

Introduction

A TALE OF TWO MEN

The first man hated his wife. And she hated him for his constant emotional and verbal abuse. At the conclusion of a bitter argument he threw a flower pot into the large round mirror of her bedroom dresser, shattering it in pieces. He then struck the wall, breaking one of his knuckles. His wife was increasingly fearful that he might attack her. On a Sunday morning during this period, he ascended the pulpit hung over and nauseated from his excessive drinking the night before. He was fearful everyone would become aware the “Reverend” had a problem. To his relief, no one seemed to notice.

In 1973 I was a “successful” pastor of a large Methodist church. But I was in deep trouble spiritually. My walk with the Lord had become a charade. I had fallen back into my pre-Christian addictions of alcohol and pornography. I was angry and hateful toward my wife. Our children were the victims of my double mindedness. Then God, in His mercy, gave me a deep experience with the Holy Spirit. It was like being born again, again!

Within a few days of this experience I was led through the experience of having demons cast out of me by a husband and wife from my church. During a little, innocuous prayer meeting I involuntarily fell to the floor and with a sense of unreality and horror heard a guttural voice which was not my own start naming the demons connected to my secret sins. The ministry went on and on for about 16 hours. The exhausted couple called in reinforcements who helped them until my healing was complete. As the product of a liberal seminary, previously I had not even believed in the literal devil, much less in demons. My theology went through a drastic change. This experience, not to be irreverent, scared the hell out of me—and that was good!

Two nights later I had a vivid dream. God showed me my heart. It was not a pretty sight. It was covered with ugly, scabrous scales. Then, a laser started grinding away at the scales. God wanted me to see clearly the condition of my heart and the terrible danger that I was in because of my backsliding. He also made it clear to me that the sin most offensive to Him was the way I had been mistreating my wife. I inferred that my healing was not going to be quick and easy but a long, painful process.

Then, within a week, I had another vivid dream: The Lord came and picked me up from my bed like a cat picks up a kitten. He took me up into the sky, and we flew to the Pool of Bethesda, which was breathtakingly beautiful with marble columns and blue-green water. An angel had just troubled the water. (John 5:2-4) The Lord took me deep down into the water. Then, He brought me up into the sky

and back to my bed. Unfortunately, the dream was not accompanied by audio or subtitles, so I did not know what it meant. After three or four months of praying about it, and asking many likely persons, a traveling evangelist gave me the interpretation. He said, “God has shown you that He is going to take you down deep into the subconscious, into the hidden places of your heart. He will start healing, cleansing, and delivering you from the deep emotional and spiritual wounds, sins, and deceptions that are hidden behind your anger and fear and from your inability to live the life of faith that you are preaching. God is also showing you that He is going to use you to minister to others, to heal bruised hearts, and to set captives free.” My effectiveness in ministry to others has been, of course, directly related to His healing my heart, and this is a work still in progress.

For the past 34 years I have been striving to fulfill the call on my life through prayer, studying the Scriptures, and searching out the wisdom given to other pastors, teachers, and authors. Through this process, I have brought together a number of teachings I found effective in ministry. I have tested these insights through teaching and counseling hundreds of people. There is nothing unique in these teachings, and they are not great personal revelations. Mostly, they are a compilation and synthesis of the insights of many teachers, pastors, authors, and counselors, and what the Holy Spirit has taught me through experience. I started making ministry trips to Mexico 20 years ago, and since my retirement at age 65 in 1992 I have made several trips each year, usually accompanied by a small team to minister with me. In the U.S., I minister through Freedom Fellowship, a ministry with access to approximately 20 prisons in Colorado, and at Hope for Homeless Youth, a major ministry at Dream Center in Hollywood, California. Locally, I serve as the jail pastor for my church, making visits when anyone requests through the church; seminars at my local church; and provide personal counseling services.

This book contains a series of teachings I developed to use in churches, prisons, rehabilitation centers, and other settings. My purpose in placing them in book form is to assist those involved in personal ministry. I desired to minister to wounded, broken people ever since I became a Christian, but I did not know how to go about it. The model I learned in seminary, and through reading various books on counseling, did not seem effective. As I began to use the principles and insights incorporated in this book, while continually relying on the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, power, and love, I have seen God set many captives free spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Outlines in chapter 23 are designed to assist those who are ministering to others. Those of us who have prayed about this book believe that we have heard from God, and that it is His will that these teachings be made available to you.

Over a period of years the first man’s hard heart was largely healed. The progress seemed agonizingly slow, but he was very stubborn and resistant to change. He was able to quickly turn away from alcohol and pornography, but the deeply engrained pride, reflected in his attitude toward his wife and in his selfish ambition toward his ministry required more divine surgery. The independent church that he had started was flourishing grandly. A large and beautiful facility had been built on a prime piece of land. However, his heavy handedness and insensitivity were wounding the congregation. One

of the faithful, older ladies once asked him, "Why are you beating the sheep when you preach?" He denied that he was doing any such thing, but he was. Not long after that the congregation split, and he was dismissed as pastor. At this low point of his life, he said to his wife, "I am a failure as a husband, as a father, as a pastor, as a Christian, and as a man." During his last few years as a pastor he had a congregation of about 40 people that met in rented facilities, and he had to supplement his income by working as an attendant in a service station.

The second man gradually emerged as a consequence of the infinite patience and grace of the Lord. The forgiveness and kindness of his wife, who was also being healed, played an important role in his healing. He began to see what a treasure God had given him in his wife. They fell in love again, better and deeper. They overlooked one another's faults and treated one another with gentleness and kindness. On occasion they held hands while watching television, driving down the highway, sitting in church together.

After 53 years of marriage, God called his sweet wife, Doris, home suddenly and unexpectedly in November, 2002. Because of the grace of God, the second man can look back on their life together without regrets. Jesus truly did save the best wine until last, and He gets all the credit for their happiness.