

LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE:

SELF-DENIAL

GUILTY FEELINGS

NCF IN ACTION

ON FATHERS

A Time for Truth

"As I reached an intersection, a hedge sprang up, obscuring my vision."

"The telephone pole was approaching fast. I attempted to swerve out of its path when it struck my front end."

These, says the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, are just two of a long list of explanations the company has received to explain automobile accidents.

But this is my favorite: "An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished."

Isn't that a perfect example of how many people try to avoid the truth so they won't have to take responsibility for their actions? An invisible car, coming from nowhere which then vanished!

This reminds me of the lawyer who challenged Jesus by asking, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10: 25-29) After Jesus told him he would have to keep the law, including loving his neighbor as himself, the man immediately tried to justify himself by asking, "And who is my neighbor?"

Distorting the truth and justifying or deceiving ourselves or others only makes matters worse. This is true at

Time, continued on the back cover ➤



By Cyril J. Barber, D.Lit.

Most of us have a tendency to become frustrated and resentful when things don't go the way we think they should.

The apostle Paul recognized the inevitability of the feeling of anger when he wrote: "If you are angry, be sure that it is not out of wounded pride or bad temper. Never go to bed angry – don't give the devil that sort of foothold so that he obtains control over you" (Eph. 4:26, 27, Phillips).

Anger is not necessarily sinful. It becomes sinful when we lose control of ourselves (James 1:19, 20; Gal. 5:19-21) or harbor it in a revengeful way (Rom. 12:17-21). There is a moment of time in which we decide to let our anger go or to maintain it in a grudging way. The result is conduct or attitudes inconsistent with the Holy Spirit's constant control.

How may we handle anger so that it will not become sinful? The book of Nehemiah (ch.5) shows how

Anger, continued on page 2 ➤

Anger, continued from page 1

one able leader accomplished this. Nehemiah was building the wall of the city of Jerusalem. From the beginning the entire operation was beset by hardships. Nehemiah's task was made even more difficult because all those assisting him were volunteers. They had left their farms and other forms of employment to work on the project.

In the middle of the work there was a great outcry from the workers and their wives. They were being oppressed and exploited by the wealthy elite who stood to gain the most from the fortification of the city. Some of the workers had been compelled to mortgage their land in order to buy food, and others had been forced to sell their children into slavery.

Into the Arena

Nehemiah began his response to this oppressive situation this way. He says, "Then I was very angry." The first thing Nehemiah did was admit his anger. He did not excuse it, ignore it, or minimize it. And he didn't deny or repress it.

While we may become angry for reasons different from Nehemiah, we have the same options he did. Even though it was brought about by circumstances over which Nehemiah

had no control, he did not blame others for the way he felt. Having admitted that he was "very angry" he was then in a position to deal with his emotion and the situation.

The Need for Elbow Room

In recalling the incident, Nehemiah says, "And I consulted with myself." He didn't do what so many of us do when we become angry, namely, gossip about it, complain or lose our temper.

Nehemiah was secure enough that he did not feel a need to justify himself in the eyes of others. He was primarily interested in what God thought of the situation. By "consulting with himself" he avoided the temptation of maligning others and avoided the sin connected with criticism (James 1:19, 20, 26).

By thinking the matter through, Nehemiah also gave himself time to evaluate the situation and decide on a course of action. Had he not engaged in this introspection, he might have acted hastily and indiscreetly. All too often we fail to evaluate the occasion of our anger and decide on our responsibility in the matter. By carefully weighing the circumstances we can first resolve our part in the conflict. Only then are we in a position to address the problems others have.

Sensitive Confrontation

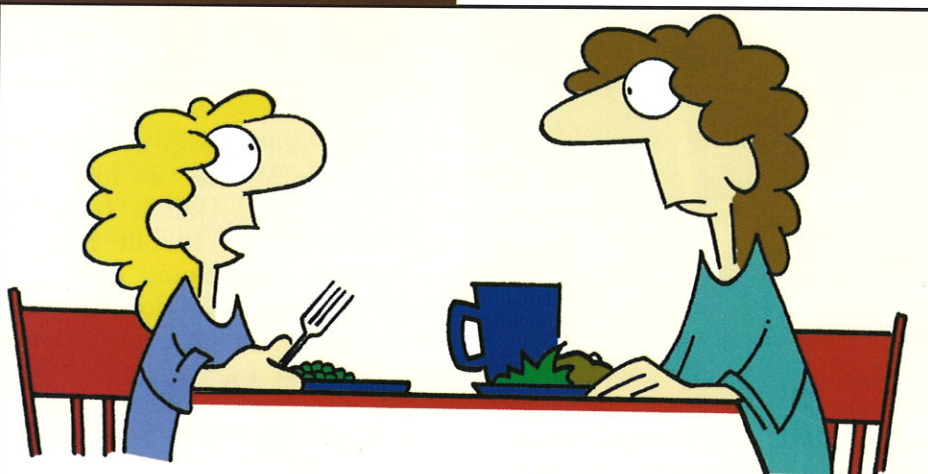
Having given himself time to gain perspective, Nehemiah then confronted those whom he believed to be in the wrong. He saw clearly what needed to be done and took immediate action: "he contended with the nobles and the rulers."

Sometimes even though we think through the issues carefully we lack the courage to confront those with whom we disagree. Satisfied that we are in the right (at least in our own eyes), we settle down complacently. Only under extreme provocation do we discuss the issues with those with whom we are offended. It is easy to find reasons for not doing what we know needs to be done. Nehemiah, for example, had some great potential excuses. After all, he could have reasoned, is it wise to take on such influential men as the nobles and rulers of Jerusalem? If I do, can I come away unscathed? And what if they make life difficult for me afterwards? I'll be in a worse mess than before. And consider the odds — one against so many! This really doesn't concern me. It's the people's problem. Let them attend to it.

This kind of reasoning was not part of Nehemiah's lifestyle. To be sure, he needed the help of these men to build the wall; but he was not about to com-

Anger, continued on page 5 ➤

LAST LAUGH



"There's war, disease, poverty, and violent crime all over the world ... and your greatest concern is me not eating peas!"

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Positive & Negative Self-Denial

By Bruce Narramore

During a discussion time on spiritual and psychological adjustment a rather frustrated looking gentleman in the back of the auditorium asked a challenging question. “Isn’t all of this talk about ourselves a waste of time? The Bible says we should deny ourselves.”

He was right, of course, in one way. The Bible does talk of self-denial but it doesn’t mean what this gentleman and some other Christians think.

Self-denial doesn’t mean we shouldn’t think about ourselves or our needs. It doesn’t mean we should dislike, “crucify,” or devalue ourselves. It doesn’t mean that we should develop a rigid set of depriving disciplines to try to become spiritually mature. And it doesn’t mean that we should never do anything good for ourselves and always be giving out and serving others. If we do that we will eventually run dry.

This approach became so popular a few hundred years after Christianity started that a group arose called the “pole-sitting saints.” They tried to purify their souls by isolating themselves from the world by sitting on small platforms atop high poles! The apostle Paul tells us that such an approach will never work. He says, “These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Colossians 2:23, NASB).

Biblical Self-Denial

The Bible speaks of five types of positive self-denial and none of them involve putting oneself down or engaging in some masochistic form of sacrifice. First, Jesus said, “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow

me” (Matthew 16:24, TLB). Jesus meant that we should be willing to deny ourselves certain pleasures and desires in order to accomplish higher and more important purposes. This kind of self-denial is never an end in itself; it is always tied to a worthy goal and it doesn’t ignore our own needs.

Second, we may be called on to deny ourselves physical or financial possessions so that we can share with those who are more needy. Jesus said, “If you have

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two coats . . . give one to the poor. If you have extra food, give it away to those who are hungry” (Luke 3:11, TLB).

Third, we should be willing to deny ourselves certain pleasures in order to not offend others or put a roadblock in their path. The apostle Paul said he wouldn’t eat meat that had been offered to idols if it would cause a Christian brother to sin. He then challenges us to “determine this — not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way” (Romans 14:13, NASB).

Fourth, the Bible tells us to deny expression to our fallenness or sinful-

ness. Paul, for example, writes: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:12, 13, NASB). We are not told to deny or crucify ourself — the core of our being. Instead, we are told to deny expression to our sinfulness because it opposes our best way of living. Denying expression to our sinfulness actually enriches and enlivens our God-given self.

A final reason for self-denial is to help spread the Christian message. Paul gave up his life for this goal. We cannot accomplish anything significant in life if we try to do only things that are pleasurable and easy. The accomplished musician, the star athlete, the wise mother, and the skilled craftsman must all sacrifice some things in order to develop their skills for their main mission in life. We can’t reach others for Christ unless we step out of our safe little cocoons of self-protection and take some risks. But this kind of self-denial is far from self-hatred and debasement. It really says that we are worthy of being motivated by a noble purpose, and that we are willing to skip some otherwise acceptable activities for a greater good.

God doesn’t want us to be self-hating, self-denying, sour-faced Christians. Instead, He wants us to know that we are created and loved by Him and are very special to Him. And as Christ sacrificed a life of ease to redeem us, God wants us to deny ourselves whatever temporal activities stand in the way of serving Him and His kingdom so that we can live the enriching and fulfilling life that He has in store for us and so that we can impact others for Christ. †

God's Alternative to Guilty

By Bruce Narramore, Ph.D.

Guilt! I don't know what is the matter with me. I'm such a failure. God couldn't forgive me for this. Why did I ever do or say such a thing? Do I have to live with this the rest of my life?

These thoughts and feelings plague even many born-again Christians. Children who were raised in an environment of excessive criticism, shame, nagging or angry punishment can be especially prone to these negative guilt emotions. Sometimes these feelings are so strong that extremely sensitive Christians begin to doubt their salvation or to believe they are completely useless to God.

In reality, this type of self-condemning guilty feelings isn't the voice of God at all. In fact, the Bible says that Satan is the "accuser of the brethren." Jesus is our "advocate," not our accuser (Revelation 12:10; 1 John 2:1, 2 NASB). Jesus took care of all our sin and guilt when He was crucified in our place. The apostle Paul put it clearly, "There is therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1 NASB).

Like many of us, the great reformer Martin Luther struggled with guilty feelings. But once he came to a deep understanding of the truth of justification by faith, he learned to overcome them. When Luther felt accused for his failure to heed God's laws, he would say: "Mr. Law, go ahead and accuse me as much as you like. I know I have committed many sins, and I continue to sin daily. But that doesn't bother me ... My conscience ... has nothing to do with the likes of you, because my conscience lives to Christ under another law, a new and better law, the law of grace."¹

When guilt feelings come to mind we need to remember this truth: We are no longer under the law and its guilty con-



demnations. Christ has taken care of our guilt. Through Him, we are completely forgiven and acceptable to God and because of that, we should be able to accept ourselves.

Does this mean that we shouldn't care about our failures and our need to grow? Not at all. When the apostle Paul told the Roman Christians they were free from the law he anticipated this question. "What should we say then? Are we to continue in sin that that grace might increase? May it never be!" (Romans 6:1, 2 NASB).

Godly Sorrow

In Second Corinthians 7:8-10 Paul gives us the alternative to self-defeating guilt feelings: "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it, though I did regret it; for I see that that

letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while. I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (NASB).

Paul speaks of "sorrow of the world" and "sorrow according to the will of God." Sorrow of the world produces nothing positive. It leads to death. In contrast, sorrow according to the will of God is helpful. It leads to repentance.

Self-condemning, psychological guilt (sorrow of the world) and godly, constructive sorrow (sorrow according to the will of God) are very different emotions.

Psychological guilt is rooted in self-hatred. When we experience this type of guilt we are essentially mad at ourselves for falling short of our standards.

Godly sorrow, however, is rooted in love and concern.

Psychological guilt focuses largely on our past failures. By contrast, Godly sorrow focuses more on the future and how we need to grow and change.

Psychological guilt is largely self-centered. Its concern is not, "What have I done to others and how can I correct the harm I have done them?" It focuses instead on: "What a failure I am." "What will everyone think of me?" Or "I am no good." Godly sorrow focuses more on the persons we have injured. It is a very deep feeling but is concerned with the impact of our sin on others.

Adam and Eve apparently didn't have the slightest concern that they had plunged the world into rebellion and thrown a monkey wrench into God's plan for the universe. They were just

Feelings

afraid they would be punished—one form of guilt.

Let's say the two of us are chatting over coffee. Reaching for the sugar, I accidentally knock your coffee in your lap. A typical guilty reaction would be, "How stupid of me. I should have known better. Look at the mess I've made. I'm sorry." In my mind (if not verbally) I might continue berating myself and feeling like a social klutz. The focus would be on myself and my misdeeds and my anger at myself for messing up.

Godly sorry is completely different. I might say (and feel) something like, "Oh, no! Are you burned? I'm so sorry. Here are some napkins. I'll get the table cleaned up." And later I might offer to pay the cleaning bill.

Notice the difference? In the first instance the focus is on myself and my failures. It hardly seems important that I'd spilled coffee on your clothes. I am more concerned with my own mistake and embarrassment. Even if I offer to pay your cleaning bill, I probably would do it to relieve my own guilt. In the second instance you are my main concern. I don't keep verbally berating myself. Instead, I immediately try to help.

Like Martin Luther, we live much happier and more productive lives when we let this truth permeate our minds and hearts. We have a radically different way of relating to God since Christ paid the penalty for our sins. We relate to Him from gratitude for all He has done for us, not from fear and guilt. We know that He doesn't want us to continue to wallow in our guilt since He has already paid. He wants us to respond to the Holy Spirit's loving correction so that we can live a better way. God knows the terrible affects of sin on us and those we sin against and He has provided complete forgiveness so that we can grow and change rather than stew in self-blame and guilt.

promise inappropriately. He explained the inconsistency of their conduct. Then he convened a great assembly and, after detailing the charges against them, gave his opponents an opportunity to reply. But, "they were silent and could not find a word to say."

A Time to Mend

With all the people fully aware of the issues, Nehemiah then moved to bring the entire affair to a satisfactory conclusion. He became conciliatory. "Please, leave off this usury," he said. "Please give back to them this very day their fields." Was this attempt at uniting the people a sign of weakness? Did Nehemiah fear the consequences of his action? Had he been too bold in what he said? Is this the reason he softened his statements? By no means! Nehemiah was conciliatory without compromising. He was a man of unquestionable integrity; he addressed the nobles and rulers of the people from a position of strength. Instead of lowering his standards, he was inviting them to join him.

Even in his move towards conciliation, Nehemiah realized that there was still an inherent danger. He was

not about to allow time to dull the memory, or to change circumstances to alter the intent of anyone's pledge. Those who have been in similar situations know how easy it is for some people to wait until the details of an agreement are forgotten and then revert to their former ways. Others, when challenged with the discrepancy between their verbal compliance and their subsequent conduct, are quick to say, "But I didn't understand it in that way." Nehemiah was a realist. He didn't leave things to chance. He required a stronger form of commitment — something in writing (or its equivalent). The nobles and rulers complied with Nehemiah's demand and formally committed themselves to the course of action they had promised.

A remarkable thing then happened. "All the assembly said 'Amen (so be it)!' And they praised the Lord." Isn't it wonderful that God can be glorified when we handle anger in the right way?

When we handle our anger like Nehemiah, we will find that God can be glorified by our conduct. We can "be angry, and yet not sin ... and give the devil no place in our lives" (Eph. 4:26, 27). †

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¹Luther, Martin: Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (Zondervan, 1949), p. 175.

2004 MKs Complete Reentry Training

Thirty-eight sons and daughters of missionaries just completed NCF's first intensive reentry program of 2004. They flew into Los Angeles from 20 different countries where their parents are serving Christ. Their homes are in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia in Asia; Mexico, El Salvador, Panama and Peru in Central and South America; and Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Mali and the Republic of Congo in Africa.

Can you imagine the rich energy in the room as these exceptionally intelligent, diverse eighteen-year-olds interacted with each other and with Christian counselors and educators about their transition to life in the United States?

After checking into their rooms and getting acquainted on Monday evening, they jumped right into a rigorous schedule that began at 8:30 each morning with a time of worship and ended with small group devotions every evening at 10:00. In between, they took a battery of personality and vocational tests and received individual feedback, listened to lectures, and dialogued about transitions, saying goodbye, college life in the U.S., and how to deal with grief and loss and other strong emotions. They also discussed ways their distinctive life experiences growing up between cultures have impacted them spiritually, socially and emotionally and how to use those experiences in positive ways here in America.

To break up the intensity of the seminar, the MKs enjoyed a picnic and pool party at Bruce and Kathy Narramore's home one afternoon and evening, worshipped at a local church on Sunday, and spent another late afternoon and evening at the beach.

By the time they had to say goodbye to their newfound friends and head off to college, there were a lot of tears in the room. They were touched deeply and found real soul mates



July 2004 MK participants (above), Dr. Bruce Narramore and Perry Bradford (left) respond to questions from MKs.



among the staff and their fellow MKs from around the world. They had developed a much better understanding of themselves and their strengths and weaknesses. And they had begun to put their transitions into God's perspective so that they could move more confidently into the next crucial phase of their lives.

Please pray for these outstanding young men and women as they continue finding themselves and their places in life in the months and years to come. They are off to a great start but will need God's guidance and a lot of encouragement and support from other caring Christians. †

Philippine Update

During their recent teaching at the Asia Graduate School of Theology in Manila, Dr. Bruce Narramore and Dr. William Kirwan traveled to Baguio City to visit one of their students, Rev. Lemuel Engcoy. Baguio is home to Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, where Rev. Engcoy serves as a professor and Dean of Students.

Since he served as a pastor for 13 years, Lemuel has a special heart and calling to minister to pastors and their families. Just recently, he was the featured speaker for more than 200 ministers attending an annual pastors confer-

ence.

"The main point is not that we failed," Rev. Engcoy began his message. "What is important is that we repent and rise from our failure." He then led in-depth workshops for the pastors on "Forgiveness and Managing Stress" and "Burnout." Lemuel and his wife Rose are also leading Marriage Enrichment Seminars for pastors and lay couples.

Please pray for Lemuel and the other students in the doctoral program as they deepen their abilities to minister to the emotional and spiritual needs of families throughout the Philippines. †



From the left Dr. Bruce Narramore, Rev. Lemuel Engcoy and Dr. William Kirwan at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary.

Earthly Father, Heavenly Father



“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:18).

Of all parental opportunities and responsibilities, perhaps the most awesome is the responsibility to teach our children about God. Our children's earliest concepts of God, however, will not come from the words we teach them, even the divinely inspired words of the Bible. They will evolve instead out of our children's relationships with us. Long before young children have the ability to understand an unseen heavenly Father, they are forming their future understanding of Him through their relationship with us, God's tangible representatives here on earth.

A number of research studies have demonstrated the connection between a person's image of God and one's concept of his or her parents. One of these studies showed that there was greater similarity between the God and parent concepts in persons who converted to Christianity before the age of ten than people who experienced conversion after the age of seventeen. Another study found that children related the characteristics of both their mother and

father to their concept of God. One mother described how her father was always too busy to play with her while she was growing up. Then she told me, “Every time I pray I get a mental image of God sitting up in heaven in an easy chair reading the newspaper.” Her image of her heavenly Father was sadly distorted by her relationship with her earthly father.

What picture of God are your children getting through their relationship with you? Are they learning that God is loving, patient and kind? Are they learning that He is just and desires for them to live rightly, but that He also freely forgives their sins and failures? Are they learning that God is always present and never too busy to spend time with them? Or are they starting to think God is impatient or short tempered or holds a grudge or is too busy to listen to them?

Long after our children forget the specific words we speak and even after they forget some of the Bible verses they have read or learned, the image of God they learned from us will still remain. Let's be the kind of parent God created us to be so that our children will see their heavenly Father as He is! †

Pearl of Great Price

By Roree Van Duyne

I dropped my earring into my coffee this morning. Yup ... went straight from my ear into the cup. I know, that takes a special kind of talent.

I immediately took the time from my busy day to find a sink. I carefully strained through my coffee, keeping a close eye on the open drain, and recaptured my stray earring.

The earring is pearl and this experience brought to mind the words of Jesus who said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46, NIV).

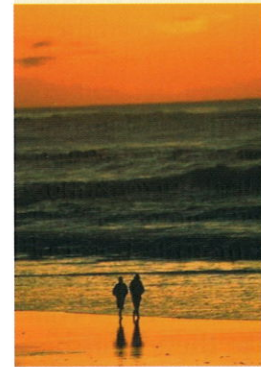
So I had to ask myself, Do I make room in my schedule for the Kingdom of Heaven? Do I jump up and search for it—care-

fully straining through the tasks of the day—keeping an open eye out for the things that might swallow it up?

I'm afraid that I don't measure up as well as I

would like. My busy days often swallow up my opportunities to spend time with the Lord. Even worse, some days I don't jump up and look for it at all.

“Help me Lord, TODAY, to search for your kingdom in my world of commonplace emergencies. Help me to find you and to value you as I should and as my heart truly desires.” †



NCF's Internet Connection

Dear Dr. Narramore ... Before I met with you earlier this year, I went to your website and was enlightened. Every so often I revisit your site and always leave with additional knowledge and insight. I'm sure this is true of others who don't take the time to thank you. Keep up the good work and wishing you success for the years to come."

—RM

Time, continued from cover

the personal level and at the political and national level. On the personal level, the Bible tells us, "The truth will make you free." On the corporate level, the Bible tells us, "Righteousness (which includes truthfulness) exalts a nation." (Proverbs 14:34)

The United States is at a critical juncture. From radical Islamic terrorists worldwide to supporters of homosexual marriages at home, our country is under attack. Although many politicians and media personalities rationalize and justify these movements, the truth is that they both carry within them the seeds of potential destruction of our nation. Their threats make our upcoming election one of the most important in our nation's history. Let's pray that our citizens will have the wisdom to elect men and women of honesty, principle, and moral conviction. It will take these Christian virtues for our leaders to make the decisions necessary to protect our country from enemies without and within.

†

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