

STUDIES IN 1 TIMOTHY

LAW NUMBER TWO: "Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position"

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Key Verse 1:12: "I am feeling grateful to the One who strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He deemed me trustworthy, having appointed me for service"

TEXT:

v.12 I am feeling grateful to the One who strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He deemed me trustworthy, having appointed me for service;

v.13 though I was formerly a slanderer and a persecutor and a violent man, but I was shown mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief.

v.14 And the grace of our Lord was present in great abundance, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

v.15 Reliable is the word, and worthy of wholehearted acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.

v.16 But on this account I was shown mercy, in order that in me first Jesus Christ might demonstrate His unlimited patience, as an example to those who will be believing on Him for life eternal.

v.17 Now to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

I am sure you have seen the commercial of George Foreman with his boxing gloves on, stripped down to the waist, and looking at his reflection in the mirror. As he prepares to punch his own reflection, the reflection turns and runs away. Then George Foreman turns around to face the camera, and with his snide little smile, says, "I'm so big I sometimes scare myself."

WE'LL TRAIN YOU

The young man had just graduated from college and went to work at his father's store. The first day his father asked him to sweep the floor.

"But, Dad," the son protested, "I'm a college graduate."

Replied the father, "I'm sorry, son. I forgot. But don't worry, I'll show you how to do it."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

SELF-DEPRECATATION . . . FOR A FEE

A panhandler, dirty, shabbily dressed, and unshaven, approached a well-dressed gentleman on the street and said, "I am a totally worthless individual, unmotivated by any desire for self-betterment, devoid of even a vestige of pride or human dignity. I am a millstone around the neck of society, and, in summation, a discredit to the American way of life and the human race. That will be five dollars please."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

SO WHAT?

A church had a man in the choir who couldn't sing. Several people hinted to him that he could serve in other places, but he continued to come to the choir. The choir director became desperate and went to the pastor.

"You've got to get that man out of the choir," he said.

"If you don't, I'm going to resign. The choir members are going to quit too. Please do something."

So the pastor went to the man and suggested, "Perhaps you should leave the choir."

"Why should I get out of the choir?" he asked.

"Well, five or six people have told me you can't sing."

"That's nothing," the man snorted. "Fifty people have told me that you can't preach!"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

A customer walked into a pet shop and spied a parrot. He ambled over to the bird and said, "Hey, Stupid, can you talk?"

The bird answered, "Sure can, Dummy. Can you fly?"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

SWEET CONCEIT

He's so conceited he takes a bow when he hears thunder.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

MARKS OF A CHRISTIAN

A rather arrogant churchman was trying to impress upon the young minds of a class of boys and girls the importance of leading a Christian life. "Why do people call me a Christian, children?" the worthy man asked, standing very erect and smiling down at them.

After a pause a shrill little voice said, "Because they don't know you?"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

IF YOU DON'T MIND

He's so opinionated that one day his wife said, "Tomorrow is Tuesday, if that's all right with you."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

"SELF" IN THE BALANCE

A man who had a high opinion of himself stepped on the scales in a penny arcade and was delighted with the statement on the card he received from the weighing device.

Handing it to his wife, he said with much personal satisfaction, "Here, look at this!" She took it and read aloud, "You are dynamic, a born leader, handsome, and much admired by women for your personality." Giving it a second look, she added, "Hmmm, I see it's got your weight wrong too!" We may smile at that crestfallen egotist; yet he portrays the carnal man who is always pleased to think more highly of himself than he ought.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

(God Uses Cracked Pots by Patsy Clairmont)

Winter . . . brrrr . . . I never liked the cold.

For years I whined my way through winter, feeling justified as I listened to many others complain about the cold. Then we moved to a Boy Scout reservation on six hundred twenty-five acres, and I realized it could be a long, lonely winter if I didn't find some way to use my time. I decided to take up cross-country skiing.

First, I had to purchase my equipment. That was fun. I chose adorable powder blue ski pants, matching jacket, a sweet little knit hat, fluffy mittens, groovy goggles, floral long johns, cute color-coordinated shoes, darling little poles and oh, yes, some skis.

Les did not think it was wise for a non-athletic novice to go sliding off by herself into half a mile of heavily wooded acreage. I kept assuring him I could handle this.

I can still hear him calling to me as I glided out of sight, "If you get lost out there, I'm not looking for you till spring."

There's something about having the right equipment that can give one unrealistic confidence. I felt as though I looked professional--besides, how hard could it be to walk in the snow?

I was amazed how quickly I picked up a rhythm. The snow must have been just right for gliding, because I was moving well, and my overrated view of my ability was growing with every stride.

At this point I passed the hill . . . a sizable hill . . . a steep hill. It seemed to be beckoning me, tempting me, daring me. What could there be to tucking my poles and bending my knees? Life was meant to be lived. I decided to go for it.

I positioned myself confidently and then leaned forward. Who would think one little lean could start one in such a downward direction? The wind blowing briskly about my face reminded me of the exhilarating challenge of life. I believe it was at this moment that I spotted the lake, which reminded me of the excruciating pain of death.

I seemed to be headed for the thinly ice-covered water at an increased rate of speed. I meant to learn how to swim, I really did. (This thought seemed a little hindsight-y.)

Being perceptive, it didn't take me long to tune into one fact--whoever designed these skis forgot an important feature: the brakes. You would think that a backup parachute would be required at the time of purchase. Where's Ralph Nader when you need him?

No fear though, for there, before my eyes, was an escape route--a grove of fir trees. Actually, I could see now that I couldn't miss those babies if I wanted to.

Leaping sideways to try to slow my momentum, I bounced off almost every tree trunk in the woods. Limbs met my face and body with a whipping force.

Finally I came to a stop. Wrapped securely in bark at the base of a tree, I lay very still. Snow is not as soft as it looks.

Slowly I tried moving body parts that just minutes before were gliding merrily along with little effort. Now some parts had no feeling while others had a great rush of pain.

Les's face flashed through my mind. I could almost see that "I warned you" look, followed by a smirky smile. I determined then to keep this story under my skis.

Discomfort began to attack all parts of my body. Nothing seemed to be broken, just painfully re-arranged.

The hill had acquired mountain proportions. I was scaling it on my knees while dragging my slightly abused ski equipment behind me. I had the suspicion that someone was videotaping this escapade, and the next time Les was watching sports, I would be featured in the "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" segment.

I buried the bent equipment in the snow beside the house and slipped onto the porch. Swallowing my groans, I made my way through the house to my room, sat down on the bed and started the uncomfortable task of disrobing.

Just then Les walked in.

I'm not sure if it was my lopsided groovy goggles, the pine cones hanging off my sweet little hat, or the evergreen needles protruding from my front teeth, but he sensed things had not gone well.

He was actually quite merciful. He only sang thirty-two rounds of "The Old Gray Mare."

When he left the room I looked down and saw the packaging my goggles had come in. It read, "High-altitude glasses." I thought, That's what I need. Not ski equipment but the advantage of a Higher perspective. Perhaps then I would have chosen tatting for my winter sport.

What was that again, the thing that goes before a fall?
pp. 135-37

(The Set of the Sail by A. W. Tozer)

Selfish personal interest, says the Greek moral philosopher Epictetus, is the motive behind all human conduct.

By way of illustration he points to two dogs romping on the lawn with every appearance of friendship when suddenly someone tosses a piece of raw meat between them. Instantly their play turns into savage fight as each struggles to get the meat for himself. Their friendship lasts only as long as their interests coincide. When those interests conflict they become snarling enemies.
p. 117

(The God-Players by Earl Jabay)

We are not the ill-equipped, disadvantaged, embryonic people we think we are. Quite to the contrary, we have thought ourselves great enough to engage in a needless, foolish war with Ultimate Authority.

This is a crucial point, for what it means is that man's problem is not that he is malfunctioning because of his immaturity but that he is mispositioned in the world because of his arrogant pride. He is over God. My experience, personally and professionally, is that when one becomes correctly positioned under God, a person begins to straighten out inwardly (psychically) and outwardly (interpersonally). Egocentric pride, therefore, seems to be the root problem in human life.

There is no human way for us to free ourselves from our pride. The solution to the pride problem can only come by divine means working in a context of human despair.
p. 99

(You Can Make a Difference by Gary R. Collins)

"The sin of the garden was the sin of power. They wanted to be more, to have more, to know more than is right. Not content to be creatures, they wanted to be gods." When power and pride go together, writes Foster, we have the most destructive force of all, especially when the pride and power reside in people who have no accountability.
p. 238

We who admire talent and originality, however, sometimes find it hard to believe that God uses weak people, even some who are not very competent or creative. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary statesman, once suggested that "all God's giants have been weak people."

This message isn't popular, but it is true; nevertheless. As Robert Girard observed, God's most effective difference makers seem to have "gone through some type of weakening process to break the outer shell of arrogance, self-righteousness, and dependence on personal strength, charisma, and talent. God uses failure, sickness, breakdown, sin, personal tragedy, and sorrow to reduce his people to usefulness. Unless the servant of God learns to depend utterly on God and to forsake self-dependence of any kind, he or she remains too strong to be of much value." This doesn't mean that we should seek to be weakened. It means, instead, that we can expect weakening if we are serious about making a difference.
p. 66

(The Kingdom of Self by Earl Jabay)

The mother of John Wesley declared that the will of a child should be conquered by the time he is four years old. Susanna Wesley was a great success as a mother. Look at her family--among them John and Charles.
p. 12

The king in the Kingdom of Self hands himself the keys to his kingdom.

Can he open the door of his life with them?

Of course he can, responds this young person in his earliest twenties. But these are drunken words. He is drunk on a delusion of his limitlessness and the fantasy of his omnipotence. He is intoxicated with the prospect of a freedom to do anything he wishes.
p. 20

God has been stripped of His attributes. Man, as soon as he is born, declares war on God. The war is on this issue: Who is Number One? Is it I or is it Thou? I think it is I.

Out of that kind of thinking, a number of unstated and usually unrecognized convictions take deep root in our lives. Let us reflect on the following convictions of an adult King Self:

1. I am power
2. I am truth
3. I am right
4. I am above time
5. I am a messiah
6. I am the law
7. I am perfect

p. 22

(The Body by Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn)

How do we tear down the pedestals? How do we vigorously assert the biblical mind-set of servant leadership, so radically at odds with the celebrity-crazed culture in which we live?

Like everything else, it begins with each of us coming under the conviction of God's truth. All of us--pastors and lay leaders and parishioners--need to take a hard look at ourselves.

p. 309

(The Grace Awakening by Charles R. Swindoll)

I vividly remember my last spanking. It was on my thirteenth birthday, as a matter of fact. Having just broken into the sophisticated ranks of the teen world, I thought I was something on a stick. My father wasn't nearly as impressed as I was with my great importance and new-found independence. I was lying on my bed. He was outside the window on a muggy October afternoon in Houston, weeding the garden. He said, "Charles, come out and help me weed the garden." I said something like: "No . . . it's my birthday, remember?" My tone was sassy and my deliberate lack of respect was eloquent. I knew better than to disobey my dad; but, after all, I was the ripe old age of thirteen. He set a new 100-meter record that autumn afternoon. He was in the house and all over me like white on rice, spanking me all the way out to the garden. As I recall, I weeded until the moonlight was shining on the pansies.

p. 9

(Principle-Centered Leadership by Stephen R. Covey)

Correct principles are like compasses: they are always pointing the way. And if we know how to read them, we won't get lost, confused, or fooled by conflicting voices and values.

Principles are self-evident, self-validating natural laws. They don't change or shift. They provide "true north" direction to our lives when navigating the "streams" of our environments.

Principles apply at all times in all places. They surface in the form of values, ideas, norms, and teachings that uplift, ennoble, fulfill, empower, and inspire people.

The lesson of history is that to the degree people and civilizations have operated in harmony with correct principles, they have prospered. At the root of societal declines are foolish practices that represent violations of correct principles. How many economic disasters, intercultural conflicts, political revolutions, and civil wars could have been avoided had there been greater social commitment to correct principles?

Principle-centered leadership is based on the reality that we cannot violate these natural laws without impunity.
p. 19

We are pursuing the subject "The Laws of Leadership" in our studies in 1 Timothy.

In Study #1 we considered LAW #1:

"A Statement of Goal Is Essential in Leadership."

Now we turn to LAW #2:

"Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position."

PAUL now turns to the personal here to give us a demonstration of the rightful use of the law in his own life. It is Paul's life story in review--his CONVERSION and CALL. Out of this we get another law of leadership.

William Barclay titles these verses:

SAVED TO SERVE

This passage begins with a very paean of thanksgiving. There were four tremendous things for which Paul wished to thank Jesus Christ.

(i) He thanked Him because He chose him.

(ii) He thanked Him because He trusted him.

(iii) He thanked Him because He had appointed him.

(iv) He thanked Him because He had empowered him.

pp. 47-49

Guy King says:

The apostle realises that as this young friend of his assumes the Oversight he will be brought up against all kinds of problems, and will be confronted by seemingly inflexible, and certainly intimidating, opposition. He would like Timothy to be quite sure in his own mind that even the toughest foe can be brought low by the convicting and conquering power and love of the living Christ, whose ambassador he is. Can Paul think of the story of any such conquest, that would bring encouragement to the young evangelist? Indeed he can : he will tell him his own story!

A story so remarkable that people could scarcely believe it to be true. The loyal disciple, Ananias, says, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints", Acts ix. 13--it takes a special reassurance from the Lord Himself to convince him of the sincerity of this Saul's conversion, believing at first that the persecutor was setting a trap to catch him in avowing his Christian discipleship. The believers at Jerusalem "were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple", Acts ix. 26--it took all the guarantee of the beloved Barnabas to persuade them that his conversion was genuine. It was some time before it dawned upon the churches of Judea at last that it really was the delightfully delirious fact that "he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed" Galatians i. 23. Yes, Timothy, you will never come across a harder case, or a greater triumph : if God can save Saul, He can save anyone you will come up against in Ephesus.

pp. 30-31

Guthrie says:

This section appears to be a digression, but is nevertheless necessary to the argument. As Easton aptly puts it, 'If Christ could change Paul, the greatest of sinners, into an Apostle, there is no limit to His transforming power. So let no man say that his duties as a Christian are beyond his abilities'. By a natural association of ideas, the thought of the magnitude of the gospel committed to him (verse 11) leads the apostle to marvel at his own experience of God's enabling power.

p. 63

Lenski points out:

The intensity of feeling expressed in this paragraph should not be lost in the cold type one reads or in the cool, dissecting comment to which the typed lines are subjected. Here speaks the very soul of Paul. Here is doctrine turned into life. Past experience burns undimmed, confession of sin, confession of faith, gratefulness burst into praise and doxology.

p. 515

Demarest says:

Here is another of Paul's testimonies. D. T. Niles of Ceylon was fond of describing evangelism as "one beggar telling another beggar where he had found bread." No sooner has Paul finished wrestling again with the essence of "the glorious gospel" than he literally explodes into a joyous celebration of his own personal relationship with Christ. Though many years had passed, Paul never got too far away from his conversion experience. And the message that comes through his story is the assurance that if Christ could indeed change him, He can change anyone else.

p. 160

Hendriksen says:

The personal reference in the last clause of verse 11 is now expanded. Beautifully the apostle combines two ideas: a. I, though entirely unworthy, have been commissioned to proclaim the gospel of God's grace; and b. that grace and mercy was most gloriously displayed in my own conversion.

In this short paragraph (verses 12-17) we find not the usual stiff, stereo-typed, and formal "thanksgiving to the gods or to a particular deity" which in ancient letters ordinarily follows the opening address. Instead, here we meet an outburst of gratitude, sincere and warm. Issuing from a heart that is filled with intense emotion, it rises to a higher and higher pitch until it ends in a sublime doxology (verse 17). What we actually see here is Paul as a radiant example of what God's law, lawfully used, can accomplish in the life of a former persecutor.

p. 73

Lange points out:

No higher ground of thanksgiving than for conversion to the truth.--The great contrast between the once and the now in the life of Paul. How far it must be repeated with every Christian.--The glory of the minister of the gospel whom the Lord has counted faithful, and has placed in office.

p. 24

v.12 I am feeling grateful to the One who strengthened me,
Christ Jesus our Lord, because He deemed me trustworthy,
having appointed me for service;

Let us remind ourselves of the 4 WORDS that Barclay uses to summarize this verse:

1. CHOSE
2. TRUSTED
3. APPOINTED
4. EMPOWERED

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

At this point Paul's inventory of sinners, of which he knew he was the chief, combined with his remembrance of the gospel with which he had been entrusted, triggered within him a powerful surge of gratitude.

We could literally translate it from the Greek: "thanks I am having." The word "thanks" is in the emphatic position.

Hendriksen says:

"I thank him, Christ Jesus our Lord, my Strength-Imparter (cf. II Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:13; II Tim. 4:17), who in his sovereign mercy considered me trustworthy--looking not at what I was in myself but at what his grace was doing within me (cf. I Cor. 4:7; Eph. 2:8)--, and accordingly for his own purpose appointed me to the ministry of the apostolic office." The enabling, the favorable judging, and the appointing were simultaneous. They all occurred when Paul was converted on the way to Damascus.
p. 73

Lock paraphrases this 1st phrase:

"I feel and show, I express, gratitude."
p. 14

Barnes points out:

The mention of the gospel (ver. 11), and of the fact that it was committed to him, leads the apostle to express his gratitude to him who had called him to the work of preaching it.
p. 119

Hiebert says:

The words "I thank" literally are "gratitude I am having." It is not a passing expression of thanks but the revelation of a constant attitude of gratitude, as the present tense shows. His gratitude is directed toward Him "that enabled me," or "put strength within me." He is referring to that new motivation and spiritual dynamic which was imparted to him by the divine forgiveness. The aorist tense points back to a definite time when he received this impartation of strength. The One who equipped him for service in the power of the Holy Spirit was "Christ Jesus our Lord." His use of "our" indicates that the Lord who thus dealt with him is likewise Timothy's Lord and Enabler.
p. 39

"GRATITUDE I AM HAVING TOWARD THE ONE WHO STRENGTHENED ME."

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Colossians 1:11

strengthened with all power, according to His glorious
might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and
patience; joyously

Isaiah 26:12

Lord, you establish peace for us;
all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

John 15:5

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in
Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me
you can do nothing.

Paul realized that God was looking for AVAILABILITY and NOT
ABILITY. God was looking for instruments through whom He
could pour His own strength and accomplish His purposes
through that life.

2 Corinthians 12:9, 10

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

"I AM FEELING GRATEFUL TO THE ONE WHO STRENGTHENED ME, CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

The reason being:

"BECAUSE HE DEEMED ME TRUSTWORTHY."

The Lord did not give up on me. He trusted me after my conversion experience. "HE DEEMED ME TRUSTWORTHY."

Barnes says:

This is equivalent to saying that he reposed confidence in me. It means that there was something in the character of Paul, and in his attachment to the Saviour, on which reliance could be placed, or that there was that which gave the assurance that he would be faithful.
p. 120

The way this trust was manifested is seen in the last phrase:

"HAVING APPOINTED ME FOR SERVICE."

1 Thessalonians 5:9

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Psalms 18:16

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.

Psalm 75:6, 7

No one from the east or the west
 or from the desert can exalt a man.
 But it is God who judges:
 He brings one down, he exalts another.

This is our KEY VERSE to study #2 - LAW #2:

"Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position."

CHRISTIAN CALLING and LEADERSHIP in the scriptures seem to be focused upon God reaching down and tuning up an available instrument for His purposes. It is not the picture of someone striving for power and authority, and God honoring that struggle by placing them in leadership.

Many illustrations in scripture are of God touching the lives of men who initially were unwilling, but by the Lord's encouragement and patience, were brought to the place of making a powerful impact upon their generation.

Paul never got over that. He is a broken man as a result of the Damascus Road experience. And so the confession of his lips here in verse 12 is:

"I AM FEELING GRATEFUL TO THE ONE WHO STRENGTHENED ME,
 CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD, BECAUSE HE DEEMED ME TRUSTWORTHY,
 HAVING APPOINTED ME FOR SERVICE."

IN-BETWEEN

A sophisticated young woman was asked to attend a formal banquet. She was assigned a place between a noted bishop and an equally famous rabbi. Throughout the meal, she talked on and on endlessly.

"Oh, this is so exciting," she gushed. "Sitting here I feel as if I were the page between the Old and New Testaments."

"That page, madam," replied the rabbi, "is usually blank."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

CHOICE OF WORDS

A pastor finished a glowing message one Sunday morning. A stately grandmother with her young grandson shook the pastor's hand at the back door and announced, "Oh, Pastor, I'm just filled with your message!"

The pastor, quite pleased with such a response, turned to the little boy and asked, "Well, young man, what did you think of the sermon?"

The little boy looked up at the pastor and said, "To be honest, Pastor, I got a belly full of you, too!"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

THINK AGAIN, BROTHER

A young preacher looked up from his reading and inquired of his wife, "How many great preachers do you think there are?"

She answered, "I don't know, but there is one less than you think!"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

EXCLUSIVE PRIDE

Christian history has too many examples of disassociation between mission leaders. Each group instead needs to develop understanding, trust and a sense of fellowship with other missions. Each can learn from the other's strengths and weaknesses. What's called for is ". . . a unity and maturity in mission grounded in our ability to discern God's spirit wherever he's moving . . . giving the title 'Lord of the harvest' to God and not to our little structures and temporal movements."

"Exclusive pride" by Gordon Aeschliman. World Christian, Sept 1989. Page 9.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

INTEGRITY CRISIS IN MINISTRY

"We are facing an integrity crisis. Not only is the conduct of the church in question, but so is the very character of the church."
--Warren Wiersbe.

The undeniable crisis of immorality in the ministry has reached the epidemic stage. The secular media is having a heyday, and respect for ministers has just about bottomed out. What has caused this crisis of integrity? Sinful human nature is the obvious root cause, but Satan has used some particular strategies to bring down pastors.

(1) Materialism: The secular values of society have had a greater impact on the church than the church has had on society, and today many men in the ministry are after gold rather than God. For them the role model of the corporate CEO has replaced the scriptural example of the servant--shepherd.

(2) Pride: Egotism is rampant as religious terminology is used to justify the drive for personal power and prestige.

(3) Deceitfulness: Exaggeration gives way to outright lying in many cases.

(4) False teaching: Many are anemic in their understanding of biblical truth and thus have very shallow theology. This results in a tendency to fall either into legalism or, at the other extreme, emotionalism. Such an unstable doctrinal foundation cannot stand under pressure.

It might seem that these factors have no direct connection with immorality, but they do. If a man lacks self-control in one area (desire for affluence), it often spills over into other areas of his life (lust). Deceitfulness in regard to his own accomplishments may be reflected in a tendency to hide the truth in other ways (being unfaithful to his wife). Moral failures can usually be traced to three lacks: no daily personal walk with the Lord, failure to meditate on Scripture, and the absence of intimacy in the marriage.

"Integrity crisis in ministry" by Danny Akin. Southern Baptist Communicator, Jan/Feb 1992. Page 3.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

THE DEADLY SINS

"Respondents were asked to rank order the sins (most to least serious) and the virtues (most to least desirable)."

The writer conducted informal surveys regarding Christians' perceptions of eight sins. Melancholy (which he defined as "a personal bitterness toward life and the people with whom one associates") was selected by both clergy and laity as the most serious item on the sin list, which also included greed, anger, and gluttony. It is interesting that the three sins the clergy respondents (85% of whom were men) identified as the worst (melancholy, apathy, and lust) were not things that they personally struggle with. More ministers (42%) said the sin they have a problem with was pride. The fact that only 24% of the laymen said they struggle with this may indicate that pride is an occupational hazard for those in ministry.

Are some sins more typical of men than women? All three groups in the survey (clergy, laymen, and laywomen) thought lust, greed, and apathy were more common among males. They also agreed that envy is primarily a women's sin. Men were given higher ratings than women on six of the eight deadly sins. Perhaps the most significant finding of this study relates to lust, which was defined in the survey not as excessive preoccupation with sexual fantasies but as "an abusive and manipulative attitude toward persons of the other sex; treating them as objects or pawns." Although clergy and laity both ranked lust as one of the top three worst sins, not even one individual out of the 353 respondents admitted that lust was the sin they had the biggest personal struggle with.

"The deadly sins and saving virtues: how they are viewed by clergy" by Donald Capps. Pastoral Psychology, Mar 1992. Pages 209-233.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

THE TEST OF HUMILITY

A top-ranking British official once entertained a haughty and sophisticated lady in his home. By mistake his assistant asked her to sit on the left of her host rather than the place of honor at his right hand. The visitor was offended and became very indignant. Turning to the general, she said, "I suppose you have real difficulty in getting your aide-de-camp to seat your guests properly at the table." "Oh, not at all," came the reply; "I have found that those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter!"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

THE REWARD OF HUMILITY

A truly humble man is hard to find. Yet God smiles upon such selfless people. Booker T. Washington, the famous black educator, was a shining example of this truth. Shortly after he took charge of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the moment, Professor Washington smiled, took off his coat, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he obediently carried the logs into the kitchen. A servant girl recognized him, and later revealed to her mistress his true identity.

The next morning the embarrassed woman went to his office in the institute and apologized profusely, saying, "I didn't know it was you I put to work." "It's perfectly all right, Madam," the renowned black educator replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading her wealthy acquaintances to join her in giving thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

DIVINE PARADOXES

A paradox is an apparent contradiction which in reality may conceal a profound truth. The Bible contains many unpopular doctrines and mind-baffling concepts which would not exist if it had been composed by men and had not been uniquely inspired by God. The fact that these do appear indicates that the Lord's thoughts and ways are much higher than ours.

Note these paradoxes: We see unseen things; we conquer by yielding; we find rest under a yoke; we reign by serving; we are made great by becoming little; we are exalted by being humble; we become wise by being fools for Christ's sake; we are made free by becoming His bond servants; we possess all things by having nothing; we wax strong by being weak; we triumph by defeat; we find victory by glorying in our infirmities; and we live by dying.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

TO WHOM ARE YOU ACCOUNTABLE?

Charles Colson, a prominent figure in the Watergate coverup when Richard Nixon was President wrote an article entitled "The Problem of Power." He wrote, "Christians need to hold one another accountable. Though I know intellectually how vulnerable I am to pride and power, I am the last one to know when I succumb to their seduction. That's why spiritual Lone Rangers are so dangerous--and why we must depend on trusted brothers and sisters who love us enough to tell us the truth."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

HUMILITY--A PRICELESS VIRTUE

An unknown author has given a clear description of humility: "Humility is to have perpetual quietness of heart. It is to have no trouble. It is never to be fretted or vexed, irritated or angry. I am to wonder at nothing that is done to me and to be at rest when nobody praises me. When I am blamed or despised, I am not to be rebellious; instead I should retire to my inner closet, kneel to my Father in secret, and find rest even though all round may be trouble."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

THE HUMILITY OF THE CROSS

It is reported that three faithful missionaries of the Gospel came to see Mahatma Gandhi while he was in one of his extended fasts. During their visit, Gandhi requested that they sing a hymn for him. When they asked him which one, he replied, "The one that expresses all that is deepest in your faith." They thought for a few moments and then sang with hearts full of deep conviction,

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

GOD NEEDS YOU!

Someone once asked Francis of Assisi how he was able to accomplish so much. He replied, "This may be why: The Lord looked down from Heaven and said, 'Where can I find the weakest, littlest man on earth?' Then He saw me and said, 'I've found him. I will work through him, and he won't be proud of it. He'll see that I am only using him because of his insignificance.'"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

(What Makes a Man? by Bill McCartney)

Are you a grateful man? Grateful men lower their defenses toward God and others. Gratitude deepens relationships and builds a defense against Satan. Grateful men are enjoyable to be around. Gratitude opens doors to reconciliation and declares my need for God and others. Grateful men invite honesty and forgiveness to be a part of their lives. Genuine appreciation creates an environment for resisting temptation, resolving conflicts, and soothing hurts.

Americans pride themselves in being independent, but so does Satan. Our nation's history did not begin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Rather, it began one hundred fifty years earlier when the Pilgrims knelt in gratitude to declare their dependence on Almighty God to carry them through another year. Grateful men know the joy of thanking God and others. Gratitude is the greatest gift a man can give to his child, wife, friend, employer, employee, and God.

p. 53

(Rediscovering Holiness by J. I. Packer)

Off-loading our fantasies of omnicompetence, we start trying to be trustful, obedient, dependent, patient, and willing in our relationship to God. We give up our dreams of being greatly admired for doing wonderfully well. We begin teaching ourselves unemotionally and matter-of-factly to recognize that we are not likely ever to appear, or actually to be, much of a success by the world's standards.

We bow to events that rub our noses in the reality of our own weaknesses, and we look to God for strength quietly to cope. This is part, at least, of what it means to answer our Lord's call to childlikeness.

pp. 120-21

(The Signature of Jesus: On the Pages of Our Lives
by Brennan Manning)

"Disciple: 'I have come to you with nothing in my hands.'"

"Master: 'Then drop it at once!'"

"Disciple: 'But how can I drop it? It is nothing.'"

"Master: 'Then carry it around with you! You can make a possession of your nothing. And carry your renunciation around you like a trophy. Don't drop your possessions. Drop your ego.'"
pp. 109-10

LAW #2 OF LEADERSHIP:

"Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position."

If God has picked you up, tuned you up and now is using you to play the melodies of heaven upon your strings, rejoice in the work of the Master Musician as He makes sweet music through your life.

I am reminded of that great old hymn:

"Channels Only"

How I praise Thee, precious Saviour,
That Thy love laid hold of me;
Thou hast saved and cleansed and filled me
That I might Thy channel be.

Channels only, blessed Master,
But with all Thy wondrous pow'r
Flowing thro' us, Thou canst use us
Ev'ry day and ev'ry hour.

Emptied that Thou shouldest fill me,
A clean vessel in Thy hand;
With no pow'r but as Thou givest
Graciously with each command.

Witnessing Thy pow'r to save me,
Setting free from self and sin;
Thou who boughtest to possess me,
In Thy fullness, Lord come in.

Jesus, fill now with Thy Spirit
Hearts that full surrender know;
That the streams of living water
From our inner man may flow.

(From The New Church Hymnal. Copyright - 1976, #226)

v.13 though I was formerly a slanderer and a persecutor and a violent man, but I was shown mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief.

The apostle in verse 13 now is demonstrating the miracle of God's grace. He is magnifying God's grace by looking at his past:

"THOUGH I WAS FORMERLY":

1. "A SLANDERER,"
2. "A PERSECUTOR,"
3. "A VIOLENT MAN."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out:

The grace of God is so striking to the apostle because he knew well the pit from which he had been dug.

Acts 22:4, 5

And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

Acts 22:19, 20

And I said, "Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him."

Acts 26:9-11

So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

Hiebert says of verse 13:

[We have] the description of the one appointed. It was the remembrance of his career as an opponent of Christianity that enhanced Paul's gratitude for his appointment.
p. 40

Barclay comments:

The thing which stands out above all in this passage is Paul's insistence upon remembering his own sin. He heaps up a very climax of words to show what he did to Christ and the Church. He was an insulter of the Church; he had flung his hot and angry words at the Christians, accusing them of crimes against God, while it was he himself who was the criminal. He was a persecutor; he had taken every means which was open to him under the Jewish law to annihilate the Christian Church. Then there comes the terrible word; he had been a man of insolent and brutal violence. The word in Greek is hubristes. It indicates a kind of arrogant sadism; it describes the man who is out to inflict pain and injury for the sheer joy of inflicting it. The corresponding abstract noun is hubris. Aristotle defines it like this: "Hubris means to hurt and to grieve people, in such a way that shame comes to the man who is hurt and grieved, and that not that the person who inflicts the hurt and injury may gain anything else in addition to what he already possesses, but simply that he may find delight in his own cruelty and in the suffering of the other person." In this word there is a sadistic delight in inflicting pain. That is what Paul was once like in regard to the Christian Church.
p. 52

J. Vernon McGee says:

"Who was before a blasphemer"--Paul uses this awful word and says that he was a blasphemer. He had blasphemed the Lord Jesus, and he had hated Him. I think he was present at the Crucifixion and ridiculed the Lord Jesus. Paul says that he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and that he had injured the church.
p. 434

Barnes points out:

The word injurious does not quite express its force. It does not mean merely doing injury, but refers rather to the manner or spirit in which it is done. It is a word of intenser signification than either the word "blasphemer," or "persecutor," and means that what he did was done with a proud, haughty, insolent spirit. There was wicked and malicious violence, an arrogance and spirit of tyranny in what he did, which greatly aggravated the wrong that was done. . . .
p. 121

Lenski identifies these 3 words by saying:

"A blasphemer" who blasphemed the Lord of the church by using the most wicked and hateful language against him and tried to force others to do the same, Acts 26:11. "A persecutor" (found only here in the New Testament) who chased the Lord's people as one chases wild animals, Acts 22:4, 7, who himself acted like a wild animal, Acts 9:1, who in this activity persecuted the Lord himself (Acts 9:4, 5).
"An insolent" who hath outraged and insulted. . . . Each term is severer than the other, [and] heaps one on the other. Can you imagine a worse sinner? Should he not have been struck down and made an example of the Lord's justice?
p. 518

"THOUGH I WAS FORMERLY A SLANDERER AND A PERSECUTOR AND A VIOLENT MAN, BUT I WAS SHOWN MERCY BECAUSE, BEING IGNORANT, I ACTED IN UNBELIEF."

The word "BUT" forms the contrast and we read the words:

"I WAS SHOWN MERCY."

Lenski says:

But, wonder of wonders: "I was mercied," the Greek has just one word in the aorist passive: I was treated with compassion in my indescribably pitiful and wretched state. . . .
p. 519

Hiebert says:

That mercy which he wished Timothy in the salutation he has himself experienced. The verb in the Greek is passive and quite literally would be "I was mercied." The mercy bestowed was not given in response to any act of his own; he was the undeserving object of divine pitying love.
p. 41

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The German philosopher Nietzsche said, "If you could prove God to me, I would believe him all the less." No such willfulness characterized Paul's unbelief.

Paul says the reason he was "mercied" or "SHOWN MERCY" was because:

"BEING IGNORANT, I ACTED IN UNBELIEF."

Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Wiersbe observes:

If a person sinned knowingly "with a high hand" in Israel, he was cut off from the people. But if he sinned in ignorance, he was permitted to bring the proper sacrifices to atone for his sins. Jesus recognized this principle when He prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Their ignorance did not save them, nor did Christ's prayer save them; but the combination of the two postponed God's judgment, giving them an opportunity to be saved.

p. 18

Demarest points out:

There's a difference between testifying to God's power to change a person's life and intentionally, or unintentionally, glorifying sin. I choose to read this difficult statement of Paul as pointing to that difference.

Having described his past behavior, I hear him saying that there was nothing chic or glamorous about what he had done.

As a matter of fact, it was grounded in his unbelief and thus utterly stupid. There's nothing smart or glamorous about sin, whatever form it may take. And let's be careful in our testimonies that we don't make sin appear to be anything other than it is. It is always the product of unbelief--the conscious refusal to trust and obey the loving God. It is always the mark of ignorance, and Paul does not equate ignorance with innocence. Notice that Paul did not go into gory details about his past behavior. He was much more interested in getting to the point of the grace and salvation of Christ. We do well to be on constant guard against glorifying past sins through dwelling on them, pandering to the curiosity of vicarious thrill-seekers.

p. 161

A "FOOL'S" WISE PRAYER

Edward Sill shows us clearly the nature of true wisdom in his poem entitled, "A Fool's Prayer." He writes,

"The royal feast was done; the king
sought some new sport to banish care,
and to his jester cried,
'Sir Fool, kneel now and make for us a prayer.'

The jester doffed his cap and kneeled
upon the monarch's silken stool;
his pleading voice arose: 'O Lord,
be merciful to me, a fool!

No pity, Lord, could change the heart
from red with wrong to white as wool.
Thy grace must heal the sin;
so, Lord, be merciful to me, a fool!

These clumsy feet, still in the mire,
go crushing blossoms without end;
these hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
among the heartstrings of a friend.

The ill-timed truth we might have kept,
who knows how sharp it pierced and stung?
The word we had not sense to say,
who knows how grandly it had rung?

Our faults no tenderness should ask;
Christ's chastening stripes must cleanse them all.
But for our blunders, O, in shame
before the eyes of heaven we fall.

Earth bears no balm for our mistakes;
men crown the knave, and scourge the tool
that did his will; but Thou, O Lord,
be merciful to me, a fool!"

The room was hushed; in silence rose the king,
and sought his gardens cool,
and walked apart and murmured low,
'Be merciful to ME, a fool!'"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

SELF-RELIANT OR GOD-RELIANT?

"Through many years of active public life and through observing many kinds of people, I have found that the strongest, wisest, most competent and reliable man is the one who is first to admit his own inadequacy. Contradictory though it may sound, he is strong because he is humble, and he always remembers that man is a creation of God. No rule of life is more basic. When one leans on his own understanding, lives by his own strength, boasts of his own accomplishments, and claims he is his own master, the result is untold suffering. Even though his position is maintained and his material wealth increases, success quickly turns to failure when God is forgotten. There is no peace of mind, no personal satisfaction, no experience of true inner joy. To trust in the Lord with all the heart is a mark of strength! It is the only path to true fulfillment." These statements were not written by a great theologian or a renowned evangelist, but by J. Edgar Hoover, former head of the FBI.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

NOT PERFECT YET!

Our life and work within the Christian community will go much better if we acknowledge our own shortcomings and do not make unreasonable demands on others. Adoniram Judson wrote, "In encouraging other young men to come out as missionaries, do use the greatest caution. One wrong-headed, conscientiously obstinate fellow would ruin us." Then he described the sort of person he preferred: "Humble, quiet, persevering men; men of sound, sterling talents (though, perhaps, not brilliant), of decent accomplishments, and some natural aptitude to acquire a language; men of an amiable temper, willing to take the lowest place, to be the least of all and the servants of all; men who . . . live near to God, and are willing to suffer all things for Christ's sake, without being proud of it, these are the men." Then Judson added, "But oh, how unlike their description is the writer of it!" The great pioneer missionary acknowledged his own shortcomings.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

(Temptations Men Face by Tom L. Eisenman)

It is the secure man who does not have to act macho. A man who has found a sense of identity and purpose does not need to strut like a peacock or hide his vulnerability within a thick, impenetrable shell. Only when a man is delivered from the burden of having to protect himself or prove his adequacy in the public world will he finally be able to live and work in freedom, and give himself away in love.
p. 42

(The Grace Awakening by Charles R. Swindoll)

This reminds me of one more characteristic of a grace awakening ministry: release from past failures. A ministry of grace doesn't keep bringing up the past for the purpose of holding it over people. There is an absence of shame. Paul addresses this in 1 Timothy 1:12-14:

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.

You may be surprised to know that the apostle Paul had every reason to feel ashamed. He was one whose past was dreadful: "formerly a blasphemer. . . persecutor . . . violent aggressor." Then how could the same man write, "I am not ashamed" (2 Tim. 1:12)? He gives us the answer here in 1 Timothy 1:14: Grace was more than abundant. Blasphemy had abounded in his past, but grace superabounded. Violence and brutality had abounded, but grace superabounded.

What if it read "divorcee"? What if it read "homosexual"? What if it read "addict"? I realize it reads "blasphemer, persecutor, aggressor." But what if it read "prostitute" or "ex-con" or "financial failure" or "murderer"? In a grace-awakened ministry, none of those things in the past are allowed to hold those people in bondage. They are released, forgiven, and the believer is allowed to go on to a new life in Christ.
p. 230

(Mentoring: The strategy of the Master by Ron Lee Davis
with James D. Denney)

Failure was not the end of Peter's career. It was the beginning. Jesus knew that Peter had earned a doctorate in Christian humility--the hard way. This made Peter vastly more valuable to the kingdom than if he had never experienced the shame of his failure.

As mentors, we must believe in the learner. That means that when the learner fails and falls, we don't turn our backs on him. Instead, we are there to lift him, dust him off, and reinstate him, just as Jesus reinstated Peter. Failure does not destroy the worth of the human being; usually, it enhances it.

p. 89

v.14 And the grace of our Lord was present in great abundance, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

Yes, it is a tremendous story of a miracle of God's grace. It is the story of the prodigal son experiencing the grace of the Father when He returns home.

This verse reminds us of the hymn:

"I Know Whom I have Believed"

I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why unworthy, Christ in love,
Redeemed me for His own.

(From The New Church Hymnal. Copyright - 1976, #143)

The Bible Knowledge Commentary observes:

The grace of our Lord was present in great abundance like a vessel running over and overflowing. Everything Paul lacked God's grace had more than amply supplied.

This verb appears only here in the New Testament. It means "to be present in great or super abundance." It is the definition of Christ's strengthening in verse 12.

Hiebert observes:

"Grace," the undeserved favor of God, "abounded," literally, "overflowed" its wonted channels, covering all of his sins. The fullness of the flood of grace poured out on him far surpassed that shown to ordinary sinners.
p. 41

Barclay says:

The memory of his sin was the surest way to keep him from all pride. There could be no such thing as spiritual pride for a man who had done the things that he had done. John Newton was one of the great preachers and the supreme hymn-writers of the Church; but there was a time when John Newton had been guilty of every sin, and when he had sunk to the lowest depths to which a man can sink. In the days when he had sailed the seas in the slave-trader's ship, John Newton had plumbed the depths. So when John Newton became a converted man and a preacher of the gospel, he wrote a text in great letters, and fastened it above the mantelpiece of his study where he could not fail to see it: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee." John Newton composed his own epitaph and it ran: "John Newton, Clerk, once an Infidel and Libertine, a Servant of Slaves in Africa, was by the Mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Preserved, Restored, Pardoned, and Appointed to Preach the Faith he had so long laboured to destroy." John Newton never forgot that he was a forgiven sinner; neither did Paul. Neither must we. It does a man good to remember his sins, for it saves him from spiritual pride.

(ii) The memory of his sin was the surest way to keep his gratitude aflame.
p. 53

Hendriksen says:

The transition from verse 13 to verse 14 is that from abounding sin to super-abounding grace. Here in verse 14 the emphasis is on the great change which by this grace was brought about in the life of the apostle.
p. 75

"AND THE GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS PRESENT IN GREAT ABUNDANCE, WITH FAITH AND LOVE WHICH ARE IN CHRIST JESUS."

This takes us back to verse 5:

"Now the goal of our instruction is (divine) love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and a genuine faith (without hypocrisy)."

Hiebert observes:

The "faith and love," standing in contrast to the unbelief and hatred of his previous life, speak of the change which God's grace wrought within him.
p. 41

Guy King observes:

This is no exaggeration, as all will know who have ever come under the deep convicting power of the Holy Spirit. The young prophet of Isaiah vi. 5 knew it when the cry was wrought from him, "Woe is me, for I am undone". The disciple of Luke v. 8 knew it when he besought, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man". The publican of Luke xviii. 13 understood it when, in uttermost contrition, he confessed, "God be merciful to me the sinner" . . . --not "a", but, "the", as if, in comparison with the outwardly righteous Pharisee; or, more likely, "the", as if, at that moment, he felt as if he were the only sinner there! So this Paul cannot get away from the thought that, but for the exceeding grace, his wickedness was the all-sufficient cause of his worthlessness--"not meet to be called an apostle", I Corinthians xv. 9; "less than the least of all saints", Ephesians iii. 8. Yet, grace made him what he was, and enabled him to work as he did--"but by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace . . . was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me", I Corinthians xv. 10.
p. 35

(Bold Love by Dan B. Allender & Tremper Longman, III)

Frederick Buechner's words in his book The Magnificent Defeat capture the wonder of our salvation:

There is little that we can point to in our lives as deserving anything but God's wrath. Our best moments have been mostly grotesque parodies. Our best loves have been almost always blurred with selfishness and deceit.

But there is something to which we can point. Not anything that we ever did or were, but something that was done for us by another. Not our own lives, but the life of one who died in our behalf and yet is still alive. This is our only glory and our only hope. And the sound that it makes is the sound of excitement and gladness and laughter that floats through the night air from a great banquet.

pp. 85-86

v.15 Reliable is the word, and worthy of wholehearted acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The central thrust of Paul's personal digression begun in verse 12 now becomes clear. It is a testimony concerning the purpose of the incarnation of Christ. It is his purpose not to come as an example but to salvage sinners.

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Galatians 4:4, 5

But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

His mission in coming into the world was to save sinners.

Hiebert points out:

The emphasis is on "sinners." The nature of the sinners Christ came to save has been shown in verses 9 and 10.
p. 42

Hendriksen points out:

Simple and great, like a granite rock, stands the word reliable, at the head of the sentence, without any connecting particle.
p. 76

Hendriksen quotes Joseph Hart:

"Come ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power;
He is able, He is able,
He is willing, doubt no more;
He is able, He is able,
He is willing, doubt no more.

"Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all;
Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call.
Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call."
(Joseph Hart)

p. 78

"RELIABLE IS THE WORD, AND WORTHY OF WHOLEHEARTED ACCEPTANCE, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, OF WHOM I AM FOREMOST."

Here the apostle is making a profound expression of humility.

Lock observes:

[Paul says,] "I am," not "I was." The sinner remains a sinner even if forgiven; the past is always there as a stimulus to deeper penitence and service. The sins for which he reproaches himself are not sins against the moral law, but sins against the truth and the light; sins which disqualified him from Apostleship.
p. 16

Wiersbe says:

If Jesus could save Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, then He can save anybody! We admire Paul's humility, and we note that he considered himself to be the "least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9) and the "least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). Notice that Paul did not write "of whom I was chief" but "of whom I am chief."
p. 18

Hendriksen says:

This interpretation of the disputed clause not only suits the context but is also in line with what Paul says about himself elsewhere:

"For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9).

"To me, the very least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8).

In both these cases, just as here in 1 Tim. 1:15, the apostle is making a comparison between himself and other people whom Christ came to save (whether they were destined to become apostles or believers not clothed with any special office), and he makes the humble confession that he is the least of all saints, the foremost (or "chief") of sinners whom Christ came to save.

Taken in that sense and as a description of what Paul felt, the words of the familiar hymn are entirely correct:

"Chief of sinners though I be,
 Jesus shed his blood for me;
 Died that I might live on high;
 Lives that I may never die."
 (William McComb)

p. 81

Guthrie points out:

Paul never got away from the fact that Christian salvation was intended for sinners, and the more he increased his grasp of the magnitude of God's grace, the more he deepened the consciousness of his own naturally sinful state, until he could write of whom I am chief.
 p. 65

Paul could also make an argument for the other side when he makes a statement of his advantages:

Galatians 1:13, 14

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

He goes on to say in verses 15 and 16:

But when He who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,

Philippians 3:4-7

although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

When we put these 2 thoughts together we can say that if God can save the chief of sinners, He can save us. If God can save the best of men, you need to be saved too.

Paul is an illustration of both of these.

Lenski, speaking of the words "WORTHY OF WHOLEHEARTED ACCEPTANCE," says:

"Worthy of all acceptance" = complete acceptance in every way, without reservation, without hesitation, without the least doubt.
p. 523

Barnes says:

The word is used to denote eminence--and it means that he occupied the first rank among sinners. There were none who surpassed him.
p. 123

J. Vernon McGee says:

This is a very important verse of Scripture because it affirms that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He didn't come to be the greatest teacher the world has ever known, although He was that. He didn't come to set a moral example, but He did do that. He came into the world to save sinners.

When you give your testimony make sure that you don't tell people how wonderful you are or all you have accomplished. Tell them you were a sinner and that Christ saved you. That is what is important.
p. 434

Demarest says:

"To save sinners" is Paul's succinct way of stating the bottom line of the Gospel. Jesus did not come into the world to develop new theological or ethical systems. He did not come into the world to make good people better. He did not come into the world to found a new religious establishment. Nor did He come into the world to create a new social order. Some or all of these things, of necessity, have been shaped and formed because of His coming. But He came into the world to save sinners. Period!
p. 162

A BIG SAVIOR

An elderly man gave some good advice. He said, "Brother, don't ever try to be a big preacher. Instead, preach a big Savior."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

MOTIVATION TO SERVE

Edwin M. Stanton ran roughshod over Abraham Lincoln in a law case and later was very vindictive. But when Lincoln became president, he invited him to be his Secretary of War. When Stanton learned of this, he was overwhelmed. With tear-filled eyes, he accepted the honor. "Tell him," he said to the messenger, "that such magnanimity will make me work with him as man was never served before!"

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

(The God-Players by Earl Jabay)

We deceive ourselves about our selfishness and egocentricity because we are afraid a revelation of our true nature would alienate us from our chosen associates. Further, we cannot face the Biblical implication that the true nature of man is such that each of us is really engaged (however unconsciously) in the building of the kingdom of Keith or Joe (or whatever your name is). . . . To build up our images, and our kingdoms, we are subtly dishonest about any thoughts or desires or habits we have which do not fit our projected image for fear our subjects will discover our secret; that inside, behind the facade, we are not really kingly or queenly at all; but instead in our intimate actions we are the servants, the slaves, of our resentments, our jealousies, our lusts, and our anxieties, and insecurities. And the more kingly, the more self-sufficient an image we try to project, the more we must dishonestly deny in a hundred ways that we are self-centered little children at heart bent on our own self-gratification.

p. 40

(Laugh Again by Charles R. Swindoll)

Did you catch the key words? "I am gentle and humble in heart," which might best be summed up in the one word unselfish. According to Jesus' testimony, that is the most Christlike attitude we can demonstrate. Because He was so humble--so unselfish--the last person He thought of was Himself.

p. 78

v.16 But on this account I was shown mercy, in order that in me first Jesus Christ might demonstrate His unlimited patience, as an example to those who will be believing on Him for life eternal.

"BUT ON THIS ACCOUNT I WAS SHOWN MERCY."

This takes us back to verse 13 where he says:

"I was mercied," or, "I was shown mercy."

And then the purpose is given:

"IN ORDER THAT IN ME FIRST JESUS CHRIST MIGHT DEMONSTRATE HIS UNLIMITED PATIENCE."

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

J. B. Phillips paraphrases Paul's words this way:

Christ Jesus entered the world to rescue sinners. I realize that I was the worst of them all, and that, because of this very fact, God was particularly merciful to me. It was a kind of demonstration of the extent of Christ's patience towards the worst of men to serve as an example to all who in the future should trust Him for eternal life.

Paul's thought is, "Christ has shown mercy toward me, the greatest of sinners. My conversion should serve as a heartening example for lesser sinners."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out:

He saved the worst first. Paul represents the extreme example. If God was patient and gracious enough to save Paul, He is patient and gracious enough to save anyone. Look back to Paul as a prototype or pattern.

Paul was:

a model,
a pattern,
an example.

2 Timothy 1:13

Hold the example of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The ultimate sinner became the ultimate saint. God's greatest enemy became his finest servant. Somewhere between these extremes fall all the rest.

Speaking of the word PATTERN or "EXAMPLE," Barnes says:

This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, except in 2 Tim. i. 13, where it is rendered form. It properly means a form, sketch, or imperfect delineation. Then it denotes a pattern or example, and here it means that the case of Paul was an example for the encouragement of sinners in all subsequent times. It was that to which they might look when they desired forgiveness and salvation. It furnished all the illustration and argument which they would need to show that they might be forgiven. It settled the question for ever that the greatest sinners might be pardoned; for as he was "the chief of sinners," it proved that a case could not occur which was beyond the possibility of mercy.

p. 124

Lock observes:

Here only in [the] N.T. with the article. His entire unlimited, ever-patient patience, not only converting, not only choosing me for service, but making me Apostle, and keeping me faithful.

p. 16

Lenski says:

In v. 12-14 Paul states what God did for him; in v. 15, 16 what God thereby did for others. The conversion of one man often means much for others; this was eminently the case with regard to Paul.

p. 525

Hiebert says:

The career and conversion of Paul afforded Christ the occasion for an exemplification of "all his longsuffering."

His case as a sinner drew out to its utmost extent "the whole of His longsuffering." "Longsuffering" is the divine attribute of God whereby He does not at once punish the sinner but forbears long under provocation and gives him opportunity to repent. "In the pardon of one less wicked than Paul, this grace could not have shown its full glory; but in him, 'the chief,' is revealed 'all his longsuffering,' so that Paul's conversion appears a very marvel of the love of Jesus Christ for sinners" (Van Oosterzee).

p. 43

Barclay says:

When we think how we have hurt God and hurt those who love us and hurt our fellow men, and when we remember how God and men have forgiven us, that memory must awake the flame of gratitude within our hearts.

p. 54

It would do us well to sing with John Newton:

"Amazing Grace"

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

(From The New Church Hymnal. Copyright - 1976, #391)

(Do Plastic Surgeons Take Visa? and Other Confessions of a Desperate Woman by Kathy Peel)

"As Christians we have the past, the pleasant and the future. Our past is absolutely forgiven, our future is absolutely certain, so that, more than any other body of people on the face of the earth, we are free to live in the 'pleasant tense'"--Tim Hansel.
p. 203

Notice that the SINGLE CONDITION OF SALVATION is stated in the latter part of verse 16 as an example to those who will be believing on Him for life eternal.

v.17 Now to the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

The apostle has been speaking of some very personal and yet some very beautiful and wonderful things. He has been overwhelmed by the grace of God in his behalf.

Now he bursts forth in a praise of doxology.

He speaks to:

"THE KING OF THE AGES,"

THE ONE WHO IS:

"IMMORTAL,"

"INVISIBLE,"

"THE ONLY GOD."

And he gives Him:

"HONOR AND GLORY FOREVER AND EVER. AMEN."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Contemplation of God's grace prompted him to one of his doxologies. Filled with awe and adoration of the Lord. "King of the ages" equals God's sovereignty over all the ebb and flow of human history. "Immortal" and "invisible" are the 2 central attributes. Eternality and essence. Only God equals His uniqueness in a typical Jewish, monotheistic fashion.

The phrase "HONOR AND GLORY" eternally causes us think of:

1 Timothy 6:16

who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Hiebert says:

He addresses God as "the King eternal," literally, "the King of the ages." This title, used only here in the New Testament, pictures Him as the sovereign Controller and Dispenser of all the succeeding ages and all in them.
p. 44

Barnes says:

This ascription of praise is offered to God in view of the mercy which he had shown to so great a sinner. It is the outbreak of that grateful emotion which swelled his bosom, and which would not be denied expression, when Paul recalled his former life and the mercy of God to his soul. It somewhat interrupts, indeed, the train of his remarks, but the heart was so full that it demanded utterance. It is just an instance of the joy and gratitude which fill the soul of a Christian when he is led along in a train of reflections which conduct him to the recollections of his former sin and danger, and to the fact that he has obtained mercy and has now the hope of heaven.
pp. 124-25

Demarest says:

As is a pattern with Paul, he gives us a benediction with no intention of concluding the letter. I can't read this one without bursting into song:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.
Walter Chalmers Smith

This apostle certainly hasn't lost the glow after all these years of ministry. For him the honeymoon is far from over because he kept in touch with himself--past, present, and future.

The glow was perpetual with Paul because he knew his calling, he knew his Gospel, and he knew himself.
pp. 163-64

(Rediscovering Holiness by J. I. Packer)

It was a sound Christian instinct that led Horatius Bonar, author of the little classic God's Way of Holiness, to pray for praise:

Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and thy ways.

Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part;

Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

Fill every part of me with praise:
Let all my being speak
Of thee and of thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak.

So shalt thou, Lord, from me, e'en me,
Receive the glory due;
And so shall I begin on earth
The song for ever new.

Exactly so: real consecration to a realistic life-purpose of pleasing and glorifying God starts here. The life of true holiness is rooted in the soil of awed adoration. It does not grow elsewhere. That which grows elsewhere is not true holiness, whatever else it is. No blend of zeal, passion, self-denial, discipline, orthodoxy, and effort adds up to holiness where praise is lacking.
pp. 72-73

From the plan of salvation I learn that the true driving force in authentic Christian living is, and ever must be, not the hope of gain, but the heart of gratitude.
p. 75

LOWLY SERVICE--GREAT REWARD

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was especially impressed by a poem someone gave him. It was written by a 19-year-old servant girl whose household chores kept her occupied 12 to 15 hours a day. Later, at a service in Westminster Chapel, London, he read the homespun rhyme penned by this faithful worker and commented favorably upon its contents.

"Lord of all pots and pans and things,
Since I've no time to be
A saint by doing lovely deeds
Or watching late with Thee,
Or dreaming in the dawnlight
Or storming Heaven's gates,
Make me a saint by getting meals
And washing up the plates!

Although I may have Martha hands,
I have a Mary mind;
So when I black the boots or shoes,
Thy sandals, Lord, I find!
I think of how they trod the earth
Each time I scrub the floor.
Accept this meditation, Lord;
I haven't time for more.

Warm all the kitchen with Thy love,
And light it with Thy peace.
Forgive me all my worrying
And make all grumbling cease.
Thou who didst love to give men food
In room or by the sea,
Accept this service that I do,
I do it unto Thee."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

The apostle opens the passage by saying, "I am feeling grateful,"

and in verse 17 he is verbalizing that gratitude.

The real key to LAW #2: "Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position" is to allow the Spirit of God to produce within each of us a spirit of humility.

Luke 14:7-11

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table; saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Proverbs 25:6, 7

Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among great men;
it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"
than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.

1 Peter 5:5, 6

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders;
and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

Matthew 20:26, 27

It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;

John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

Philippians 1:20

according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 2:17

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all.

John 13:3-5

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: LAW #2 of Leadership says:

"Never Get Over the Privilege of Your Position."

LESSON #2: Paul was feeling gratitude for God's choosing him, trusting him, appointing him, and empowering him for ministry.

LESSON #3: Remembering our past causes us to appreciate even more the grace of God.

LESSON #4: The grace of God exceeded Paul's need.

LESSON #5: If God can save "the chief of sinners," He can save us.

LESSON #6: Paul says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am foremost."

LESSON #7: The mission of Jesus was to save sinners.

LESSON #8: Paul's conversion is a pattern for others to be encouraged that if God could do it for Paul He could do it for anybody.

LESSON #9: Paul's salvation is an illustration of God's unlimited patience with us.

LESSON #10: Praise is the expression of the humble heart.

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHANGE

"If you desire to change, and if you are using personal strength to get it done, you will never have enough courage and perseverance to accomplish lasting change."

Even though making positive changes in our personal lives often brings great benefit, very few of us are capable of pulling it off. Radical change is not merely hard to do; it is downright improbable without wholehearted effort. We all face three obstacles to change.

1. Pain. Nobody enjoys pain, and we go to almost any lengths to avoid something that hurts. Yet the process of change always involves pain. So we resist changing. We're willing to put up with a predictable level of ongoing emotional misery instead of going through more intense pain temporarily in order to get beyond a problem. It takes courage to choose to deliberately subject ourselves to pain.

2. Perseverance. As hard as it is to begin making a change, it is even harder to persist and stay with the process to its completion. We lack the stamina to continue the daily struggle of staying on the straight and narrow. We tend to desire beneficial changes in our lives, but we want them to come quickly and painlessly. Resolve that lasts only a few days or weeks isn't enough.

3. Powerlessness. Trying to change by your own will power--the way our culture approaches self-improvement--never succeeds in producing deep, lasting change. The old "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" approach is like trying to get enough energy out of a AA battery to fly a 747. To tackle fundamental personal and life pattern problems we need to plug into the only power source that can bring permanent change: God. We need His power to change, but He needs our cooperation. Without God we can't change, but He "can't" change us unless we submit our wills.

The starting place is to honestly admit your failures and weakness to God. It is easier to listen to the humanistic hogwash that "You can do it!" than it is to be broken and humbled before the Almighty. Merely accepting God as your power source while insisting that He change you on your own terms will not work. If you admit your inability to change yourself, God will supply strength and encouragement through His Word, His people, and His Spirit.

Studying the Bible "academically" doesn't help, but allowing the Scriptures to penetrate your shell and break down your defenses will facilitate change. God will bring other Christians into your life to affirm and to challenge you. The Holy Spirit Himself will support you and intercede on your behalf.

It is discouraging to realize that change is so difficult, that self-reliance can't cut it, and that we must be broken, but the balancing truth is that God loves us deeply, wants to forgive us, and makes His power available to change us into what He wants us to be.

"The truth about change" by Chris Thurman. Today's Better Life, Sum 1992. Pages 38-41.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

A SAINT'S CONFESSION

Many years ago John Newton, the converted slave trader who became a preacher and a Christian poet, lay upon his deathbed. A young clergyman of his acquaintance came to see him and expressed deep regret at the prospect of losing so eminent a laborer in the Lord's vineyard. The venerable servant of God replied, "True, I'm going on before you, but you'll soon come after me. When you arrive, our friendship will no doubt cause you to inquire for me. But I can tell you already where you'll most likely find me--I'll be sitting at the feet of the thief whom Jesus saved in His dying moments on the cross!" Although a distinguished man, Newton felt with Paul that he could only class himself among the chief of sinners who have been saved through marvelous grace.

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

TRUE HUMILITY

Andrew Murray said, "The humble man feels no jealousy or envy. He can praise God when others are preferred and blessed before him. He can bear to hear others praised while he is forgotten because . . . he has received the spirit of Jesus, who pleased not Himself, and who sought not His own honor. Therefore, in putting on the Lord Jesus Christ he has put on the heart of compassion, kindness, meekness, longsuffering, and humility." Humble people are not conscious of being humble. As Dr. M. R. De Haan used to say, "Humility is something we should constantly pray for, yet never thank God that we have."

(From InfoSearch 3.0)

(A Burden Shared by David Roper)

Charles de Foucauld's words from long ago seem singularly appropriate:

Never think that in lowering yourself you have less power for good. On the contrary, in thus humbling yourself you are imitating and using the same means that I (Jesus) used. You are walking in my way and therefore in the truth, and you are in the right state to receive life and impart it to others.

The best means for this is my way. I came down to the level of men by my Incarnation, and to that of sinners by my Circumcision and Baptism. Be lowly, lowly, lowly, humble, humble. Let those that are in high places put themselves last in a spirit of lowliness and service, love for men, humility, taking the lowest place so long as the divine will does not call you to another, for in that case you must obey. Obedience first of all-- conformity to the will of God.

If you are placed high, then keep yourself in humility of soul as though you were last; occupy your high position as though you were there only to serve others and to lead them to salvation.

(Meditations of a Hermit)

p. 27

O Jesus! Meek and humble of heart, hear me.

From the desire of being esteemed,
 From the desire of being loved,
 From the desire of being extolled,
 From the desire of being honored,
 From the desire of being praised,
 From the desire of being preferred to others,
 From the desire of being consulted,
 From the desire of being approved,
 From the fear of being humiliated,
 From the fear of being despised,
 From the fear of suffering rebukes,
 From the fear of being falsely accused,
 From the fear of being forgotten,
 From the fear of being ridiculed,
 From the fear of being wronged,
 From the fear of being suspected,

Deliver me Jesus.

That others may be loved more than I,
 That others may be esteemed more than I,
 That, in the opinion of the world,
 others may increase and I may decrease,
 That others may be chosen and I set aside,
 That others may be praised and I unnoticed,
 That others may be preferred before me in
 everything,
 That others become holier than I,
 provided that I may become as holy as I should,

Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

(A Litany of Humility)

p. 28

(The God-Players by Earl Jabay)

Anxiety, loneliness, unteachableness, conflict, possessiveness--are a few of our sorrows when we are self-enthroned.

The way out of our misery is to make our peace with God. No more climbing on His throne. No more playing god. No more self-enthronement.

It is time to descend from the throne of our hearts and confess our ultimate sin--pride which vaunts itself against God--to the Lord Jesus Christ who made "peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). God the Father, who patiently endures the humiliation of our quixotic assaults against His royal rule, is reunited with estranged mankind through the finished work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ.
p. 128

The suffering person, before he can really be helped, must come to an acceptance of his problem. He must admit that there is a problem and that he has it. This is extremely difficult for all of us and we have all kinds of ways of hedging and even denying what we really have. Instead of a flat statement like "I am a homosexual," a person will say, "I think I am a homosexual" or "I am a little bit homosexual." Such tactics are similar to the young, maiden lady who told her doctor that she thought she was "just a little bit pregnant." When the doctor finally talked her out of that one, she insisted that this must be one of those very rare cases of virgin birth!

The truth about ourselves is very painful to accept. It is excruciatingly painful to our egos to make statements like "I am overweight," "I am a liar," "I am an adulterer."

Until we, by the grace of God, finally reach a point where we can say "I have this problem," we are beyond the reach of those who would help us.
p. 106

You are in a delusion about yourself. You diminish the size of your staggering problems and magnify your capacity to deal with them. You are in a fantasy--that is why you fall on your face.
p. 111

(What Makes a Man? by Bill McCartney)

Six weeks before he died, Elvis Presley was asked by a reporter, "Elvis, when you started playing music, you said that you wanted three things in life: You wanted to be rich, you wanted to be famous, and you wanted to be happy. Are you happy, Elvis?"

Elvis replied, "No. I'm lonely as hell."

Rich. Famous. But lonely. At first Elvis' remark may seem offensive. But actually it's well put. Hell is a lonely place. For some very lonely people, hell begins here on earth.

p. 194

(You Can Make a Difference by Gary R. Collins)

Thirty years ago, A. W. Tozer wrote some insightful words about leadership that could apply equally well to difference making. You might want to read the following paragraph slowly, substituting "difference maker" for "leader" as you read.

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I think there was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day but was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task, and commissioned by the Lord of the Church to fill a position he [or she] had little heart for. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man [or woman] who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader. The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing, and altogether as ready to follow as to lead, when the Spirit makes it clear that a wiser and more gifted . . . [person] has appeared.

p. 230

Stuart Briscoe tells a story about Phillips Brooks, the powerful preacher who lived a century ago and wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The great man was pacing fretfully back and forth in his office, muttering to himself, when somebody asked why he appeared so troubled.

"I'm troubled," Brooks replied, "because I'm in a hurry and God isn't!"

Do you ever feel that way? For about ten years I was at a stage in my career when I felt like a small Piper Cub sitting at the side of a busy airport runway, waiting for clearance to take off. In the meantime planes of all shapes and sizes were passing me, revving up their engines, and soaring beautifully and gracefully into the sky.

One day I reached the point of thinking that I might never take off and make a difference. "Lord," I said, "it isn't easy for an active person like me, but I'm willing to stay where I am, for all of my life if need be, sitting in a corner, willing and ready to go, while I watch others pass by with your clearance to take off and make a difference."

I can't tell you where I am today. Some days I feel like I am still on the runway, but I don't get frustrated as easily. My job is to know Christ better and remain ready to go where and when the divine control tower directs. I want him to lead, showing where and how I can be a difference maker for him.

pp. 257-58

STUDY #2 - 1 Timothy 1:12-17

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