

# SOUL PRESCRIPTION

**DIVISIVENESS:  
DISTURBING THE PEACE**

**SIN FAMILY #8**

GOSSIP ARGUING  
CRITICISM  
**DIVISIVENESS**  
JUDGMENTALISM  
SLANDER

**BILL BRIGHT & HENRY BRANDT**



# SOUL PRESCRIPTION

*Experience  
True Healing and Freedom*

**BILL Bright & Henry Brandt**

*Foreword by Tim LaHaye*

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**This book contains stories of people the authors met with over the years. In some cases, names and secondary details have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.**

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He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

—Psalm 147:3 NIV



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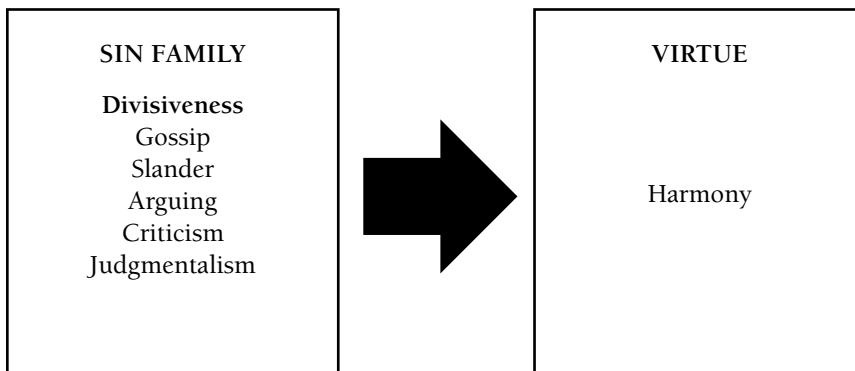




## Chapter 16



# DIVISIVENESS: DISTURBING THE PEACE



Visitors to Castle Ward, a country estate near Strangford Lough in Ireland, are treated to the sight of a house divided against itself, literally. One façade is in the classical style, while the other is in the Gothic style. This difference in design extends to the interior of the house, where the rooms that were most frequented by females are adventurously decorated and the male preserves are more conservative and conventional.

The architectural discord is due to a difference of opinion between Bernard Ward (later Viscount Bangor) and his wife, Lady Anne Bligh, at the time the house was under construction in the 1760s. Apparently, the couple could not agree on a single style

for their new house that would suit them both, so they “agreed to disagree.” The house bears the marks of their disagreement to this day.

Like Lord and Lady Bangor, some people today have a history of being involved in disagreements. From fistfights on the playground, to power plays in the office, to arguments on a church committee, they are known for being at odds with others. They are quarrelsome, critical, and divisive.

In listing the acts of the sinful nature in Galatians 5, Paul included “divisions” and “the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group” (verse 20). He was describing what goes on in a body of people when its members don’t agree. This is a type of “home divided against itself” and “kingdom at war with itself” (Matthew 12:25).

The sin of divisiveness raised its head early on among Paul’s new congregation at Corinth. At one point in a letter to them, Paul had to say, “Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves.”

I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe’s household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. Some of you are saying, “I am a follower of Paul.” Others are saying, “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,” or “I follow only Christ.” Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!

—1 Corinthians 1:10–13

*It is as we are all in one accord that we move ahead to the future that God has for us.*

Divisiveness can be a problem in any type of team or group. But in a church group, particularly, unity is essential to bearing fruit. It is as we are all in one accord that we move ahead, under the Spirit’s direction, to the future that God has for us. God bids us, as much as it is possible, to “live in peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

When an individual is picking a fight with someone else or setting one part of a group against another, he or she is at fault before God and the body.

Are you uncertain about whether this sin habit of divisiveness describes you? Keep your mind open as we look at different kinds of quarreling and ways of using words that lead to division.

### THE MONSTER OF STRIFE

In a fable called “Hercules and Pallas,” Aesop told a story that is instructive for people who find themselves embroiled in conflict.

It seems that Hercules, journeying along a narrow roadway, came across a strange-looking animal that reared its head and threatened him. Undaunted, the hero gave the animal a few powerful blows with his club.

Hercules would then have gone on his way. However, much to his astonishment, the monster grew three times as big as it was before and appeared still more threatening.

The hero redoubled his blows, striking fast and furiously at the monster. But the harder and quicker came the strokes of his club, the bigger and more frightful grew the monster. It now completely filled the road.

Just then Pallas appeared upon the scene. “Stop, Hercules. Cease your blows,” she said. “The monster’s name is Strife. Leave it alone, and it will soon become as little as it was at first.”

Of course, every Aesop fable has its moral. What do you suppose is this one’s? “Strife feeds on conflict.”

Some people seem to have a knack for contributing to a conflict so that strife grows and grows. Maybe it is starting shouting matches with family members. Maybe it is alienating friends by talking about them behind their back. Maybe it is creating divisions in teams and groups. In any case, such people have a problem that calls for more than learning better social behavior; it is really a sin habit we are talking about.

These people need to know that in fact they are involved in a complex of sins. Certainly, sins of any sort rarely if ever stand on their own. But fighting, in particular, is a sin that tends to company with others of its kind. Sins like anger, bitterness, and

#### Are You Divisive?

The following self-evaluation quiz will help you determine whether you have a tendency toward conflict.

- Right now, are you engaged in a “hot” or “cold” war with anybody?
- How often do you argue and quarrel with others? Do you raise your voice?
- Do you tell stories about others that they would prefer not to be spread around?
- Do you ever make up (or exaggerate) stories to put your enemies in a bad light?
- Is it more important to you to get people on your side than it is to help reach agreement within a group you are a part of?
- Do you take delight in pointing out the faults of others?
- Do you condemn the piety or morality of others?
- Do you have a reputation as someone who is hard to get along with?

envy often erupt into visibility by means of the sin of quarreling. The apostle James explored this interaction of fighting and other sins.

“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you?” James asked a contentious bunch of early Christians. And then he answered his own question. “Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it” (James 4:1–2).

Due to the serious nature of its causes, conflict between individuals can be severe and bitter. And the closer the two people are, the more bitter the conflicts may become. This was well illustrated for me (Henry) in a true story about a man named Bert told to me by my friend Tim Daley.

### **BROTHERLY HATE**

Bert was a Christian man and a successful insurance agent who had other agents working for him. Among these other agents was Bert’s older brother, Allan, whom Bert had taken on with some trepidation because of the strain their working arrangement might put on their relationship. The trepidation Bert had felt proved to be prophetic.

All was fine at first, but then Allan refused to comply with some new procedures Bert established for all his agents to follow. Over the period of a full year, the two brothers had many strained and heated conversations about the issue. Finally, one day when they were throwing verbal bricks at each other, Allan cleaned out his office and left.

Feeling bad about what had happened, Bert called his brother on the phone a few days later. The verbal barrage started up again and ended only when Bert hung up on Allan. He was livid with rage.

There was no contact between the two for a month. Meanwhile, Bert consulted with biblical counselor Tim Daley about the situation.

After listening intently to the story, Tim leaned forward and said to Bert, “You are a bitter, angry man. The way you talked to your brother is unacceptable as a Christian example. You need to repent and then apologize to your brother for your bad attitude. You will not find peace until you do.”

Bert was not prepared for that response. He was expecting some reassurance that he was justified in his response because of the problem Allan had created. Nevertheless, he pondered Tim’s advice.

At first Bert did nothing. He was afraid to call his brother and did not want to admit he was wrong. In the end, though, he admitted his sin to God and asked to be cleansed and empowered to love his brother. To his surprise, his resistance to calling Allan turned into an urge to see him.

Bert managed to overcome Allan’s reluctance and arranged a twenty-minute meeting. At the appointed time, as Bert looked at his brother, he sensed nothing but compassion for him in his heart; all the bitterness was gone. He proceeded to apologize for the attitude he’d had toward Allan and asked forgiveness. Both brothers had tears in their eyes.

Later, Bert would say to my friend Tim that at that moment it was as though a two-hundred-pound weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

As we see in the case of Bert and Allan, the unrighteous use of words plays a major role in our conflicts with others. Words can be tools to build up or they can be weapons to destroy.

## WORDS AS WEAPONS

Interpersonal conflict usually occurs because of, and by means of, the words we use. “Harsh words make tempers flare” (Proverbs 15:1). With words, we quarrel, argue, and dispute. With words, we gossip, slander, and smear. With words, we mock and ridicule, taunt and deride. With words, we criticize and judge and curse and condemn. Certainly your authors can look back on times when we wish we could have taken back words we had spoken—but that’s never possible.

The apostle James was right in saying that the tongue has a destructive power far beyond what its small size might suggest.

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.

—James 3:3–6

We sometimes use our tongue like a weapon, to hurt and to maim others. Even if a part of us realizes that what we are doing is wrong, we cannot seem to stop ourselves. The tongue at such times, seems wild, unmanageable.

James, again, told us what this is like. “People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish,” he said, “but no one can tame the tongue.”

*If you have a divisiveness habit, it is almost guaranteed that you have a tongue like a poisonous snake that has gotten loose from its cage.*

People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

—James 3:7–10

Have you tried and failed to tame your tongue? If you have a divisiveness habit, it is almost guaranteed that you have a tongue like a poisonous snake that has gotten loose from its cage. The people nearby had better watch out!

You had better watch out too if you are prone to saying wicked things. Jesus explained, “A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. And I tell you this,

you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak” (Matthew 12:35–36).

Two of the chief ways people hurt others are by gossiping about them and by slandering them.

### TELLING TALES

One need only look at entertainment news to see how much we, as a society, love to know details from the lives of celebrities and other public figures—and the more intimate the detail, the better we like it. A similar dynamic is at work in our lives when we put gossip into circulation, or pass it on secondhand, and when we shoot out slander like a dart full of poison.

*Gossip* is passing around tales of an intimate nature about another. An example is telling Marilyn in Accounts Receivable that Phil in Marketing has separated from his wife. *Slander*, on the other hand, is telling a deliberate falsehood about someone else that damages that person’s reputation. Here an example would be claiming that Phil has been embezzling from the company, when in fact, he has not. Both forms of talebearing are wrong.

If the tongue is a flame of destruction set on fire by hell itself, as James said, this is certainly true in the case of gossip. “Scoundrels create trouble; their words are a destructive blaze” (Proverbs 16:27).

Ramona Cramer Tucker tells a story about a friend of hers named Michelle, who learned too late the danger of gossip.

While at a restaurant over lunch, Michelle and her coworker, Sharon, stopped in the restroom to fix their makeup before returning to their jobs. Their small talk turned to the subject of who drove them crazy. Immediately Michelle launched into a two-minute diatribe about Beth, a mutual coworker. As Michelle prepared to divulge more specifics, a stall door opened. Out walked Beth, red-faced and angry.

In a split second, what had seemed like a pressure-relief session turned into an awkward mess. Michelle and Beth stared at each other in embarrassed panic. Michelle

knew she couldn't take her words back. In the instant their eyes met, Beth fled out the door. That afternoon, Beth didn't return to work, and the next day Michelle heard through the grapevine that Beth had resigned.<sup>1</sup>

Michelle did not know Beth was listening and had no idea her words would have such an effect. But it does not matter. She should have been watching what she said about Beth anyway.

Gossip proceeds from an unkind spirit. Since gossip is rarely about something that reflects positively on another, passing it on may be an exercise in taking delight in another's error or misfortune. The desire to gossip is often connected with other sins, such as idleness, gloating, and a desire for advantage (possessing information makes one powerful).

The book of Proverbs reveals some of the wicked consequences of gossip.

Gossip makes people mad. "As surely as a north wind brings rain, so a gossiping tongue causes anger!"  
—Proverbs 25:23

Gossip prolongs arguments. "Fire goes out without wood, and quarrels disappear when gossip stops."  
—Proverbs 26:20

Gossip ruins relationships. "A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends."  
—Proverbs 16:28

*A gossip's mouth is the Devil's mailbag.*

A Welsh saying states, "a gossip's mouth is the Devil's mailbag." May none of us deliver any mail postmarked "Hell."

As devilish as gossip is, talebearing crosses a line to a new level of seriousness when it becomes slander.

God's position on slander is clear enough. "Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people," He said (Leviticus 19:16). "I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors" (Psalm 101:5). "Get rid of all...harsh words, and slander" (Ephesians 4:31).

Christians tell harmful untruths about others more often than we would like to believe. Usually they are motivated by hate,



jealousy, or a thirst for revenge. We can be certain that something has gone seriously wrong in the spirit of a Christ follower who slanders another, especially if the slander is part of an ongoing pattern of behavior.

A. B. Simpson, an evangelical leader from a century back, spoke words we would be wise to take to heart today. He said, “I would rather play with the forked lightning, or take in my hands living wires with their fiery current, than speak a reckless word against any servant of Christ, or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others, to the hurt of their own souls and bodies.”

But gossip and slander are not the only ways to hurt others with words. Criticism and judgmentalism are two more.

### DESTRUCTIVE SPEECH

Russian theologian Alexander Schmemmann and his fiancée were sitting in a Paris Métro subway train when a badly dressed and unattractive old woman got on and sat down across from them. Speaking in Russian, the couple began to talk about her and to laugh about her appearance, assuming all the while that she could not understand what they were saying. As the train pulled up to a station, though, the woman stopped in front of them and said in perfect Russian, “But I was not always so old or so ugly.” Then without another word, she stepped onto the station platform, never to be seen by the couple again.

Schmemmann reported later that he was not only shocked that he and his fiancée had been understood by the woman, but worse, he was shocked to realize that he, a follower of Christ, had so easily dehumanized another and ripped away some of her few, remaining shreds of dignity. He was driven to confession before the Lord.

Criticism is a kind of speech that tears down; it is not an expression of love that wants to build the other up. One biblical proverbialist said, “Love prospers when a fault is forgiven” (Proverbs 17:9). The apostle Paul warned, “If you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another” (Galatians 5:15).

Do you find fault with others? Do you point out their mistakes? Do you tease them about their weaknesses? Then remember what Paul said: “Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them” (Ephesians 4:29).

If your criticism is tinged with self-righteousness, then you are likely guilty of judgmentalism—this is finding fault with others specifically, about their spiritual or moral condition. The New Testament is consistent in saying that God alone has the ability and right to judge others’ standing before Him.

Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, “Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,” when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

—Matthew 7:1–5

Don’t speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God’s law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?

—James 4:11–12

If you see something that appears wrong in the spiritual life of another, do not presume that it is your job to flag the error for others. Instead, use it as a reminder that you need to examine yourself for similar flaws. Learn not to create conflict in this way but to set an example of harmony.

## LEARNING TO GET ALONG

In his modern classic, the Lord of the Rings trilogy, author J. R. R. Tolkien tells the story of nine individuals who band together as “the fellowship of the Ring” to thwart the plans of the evil Sauron. During the course of their harrowing adventures, the nine often quarrel and disagree with one another—elf against dwarf, men against hobbits. But in the end, the fellowship holds together sufficiently for the group to succeed in rescuing Middle-earth from the perilous power of the Ring.

Tolkien was a Christian, and so maybe he had the church in the back of his mind as he developed his conception of the fellowship of the Ring. We are to be that body of people who overcome the human tendencies to fracture and fragment, such that others will look at us and know us by our “love for one another” (John 13:35). This goes even for Christians who have an ingrained habit of fighting with others.

What was on Jesus’ mind when whip, thorn, and nail were just hours away? Among other things, He was concerned about our getting along. In His words to the Father, He said, “I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in Me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in us so that the world will believe You sent Me” (John 17:21).

Such unity and harmony are not ours just by choosing them; they are possible only through supernatural enabling. When Christ departed this world, He left behind the Holy Spirit to live in us and work in our hearts. He softens our hearts toward one another and quells our tendency toward conflict. For this reason, Paul could say, “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

As we work through the soul-healing process, we should be seeking the virtue of harmony with others to take the place that was once filled by conflict. Our final word on the subject to you, then, is the same as that of the apostle Paul: “Live in harmony with each other” (Romans 12:16).

*What was on Jesus’  
mind when whip,  
thorn, and nail were  
just hours away?  
Among other things,  
our getting along.*

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## SOUL PRESCRIPTION FOR DIVISIVENESS

Are you struggling with a habit of being divisive? We have outlined a five-step process to help you repent and heal in this area of your life. Take all the time you need with each of the steps below.

### Step 1: Adopt a Correct View of God

When we are constant sources of conflict and strife, it is obvious that we are not truly seeing God for who He is. What aspects of your view of God may be influencing your conflict problem? The points listed below will help you begin the process of self-analysis.

- God is love; there is no place in His kingdom for conflict.

We don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God Himself has taught you to love one another.

—1 Thessalonians 4:2

- God is merciful and He expects us to show mercy to others.

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.

—Ephesians 4:2

When you view God as a loving and merciful being, you will respond in like manner to those around you. Undertake a survey on the Bible's passages on God's peaceable nature. Tools such as a concordance and a topical Bible can help you in this task.

### Step 2: Revise Your False Beliefs

What erroneous beliefs do you have that justify your combative spirit? Chances are, you have some false beliefs about yourself, about other people, and about how life works. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you believe you must always correct others when they are wrong?

Starting a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so stop before a dispute breaks out.

—Proverbs 17:14

- Do you believe you have the right to say spiteful things about others because of something they have said about you?

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

—Romans 12:18

Continue your Bible study by examining what Scripture says about harmony and unity. As you do so, reconsider your beliefs, acknowledged or unspoken, that may have helped turn you into a fighter. Conform your thinking to God's truth.

### Step 3: Repent of Your Sin

What type of conflict are you engaged in? Is it gossip? Quarreling? Judgmentalism? Something else? Identify it specifically.

After admitting your sin to yourself, admit it to God. Pray the following prayer of repentance (or pray in your own words):

God, I am guilty of \_\_\_\_\_. It is sin, and I am sorry for it. Please forgive me for being a person of conflict and strife. Cleanse me of that sin, I pray. Then grant me some of Your power to keep from participating in conflict the next time the potential arises. And the next. And the next. In Christ's name, amen.

If you have harmed others with your sin, apologize to them. Seek reconciliation and offer restitution where appropriate.

### Step 4: Defend against Spiritual Attacks

Beware the world, the flesh, and the Devil, who will want to goad you into fighting again. They want nothing better than to see you

contradict your repentance by returning to a pattern of conflict. Do not be naive about these foes!

- In God’s eyes, harmony among people is a high value. In the world system, though, conflict is seen as a way of getting what you want. Watch out for worldly values that would justify your sinful tendency toward conflict. Overcome the world by rejecting its values.
- God honors those who control their desires to say and do things that divide people. Your flesh, or sinful nature, however, still enjoys the feeling of power that comes from mixing it up with people. Do not forget that the sinful nature has been crucified and that you do not have to give in to its desires. Give in to the Spirit instead.
- God provides a way out of every situation where you would be tempted to spread strife. Satan, on the other hand, gladly points out each opportunity you have to fight, gossip, and judge. Resist his schemes with the “shoes of peace” and the rest of the spiritual armor (see Ephesians 6:10–18).

Remain alert to any temptation that would draw you back into your sin of conflict. Seek the resources offered by God to defend against the attacks when they come. Those resources are more than enough to beat back all attacks.

### **Step 5: Flee Temptation**

If you do not want to give in to the temptation of conflict, get away from it as fast as you can!

- Focus on your relationship with God.  
You get into conflict when you focus on what others have done to upset you. So instead, keep your focus on God and His peace-loving nature. Learn to jump right into prayer when a situation arises that makes you want to fight.
- Latch on to God’s promises.  
Find encouraging words in the Scriptures that you can learn from and memorize for times when you are inclined to jump into the fray. Psalm 133 is one eligible passage.

How wonderful and pleasant it is  
when brothers live together in harmony.  
For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil  
that was poured over Aaron's head,  
that ran down his beard and  
onto the border of his robe.  
Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon  
that falls on the mountains of Zion.  
And the LORD has pronounced his blessing,  
even life everlasting.

- Establish safeguards.

Are there certain things that trigger your tendency to sin through conflict? Of course there are. Take practical precautions to avoid those triggering situations. These are the kinds of things you can try:

- If you like to gossip, avoid people who pass on juicy tidbits to you in the first place.
- If you start arguments when your spouse criticizes something in your behavior, try harder to meet his or her expectations.
- If you joined a committee and seem to always be the center of conflict, resign from the committee.
- Ask a trusted Christian friend to hold you accountable in your commitment to not participate in conflict.

- Expect victory.

Every day is a new day. Though you may have slipped into conflict regularly in the past, you can now become a peacemaker with the help of the Prince of Peace. Thank God in advance for the victory He will give.

Visit [www.SoulPrescription.com](http://www.SoulPrescription.com) for more insights and resources, and to download a free leader's guide for small group Bible studies.





## *Appendix A*



# HOW TO KNOW GOD PERSONALLY

**J**ust as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so there are spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God.

**Law 1:** *God loves you and created you to know Him personally.*

### **God's Love**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

—John 3:16

### **God's Plan**

This is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth.

—John 17:3

What prevents us from knowing God personally?

**Law 2:** *People are sinful and separated from God, so we cannot know Him personally or experience His love.*

### Human Beings Are Sinful

All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.

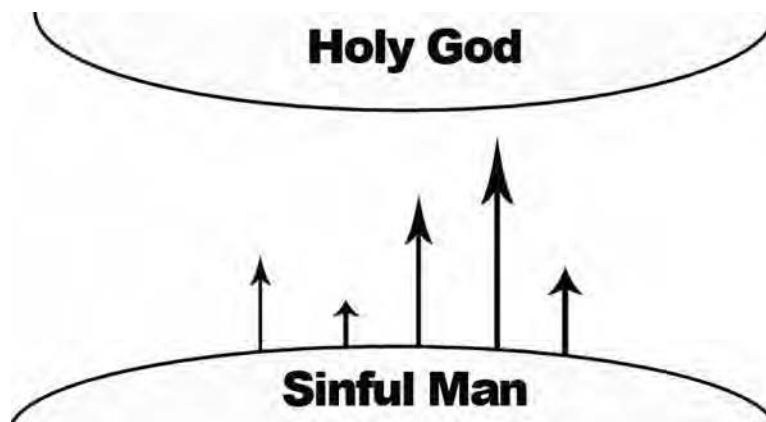
—Romans 3:23

The human race was created to have fellowship with God. But because of our own stubborn self-will, we chose to go our own independent way, and fellowship with God was broken. This self-will, characterized by an attitude of active rebellion or passive indifference, is an evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

### Human Beings Are Separated

The wages of sin is death [spiritual separation from God].

—Romans 6:23



This diagram illustrates that God is holy and humanity is sinful. A great gulf separates the two. The arrows illustrate that people are continually trying to reach God and establish a personal relationship with Him through their own efforts, such as a good life, philosophy, or religion—but they inevitably fail.

The third principle explains the only way to bridge this gulf.

**Law 3:** *Jesus Christ is God's only provision for human sin. Through Him alone we can know God personally and experience God's love.*

### He Died in Our Place

God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

—Romans 5:8

### He Rose from the Dead

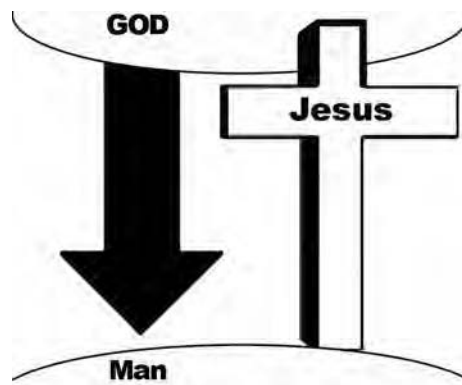
Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time.

—1 Corinthians 15:3–6

### He Is the Only Way to God

Jesus told [Thomas], “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

—John 14:6



This diagram illustrates that God has bridged the gulf that separates us from Him by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place and pay the penalty for our sins.

It is not enough just to know these truths.

**Law 4:** *We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know God personally and experience His love.*

### **We Must Receive Christ**

To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

—John 1:12

### **We Receive Christ through Faith**

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

—Ephesians 2:8–9

### **When We Receive Christ, We Experience a New Birth**

After dark one evening, a Jewish religious leader named Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to speak with Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are proof enough that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives new life from heaven. So don't be surprised at my statement that you must be born again. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

—John 3:1–8

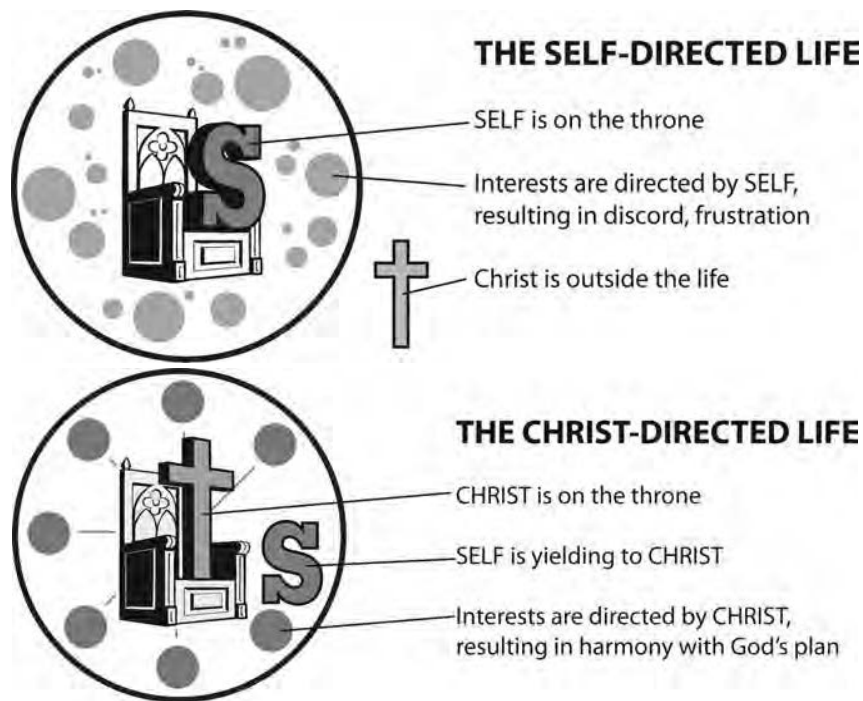
### **We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation**

[Christ said,] "Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."

—Revelation 3:20

Receiving Christ involves turning to God from self (repentance) and trusting Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sins and to make us what He wants us to be. Just to agree intellectually that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins is not enough. Nor is it enough to have an emotional experience. We receive Jesus Christ by faith, as an act of our will.

These two circles represent two kinds of lives.



Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

### You Can Receive Christ Right Now by Faith through Prayer

Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now, and Christ will come into your life, as He promised.

### **How to Know That Christ Is in Your Life**

Did you receive Christ into your life? According to His promise in Revelation 3:20, where is Christ right now in relation to you? Christ said He would come into your life and be your friend so you can know Him personally. Would He mislead you? On what authority do you know that God has answered your prayer? (The trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word.)

### **The Bible Promises Eternal Life to All Who Receive Christ**

“This is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. So whoever has God’s Son has life; whoever does not have his Son does not have life. I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.”

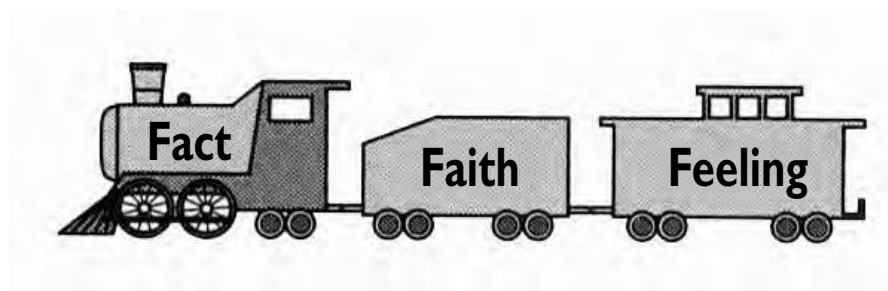
—1 John 5:11–13

Thank God often that Christ is in your life and that He will never leave you (Hebrews 13:5). You can know on the basis of His promise that Christ lives in you and that you have eternal life from the very moment you invite Him in. He will not deceive you.

An important reminder...

### **Do Not Depend on Feelings**

The promise of God’s Word, the Bible—not our feelings—is our authority. The Christian lives by faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God Himself and His Word. This train diagram illustrates the relationship among fact (God and His Word), faith (our trust in God and His Word), and feeling (the result of our faith and obedience). (Read John 14:21.)



The train will run with or without the caboose. However, it would be useless to attempt to pull the train by the caboose. In the same way, we as Christians do not depend on feelings or emotions, but we place our faith (trust) in the trustworthiness of God and the promises of His Word.

### **Now That You Have Received Christ**

The moment you received Christ by faith, as an act of your will, many things happened, including the following:

- Christ came into your life (Revelation 3:20; Colossians 1:27).
- Your sins were forgiven (Colossians 1:14).
- You became a child of God (John 1:12).
- You received eternal life (John 5:24).
- You began the great adventure for which God created you (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Can you think of anything more wonderful that could happen to you than entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Would you like to thank God in prayer right now for what He has done for you? By thanking God, you demonstrate your faith.

### **Suggestions for Christian Growth**

Spiritual growth results from trusting Jesus Christ. “The righteous man shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11). A life of faith will enable you to trust God increasingly with every detail of your life and to practice the following:

- G** Go to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).
- R** Read God’s Word daily, beginning with the gospel of John (Acts 17:11).
- O** Obey God moment by moment (John 14:21).
- W** Witness for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).
- T** Trust God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).
- H** Holy Spirit—allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Acts 1:8; Galatians 5:16–17).

### **Fellowship in a Good Church**

God's Word admonishes us to "not neglect our meeting together" (Hebrews 10:25). Several logs burn brightly together, but put one aside on the cold hearth and the fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians. If you do not belong to a church, do not wait to be invited. Take the initiative; call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ is honored and His Word is preached. Start this week and make plans to attend regularly.



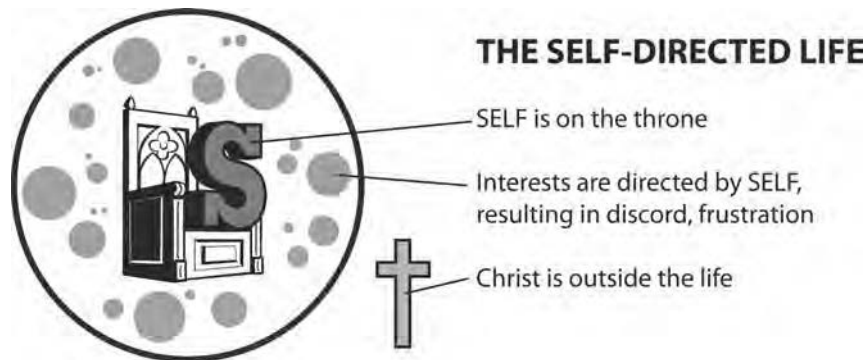
## Appendix B



# HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every day can be an exciting adventure for the Christian who knows the reality of being filled with the Holy Spirit and who lives constantly, moment by moment, under His gracious direction.

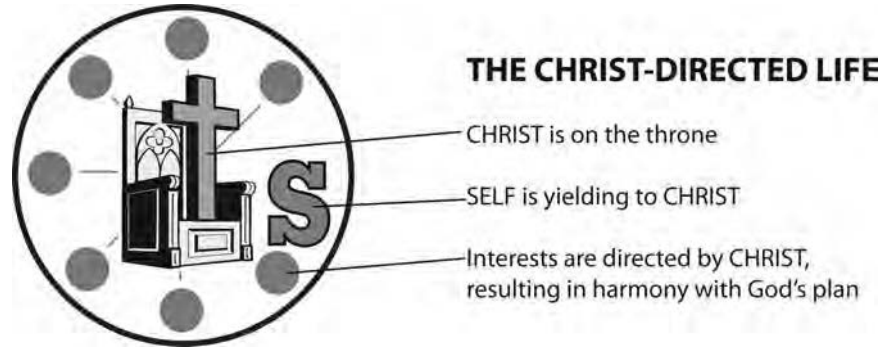
The Bible tells us there are three kinds of people:



### 1. The Natural Person: One who has not received Christ

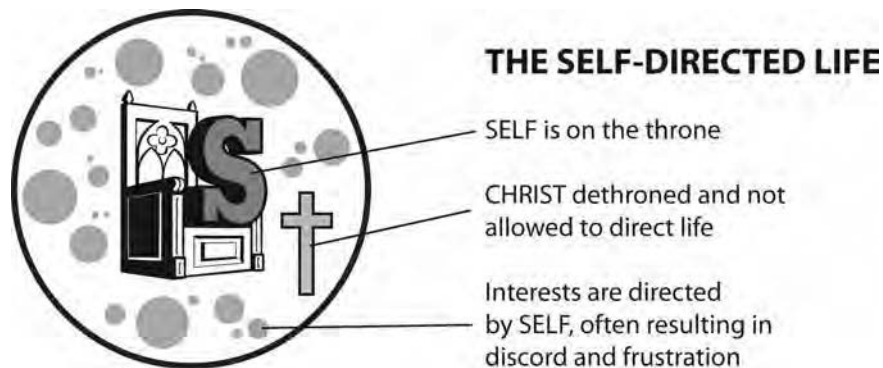
People who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means.

—1 Corinthians 2:14



2. **The Spiritual Person:** One who is directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit  
 We who have the Spirit understand these things.... We have the mind of Christ.

—1 Corinthians 2:15–16



3. **The Worldly (Carnal) Person:** One who has received Christ but who lives in defeat because the person is trying to live the Christian life in his or her own strength

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord.

—1 Corinthians 3:1–3

The following are four principles for living the Spirit-filled life:

## 1. God has provided for us an abundant and fruitful Christian life.

[Jesus said,] “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.”

—John 10:10

[Jesus said,] “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

—John 15:5

When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

—Galatians 5:22–23

When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

—Acts 1:8

The following are some personal traits of the spiritual person that result from trusting God:

Christ-centered  
Empowered by the Holy Spirit  
Introduces others to Christ  
Effective prayer life  
Understands God’s Word



Understands God’s Word  
Trusts and obeys God  
Experiences love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness,  
faithfulness, gentleness,  
goodness, and self-control

The degree to which these traits are manifested in the life depends on (1) the extent to which the Christian trusts the Lord with every detail of life and (2) his or her maturity in Christ. One who is only beginning to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit should not be discouraged if he or she is not as fruitful as more mature Christians who have known and experienced this truth for a longer period.

Why is it that most Christians are not experiencing the abundant life?

## 2. Worldly Christians cannot experience the abundant and fruitful Christian life.

Worldly (carnal) people trust in their own efforts to live the Christian life:

- They are either uninformed about, or have forgotten, God's love, forgiveness, and power (Acts 1:8; Romans 5:8–10; Hebrews 10:1–25; 2 Peter 1:9; 1 John 1; 2:1–3).
- They have an up-and-down spiritual experience.
- They cannot understand themselves—they want to do what is right but cannot.
- They fail to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life (Romans 7:15–24; 8:7; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; Galatians 5:16–18).

Some or all of the following traits may characterize the worldly person—the Christian who does not fully trust God:

Unbelief

Disobedience

Poor prayer life

No desire for Bible study



Legalistic attitude or critical spirit

Impure thoughts, jealousy, guilt

Worry, discouragement

Loss of love for God and others

(Those who profess to be Christians but who continue to practice sin should realize that they may not be Christians at all, according to Ephesians 5:5 and 1 John 2:3; 3:6–9.)

The third truth gives us the only solution to this problem.

## 3. Jesus promised the abundant and fruitful life as the result of being filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit-filled life is the Christ-directed life by which Christ lives His life in and through us in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15).

- One becomes a Christian through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, according to John 3:1–8. From the moment of spiritual birth, the Christian is indwelt by the

Holy Spirit at all times (John 1:12; 14:16–17; Colossians 2:9–10). (Though all Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, not all Christians are filled—that is, directed and empowered—by the Holy Spirit on an ongoing basis.)

- The Holy Spirit is the source of the overflowing life (John 7:37–39).
- The Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ (John 16:1–15). When one is filled with the Holy Spirit, he or she is a true disciple of Christ.
- In His last command before His ascension, Christ promised the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be witnesses for Him (Acts 1:1–9).

How, then, can one be filled with the Holy Spirit?

#### **4. We are filled (directed and empowered) by the Holy Spirit by faith. Then we can experience the abundant and fruitful life that Christ promised.**

You can appropriate the filling of the Holy Spirit right now if you:

- Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:6; John 7:37–39).
- Confess your sins. By faith, thank God that He has forgiven all of your sins—past, present, and future—because Christ died for you (Colossians 2:13–15; Hebrews 10:1–17; 1 John 1; 2:1–3).
- Present every area of your life to God (Romans 12:1–2).
- By faith claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit, according to

*His command:* Be filled with the Spirit.

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.

—Ephesians 5:18

*His promise:* He will always answer when we pray according to His will.

We can be confident that he will listen to us whenever we ask him for anything in line with his will. And if we know he is listening when we make our requests, we can be sure that he will give us what we ask for.

—1 John 5:14–15

Faith can be expressed through prayer.

## How to Pray in Faith to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith alone. However, true prayer is one way of expressing our faith. The following is a suggested prayer:

Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have sinned against You by directing my own life. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now invite Christ to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You commanded me to be filled and as You promised in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. I pray this in the name of Jesus. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If so, bow in prayer and trust God to fill you with the Holy Spirit right now.

## How to Walk in the Spirit

Faith (trust in God and His promises) is the only way a Christian can live the Spirit-directed life. As you continue to trust Christ moment by moment,

- Your life will demonstrate more and more of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and will be more and more conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Your prayer life and study of God's Word will become more meaningful.
- You will experience His power in witnessing (Acts 1:8).
- You will be prepared for spiritual conflict against the world (1 John 2:15–17), against the flesh (Galatians 5:16–17), and against Satan (1 Peter 5:7–9; Ephesians 6:10–13).
- You will experience His power to resist temptation and sin (Romans 6:1–16; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 1:19–23; Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:7).

## Appendix C



# SPIRITUAL BREATHING

If you become aware of an area of your life (an attitude or an action) that is displeasing to the Lord, even though you are walking with Him and sincerely desiring to serve Him, simply thank God that He has forgiven your sins—past, present, and future—on the basis of Christ’s death on the cross. Claim His love and forgiveness by faith and continue to have fellowship with Him.

If you retake the throne of your life through sin—a definite act of disobedience—breathe spiritually. Spiritual breathing (exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure) is an exercise in faith that enables you to experience God’s love and forgiveness.

1. *Exhale*: Confess your sin—agree with God concerning your sin and thank Him for His forgiveness of it, according to 1 John 1:9 and Hebrews 10:1–25. Confession involves repentance—a change in attitude and action.

2. *Inhale*: Surrender the control of your life to Christ, and receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit by faith. Trust that He now directs and empowers you, according to the command of Ephesians 5:18 and the promise of 1 John 5:14–15.







## ENDNOTES

1. Ramona Cramer Tucker, "Loose Lips," *Christian Reader*, March–April 2002, 38–39. Michelle tried to get in touch with Beth to apologize but was never able to.





## MORE RESOURCES

### **Free Discipleship Courses**

Sign up for one of these weekly personal development courses at [BiblicalCounselingInsights.com/courses/](https://BiblicalCounselingInsights.com/courses/).

### **From Coping to Cure**

Why are so many Christians unhappy? From Coping to Cure by Dr. Henry Brandt looks at the relief available through people helping people, through human efforts apart from God. Then, the lessons explore the many dimensions of Christ the Cure: God's healing love can transform the most miserable life into one of comfort, joy, and deep personal peace. Lessons are sent once per week.

**I Want Happiness Now!**

Are you dejected and desperately unhappy? Good news! You can find relief from your frustrated, hopeless condition resulting from your response to the circumstances and people in your world. In this weekly series, *I Want Happiness Now!*, Dr. Henry Brandt reveals how you can tap into the resources freely given to us by God so you will be a truly radiant, contented and joyful person.

**The Struggle for Inner Peace**

This weekly study addresses the problem that many Christians hold hatred, fear, resentment, jealousy, and malice toward others. As a result, fellowship with these persons and the Lord is broken, joy is lost, and God's peace is not enjoyed. Confessing and forsaking one's sinful ways in obedience to the Lord and His Word are necessary if the Christian is to enjoy God's peace. This series was written with the hope that many Christians will be helped in their "struggle" for inner peace, released from anxiety, and set free to experience the "fruit of the Spirit" which includes peace (Gal. 5:22).

**More Free Resources**

Find more free personal growth options available through affiliated ministries at [JesusOnline.com/resources](http://JesusOnline.com/resources).

# SOUL PRESCRIPTION

**WHEN WHAT YOU CHOOSE DESTROYS THE LIFE YOU WANT...**

Does your life feel out of control? Are you struggling to free yourself from a web of destructive habits that are holding you in bondage? Are you engulfed in an endless cycle of trying to change but continually falling back into sin?

Soul Prescription offers the healing and hope you seek. With a unique, methodical, and biblically based approach to eliminating sin habits, this book will help you evaluate your behavior and attitudes in light of God's standards. As the authors gently lead you through the process of turning away from debilitating habits, you will be free to embrace Holy Spirit-empowered virtues.

God longs to see you living in the joy and freedom that He promises in His Word. You can live a victorious Christian life. Soul Prescription will show you how.

Dr. Henry Brandt is often called the "Father of Modern-Day Biblical Counseling." For decades he personally counseled individuals to evaluate their heart attitudes and behavior in the light of biblical teaching and guided them to a godly solution. His teaching continues to be a source of inspiration to people throughout the world through the Henry Brandt Foundation's resources and Web site:

[www.HenryBrandtFoundation.org](http://www.HenryBrandtFoundation.org).

Dr. Bill Bright was devoted to holy living and spent more than five decades building and leading Campus Crusade for Christ. Fueled by his passion to present the love and claims of Jesus Christ to every person on earth, he wrote the booklet The Four Spiritual Laws, which has been printed in 200 languages and distributed to more than 2.5 billion people. Find out about his 100 other books and pamphlets at:

[www.BrightMedia.org](http://www.BrightMedia.org).