

November 1, 2009

Lesson 1: The God Who Heals

[Adapted from notes by Grady D. King]

God heals. This is the overwhelming testimony of Scripture, the ground of prayer, and hope for broken lives. Healing is one of the names of God—Jehovah *Rapha*.¹ As believers we affirm God’s healing while at the same time we live with those who have not been healed, even we ourselves. As humans we are broken in many ways and in need of healing—physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Many times, these various needs are enmeshed with each other, making it difficult to discern cause and affect relationships. Regardless, God heals and makes new for the sake of his relationship with us. He heals out of compassion and mercy. Healing is an act of grace, for we cannot heal ourselves.

Perhaps the best way to consider biblical healing is to think in terms of wholeness or well-being. The Hebrew understanding of *shalom* is best understood as health which involves the whole person—every aspect of life, personal, relational and national. Because *shalom* is part of a covenant relationship with God and others, righteousness and holiness are inherent in *shalom* as well.² This view of *shalom* is carried over into the New Testament and involves not only physical restoration and healing but also renewal of relationship with God and others.

Enter Jesus whose presence in the world fleshes out what “shalom” looks like in kingdom living. Through healing Jesus announces the rule of God over disease, demons, disaster and death. This is vividly portrayed in the opening chapters of Mark.³ When Jesus heals someone he is doing more than offering physical healing; he is undoing the effects of the Fall in their lives as well.⁴ He heals them, makes them a new creation as sign and foretaste of the kingdom—God’s rule on earth.

¹ *Rapha*=to heal, restore, health. See Ex 15:25-26; Jer 30:17; Jer 3:22; Isa 30:26; Isa 61:1; Psa 103:3.

² See Isaiah 61 and note the healing language and restoration of holiness and righteousness personally, relationally and nationally. Jesus quotes Isa 61 to announce his ministry (Lk 4:18-19).

³ See Mk 1-6 in particular for Jesus’ rule over disease, demons, disaster and death.

⁴ “The Fall”. See Gen 3 and Rom 5 regarding Adam. Consider the effects of his decisions and what it says about our brokenness as well.

The New Testament term, *sozo* (“to save” or “to heal”) is used for physical healing and salvation and has the same range of meanings as *shalom*—healing, restoration, wholeness, and health. Therefore, the Christian understanding of healing concerns the well-being of the whole person in every aspect of life. It is a process involving being in right relationship with God, self, others and creation.

Q & A

1. How is our human brokenness manifested?
2. What do we struggle with regarding healing?
3. Why do some believe that healing is only spiritual?
4. What is significant about Luke 4:18-19?
5. How does understanding healing as *wholeness* deepen and expand our prayers? What are the implications? Does this change our understanding of “need”? Does it change our priorities?

Jesus continues God’s work. Through healing, Jesus opens up a new horizon, a glorious future described as a new creation.⁵ Healing therefore, is not a gimmick of Jesus to get attention. It is central to the God’s eternal purpose of reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth in Christ.⁶ *All things* bears witness to God’s interest in the wholeness of his creation and creatures. Paul’s prayer for believers reflects this wholeness.

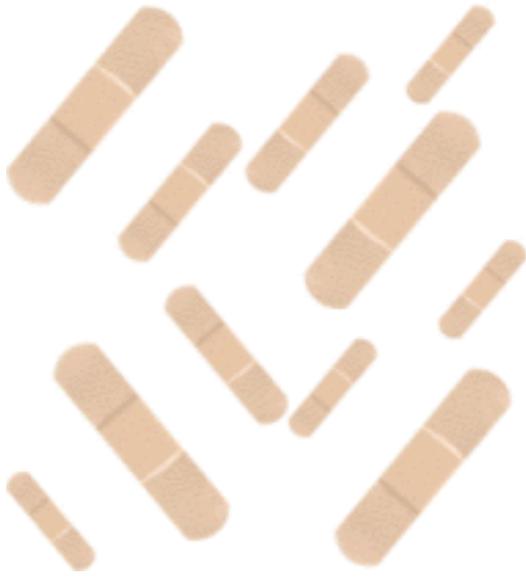
“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:2

⁵ God is committed to a future for his people. Ultimate healing is God dwelling with his people and it is already realized now in Christ, but not yet fully. This is hope that anchors and purifies our soul (Heb 6:19; 1 Jn 3:1-3). *New Creation* – 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; *New heavens and earth* – Is 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1-5 (“Behold, I am making everything new...”)

⁶ See Col 1:15-20.

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The Healings of Jesus

- Mt 4:23 -- Every disease and sickness
- Mt 8:3, Lk 17:12-14 -- Leprosy
- Mt 8:13 -- Centurion's servant
- Mt 8:14-15 -- Peter's mother-in-law of fever
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- November 1 The God Who Heals
- November 8 God Heals Our Bodies
- November 15 God Heals Addictions
- November 22 God Heals Our Sexuality
- December 6 God Heals Our Marriages
- December 13 God Heals Our Finances

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Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ
McAlester, Oklahoma

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November 8, 2009
Lesson 2 – God Heals Our Bodies
[adapted from notes by John Ogren]

The Body Blessed

God created us for wholeness and health, for *shalom*. God designed our bodies with great care, so that we might enjoy life to the full. In creation God blessed us with sight, touch, taste, thought, strength, and the ability to give and receive love. By molding us out of earth and breathing life into us, God constituted and blessed us as bodily creatures. When he finished making human beings, God looked at us and the whole of creation and said it was *very good*. Our bodies were not an afterthought, and God’s plans from beginning to end, from creation to resurrection are to bless, redeem, vindicate, and make whole our *bodies*, so that we might enjoy God’s abundant life and peace.

1. What are five things about your body you are most thankful for?
2. How do you see the wisdom of God in the design of your body?

The Body Broken

Had a migraine lately? A gallstone? A tumor? What has gone wrong with our bodies? Was it part of God’s plan that we should have excema, encephalitis, or epilepsy? Fine rhetoric it is to talk of the wonder and blessedness of our bodies—until they become ill, begin to break down, or give us ceaseless pain. Even when we enjoy reasonable health, we inevitably have to watch as our hair thins, our waistlines expand, and our skin wrinkles and sags. Were these bodies such a great idea? Would it not be better if we could somehow escape the flesh into some unbodied bliss?

1. Would you like to escape your body? Why?
2. If you expressed a future hope for your body, what would it be?

The Body Baptized

The gospel offers no promise of escape from the body. Consider how scandalously the gospel centers on and affirms the body: even God becomes embodied in the Incarnation. In his body, tortured and broken on

the cross, Christ redeems a fallen world. In Christ’s resurrection, God “repeats the verdict” concerning the original creation—on the first Easter Sunday, when God raises Jesus from the dead, in effect God says, “It is very good” and begins creation anew. The hope of the gospel is not escape from creation, but the renewal of creation; it is not release from the body, but renewal of the body.

This resurrection, renewal, and new creation is the meaning of our baptism. In baptism we died and were buried with Christ, so that we might be raised up to walk with him in newness of life. In baptism we received the Holy Spirit, who *indwells our bodies* in the hope and promise of resurrection and transformation.

1. How is the healing ministry of Christ connected to the resurrection hope of the gospel?
2. What are some of the ways that Christians may demonstrate to the world the hope of the gospel of our bodies?

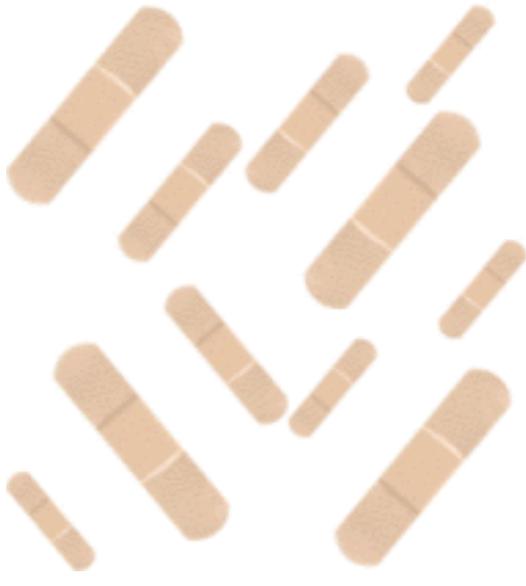
The Body Between

Paul referred to our bodies as *clay jars*, the breakable, disposable, temporary containers of his day. In our time, he might have called them paper sacks. He recognized their frailty and weakness, but always he held on to the promise of resurrection. He understood that we live in an awkward phase when our hope has been revealed in Christ (it is imprinted on us through baptism and the gift of the Spirit) but remains yet to be fulfilled. Between the new beginning that Christ made possible and its fulfillment in resurrection and a new heaven and earth, our bodies continue in their scandalous state of hopeful disrepair. Between the cross and the consummation of the age, our bodies still suffer, age, and die. *Yet, as followers of Christ, we have seen too many healings to become apathetic about sickness and suffering, to postpone all healing until the next age.* The hope of the next age keeps breaking into the here and now—through the research and work of scientists and health professionals, through prayers in Christ’s name, and through the mystery of God’s healing.

1. Can we fully understand in this between time why some bodies are healed and some are not? Explain your answer.

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menu of addictions that could enslave any of us. Some are likely more appealing to you than others.

<i>Alcohol</i>	<i>appearance</i>	<i>clothes</i>	<i>purging</i>	<i>talking</i>
<i>Television</i>	<i>Internet</i>	<i>videos</i>	<i>mushrooms</i>	<i>spending</i>
<i>Exercise</i>	<i>prostitution</i>	<i>work</i>	<i>cars</i>	<i>ecstasy</i>
<i>Fast-driving</i>	<i>overeating</i>	<i>drugs</i>	<i>fire</i>	<i>romance</i>
<i>Shoplifting</i>	<i>shopping</i>	<i>video games</i>	<i>junk food</i>	<i>tobacco</i>
<i>Fantasy</i>	<i>sugar</i>	<i>relationships</i>	<i>orderliness</i>	<i>dating</i>
<i>Bars</i>	<i>card games</i>	<i>pornography</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>caffeine</i>
<i>Snacking</i>	<i>gambling</i>	<i>care-giving</i>	<i>politics</i>	<i>pets</i>

We can mess up God's plan with just about anything that we use to escape the real world. So, in what other ways could we handle the pain, anxiety, and trauma that happen in life?

1. If you feel safe sharing with your class, discuss the list and which areas could be problems for you.
2. If you have overcome some of these addictions, and are comfortable with sharing, discuss the process of overcoming them.

God's New Plan to Clean Up the Mess We Make

God offers love and forgiveness in Christ. Through the support of caring Christians, healing, renewal, and relief of pain can occur. Many are aware of 12-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and others. These groups encourage their members to recognize their need for a higher power (God) and to find a church to attend. The love and forgiveness that God offers needs flesh and bones to help people who are fighting addictions. This is where the church becomes a vital part of recovery for addictions.

Those struggling to overcome an addiction may find themselves unemployed after spending time in a rehab unit or a detoxification center. Without employment, adequate housing and some form of transportation, it is difficult to leave behind the old way of coping with pain, anxiety, and trauma.

November 15, 2009

Lesson 3 – God Heals Our Addictions

[adapted from notes by Carol Ritchie]

God's Plan

God created us in His image. He tells us that our bodies are very special. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, "Don't you know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? The Spirit is in you. You have received him from God. You do not belong to yourselves. Christ has paid a price for you. So use your bodies in a way that honors God" (6:19-20 NIV).

1. What does it mean to you that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?
2. What are some ways that you could use your body in a way that honors God?

God's Plan – Messed up by Addiction

The Bible has many teachings concerning the problem of drunkenness. When the wise writer of the Proverbs wrote, he described the problem well. "Who has trouble? Who has pain? Who fights? Who complains? Who has unnecessary bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? It is people who drink too much wine, who try out all different kinds of strong drinks. Don't stare at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. Later it bites like a snake with poison in its fangs. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind will be confused. You will feel dizzy as if you're in a storm on the ocean, as if you're on top of a ship's sails. You will think, 'They hit me, but I'm not hurt. They beat me up, but I don't remember it. I wish I could wake up. Then I would get another drink'" (23:29-35 NCV).

One can define addiction as a coping skill to deal with pain, anxiety, or trauma. It can be any compulsive or habitual behavior, feeling, or thought that inhibits normal functioning or limits human desire or freedom and enslaves the individual. Any of us can turn to an addiction when we do not like our reality and want to escape the pain of the real world. Here is a

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In virtually every major metropolitan area or city, there are groups working to help people with these basic needs. Many of the groups which provide assistance are church-based. One well-known curriculum which helps address addictions, hang-ups and hurts is "Celebrate Recovery". While groups and different curricula all work a little differently, all recognize the grace of God that is needed to renew a life that has been messed up by addiction.

1. What are you willing to support to help people overcome addictions and meet Jesus?
2. Could you find it in your heart to worship beside someone that has a strong odor of tobacco or needs to wash their clothes and take a bath? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit could give you that strength?

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Lesson 4 – God Heals Our Sexuality

[adapted from notes by David Vest]

God's Plan

In the beginning, God created sex. When God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply the subject was not farming and mathematics (Genesis 1:27-29 KJV). Though Puritan, Victorian, and Ward Cleaver versions of Christianity believe the subject of sex is taboo, the Bible suggests just the opposite. Sex between monogamous men and women is part of God's creation and He said, "...it was very good" (Gen. 1:31 KJV). Neither is Genesis the last time that the Bible speaks about sex. One can learn much from the two betrothed lovers in the Song of Songs. God created sex for men and women clothed in the monogamous relationship of marriage, and He created it for the good of men and women and not for evil.

1. Where does the topic of sex belong in the church?
2. Why do we often focus on the negative aspects of sex instead of the positive?

God's Plan, Just Plain Messed Up

Humans are adept at misusing and abusing God's creation, even the parts of creation that God created especially for the good of humanity. In the story of Judah and Tamar, sex is an act of prostitution and extortion (Gen. 38). Absalom uses sex to gain revenge against his father David (2 Samuel 16-17). David uses sex for adultery and tries to cover his sin with murder (2 Samuel 11). These are just a few examples from the Scriptures that demonstrate that even God's people misuse sexual relations.

Today, Christians face a multitude of problems concerning sexual relations, and pornography is one of the largest problems. Though pornography is as old as art, today the ease of access and the ability to hide the problem (at least temporarily) causes much pain and brokenness for 21st century Christians. Ministers, elders, deacons, church members, theology professors, and seminary students have encountered and succumbed to the addiction of pornography. Nor should we believe the problem only occurs with men; it can be a problem for both sexes.

For decades, American, European, African, and Asian societies have lowered the resistance of people with regard to sex outside of God's context.

Inappropriate sexual images appear on television, in our movies, on billboards, and almost any media possible to the point that it invades the church. Pornography is not the only sexual problem among believers, but it is the poster child for problems in this area of life. Combine these issues with the guilt and shame that comes to those who sin in this aspect of life and no one has to wonder why it is difficult for many to understand how it can be true that God heals our sexuality.

1. Are some sexual sins worse than others are? Why?
2. Why is pornography such a large problem in the church today?

God's Plan Restored in Christ

Jesus clarified and strengthened the law against adultery, saying that one lusting after another has already committed adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:27 NIV). This is a sexual standard not humanly possible, but it is possible through Christ. The Psalmist says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (147:3). There is no wound too difficult for Christ to save. There is no heart too broken for Christ to repair.

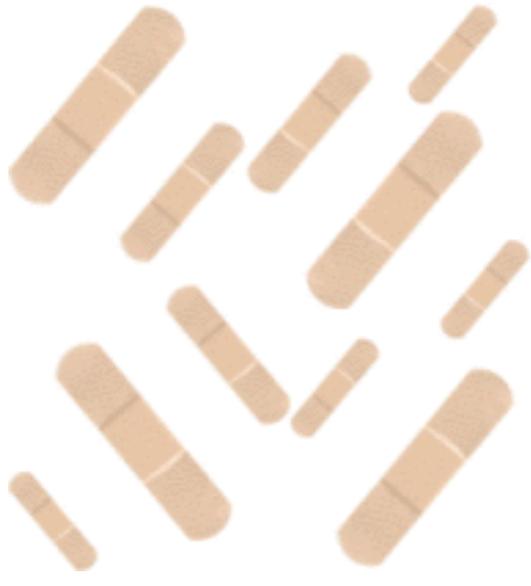
Finding healing in Christ is easy, but finding healing in the assembly is difficult. Despite our calling as Christ's envoys of forgiveness, our culture and heritage often works in the opposite way. We remember Paul's command to "expel the wicked man from among you" when the assembly hands out discipline (1 Cor. 5:13 NIV). However, Paul's later advice "to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow", often goes unremembered (2 Cor. 2:7 NIV).

If we are going to be relevant in our culture, our best defense is a good offense. Rather than relegate the topic of sex to a dark corner, it needs the strong light of Christ. Rather than only teaching our children what to avoid sexually, we should also teach them its connection with God as part of creation. Discipline for sin is an obligation of the assembly, but so is healing and forgiveness. God heals our sexuality, but it requires believers to apply the bandages.

1. Explain which you would find less difficult to forgive and seek to heal, the person that abuses alcohol or the person that abuses sex?
2. In regards to our own local culture how can we better deal with people broken by sexual sins?

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December 6, 2009

Lesson 5 – God Heals Our Marriages and Families

[adapted from notes by Susan Vaughn]

God's Plan

The early chapters of Genesis give us the beginning of God's plan for marriage. After Adam's creation, God declares it is not good for man to be alone. God creates woman from man and reveals the plan for marriage, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). God's gift was that two would become one in the relationship of marriage. However, in God's plan, they would become as spiritually one as they were physically one. They would unite in heart, mind, and body. This first marriage takes place in the garden where God walks in the cool of the evening. A close relationship with God was to lead to spiritual unity. Spiritual unity happens only when each partner fully surrenders to the heart and will of God.

1. The Bible tells about many marriages, reflecting both positive and negative qualities. Choose one Bible story about marriage and share it and the lessons it teaches.
2. Read Philipians 2:1-11. What message for marriage does this passage give?

Choosing a Spouse

Abraham knew the importance of God in a marriage and the danger of marriage to an unbeliever. This caused Abraham to return to his family for a wife for Isaac rather than to have Isaac marry a pagan woman. Later, Jacob's wife comes from the same family, and when Israel enters the Promised Land, God commands the people not to intermarry with the native tribes (a command they quickly forgot). This left Israel susceptible to idolatry. Even Solomon's wisdom is not enough to keep him from disobeying this command with the result that he worships the gods of his foreign wives. These wives turn Solomon's heart away from God, which ultimately leads to the division of the kingdom (I Kings 11:1-13).

1. What does it mean to be unequally yoked?
2. What young person do you need to be praying for as they are looking for a marriage partner? Spend time right now praying.

Problems

The list of issues that destroy marriages is long: sex, money, unfaithfulness, stress, and poor communication. The addictions we have studied in recent weeks impact our marriages and can lead to their destruction. What does God call us to do in healing our marriages?

1. In your experience, what is the biggest threat to marriages today?
2. What can you do to help guard against this threat?

Being Jesus to my spouse

In Ephesians 5, Paul reminds his readers that their marriages must reflect the relationship of Christ and his church. Wives are to submit to their husbands as if to Christ and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

Satan has helped us put our own twist on these commands. Wives would submit if their husbands were really like Christ; but since their husbands sin, submission is unnecessary. Husbands would love their wives if their wives would only love them as Christ loves the church; yet, their wives fail this test of love. Each expects the other to meet all their needs and make them complete. Each waits for their spouse to act toward them as Christ would before they become Christ-like in their own actions. How far from God's plan we are!

God calls us to be like Jesus in our marriage. This is a call to put God first in our heart. It is a call to establish a strong relationship with God and then let our God-filled heart help us act as Jesus to our spouse. Establishing a healthy vertical relationship with God helps ensure that the horizontal relationship between a husband and wife is a lasting one that also glorifies the LORD.

1. What does it mean to you to be Jesus to your spouse?

Being Jesus to my family

The Bible also says a great deal about the responsibilities of members of the family in establishing and maintaining Christian families. Fathers, mothers, and children all have god-given responsibilities which are mentioned in the Bible (especially see Ephesians 5-6; Colossians 3). God has the ability to heal both marriage relationships and the other relationships that exist in the context of the physical family. Such healing comes from living out Bible principles in our families.

1. What does it mean to be Jesus to your family?
2. What specific actions could you take to improve your role and to accept your responsibilities in the context of your family?
3. Identify some of the specific challenges that families face today, challenges that the church should consider as it seeks to help with the process of God healing marriages and families.

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Lesson 5: God Heals Our Marriages
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December 13, 2009
Lesson 6 – God Heals Our Finances
[adapted from notes by Steve Killebrew]

Our Finances are Blessed by God

God promises to provide all our needs. “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] shall be given to you” (Matthew 6:33). In keeping his promise, God is both predictable and unpredictable. He is predictable in His faithfulness to provide for our needs. What we cannot predict is *how* the Lord will provide. He uses various and often surprising means – an increase in income or a gift. He may provide an opportunity to stretch limited resources through money saving purchases. Regardless of how He chooses to provide for us, we can depend upon Him.

Once God provides for our needs, He wants us to be faithful in handling all our money. As illustrated in the parable of the talents, God rewards faithfulness regardless of the amount over which we are responsible (Matthew 25:14-24). We are required to be faithful whether He gives a little or a lot. As someone once said, “It is not what I would do if a million dollars were my lot; it is what I am doing with the ten dollars I have.”

Following is a short list of some areas where a Christian should practice faithfulness to God: 1) Avoiding debt, 2) Seeking counsel when making financial decisions, 3) Practicing honesty in all financial dealings, 4) Giving generously to the work of God, 5) Working hard and with integrity in one’s job, 6) Saving consistently, 7) Spending wisely, 8) Living for eternity.

1. How does God provide for you?
2. What does it mean to be faithful to God with your finances?

Our lives are Cursed by Debt

Scripture does not say that debt is a sin, but it discourages the use of debt. Debt is so much a part of society today that most accept it as part of the normal environment. However, the Bible powerfully develops the idea that the godly person uses debt with the utmost care.

Debt is considered slavery in the Bible. Proverbs says, “Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender” (22:7). When we are in

debt we are in a position of servitude to the lender. We do not have the freedom to decide where to spend our income because our money is obligated to meet our debts. The more money we owe, the less free we become.

Debt presumes upon tomorrow. When we enter into debt we assume that we will earn enough in the future to pay. We plan for our jobs to continue or our investments to be profitable. Scripture cautions against such presumption. “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city and spend the year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow... Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that’” (James 4:13-15).

Debt is considered a curse. In the Old Testament, being out of debt was one of the promised rewards of obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1,2,12). On the other hand, debt was one of the curses of disobedience. “If you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.... The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 43, 44).

Finally, debt may deny God an opportunity. In a family budget with large monthly debt payments there may not be cash available to serve the Lord. An opportunity to bless a troubled person or a struggling ministry could pass because money is obligated to debt payments. Indebtedness prohibits the freedom to serve God.

1. What percentage of your monthly income do you use to pay debt? (Exclude your home mortgage, if any.) Why does this seem reasonable or too high to you?
2. Have the purchases you have made on credit been a blessing in your life? How might you have used that money to serve God?

Healing Our Finances

Here are some steps for getting out of debt. The steps may seem obvious and appear easy, but they are hard work: (1) pray, (2) establish a budget, (3) establish a debt repayment plan, (4) control the use of credit cards, and (5) consider a lifestyle change.

The same God who supernaturally provided for the Israelites in the desert is interested in you becoming free from debt. The first, and often overlooked, step is to pray. Seek the Lord's help and guidance in your journey toward being debt free. God may act immediately or slowly over time. In either case, prayer is essential.

Few people in debt know how to effectively use a budget or have a repayment plan to get out of debt. A budget and repayment plan helps you plan ahead and control the biggest financial wrecker of them all, impulse spending. Take your budget and repayment plan seriously and remember to update them as your situations change.

When financial counseling services examine the finances of someone in debt, many use a simple rule of thumb for credit card use. If a person does not pay the entire balance at the end of each month, they encourage them to perform plastic surgery—any pair of scissors will do.

Those deeply in debt may have to consider a lifestyle change—searching for additional sources of income, driving less expensive cars, or downsizing to a less expensive dwelling. These types of changes will allow freedom from debt in a much shorter time, and reflect a strong faith in God's will for a person's financial life.

1. How might being free from debt change your walk with God?
2. What kind of sacrifices would you be willing to make to be free from debt?

The God Who HEALS

Seeking God's Healing for Broken Lives



Lesson 6: God Heals Our Finances
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