorrent.

Where would you say our own nation comes at this time in this area of pride?

**8. Review**

Which of these seven aspects of pride that we have looked at in this section are the main ones in our society today?

Which, if you are honest, are the biggest areas of challenge for you personally?



5. Examples of Pride Today



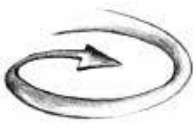
Our final question in the previous section begins to bring this matter of pride closer to home to us. So let's follow that through a little further.

Pride is such a subtle sin that it finds expression in many different ways, changing its appearance, like the chameleon, to suit its surroundings. What makes it even more difficult to pin down is that what may be a source of pride for *you* may genuinely not affect *me* at all; but what affects me may not be an issue for you!

This makes looking at examples today all the more difficult, for it is all too easy to dismiss the *sin* of pride because the particular *sins* in question do not affect me. But *examples* of how pride can get expressed today in a number of different areas include things like –

- dropping into conversation what you have done/where you have been/whom you have met
- looking for approval or affirmation after sharing a ‘good prophetic word’ in a meeting
- showing off your new bike/car/house/outfit
- making sure people at work know your latest successes or hear of the boss’s approval of you
- telling people how well your children have done

But rather than stay at the level of generalisations, let’s be bold and make this more personal!



*In groups of two or three, share with one another one or two key areas where you know pride can rise up in **you**. (It may well not be any of the above examples.) Try to be both specific and honest. Then pray for one another.*



6. God's View of Pride

Having recognised that pride can all too easily be found in all of us, now would be a good time to see how God feels about it.

God's hatred of pride is a key feature of Biblical religion, and stands in stark contrast to the attitude of other religions towards it. For example, for the Greeks, humility was something to be despised, while pride was seen as a virtue! (Perhaps not greatly different to our world today!) How different this is to the Bible's standpoint.

The Bible consistently presents God as one who "opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4 v6).

Perhaps it is because pride was one of the most original of sins, and was the one that led to the fall of the devil and his consequent deceiving of mankind (see section 3), that God so hates it. *He saw what it could do.*

1. God hates pride

Let's look at one story that reveals God's attitude towards pride.

Although initially a humble man (1 Samuel 9 v21), Saul, Israel’s first king, soon allowed pride in his new position to grow. Because he failed to deal with it, it would eventually destroy him.



Read:

1 Samuel 15 v17–23

Note the key words in v23. What does this tell us about God’s attitude to arrogance or pride?

See also,

Proverbs 16 v5

Proverbs 21 v4

2. God humbles those who are proud

Because God hates pride, it should not surprise us to find that the Bible often speaks of him humbling the proud.



Read:

Isaiah 2 v12–18

James 4 v4–7

1 Peter 5 v5–6

Who, according to these verses, are the ones who receive God’s favour?

Have there been times when I have learned the hard way that God humbles the proud? Am I still walking in that lesson that I learned?





7. Results of Pride

If God is so opposed to pride and the proud, it should not surprise us to discover that there are serious consequences to this sin. Here are just seven of them. Note how one so easily leads on to the next.

1. **Self-deception**

How does pride lead to self-deception in the following two passages?

Read:

Deuteronomy 8 v10-17

Galatians 6 v3-5

In this second passage, there is reference to a proper 'taking pride in oneself'. But the verse (Galatians 6 v4) also contains the key to doing this correctly. What is it?



2. **Spiritual blindness**

When we allow ourselves to be deceived, it is not long before we become blind and cannot see things as they really are.

Read:

Jeremiah 43 v1-4



Note how their arrogance led them to reject the prophetic word, feeling that they knew better.

One of the common descriptions that Jesus gave of the Pharisees was that they were ‘blind guides’ (eg, see Matthew 23 v16,17,19,24,26). They thought they knew where they were going, but pride had so deceived them that they could no longer see the way ahead.



Is my pride stopping me from seeing God’s way ahead at this time?

3. Hardness of heart

Pride is always seen in the Bible as a ‘heart issue’ (in fact, it is often ‘the heart’ that is seen as becoming proud) and so it inevitably affects the heart unless it is dealt with.



Read:

Daniel 5 v18–20

How do you think we can check our hearts from becoming hard in this area?

4. Contempt for others

When our hearts become hard through pride, we begin to lose our concern and care for others.



Read:

Psalms 123 v3–4

Proverbs 21 v4

Luke 18 v9–11

In fact, our contempt may even stretch to God himself!

Read:

Psalms 10 v2–4

5. **A quarrelsome spirit**

Read:

Proverbs 13 v10

What do you think the writer means by saying “pride only breeds quarrels”? And how does this relate to wisdom being found in those who take advice?



6. **A vengeful spirit**

The proud person knows they are right, and so when they do not get their own way or win their argument, it can lead to a desire to get revenge or get their own back in some way.

Read:

Psalms 73 v7-8

Esther 3 v1-6

In the second passage, what reflects Haman’s growing pride in these verses? What was it that sparked his desire for revenge against Mordecai?



7. **Judgement!**

While the proud may sometimes seem to ‘get away with it’ and even prosper (eg Psalm 73 v3), God has decreed that the sure and certain end of pride is always *judgement* – if not in this world, then certainly in the next.

Read:

Proverbs 16 v4-5

Isaiah 2 v11-18

Malachi 4 v1

Luke 1 v51-52

There are lots of examples in the Bible of proud people or cities or nations being humbled by God. Can you think of any?

Do I recognise any of these seven symptoms in my own life? If so, ask for God’s help in dealing with them.





8. The Way Out of Pride

As with every *Enemy of the Soul* that we have looked at in this course, the first step is always to recognise that this particular enemy is there within *me* – not just in general terms, but in specific expressions – and to acknowledge that this is *sin* and therefore needs to be repented of.

Pride is not a little weakness, it is a big sin. It offends the heart of God and must be rooted out from our lives.

But besides this general posture, there are two things in particular that can help us walk out of this sin – *brokenness* and *openness*.

1. **Brokenness**

After his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, David wrote his powerful psalm of repentance, Psalm 51. One of the verses in that psalm says this:

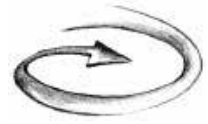
“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (v17)

This does not mean that God delights in breaking us, in the sense of wanting us to go around as crushed, grovelling people. It means he is looking for *a heart that continually walks humbly before him*; a heart that says, what *God* wants is my chief and sole delight; everything else is nothing in comparison to that.

The following chart contrast some of the attitudes that characterise the broken and the unbroken man and woman of God.

Reflect on this list for a few moments. As you read through it, ask God to show you which side of the line you fall.

Then try to share with one another one or two areas from the chart where you recognise you are more unbroken than broken, and then pray for one another.



| Unbroken People | Broken People |
|--|---|
| know their strengths | know their weaknesses |
| self-sufficient | recognise need of others |
| critical of others | compassionate to others |
| maintain control | look to serve |
| claim their rights | yield their rights |
| being right is more important than being relational | being relational is more important than being right |
| offended when overlooked | rejoice when others are lifted up |
| feel the church/company etc is privileged to have them | amazed that they have been included and have a part to play |
| confident in what they know | humbled by what they have to learn |
| keep people at arm's length | risk building relationships |
| defensive when criticised or corrected | receive correction gratefully |
| eager to be respectable | eager to be real |
| find it hard to say 'sorry' | quick to admit that they were wrong |
| hide their sin | willing to be open |
| compare themselves with others | compare themselves with God |
| revival is a nice idea | revival is a desperate need |

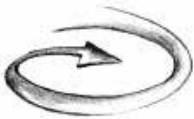
Remember to keep on praying for a “humble and contrite spirit” in the coming days – even though it is the very opposite of what the world would encourage us to pursue.

2. Openness

The second point follows on from the first. Once we have resolved that we are going to walk as broken people, then we have nothing to hide and nothing to prove. We won't care *who* knows as long as it gets sorted out! Resolve therefore to be –

1. Open to tell your weaknesses

Ensure there is at least one other Christian with whom you can share your heart and from whom you will keep nothing back. There is tremendous strength in this sort of relationship, both from the point of view of *confession* and *accountability*.



What do we mean by these last two words?

2. Open to let your weaknesses be told to you!

Psalm 141 v5 says, “Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head.”



What do you think the writer meant by this?

Having someone who loves you enough – and whom you know loves you enough! – to tell you the truth about yourself, your behaviour or your attitudes once in a while is a tremendous blessing. All of us are the poorer without such a friend. Encourage such frankness towards you from those you walk closely with; let them know they can ‘strike you’ and that you will receive it as a blessing. And then, when they do it – don't sulk!

Such openness is an important tool in dealing with our pride.



9. Conclusion

If the Lord “opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”, then it is important to get ourselves on the right side of the line! Do we want to be opposed by God? Or graced by God? To walk with pride means to be opposed by him; to walk humbly means to have him on our side. When we put it in those terms, there seems little point in hanging on to pride. So let’s resolve to see it as an *Enemy of the Soul* and resolve to deal with it, rather than to accommodate it, and so find the grace of God released even further in our lives.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 13: Irritability and Anger



1. Introduction: An Angry World

Irritability and anger are, sadly, fairly common features of life these days, and perhaps increasingly so. Consider some of the following situations where people get so easily ‘worked up’:

- in the car in a traffic queue
- when the bus or train doesn’t turn up
- with an unhelpful official
- when something won’t ‘work’
- when the children aren’t being co-operative
- when people let us down

What other examples could you add?



*What about **you**? What makes you irritable or angry?*

Now we've looked at some examples, let's have a go at defining these two words:

Irritability:

Anger:

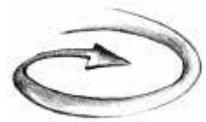


Why do you think we have linked irritability and anger in this Unit?

It is probably fair to say that the world we live in is becoming an increasingly angry world. Grace has been replaced by impatience, and impatience leads to irritability and anger when things do not go *my* way.

*A graceless world will always
be an irritable and angry world.*

Why do you think there seems to be so little 'grace' in the world today?





2. The Two Sides of Anger

Ask a Christian who knows their Bible fairly well what verse comes to mind when you say the word ‘anger’ and the one that most will quote will be:

“In your anger do not sin.” Ephesians 4 v26

Few however, will quote Paul’s words that come just five verses later:

*“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger ...”
Ephesians 4 v31*

In verse 26 anger seems to be OK; in verse 31 it seems to be forbidden. So what is happening here? Surely Paul hadn’t forgotten what he wrote just five verses earlier? Of course not. What these two verses bring home to us is that there are *two sides to anger* in the Bible.

But let’s read the two verses in context before we go any further:

Read:
Ephesians 4 v20 – 5 v2



In verse 26 anger is seen as something permissible, but that we must be very careful about; in verse 31 it is something that we must get rid of at all costs because it is part of ‘the old self’ (v22) that Paul is writing about in this section.

So there must be two sides to anger. We will sum up those two sides as *righteous* anger and *unrighteous* anger. Let's take a look at both.

1. **Righteous anger**

Righteous anger is something that all of us like to feel we demonstrate whenever *we* get irritable or cross. (Unrighteous anger is what other people show!) But interestingly, anger as a *positive* thing is not seen all that often in human beings in the Bible.

Consider the following statistics:

In the Bible, the word *anger* appears 256 times:

- In the Old Testament, it occurs 244 times. Only 33 of those occurrences refer to human anger, the rest refer to God's anger; and even some 50% of those 33 references come simply as general observations about anger (especially in the book of Proverbs).
- In the New Testament, it occurs just 12 times. Of those 12, 4 refer to God's anger and 8 refer to man's anger – but 7 of those 8 tell us that anger is something to be avoided at all costs!

The same proportions apply to the adjective *angry*. The word *wrath* is almost exclusively reserved for God.

What does all this tell us? Perhaps we might sum it up as follows:

The Bible seems to indicate that anger is an expression more appropriate to God than to men and women.

Why do you think that might be?



1. God’s righteous anger

As we have seen, there are lots of examples of God’s righteous anger, or wrath, in the Bible.

*In the following passages, note **what** it is that God gets angry about, and think **why** it is right for God to feel that way.*



Exodus 32 v7-10

Numbers 11 v1-2

Numbers 25 v1-4

Joshua 7 v1

2 Samuel 6 v6-7

2 Chron 36 v15-16

Zechariah 7 v8-12

Mark 3 v1-5

Romans 2 v5-8

But while God, who is completely righteous and holy, has a perfect right to demonstrate his anger against that which offends him, the Bible also shows that this is something he is *slow*, if not *reluctant*, to do.

Read:

Exodus 34 v4-7



See also,

Psalm 30 v4-5, Isaiah 54 v7-10

If this sort of attitude restrains God's anger, what conclusion might we draw from this for ourselves?

2. Man's righteous anger

We have already seen that there are very few examples of people demonstrating righteous anger in the Bible.

What should this fact alone alert us to?

Let's look at some examples of people genuinely demonstrating righteous anger. Note who it was, what the issue was that they were angry about, and why they were right to get angry as they did.

*Did these people **always** demonstrate righteousness in their anger on every occasion?*

| Passage | Who? | What? | Why? |
|---------------------|------|-------|------|
| Exodus 16 v13-20 | | | |
| Exodus 32 v15-20 | | | |
| 1 Samuel 11 v1-7 | | | |
| Nehemiah 5 v1-6 | | | |
| Ezekiel 3 v10-15 | | | |



What does this tell us?



There are no doubt situations today too where it may be right to demonstrate ‘righteous anger’; but if we do so, it should be out of prayerfulness and with great care, watching our own attitudes.

Share together what some of those situations might be in our own society today, whether locally or nationally.

How can we ensure that we watch our attitudes at such times?

What ‘warning signs’ would show that our righteous anger is starting to lose its righteous dimension?

2. **Unrighteous anger**

We certainly don’t have to look too far to find examples of *un*-righteous anger. In fact, virtually all the examples of human anger in the Bible come into this category. (And if these examples aren’t enough, our own lives will no doubt furnish lots more!)

Read the following passages and note the *wrong attitudes, desires or reactions* that lay behind the particular expression of anger.

Genesis 4 v3-7

1 Samuel 18 v8-11

2 Chronicles 16 v7-10

Jonah 4 v1-3

Luke 15 v11-31

John 7 v21-24





3. The Exception that has Become the Rule

So, to recap: the Bible shows that there are two types of anger – *righteous* and *unrighteous*. But righteous anger seems to be largely (and more safely) the preserve of God, with just a scattering of examples of it being handled rightly by people.

But our problem is:

- we often confuse the two
- we find it hard to tell the difference between them
- we tend to think *our* anger is always righteous

And these points are even more true when it comes to an issue that affects us personally.

While righteous anger is permissible, we have somehow managed to ‘turn the exception into the rule’! We have turned the verse “In your anger do not sin” (a restraint on anger) into what is almost a ‘permission slip’ for getting irritable or angry on almost any occasion – justified, of course, by our conviction that it was ‘righteous anger’ or that there was ‘good reason’ for it. The weight of evidence in the Bible suggests that we might be deceiving ourselves!

Look at the following examples and note what they say about anger.



Read:

Psalm 37 v7-10
Proverbs 29 v11
Matthew 5 v21-22
1 Corinthians 13 v4-5
Ephesians 4 v25-27
Colossians 3 v5-10
James 1 v19-20

What would you say is the over-riding and clear message of all these verses?

The Bible encourages us to deal with our anger, rather than let our anger deal with us.



4. What Anger Does

Why is it so important that we deal with our anger then? It is because of what anger does, spoiling life in its four main dimensions: our relationship with God, others, the world around us and even ourselves.

Let's read one story where anger was unrestrained and where it did its spoiling work. As you read the passage, try to look for those four dimensions of spoiled relationship.

Read:

Genesis 4 v1-16

In the chart below note down the phrases or verses that indicate spoiled relationship with each of the categories as a result of Cain's anger.

Remember: anger never solves anything. It only ever makes things worse – at every level of life.

| | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| With God | With Others |
| With the world around | With himself |





5. So, Why do we Get Irritable and Angry?

So if the Bible carries such warnings to us about anger, and if it spoils so many things, why do we fall into it so easily? There are no doubt many different reasons for why we respond to this *Enemy of the Soul*, but the following are often part of the root cause. As you read through them, be open to God prompting you about any that may be roots of irritability and anger in your own life.

1. **Deep – rooted habits**

Some sins become ‘habitual’, either because they were never corrected as we grew up (e.g., temper tantrums), or perhaps because they were part of our character or way of life before we became a Christian. Irritability and anger can be one of those.

Continuing to live with such things is what the Bible means by “living according to our old sinful nature [or, ‘the flesh’]” (e.g., Romans 8 v5-14). The *consequences* of that old sinful nature were dealt with by Jesus at the Cross; but the *changing* of it is something that needs his ongoing attention.

Whenever we respond to ‘our old sinful nature’, anger will be one of the things that arises. Jesus wants us to learn how to respond to his Spirit instead.

Resolve that you will not remain a slave to that which Christ has set you free from. Understand *it is possible to change!*

Read:

2 Corinthians 5 v17

Do we believe the truth of this verse concerning our own life and specific issues within it?



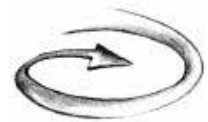
2. **Unresolved inner conflicts**

Anger can sometimes arise because we have failed to deal with issues in the past. Things like past hurts, disappointments, harboured resentments, hidden sin, unforgiveness towards others, or unresolved jealousy, can all lie hidden within, waiting to erupt in anger.

When our anger is constant, or disproportionate to the issue, it is generally because there are unresolved issues within.

The solution and way of escape is not to keep getting angry (which only feeds the unresolved issue) but to get the underlying issue dealt with once and for all.

Can you think of anyone in the Bible who got angry because of unresolved issues? Where did their anger lead them?



3. **Selfishness**

We have already looked at issues of selfishness in Unit 5 ('The Self Syndrome'), so we will not dwell on them in depth here. Let us simply note that when we like to get our own way, when we do not like to be challenged or crossed ever, when 'I' am the most important person to be considered, then I will be prone to making irritability and anger my first response.

Can you think of anyone in the Bible who got angry because of selfishness?



4. **Excusing myself**

One reason for our getting irritable or angry is that we simply *excuse ourselves*. “The reason that I get irritable/angry at such times is because -

- that’s the way I am
- the pressures around me are so great
- it’s in my hormones/genes

When we excuse issues in our character or life, we put them outside of any expectation of change – and we are as good as blaming God for them by default! There is simply no excuse for irritability, anger, bad temperedness and so on. It is *sin*; and I will not begin to change (to my blessing and others’ relief!) until I own up to it.



Am I aware of any inclination in me to explain away my irritability or anger?

5. **Feeling we have been treated badly**

Sometimes we get angry because we feel we have been treated badly or unjustly, and we feel we need to let our cause be known or to ‘fight our corner’.

But was *God* surprised by the events that happened? Is *God* not big enough to fight our corner for us? Cannot *God* turn things around for us if he feels he needs to? When we have such a one for us, why do we feel we need to get angry or to take matters into our own hand.

As Paul puts it: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8 v31)

Which Bible characters were treated unfairly but put their trust in God rather than resorted to anger?



6. **Owning the right to judge**

At the end of the day we get angry because we feel we own the right to judge – we feel we can ‘play God’ for a little while! *We* are the righteous and innocent party; the whole matter is one-sided (*our* sided!), and *we* have every right to feel as we do.

But as Jesus put it: “No one is good – except God alone.” (Mark 10 v18) In comparison to him, *our* opinions, judgements and responses are all partial and flawed. Therefore we have no right to judge.

The great heroes of the Bible learned to lay down their right to judge and entrusted their cause to God, who alone judges justly, yet with mercy, and in his own good time.

We need to learn how to ‘leave things with God’.

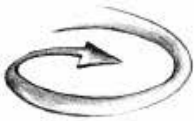
7. **Not spending time with God**

Sometimes we get irritable or angry simply because we have not spent time with God. We got up late, rushed out of the house, got straight into our work or studies – and have not said so much as “Good morning” to Father. Little wonder that when someone disappoints us, cuts across us or does not do what we ask, that we respond wrongly.

It is simply unfair and unrighteous to take things out on other people because we did not get ourselves in a good place for the day.

Do I recognise this at work in myself at times?





As you look back over these seven points, if you recognise any of them at work in your own life, then now would be a good time to share, openly and honestly, with one another.

Split up into two's or three's and share together anything you feel God might be highlighting. Pray for one another in those specific areas.



6. The Way Out

As we have seen throughout this course, our enemies are *real*, but they are also *conquerable*! Jesus has defeated the devil and redeemed us, not just to get us to heaven one day, but to release his Kingdom life into us right now. This area of irritability and anger is no different.

So, what are some of the steps we can take to find the way out?

1. **Acknowledge it!**

What we don't own up to, we can never change. So the first step is to stop excusing ourselves. This may mean –

- not dismissing irritability as *unimportant* or as a *trivial* character issue. We need to own up to it as a form of anger which promotes self and our viewpoint, which demeans others and their thoughts or actions, and which lacks trust in God to deal with things.

- stopping seeing all *our* anger as *righteous* (and others' anger as 'fleshly'). The Biblical statistics on righteous human anger show it will be a rare, rather than a common, thing. Recognise that if we get angry *often*, it is unlikely to be *righteous* anger.
- keeping ourselves honestly accountable to others for them to judge whether anger is righteous or not. We cannot trust ourselves in this matter!

Acknowledging that irritability and anger is *sin* is the first step to getting free of it.

Do I excuse irritability or anger in myself?



2. Repent of it quickly!

If we do fall into irritability or anger we need to repent of it quickly – *without excuse or self-justification*. Confessing it quickly allows us to receive God's forgiveness and grace, as well as tenderising our hearts in this process of change.

Am I quick to repent of my irritability and anger when it occurs?



3. Don't nurse or feed your anger!

Often when we get irritated or angry, we feel we have the right to do so. Perhaps someone wronged us or something didn't work out 'fairly'. That may well be true! But the more we think about it, the more we nurse our injured pride and feed the anger within. So don't do it!

And don't be tempted to discuss the issue with others, looking for further justification of your position through their support. It only feeds something that needs to die!

As we said earlier in this course about a different issue:

Don't nurse it – curse it!

Do I have a tendency to nurse or feed my irritability or anger?

What do you think would help us focus on other things instead?



4. Don't lose your temper!

Even if there are things that you may need to express strong feelings about, it is possible to do so with grace (yet firmness) and gentleness (yet strength). Expect God to start growing such qualities in you.

Remember: the Bible says –

“In your anger do not sin.” (Ephesians 4 v26)

This means that it *must* be possible to express righteousness and truth *without* falling into the sin of getting angry or irritable. A key to this is resolving that I will grow in being someone who *does not lose their temper*. Determine this will *not* be part of your life. It really is possible to get things done and changed while still carrying the spirit of the grace of Christ.

Do you recognise that you tend to lose your temper? If so, in what circumstances and what would help you respond differently? If not, share with the group what has helped you in this area.



5. **Don't let the sun go down ... !**

Read:

Ephesians 4 v26-27

The Bible couldn't be clearer here: we are not to let the day end without our having resolved our anger.

When we leave the embers of anger to smoulder overnight –

- it does *us* no good (for the anger is at work in our subconscious mind while we sleep)
- it does *others* no good (for we are 'all fired up' for when we meet them the next day!)
- it is no blessing to *God* (who has commanded us not to live that way)



God says that, no matter what the offence, hurt, or situation, one day is long enough to be angry about it.

Am I growing in putting my Father's requirement in this matter into practice?



6. **Do get reconciled quickly!**

If we do get irritable or angry with someone, then we should seek to be reconciled to them *as quickly as possible*. It is important not to ignore the incident or sweep it under the carpet. God's way of dealing with it is for us to say, "I am sorry; please forgive me." Do not go looking for an apology from them too! Simply do what God says is right, and leave the rest to him.

If we have been offended against, we should not 'stand on our dignity' or want to make the other person 'eat humble pie'. The Bible's teaching is simple: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3 v13)

Ask forgiveness from those we have offended;
extend forgiveness to those who have hurt us.
Remember: God would rather have us gracious than right.



Read:

Matthew 5 v21-26

Ephesians 4 v25 – 5 v1

7. Don't give the devil a chance!

There are enough opportunities in the world for the devil to do his work without our giving him more! That is why, in our key passage from Ephesians, Paul tells us that we must all watch our anger so that we “do not give the devil a foothold.” (Ephesians 4 v27)

The devil knows how hard it is for human beings to handle anger properly, so he loves to hang around, doing all he can to provoke anger and irritation and to exploit the situation that results from it.

When tempted to get angry, we need to stop and ask ourselves, “Is this issue really worth getting angry about, enough to give the devil such a big opportunity?” This is perhaps why the Scripture tells us that we should be “quick to listen, slow to speak and *slow to become angry.*” (James 1 v19) If we work at slowing down our angry reactions, then the Holy Spirit has time to do his prompting work about how Jesus would have us handle the situation.



7. Conclusion

We began this Unit by saying that our world is an impatient, irritable and angry place. Therefore the temptations to anger will be great. But in such a world, a gracious person can make a powerful impact.

It was from Barney Coombs that I first learned that ‘*kindness*’ gets you further than ‘*crossness*’. Over the years I have found, again and again, that whenever I have needed to make a complaint about something and have done so, not with anger, but with graciousness (yet firmness when required!), the response has always been far more satisfactory than if we had ‘had a fight’ over it – as well as often giving me an opportunity to witness to Jesus on the back of it.

“Man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires,” wrote James (1 v20). It has never done so since that first outbreak of anger outside the Garden of Eden (Genesis 4 v1-16); it will never do so to the End of the Age (Revelation 12 v12).

Let us resolve to root out this *Enemy of the Soul*, to refuse to invest our time and energy into it, and to seek to follow the example of the gracious Son of God.

God prefers kindness to crossness.

Enemies of the Soul

Unit 14: Sexual Impurity



1. Introduction

This is, no doubt, the trickiest topic that we have covered in *Enemies of the Soul*. Not because the Bible is unclear about what God thinks about this whole area; but because it is one of the most intimate areas of our life and one that we can therefore respond to in one of two ways:

- either we clam up completely, embarrassed and unwilling to talk or be open
- or we go overboard and ‘air all our dirty washing’ in public in an inappropriate way

We need God’s help therefore! Not least because this is one of the most *powerful* areas in our life (for good or for bad) and also one of the most *pressured* areas because of the standards of society around us today. We live in a world where any concept of sexual impurity or sexual sin is a nonsense. Sex is there and is there to be enjoyed, the argument goes. *As long as you don’t hurt anyone else* (the touchstone, if not the god, of the Western World) then what does it matter what you do?

As Christians, our answer has to be: it matters a lot! Because it matters to God.

2. What God says about Sexual Relationship



1. *God made sexual relationship as something good*

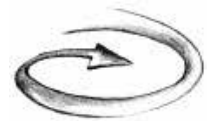
That can come as a surprise to some of us (perhaps because of our background). We can somehow think that sexual relationship is something that God rather reluctantly ‘puts up with’ as a way of keeping the human race going (but please could we not enjoy ourselves too much!)

Such thinking has been common at times in Church History, particularly among those converted from Greek or Roman backgrounds. They had grown up with an underlying philosophical and religious view that said: ‘The body and spirit, or soul, are quite distinct. The spirit is what really matters; so what you do with your body is unimportant.’

How do you think this sort of view could end up having a negative effect on sexual relationship? What other things in life might such a view affect?

*Do **you** sometimes recognise within yourself a false distinction between your body and your spirit/soul?*

A negative view of sexual relationship is not God’s view however. Sex was God’s gift to the human race right back at the beginning, when he created us. It was part of that which he made and about which he said, “And it was good.” (Genesis 1). Many parts of the Bible talk freely about sexual intimacy, particularly the books of Proverbs and



Song of Songs. Proper sexual activity is never hidden in the Bible or seen as something ‘dirty’ or taboo. However...

2. **God says sex belongs to the marriage relationship**

Because God has blessed sex as something ‘good’ does not mean it can be used as and how we please – which is largely the view of the modern world. Things that are special need special care. And God says that sex needs to be handled specially; that it needs to be kept in its proper *place* if it is going to fulfil its proper *purpose*.



Read the following passages and note what they tell us about **in what context** and **for what purpose** the sexual relationship is to be enjoyed.

| | What context? | What purpose? |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Genesis 1 v 27-31 | | |
| Genesis 2 v 24-25 | | |
| Proverbs 5 v 15-20 | | |
| 1 Corinthians 7 v 1-5 | | |

3. God says some things spoil sex

Most things in life can be used or abused; but we get the best out of them when we use them properly. The same is true of sex. Sadly, the human race has abused sex, separating *sexual activity* from *sexual relationship*, with drastic results. Sex has become ‘*a thing to do*’ rather ‘*a relationship to enjoy*’.

God’s standpoint is very clear: he says that *sex belongs with relationship*, and with one very special relationship at that – your spouse; and therefore any sexual activity, other than with your spouse, spoils sex, for it spoils the relationship, and that is why he forbids it. We can sum this up in the following way:

*The only proper sexual activity is that which takes place between **one man with one woman** in a **committed, life-long** relationship of marriage.*

What sort of sexual activities are therefore excluded by this definition?

The New Testament Church was clear that any sex outside of this definition was simply unacceptable to God. In fact the avoidance of ‘sexual immorality’ was one of the very few things that were required of Gentile (non-Jewish) people when they became Christians.

Read:

Acts 15 v22-29

Why do you think that the Church Leaders needed to stress this point (v28-29)?

What do you think its inclusion in this short list of requirements indicates?





3. Things that Spoil Sex

If we have grasped our definition of sex belonging to a relationship of ‘one man with one woman for life’, then we will see that it automatically excludes a number of things:

1. **Polygamy**

Polygamy – where a man or woman has a number of marriage partners *simultaneously* – is clearly not in God’s heart. Thankfully, most nations have outlawed this practice; but it still happens at times.

God’s plan from the beginning was that *one* man and *one* woman should become *one* flesh (Genesis 2 v24). The practice of polygamy among God’s people in the Old Testament seems to have been something that God ‘bore with’ for a season; but it was not his original intention, as Jesus reminds us (Matthew 19 v4-6).

(While this is not generally a problem in the West, because of national laws, there are still cultures where it is an issue. If you are in such a culture and facing this issue, you need to talk with your church leaders about the way ahead.)

2. **Adultery**

Adultery is the engaging of sexual activity between a married partner and someone who is not their spouse. This is abhorrent to God because it involves

breaking the *covenant* made in marriage, and God esteems covenant highly.

Read:

Romans 13 v8-10

Hebrews 13 v4

None of us should ever think this could not happen to us! Some of God's greatest saints have stumbled in this area because they were not realistic about the strength of temptation in this area.

Remember, too, that Jesus said it is possible to commit adultery in your heart!

Read:

Matthew 5 v27-30

Does this mean, then, that it is no worse to go on and actually turn the thought into action?



3. Fornication

Fornication is the rather old-fashioned word for sexual relationships between two *single* people. In fact, not only the *word*, but the very *idea* of young people not 'sleeping together' is seen as very old-fashioned in society today. The accepted norm is that you will sleep with your boyfriend or girlfriend; indeed, that there is something rather weird about you if you do not!

What most people fail to realise is that when we have sexual relationships with someone, we are not just *enjoying a physical experience*; we are *undergoing a spiritual experience*. We are 'becoming one' with the person that we have sex with. We are giving something of our very selves to them (on far more than a physical basis) and we are receiving something from them.



Read:

1 Corinthians 6 v12-20

How would you answer someone who told you that they were sleeping with their boy/girlfriend, but that God had said it was all right because they loved one another?

God can forgive and cleanse us from sin in this area, as much as in any other. But if it is left undealt with, it can affect the rest of our life.

4. Homosexuality

If it is seen by the world as the norm to have sex as a single young person, it is increasingly seen as the norm (at least, in the West) for people to choose whether that sex is with a different-sex partner or a same-sex partner. All of this is a million miles away from what God’s Word teaches!

Read the following verses and note down the words or phrases that reveal God’s attitude to same-sex sexual relationships.

Leviticus 18 v22

Genesis 19 v1-11

1 Kings 14 v24

Romans 1 v18-28

1 Corinthians 6 v9-11

Jude v7



The overwhelming weight of the Bible’s teaching, both Old and New Testaments, is that same-sex sexual relationships (homosexual or lesbian) are *sinful*; that it is a perversion based on a lie (Romans 1); that it is one of the “fruitless deeds of darkness” (Ephesians 5 v11). In fact, just how *fruitless* they are, is plain for all to see!

However, ‘Gay’ pressure movements today work hard –

- to make us feel bad about declaring Biblical truth
- to convince us that a significant percentage of the population is homosexual/lesbian
- to accuse us of ‘homophobia’ if we do not agree with their viewpoint
- to tell us that it is all a question of genes and ‘how you are made’, and that we are therefore causing untold misery to millions by our archaic views

How do you find yourself responding to all this?



The Bible says: homosexuality is not about how God made you; it is about decisions and responses you yourself have chosen to make.

With increasing pressure in Western society to yield ground in this area, we need to –

- get the Biblical principles clear in our mind and resolve we will not move from them
- ensure that we do not lack compassion towards homosexuals. Let us hate the sin, but all the more love the sinner!
- encourage people they *can* get free of this sin as much as any other, even if it has become a lifestyle over the years
- walk through this issue with people when they become Christians until they are free
- develop healthy, manly (or womanly) friendships that show there is something better!

If this is an area that you have been struggling in, either in thought or in practice, go and share it with one of your leaders as quickly as possible. You will *not* be rejected!

5. Lust

Lust is an overpowering desire for sexual fulfilment, and can be an issue as much as for marrieds as for singles. It is about wanting what is not appropriate for us to have, and is an issue of the *heart* and *mind* before it is an issue of the *body*.

The Bible always warns against lust, shows how it grows if not handled properly, and demonstrates the dangers of failing to control it, both for ourselves and others.

Read the following verses and note down what they say about lust, how it operates or what it leads to:

Proverbs 6 v20-29

Romans 1 v27

Ephesians 4 v17-19

1 Thessalonians 4 v3-7

This is not an issue we should treat lightly, for even the greatest men of God have not been immune from attack in this area!

Read:

2 Samuel 11 v1-5

What stages can you see here in the awakening and growth of David's lust?

It is because lust is so powerful and deceptive that the Bible challenges us to take decisive and ruthless action in dealing with it. (See Matthew 5 v27-30; Colossians 3 v5-6.)

What sort of things feed lust? Do you recognise any of these in your own life that need ruthless action?



6. Masturbation

Masturbation – the self-stimulation of one’s sexual organs for pleasure – is an area that Christians are often reluctant or embarrassed to talk about; yet it can be one of the biggest areas of temptation and one of the biggest sources of guilt.



1. What does the Bible say?

We have to be honest and say that the Bible has no obvious ‘proof texts’ about masturbation. (A supposed traditional one – God’s judgement on Onan in Genesis 38:6-10 – is not about masturbation, but is about Onan’s disobedience in refusing to provide offspring for his deceased brother’s wife, in accordance with Israelite law.) Does the lack of proof texts mean it is unimportant to God therefore, or at least not as major a sin as some have made it out to be?

While the Bible does not use the term masturbation, it does have things to say about the related issue of *uncleanness*.

Read:

Deuteronomy 23:10-11

If **involuntary** sexual stimulation was seen as making someone ‘unclean’, it might surely imply that improper **voluntary** sexual stimulation might do the same.

Note that while no sacrifice is demanded in the above example – which would have been the case if this were a matter of *outright sin* – the need for ritual cleansing at least indicates *something that spoils fellowship*.



*This would seem to show that the very least that the Bible indicates about masturbation is that it **spoils fellowship with God**, as does any issue of uncleanness.*

In the New Testament Paul links ‘impurity’ with ‘sexual immorality’ (see Ephesians 5 v3-5) and so may be referring to the same thing.

2. What lies behind it?

In the absence of very clear or direct references to masturbation, we will have to determine in our conscience before God whether we believe the actual *act* of masturbation is in itself a sin or not. But what is clear is this: masturbation is not a *neutral* activity. It is invariably associated with lustful thoughts and fantasy, and such *attitudes* that lie behind the act are, without doubt, sinful.

What we can safely say is this: masturbation is more of an enemy of the soul than a friend of it!

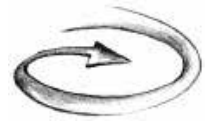
Masturbation is *not a neutral issue* therefore. For while it is self-evidently a *bodily* activity, it has a number of other dimensions to it:

- *Spiritually*, it is an expression of self-centredness. It says, “I need to find release, I want satisfaction and pleasure.” Wherever ‘I’ is at the centre, you can be sure there is an *Enemy of the Soul*.
- *Mentally*, it is an activity that involves the imagination. It is fed by, and then in turn feeds, lustful thoughts involving other people, real or imaginary, about whom I have no right to be having sexual thoughts.

- *Emotionally*, it is a lonely act in an area of life that God designed to be enjoyed by two people in the intimacy of marriage. This is why feelings of guilt and loneliness often follow it, indicating that here is something that is spoiling what God has made.
- *Psychologically*, it can become a compulsive part of my life. The more I do it, the more I want to do it; the more addicted I become to it, the more controlled I am by it, until it becomes an enslaving habit. This then affects the way I live and behave towards others.

Like homosexuality, and so many other abuses of the gift of sex, masturbation is a completely *fruitless* activity – another of those “fruitless deeds of darkness”.

What things can help us change in this area?



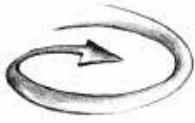
7. Pornography

While pornography is ‘as old as the hills’, it is more easily accessible these days than ever before. Nor is it confined to the more obvious sources such as ‘overtly’ pornographic magazines or Web sites; even some daily newspapers (certainly in Britain) and teenage magazines have *pictures* and *stories* that go way beyond the bounds of godly decency. TV programmes and films have increasingly pushed back the boundaries in their depiction of sex scenes.

All of this changes *the atmosphere* that we breathe, so that the standards we accept become lower and lower – often without our even noticing it.

Where do you see the standards being lowered in our country at this time?

Why do you think pornography is so attractive to so many people?



So, why is pornography wrong?

- it abuses manhood and womanhood as God has designed it to be
- it involves leading others into sin as they expose themselves in godless ways or engage in acts of immorality
- it provides opportunity for fantasising, feeding the mind with unhelpful imagery that inevitably comes out in some way or other
- it feeds lust, which clearly receives God’s condemnation

Do I look at overtly pornographic material, either in magazines, books or on the internet? Do I allow my fantasies free play, feeding my imagination and lust?

If so, I need to confess this as sin and get help to get out of its grip.

Do I recognise that I have lowered my standards of what I am prepared to watch or read?

8. Other perversions



The amazing thing about sinful man is that he seems to have a capacity for ever-increasing depravity, even giving himself to things that God, in his holiness, had not even thought of.

Such things do not bear our dwelling on; but nor can we omit to mention what may be an area of real struggle and sin for some people, particularly if a new Christian.

The following is therefore simply a list of some other abuses of sex that are an abomination to God.

- paedophilia (sex with children)
- incest (sex within prohibited family relationships; eg, between parents and children, parents and stepchildren, brothers and sisters, stepbrothers and stepsisters etc)

- group sex (sex with more than one person at a time)
- spouse-swapping (agreeing with friends to swap partners for sexual excitement)
- affairs (short-term relationships with someone outside of your marriage)
- voyeurism (watching other people undress or have sex)
- bestiality (sex involving animals)

If any of these are, or have been, an issue for you, we urge you to share it with one of your church leaders at the earliest opportunity so that they can pray with you.

9. ***Marrying unbelievers***

This may seem a strange inclusion in this section; but the prohibition of marriage to unbelieving partners is so clear and repeated in Scripture that it cannot be left out.

Read the following passages and note what they say about mixed marriages, or what the consequences of such marriages can be:



Deuteronomy 7 v1-6

Nehemiah 13 v23-27

Malachi 2 v11

2 Corinthians 6 v14–18

Trying to convince us that it will be ‘OK’ to marry a non-Christian is one of the devil’s biggest lies. “Go ahead! After all, you *love* them don’t you? They are nice and decent. They’re at least interested in your faith. They’ll get saved one day!”

But all of this is clear deception, and we need to recognise it as such! All that the devil is doing is trying to get us to disobey the clear teaching of the Word of God by playing on our emotions. Resolve that, if it comes to it, it is better to stay single *with* God’s blessing than to be married *without* it.

*You cannot ask God to **bless** what God **forbids** !*

But what about Christians who are already married to unbelievers? What should they do?



Read:

1 Corinthians 7 v12-17

What answer does Paul give to this question in this passage?

10. Flirting

This too may seem a strange inclusion in this section; but it is so prevalent in the world today that again we dare not omit it.

Flirting is behaving or dressing in a way that is designed to attract the interest of others and arouse them sexually. It is wrong because it promises to give what cannot be given, and because it entices others into thoughts or behaviour that are sinful.

If others are called upon not to lust, then I am called upon to make it easier (not harder!) for them not to do so!

Reflect for a moment on the following ways in which people often flirt. Are any of them characteristic of you and your behaviour?

- women: dressing with skirts that are too short or too split, or with tops that are too revealing
- men: dressing with trousers or shirts that are too revealing
- making sexual innuendoes in conversations with the opposite sex
- opening up your emotions inappropriately to the opposite sex
- sending hidden signals through eyes, mouths or gestures

Why not ask a friend you trust whether **they** think you do any of these?!



Finally: if you recognise any sin or weakness in any of these ten areas we have looked at, we urge you not to leave it, but to resolve right now that you will share it with one of your leaders as a matter of priority. Do not put it off. Do not listen to the devil's lies. Whatever you have done, as we shall see below, there can always be forgiveness and restoration.



4. Consequences of Sexual Sin

Why is it important that we deal with sexual sin and rule it in our life? Because the Bible says that it has consequences if we don't!



Read:

1 Corinthians 6 v12-20

Can you identify seven different reasons from this passage as to why sexual immorality is wrong?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

One other key reason why sexual immorality is wrong is that it invariably involves *deceitfulness*. We try to cover up what we have done – either from God or others – by pretending, by lying, by constructing elaborate scenarios, etc. Even King David fell into that trap! (See 2 Samuel 11 if you do not know the story.)

Wherever we have to resort to lies or deception, we can be sure it is the devil's work that is being done and not God's.

5. Ways out of Sexual Sin



While God sees sexual sin as a very serious thing, it does not mean it is unforgivable! It is important that we know there is forgiveness for it and a way out of it. No matter what we have done in the past, no matter how terrible we might now see it is, the Bible assures us that God can, and will, forgive us.

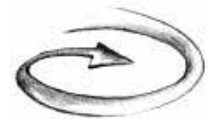
Read:

1 John 1 v8 – 2 v2

Once our sins are confessed and dealt with (which may involve receiving prayer or deliverance), and we have received God's forgiveness, then any remaining accusations of the devil are unimportant!

But besides forgiveness, we need to know how to take practical steps to ensure we keep clean and 'on the straight and narrow'. The following are some keys that can help us.

If you have a testimony in any of these areas, why not share it as we go along?



1. Feed your spirit

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." (Galatians 6 v7-8)

Pour your energy into feeding your spirit, rather than into feeding your soul, in as many ways as you can. If we spent as much time reading the Bible as watching TV, for example, we would be quite different people! Seek to fill *your* spirit with *his* Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5 v18) as the key to godly living. He is the one who helps us to ‘walk clean’ (Galatians 5 v16). Ask daily to be filled with him; take every opportunity in meetings to draw from him.

2. Give your heart

“My son, give me your *heart* ... ” is one of the first steps to avoiding immorality and sin (Proverbs 23 v26a). Unless God has our heart, then all the rules or guidelines in the world will not rescue us when the time of pressure comes. Pray daily for God to be ruler of your heart; keep your heart soft towards him; get help whenever you see it is getting hard. “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4 v23)

3. Guard your eyes

“My son give me your heart, and let your *eyes* keep to my ways ... ” (Proverbs 23 v26b). The context of this advice is handling sexual temptation! David fell into the sin of adultery because he failed to rule what his eyes looked at (2 Samuel 11 v2).

Avoid looking at things that you know are unhelpful – TV programmes, films, books, people. If you are caught unawares, get out of the situation fast!

4. Control your hands

Be careful of physical contact. Over-familiarity, hugs, caresses, and so on, can draw us into situations that are difficult to control. In particular, don't do anything when you are *not* being watched that you wouldn't do if you *were* being watched! Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships need to be particularly careful here; but so do all of us!

5. Rule your thoughts

Our thoughts are the most fertile area for the attacks of the devil, for he knows just what weak spot to go for! Paul tells us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10 v5). Don't cherish ideas or play with them; don't let romantic fantasies carry you away; repent of them and turn them instead to Jesus. Remember,

What we feed grows; what we starve, dies.

6. Open your life

Being accountable is a key to walking in godly ways. Resolve you will be honestly and openly accountable to at least one other Christian in any of these areas of weakness. Give them permission to ask you how you are getting on and to ask you the awkward questions!

7. Watch your standards

Drop a frog into boiling water (so the old story goes) and it will leap out immediately. Put it in cold water and heat the water up gradually, and it will not notice. Not a particularly pleasant illustration (!), but it does remind us of what life is like. The moral ‘temperature’ round us rises all the time, and we hardly notice. So check that you are not happily living with standards now that only a few years ago would have appalled you. If you are, it is probably you that has got it wrong, rather than society!

8. Set your boundaries

Establish what will be the boundaries of your behaviour *before* any situations arise. When they do, it will probably be too late! For example, a boyfriend and girlfriend should resolve that they will *never* go into one another’s rooms with the door closed. Determine your boundaries and stick to them!

9. Make your choices

Is sex (or marriage) *really* the most important thing in life? (If it is, then have you really understood the Kingdom?!) Resolve that you will stay single and celibate if that is what God calls you to, knowing that it is not ‘second best’, but can really have God’s call and blessing on it (see 1 Cor 7). Make the choice that you would be better off staying single and celibate *with* God’s blessing than getting married or having sex *without* it. Even married couples may have spells in their life where sex is not happening for a particular reason; but does the strength of your marriage really depend on that?

10. Enjoy your sex!

If you are married, then remember that sex is a good gift from God and one that he wants you to enjoy. A healthy and regular sex relationship within marriage is one of the best safeguards against the enemy's attacks (1 Corinthians 7 v3-5).

Now take some time to pray with one another that God would help you grow in each of these areas.



Enemies of the Soul

Unit 15: Stress



1. Introduction

Stress is probably something that all of us have experienced at some time or other in life. One definition of stress goes like this: *a state of personal anxiety, strain or tension resulting from pressures of life.* Well, while pressures of life are around, then surely stress is going to be around as well, isn't it?

*Before we go any further, and without looking ahead in this Unit, write down the one or two main things that you recognise cause **you** to get stressed. Be honest!*



Now share them (briefly!) with the group.

Well, at least we know now that we all get stressed at times! But this must not become a reason for our approving of one another in this state. The Bible shows that stress is another of those *Enemies of the Soul* that God wants to come in and help us deal with.



2. The Pressures of Life

Our definition described stress as “a state of personal anxiety, strain or tension resulting from *pressures of life*.”

What would you say are some of the most common pressures in life today?



Of course, pressure, in itself, may not always be wrong or a bad thing. Some pressure can be good and have a good purpose and outcome.

Can you think of some examples of this from everyday life?



What seems to be the key, then, is not *whether* we experience pressure (we all will – whether good or bad), but *how* we handle it, and whether we let it become a cause of *stress* to us or not.

While pressures are a part of life, stress does not have to be!



3. Stress – No New Phenomenon!

It is easy for us with our busy lifestyles in a busy world to think that stress is something relatively new. Not so! It seems to be as old as the hills!

In the following psalm David pours out his heart before God, expressing the stress he was experiencing in four areas: *physical, emotional/psychological, social* and *spiritual*.

Read:
Psalm 38

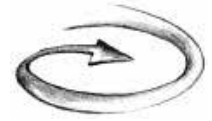
Note down the relevant verses or phrases in the box below:



| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Physical | Emotional/Psychological |
| Social | Spiritual |

So there is nothing new in stress then! In fact, when the Son of God came among us as a man two thousand years ago, he too experienced stress.

Can you think of one of the clearest examples of where Jesus is shown as undergoing stress?



God himself has faced the issue of stress – and has come through it! This means there is hope for us – and that there are answers to be found!

4. Some Expressions of Stress



Stress affects different ones of us in different ways. Something that may cause some of us just mild irritation can seem like the end of the world to another! It is important for each one of us, therefore, to recognise how *we* respond under pressure so that we can take appropriate steps to deal with it.

But there are some fairly common *expressions* of stress. These include:

- feeling we cannot cope or continue
- becoming anxious (often without reasonable cause)

- losing perspective
- feeling we are useless
- not sleeping or eating properly
- getting irritable with others quickly
- asking questions it is not helpful to ask (“But supposing I *don’t* get better?”)
- living in the realm of the hypothetical (“But what if ... ?”)



What other things could you add?



5. Stress: some Causes and some Cures

In this section, we want to look at some of the more common causes of stress and some ways of handling of it. Not every issue may be relevant to your situation; so you may want to choose those that are particularly relevant to you.

1. ***Failure to get our priorities right***

Much stress would be alleviated at a stroke if we took the Bible’s teaching seriously on this matter! While we know this in theory or in the comfort of a Christian meeting, we can quickly forget it in the busyness of daily life. An incident from the life of Mary and Martha bring this home.

Read:

Luke 10 v38–42

What words show that Martha was getting under stress?

How did her stress cause her to respond?

What did Jesus underline as the priority in this situation?



Much stress occurs in life when we do not make Jesus the priority.

On a scale of 0 – 10 (where 0 = very low and 10 = very high), assess what **priority** the following have in your life at this time (in reality, not in theory!) by putting a ring around your score.

Are there changes that you need to make to get the priorities right or to get the balance right?

| | very low | very high |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------|
| God | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Time with God | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| The family | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Friends | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Leisure | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| My job | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| Meeting with other Christians | 0 | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 |
| | | |
| | | |



2. **Failure to stop and wait**

From the previous story in Luke 10, it would be easy to assume that Mary was the ‘spiritual’ one in the family; but this was not the case. We know from elsewhere that Martha was just as spiritual (see, for example, John 11 v17–27). It was simply that she had not yet learned, like Mary, the secret of stopping and waiting; of grabbing the moments in the day to refocus on God.

Much of our stress arises from failing simply to *stop*. We get busy; more pressure comes, so we get more busy to deal with it; yet we have less resources to do so. And the very last thing we think we have time to do is to *stop*. Yet this is the very thing we need to do!

Do you recognise this scenario in your own life? When does it tend to happen for you?

Why do you think we find it hard to stop and focus on God when things get busy or pressured?

Read:

Isaiah 64 v4

Proverbs 8 v34



Much stress would be dealt with if only we learned to stop and wait before God. Time spent with him is not time wasted but time invested.

3. **Failure to ‘seek first the Kingdom’**

God keep us from being nothing more than a holy huddle! Christians need to be ‘out there’ in the world, being salt and light (Matthew 5 v13–14), bringing godly influence to bear as much as they can.

But the truth is, it is so easy to slip from pursuing *the Kingdom in the world*, to just pursuing *the world*! Of course, we say that we want promotion in order

to bring more influence; that we want a pay increase so we can give more away, and so on. This may well be the case; but it is also the case that “the heart is deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17 v9) and that what we really want is the money, the perks, the prestige and so on. When this becomes our goal and the first thing we are seeking (and it can happen so subtly!), then we are lining ourselves up for a whole dose of stress coming our way.

Read:

Matthew 6 v19–34

What issues of life that can often bring us stress does Jesus touch on here?

What does Jesus say is the key (v33), and what do you think he meant by that?



4. Disobedience

One cause of stress – and one that we may not like to face up to – is *disobedience*. God has given us his Word with its instructions for right living, for enjoying his blessing, and for keeping under God’s protection. If we disobey, then it should not surprise us when we start to forfeit some of those things and begin to get into stress.

In Deuteronomy 28, Moses outlines the blessings and curses brought about by obedience and disobedience respectively. One of the consequences of disobedience is stress!



Read:
Deuteronomy 28 v64–67

What phrases in this passage speak of stress?

Of course, this does not mean that if we feel stressed we must assume we have been disobedient! But it is certainly an issue that we should look at and enquire of God about.

5. **Wrong motivations**

Whenever we do things – whatever they may be – out of a wrong motivation then we should not be surprised to find that things may not go smoothly. God cannot bless things like greed, ambition, compromise, desire for recognition etc. When we live like this, we step outside of his order and pressure and stress will inevitably arise.

Do not be surprised to find God opposing you when your motivations are wrong!

Get the motivation right once again and the wall of stress, based as it was on a faulty foundation, can now fall.

Can you recognise in your own life times when wrong motivations have led to stress? Do you recognise any at this time?



6. **Not believing I am “a new creation”**

“The trouble with me is, I am just a born worrier!” Well, maybe that’s how you *were* born; but it doesn’t mean that’s how you have to stay! For the Bible

talks about us being “born again” (John 3 v3). This means the opportunity of a brand new start – in every aspect of life. Baptism is the outward sign of the death of the old me and the start of “a new life” (Romans 6 v3–4).

Read:

2 Corinthians 5 v17

What do you think this implies?

We do ourselves, and one another, no favours when we fall into the language or ideas of “I am a born ...” We do *not* have to stay the same!



*What matters is not what I was **born** as, but what I have now been **re-born** as! In Christ, I really am “a new creation”.*

7. Not understanding the principle of ‘fellowship’

There is, in most of us, a strong streak of independence. Phrases like, “I can manage, thanks” or “I’ll sort it out myself” or “I didn’t want to bother you” reveal how much we fail to understand how God has made us and how he wants us to operate.

God has designed us not to be *independent*, but to be *inter-dependent*. This is one of God’s gifts to us –

- to stop us getting proud
- to get his work done the better
- to bear the strain of life together

When we fail to act *inter-dependently*, we deny the very way that God has made us and has designed the Body of Christ to operate.



Read:

1 Corinthians 12 v21–27

There is a very real danger of getting stressed because we fail to take this seriously and do not draw on the strength of our fellowship in Christ.

Do you draw on the fellowship of brothers and sisters when pressures come? Or do you ‘clam up’ and try to ‘get through’ on your own?



8. Family life that is not ‘Kingdom’

Let’s face it, bringing up a family is hard work! And it can be especially so when children are small and demanding, or when teenagers are growing up and starting to ‘flex their muscles’. At such times, family life can be a cause of real stress.



Read:

Genesis 21 v8–11

1 Samuel 2 v22–25

What was the cause of the family stress in these situations?

1. The importance of Kingdom order

In both stories above, there was a lack of ‘Kingdom order’ in family life. Where such order is lacking, it will invariably lead to stress. Where it is present, it does not mean there will never be a problem! But it does mean that we can appeal to God for his intervention and blessing and receive *his* peace rather than *our* stress.

Paul sums up God’s Kingdom order for the family in the following passage:

Read:

Ephesians 5 v21 – 6 v4

Note down what each part of the family is called to do, and what this might actually mean in practice.

**Husbands**

Wives

Children

Fathers/mothers

Am I fulfilling my God-given role in my family in a God-designed way?

**2. The importance of discipline**

Remember too the important place of *discipline* for children. While western culture has reacted to this (to its cost!), the Bible is unequivocal about its importance and value. Proper discipline, within a loving framework, can save many a stressful situation for all concerned! The wise will establish it as part of their family life from the earliest days.

Read:

Proverbs 13 v24; 22 v15; 23 v13-14; 29 v15

Hebrews 12 v5-11

*Am I shirking the issue of discipline in my family life?
Am I exercising it in a proper way?*



9. Leadership responsibilities

Leadership, whether in the family, the church or in the world, can at times be stressful. With decisions to be made, consequences to be thought of, people to be concerned for, accountability to be given, and so on, it is not always an easy thing to be a leader, as Moses found out.

Read:

Numbers 11 v1-15

Clearly here was a man who was facing the stress of leadership! But God had a solution for this stressful situation, as he always does for others.

Read:

Numbers 11 v16-30

What strategies did God set in place to ease the burden?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Do I take time to ask God for his strategy for my leadership?

10. The burden of the workplace

For many of us, the burden of the workplace is getting greater and greater, as employers make increasingly heavy demands. But while it can be a burden, for some of us it can also be our 'thing' in life, captivating and exciting us, and giving us a sense of worth. As a result we give ourselves to it more and more in order to increase that sense of worth and fulfilment; until one day, without our even noticing, it becomes an idol – and an idol that is remorseless in its demands.



God does want us to be good workers in the workplace (e.g. Ephesians 6 v5–9); but he does not want the workplace to so captivate our hearts, or so to bind us up in fear, that it takes a disproportionate place in our lives and so becomes a source of stress.

What relevance do the following verses have for the workplace and for our handling of stress there?

Genesis 2 v1–3

Matthew 6 v24

2 Corinthians 12 v7–10

Galatians 6 v7

Colossians 3 v23–24

1 Thessalonians 5 v24

“No man can serve two masters.” Resolve this principle in your heart.

11. Study

Since this is being written in Oxford, we can hardly miss this one out!

Study can be a great cause of stress for many people – the challenge of getting a piece of work completed on time, squeezing in all the reading that needs to be done, revising for key exams, and so on. But as the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1 v9), including in this area.





Read:
Ecclesiastes 1 v12-18

This man’s studying had certainly produced some stress!

Of course, the pressure involved at essay and exam times can be a great motivation – we might never get round to doing the work otherwise! But it is not God’s heart that our study should be a cause of stress to us.

Some keys to not getting stressed through studying include:

- planning a work schedule
- not leaving everything to the last minute
- learning to say ‘No!’ to invitations that come at the wrong moment
- keeping our perspective on what is the most important thing in life
- recognising it really *isn’t* the end of the world if I don’t do well!

What others can you add from your own experience?



12. The ordinary events of life

Some stressful situations that come our way are not anyone’s ‘fault’ but are simply part of living in this fallen world. Even ordinary things can be stressful at times:

- fitting everything in to the day
- caring for the children
- making our money stretch
- getting somewhere on time
- dealing with the car when it breaks down yet again

Can you add other things to this list – the ‘ordinary’ things in life that you know make you stressful?



Any of these things can be the cause of great stress, if we do not handle them right or use ‘the means of grace’ God has given us.

Read:

2 Corinthians 1 v3–10

2 Corinthians 7 v5–7



What secrets does Paul share in these passages about how he handled some of the events of life that came his way?

13. Difficult circumstances

Let’s face it: life is hard at times! Sin has spoiled this world in which we live, and Christians are no more exempt from the consequences of that than others. Sometimes that will involve hard circumstances – things beyond the ‘ordinary events of life’; things like severe illness, unemployment, hardship, bereavement etc – with the pressures and potential for stress that can lead to.

The people in the Bible faced such circumstances too, but they discovered again and again that the secret of dealing with the stress was to *focus on God again* and to *trust his sovereignty*.

Read:

Exodus 16 v1–35

Note the following from this passage:

- Difficulties can make us say things we don’t really mean (v1–3). Be careful!
- Never leave God out of the equation. He has always got a surprise up his sleeve! (v4–5)



- Remember that grumbling against our circumstances is ultimately grumbling against God (v8).
- Remember that your circumstances are always known to God (v11–12). He sees, hears and cares.
- Don't try to get round your difficulties in ways that involve disobeying God (v19 & 27).
- Make provision for remembering what God has done in the past as a provocation to faith for the future (v32–34).
- Remember that God has seasons in his working. Circumstances come and go (v35; see also Joshua 5 v11–12). Only God remains for ever; so focus on him.

*Providing we handle it right, difficult circumstances can become a **friend** rather than a **foe**. We can choose to let the pressure turn us **inwards to stress** or **upwards to God**.*

It is as we turn our circumstances upwards to God that our faith and character can develop.



Read:

Romans 5 v1–5

James 1 v2–4

1 Peter 1 v3–7

*Are you going through some difficult circumstances at the moment? If so, lift your eyes to God and remember that **he knows** and **he cares**. Trust in his sovereignty over your life and allow him to pour more of his character into you.*

14. Unjust actions of others

Sometimes the unjust or unfair actions of others towards us can produce circumstances that lead to stress, as Elijah experienced.

Read:

1 Kings 19 v1-5

At such times we have a *choice* – either to respond to the stress and fear of the situation, as Elijah did initially; or to press into God for his reassuring presence, as Elijah discovered he needed to do in the following verses (v9-13). *It was this encounter with God that changed everything for him.* The situation was still the same; but he was now starting to see the bigness of God and was therefore able to draw on God's solution for the problem (v14-18).

Remember: when unjust, unfair or hard situations come our way, it might just be *God* – wanting to get our heart and our attention!

What do you think we mean by this last sentence?

*We need to keep **God** in perspective if we are going to keep **the situation** in perspective.*



15. Failure to bring things to God

Sometimes we are left with our stress because we simply fail to take things to God in prayer. Perhaps we feel we do not know what to pray or how to pray; perhaps we do not even want to pray! Yet in failing to pray, we are cutting ourselves off from the very lifeline that we need.

The good thing about the Bible is that it is full of prayers that can help us at such times. The Psalms are a particularly rich source of prayers – especially the sort that tell God how we feel in times of stress!

In a very real way, the psalmists discovered that prayer ‘gets things off your chest’ and relieves the stress building up within, as we see in the following examples.



Read:

Psalm 13 v1-6; 35 v1-28; 42 v5-11; 44 v20-26

What do these examples show us about the reality with which the psalmists prayed?

What did their prayers always include however?

An old hymn puts it like this:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
 All our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry
 Everything to God in prayer!
 O what peace we often forfeit,
 O what needless pain we bear –
 All because we do not carry
 Everything to God in prayer!*

*Have we trials and temptations?
 Is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged:
 Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 Can we find a friend so faithful
 Who will all our sorrows share?
 Jesus knows our every weakness –
 Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 Cumbered with a load of care?
 Jesus only is our refuge,
 Take it to the Lord in Prayer.
 Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer!
 In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
 Thou wilt find a solace there.*

Joseph Scriven, 1819–86



5. Promises of God for Times of Stress

Let us end this Unit by focusing on God and some of his promises of comfort and strength for those hard times in life. As we read them, let's claim them and resolve we will go out and live them!



Read:

Psalm 94 v18-19

Matthew 11 v28-30

2 Corinthians 4 v7-9

Philippians 4 v6-7

1 Peter 5 v6-7

Pray for one another that these verses will be reality in all our hearts and lives.

Enemies of the Soul

Review of Units 6-10



Introduction

Our memories are amazing machines: they seem to have the ability to remember all sorts of irrelevant trivia and events, and to forget the things that are important! Even more so, they can forget the things that have challenged us and require change of us. That's why, every five units through Enemies of the Soul, we are providing an opportunity to stop and remind ourselves briefly of the things that God has been saying to us, and to check with one another on progress we are making.

Of course, going over the same ground is not always our favourite pastime – think of how we groan when TV shows yet another 'repeat'! If that's how you find yourself approaching this review, we would ask you to check your thinking right now, or you may miss something that God might want to do for you.

While this Review Unit is designed to be brief, it is nonetheless designed to be thorough. Your openness and your honesty will determine its value!

Stop and pray together that God would help us to be honest and open as we share together, and that he would bring to mind anything that we need to share with one another.



1. Unit 11 - Pleasing Others

1. *How did we distinguish between 'pleasing others' in a wrong/negative sense and in a right/positive sense?*

(-)

(+)

2. *How can 'a culture of popularity' impinge on our Christian witness at times?*

3. *We noted the following roots of 'pleasing others':*

- Insecurity about who we are in Christ
- Failure to settle the issue
- Avoiding the cross (not being willing to 'die')
- Fear of man

Which of these, if any, still tends to be the main cause of 'pleasing others' for you? Are you seeing growth in that area?

4. *Why is hypocrisy linked with pleasing others?*

Who were the chief hypocrites in the time of Jesus?

Are there are areas of life at the moment where you could be charged with hypocrisy?

5. *Whom are we called to please as Christians, and in what ways?*



2. Unit 12 - Pride

1. *Just as in the Unit on 'Pleasing Others', the word 'pride' can be used in both positive and negative senses. How would you define each of these?*

(+)

(-)

2. *We looked at seven different areas of pride in the Bible:*

- Pride in our status or position in life
- Pride in our achievements
- Pride in our physical abilities
- Pride in our skills & abilities

- Pride in our learning
- Pride in our spirituality
- Pride in our national achievements

Which of these did you decide were the main ones in our society today?

Which of these did you identify as the biggest areas of challenge for you personally? Or were there others?

Do you feel you are making progress in dealing with them?

3. *We noted that the Bible consistently presents God as one who “opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4 v6). Why does he do this?*

4. *We looked at seven serious consequences to the sin of pride.*

- Self-deception
- Spiritual blindness
- Hardness of heart
- Contempt for others
- A quarrelsome spirit
- A vengeful spirit



- Judgement!

Which of these did I note tends to arise in my own heart when I get proud?

Do I still recognise any of these consequences of pride in my own life at times?

Pray with one another in two's or three's over any that are still an area of struggle for you.

3. Unit 13 - Irritability and Anger

1. *Define our two key words:*

Irritability:

Anger:

2. *Is it possible for people to demonstrate righteous anger? If so, what must we take great care of?*

3. *What did we mean by “the exception that has become the rule” in this area of anger?*

4. *We noted that the roots of irritability and anger could often be found in -*

- Deep rooted habits
- Unresolved inner conflicts
- Selfishness
- Excusing myself
- Feeling we have been treated badly
- Owning the right to judge
- Not spending time with God

Which of these did you identify as the main root of anger and irritability in your own life? Are you beginning to deal with these?

5. *What did we mean by saying “Don’t nurse your anger”?*



6. *Are you making progress in dealing with your anger when it does arise (eg, by apologising quickly, not letting the sun go down on your anger, etc)?*

Share with the group any progress you feel you are making, and pray with one another over any areas that still need to change.

4. Unit 14 - Sexual Impurity

1. *“Sex has become ‘a thing to do’ rather than ‘a relationship to enjoy’.” What did we mean by this?*

2. *Where is the only proper place for the enjoyment*



of sexual relationship?

3. *What sort of 'sexual activity' does your answer to Question 2 therefore rule out? (Try to remember as many of the ten points we looked at as you can.)*

4. *Why is sexual immorality so wrong?*

5. *Are you making progress in any areas of weakness?*

5. Unit 15 - Stress

1. *Why does stress seem to be such a common part of life today?*

2. *We noted 15 different things that can be the cause of stress:*

- Failure to get our priorities right
- Failure to stop and wait
- Failure to ‘seek first the Kingdom’
- Disobedience
- Wrong motivations
- Not believing I am “a new creation”
- Not understanding the principle of ‘fellowship’
- Family life that is not ‘Kingdom’
- Leadership responsibilities
- The burden of the workplace
- Study
- The ordinary events of life
- Difficult circumstances
- Unjust actions of others
- Failure to bring things to God

Are any of these still a factor in producing stress in your life at this time? Are there any other things that make you stressed?

Are you growing in the way you seek to deal with these issues?

3. *What does Jesus’ handling of stress in the Garden of Gethsemane reassure us of?*
