

CHAPTER FIVE  
**TOOLS OF  
THE TRADE (I)**

ROBIN BOISVERT

**B**ack in the days when a pack of cigarettes still cost 35 cents, I was a heavy smoker. Some might say a nicotine fiend, a Chesterfield-regular kind of guy. I was addicted to smoking and I knew it.

Quitting was no problem—I had quit a dozen times. But when the urge to smoke became too strong, I would start back up again. So I decided to stop buying cigarettes. That didn't work either. It only made me a nuisance to my friends since I was always bumming smokes from them. At my lowest point, I was scavenging half-smoked butts out of the ash tray.

Around this time I became aware the Holy Spirit was convicting me of sin and drawing me toward Jesus. Though my smoking was just one evidence of my internal state, it seemed symbolic of my whole life. I was stuck. Every attempt to stop smoking had failed. I could not see how I would ever be able to overcome this habit. I wasn't even sure I wanted to.

I knew Jesus was primarily after my heart, not my habit. Still, I couldn't imagine following him and smoking at the same time. So one evening I asked Larry, a believer I had just met, if a guy could be a Christian and still smoke. This was my version of the trick question the Pharisees asked Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar. They thought they could trap him no matter which way he answered.

My strategy went like this. If Larry replied, "No—one cannot be a Christian and smoke," I would solemnly pronounce his answer to be legalistic and contrary to the principle that God looks at the heart. On the other hand, if he said, "Yes, no problem," then I could dismiss Christianity as a meaningless set of powerless beliefs. Yet the question wasn't entirely cynical. Part of me desperately wanted to believe—and be free.

Well, Larry gave me an answer I hadn't counted on.

**Meditate on Romans**

**8:29.** What is one aspect of Jesus' character you would really like to see in your own life?

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“Suppose,” he said, “you wanted to encourage someone to trust in the Lord. Do you think you’d be more effective as a witness *with* a cigarette in your hand or *without* one?”

Hmmmm...good response. Suddenly the issue wasn’t smoking, but whether or not I wanted my life to glorify God. It was really a question of motive.

I’m now of the opinion that no person with true faith in Jesus Christ will be barred from heaven for having a pack of cigarettes in his pocket. But that’s beside the point, for God’s goal in sanctification is that we be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. And I can’t picture Jesus walking up to the woman at the well (Jn 4:7-18) and saying, “Got a light? Thanks. Now, let’s talk about your sin. How many husbands have you got?”

By the way, I’m not a Chesterfield-regular kind of guy

anymore. God had means available to help me kick the habit—the same means we’ll be examining in these next two chapters. Of prior importance, though, was my motive. God will always help someone whose motive is right, who really wants to

glorify him and do his will. But he will not let us use him merely to improve the quality of our lives or change our circumstances. He’s after nothing less than our hearts. In holiness, motive always precedes means.

Before delving into the next section, let’s quickly review what we’ve learned thus far about God’s plan of sanctification. We are new creations who enjoy a living union with Jesus Christ. But we are still in a battle. We experience

inward warfare and inward peace; we wrestle with sin and rest in Christ.

A clear understanding of this tension between the “now and the not yet” will guard you from some serious misconceptions. For example, just because you encounter severe temptations and spiritual battles doesn’t necessarily mean you have done something wrong. A holy person is *not* one who never has any spiritual conflicts, or has achieved perfection. Rather, a holy person is one who is becoming more Christlike through the process of obeying God amidst life’s daily struggles.

“ Grace is not simply leniency when we have sinned. Grace is the enabling gift of God not to sin. Grace is power, not just pardon.<sup>1</sup>

”  
— John Piper

**1** Can you locate one Bible verse that shows we are powerless to earn God’s salvation? Write it out in the space below. (If you’re stumped, try Ephesians, Chapter 2.)

## Learning from a Master

Like most men, I have a fondness for tools. I can still recall my excitement when my friends gave me a brand-new, fully equipped toolbox at my bachelor's party. I could hardly wait for the party to end so I could play with my new tools. In fact, I was so eager that I gashed my finger trying to get the toolbox open.

Any genuine Christian will admit that he or she is in serious need of spiritual repair. What assurance we have in knowing the Holy Spirit has the right tools to make those repairs—to sanctify us! More importantly, he is personally responsible for teaching us how to use those tools so that we mature and change. And he can show us how to use them without hurting ourselves.

As the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is the One who effects change in our lives. But he's not merely a specialist in sanctification. God's Spirit is involved in our salvation from start to finish. To be regenerated (born again) is to be born of the Spirit. Both repentance and faith—the two sides of conversion—are gifts the Spirit gives.<sup>2</sup> He is active in our justification and adoption. He fills us, intercedes for us, seals us in Christ for the day of redemption, and will ultimately glorify us.

### For Further Study:

Read Romans 3:9-12. Do you consider this a fair description of yourself? If not, what biblical evidence do you find to the contrary?

But we are concerned now with the Holy Spirit in his sanctifying role. We are those “who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *through the sanctifying work of the Spirit*, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood” (1Pe 1:2, emphasis added). Throughout the rest of this chapter and the next, we will examine some of the tools with which he so effectively works in us.

“ God does not leave even the issue of conversion finally in the hands of man...Nor does God leave to uncertain risk our growth and perseverance and holiness. Rather, he says, ‘I will put my Spirit within you, and will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances’ (Ezekiel 36:27). It is the Lord himself who works in us to will and to do his good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 13:21).<sup>3</sup>

”  
— John Piper

## The Word of God

The Bible is God's unique revelation to man. It tells us truths we could never find in any other source, such as how the world began, what happens after we die, and so on. It also tells us some things we would never have *want-*

**Meditate on Jeremiah 23:29.** Have you ever felt the power of God's Word as described in this passage?

**Meditate on Psalm 32:8-9.** If we ignore Scripture, God may have to pull out the bit and bridle.

*ed* to find out: we are born in sin, we're in need of redemption, and we are unable to please God by ourselves. Someone has remarked that the Bible must be the Word of God because man would never write anything so disapproving of himself!

The Bible does not flatter us, nor does it teach—as virtually every other religion does—that man can perfect himself. In fact, Scripture is pessimistic in the extreme regarding man's innate ability. That's why it is such a valuable and essential tool in man's sanctification. Jesus himself confirmed this in praying to his Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (Jn 17:17).

John Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress* begins with the hero, Christian, finding "the book"...and that was the start of his troubles. But it was also the beginning of the end of his troubles. The Holy Spirit and the Bible conspire together to *convict* us of our great need for God. Yet as Christian discovered, they convict us in order to *convert* us, and they convert us in order to *transform* us:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. (2Ti 3:14-16)

As Paul makes clear in this letter to Timothy, Scripture has a unique power to produce change in the Christian. It *teaches* us God's laws and ways, then *reproves* us when we fall short of that instruction. But it *corrects* us as well. It doesn't just tell us we're wrong; it lifts us back up and sets us on the right path. Finally, it *trains us in righteousness*, showing us how to live.

Have you ever noticed how many vivid metaphors are used to describe the Word of God?

*It's our spiritual food and drink.* "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Dt 8:3). Scripture is both milk for the young and solid food for the mature (Heb 5:12-14).

*It's a mirror.* "Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like" (Jas 1: 23-24). The Bible shows us ourselves as God sees us. It's a reality check, revealing who and what we really are.

*It's a light.* "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps 119:105). Scripture shows us the way we should live and what we should avoid.

*It's seed.* "The farmer went out to sow...The seed is the word of God" (Lk 8:5,11). When planted in the good soil of a receptive heart, it bears much fruit.

*It's a sword.* "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

What all these figures of speech have in common (and there are more) is the absolute necessity and usefulness of Scripture. Nothing about the Bible is superfluous, and it needs no supplement. It is sufficient for all things having to do with salvation and godliness, "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2Ti 3:17).

In past generations, the inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture has been repeatedly attacked. Today the Bible's sufficiency is questioned by those who suggest, both outright and subtly, that it is incapable of addressing some of humanity's deepest questions and fundamental needs. But the Bible is in no way dependent upon any outside source of knowledge. It is more than enough. This wonderful Book is the Holy Spirit's primary tool for changing us.

How does that change take place? By our hearing and applying the Word of God, otherwise known as obedience. That will only happen consistently as we commit to the following disciplines:

*Set aside a regular time to read the Bible...and make sure you keep the appointment.*

**For Further Study:** Is merely hearing the Word sufficient to produce change? (See Matthew 7:24-27; John 14:21-24; James 1:22)

“ Some friends of mine practice a ‘no Bible, no breakfast’ discipline. Some read at night. Some spend time with God at other opportune times during the day. But I know of *no one* who has a deep spiritual walk who does not spend time daily with God in his Word. It is indispensable. It requires a specific commitment.<sup>4</sup> ”

— Jerry White

*ment.* First thing in the morning is for many the most effective time. Of course, that may mean going to bed earlier to insure you get enough sleep. If you aren't reading your Bible regularly, and you can't seem to fit it in, it's because something less important has become too important. Find out what it

is and make changes. Be ruthless.

One major distraction is news and information. In this age of instant and global communication, many Christians

**2** According to a Barna survey, 73% of Americans say it is important to read the Bible. An amazing 93% of U.S. households have at least one Bible. But notice how often those Bibles actually get opened...then check the box that most accurately reflects your own reading habit.

In an average week, Americans read the Bible...

- |                          |              |     |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Every day    | 12% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Several days | 15% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | One day      | 16% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Never        | 57% |

spend more time with newspapers, news magazines, and news broadcasts than they do with the Lord. There are now more things than ever to shock us, outrage us, frighten us, and usurp our precious time. But there is no possible way we can monitor or respond to all that is happening. Of course, I'm not suggesting ignorance or inaction, but if the daily paper or evening news crowds out your study of the Bible, then it's time to make major adjustments.

*Commit yourself to a specific plan of study.* Reading through the *NIV Study Bible* has worked well for me.

This way I'm forced to read those portions of Scripture I might consider to be less important or less interesting. It takes a full reading of the Bible to develop a complete picture of God. As the late A.W. Tozer once said, "We can hold a correct view of truth only by daring to believe *everything* God has said about himself" (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of good resources that can enhance your daily time in the Word. We've listed a few in the "Recommended Reading" section at the end of this chapter. Varying your approach from time to time will make this discipline more enjoyable and profitable.

*Find someone who will help you.* Your study of the Bible will be greatly accelerated as you interact with a Christian mentor. You'll learn lots simply by asking, "How do you study Scripture?" You'll also benefit (though

not without some squirming) when he or she asks, "So...are you actually doing it?" Accountability is a great asset. Just make sure the person holding you accountable doesn't have similar shortcomings—or the gift of mercy.

*Hide God's Word in your heart by memorizing Scripture.* Paul points out the inner transformation that occurs as we begin letting the Bible shape our thoughts and attitudes: "Do

**For Further Study:**

Timothy benefited immensely from having Paul as his mentor. To glimpse the impact of this relationship read 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and 3:10-15.

“ The word hidden conveys the thought of storing something up against a time of future need. We do this by meditating continually on God's Word, by constantly thinking about it, and applying its truths to the everyday situations of life. I personally have found a systematic Scripture memorization program to be absolutely necessary to continual meditation on God's Word. I cannot think throughout the day about what I do not have in my heart.<sup>6</sup> ”

— Jerry Bridges

not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Ro 12:2). Memorization may not come easily, but as you weave the Word into the fabric of your life, you'll be well prepared when temptation or adversity strikes.

## A Clear Conscience

Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.<sup>7</sup>

Luther's famous defense before the Diet of Worms (that was the name of the official council that tried him, I kid you not!) indicates what an important place conscience occupies in the life of the Christian. It also plays a major role in our sanctification.

Each of us has undoubtedly encountered this mysterious faculty called conscience. When, as a sixth-grader, I shot a rubber band into a group of students by the school-room door, I didn't expect it to hit anyone in the eye. But it did. And when my classmate screamed out in pain, neither she nor any of the others knew what had happened. My conscience knew, however, and insisted that I take responsibility for what I had done. I fought against it, trying every possible excuse, but to no avail. My conscience refused to let me off the hook. The only way to silence it was to admit my guilt and face the consequences.

This incident illustrates the most remarkable feature of conscience—the judgments it renders are completely objective and unbiased.<sup>8</sup> In other words, you can never win an argument with your conscience. It's always on the job, even in dreams. It can act as *witness*, telling what it sees or hears. It can act as *attorney*, prosecuting us for misdeeds or, on rare occasions, defending us. It may also act as *judge*, issuing categorical verdicts which cannot be appealed.

"You lied," proclaims conscience.

"I did not! I was just stating the truth in a certain way so as not to cause any unnecessary conflict."

"You lied."

Conscience doesn't argue the point. It just states it. This is why conscience drives some people to distraction and why they will go to great lengths to stifle it, or deaden

**Meditate on Romans 1:20-21.** Why is there no excuse for rejecting the moral law of God?

“ Great indeed is the power of conscience! Mighty is the influence which it is able to exercise on the hearts of men! It can strike terror into the minds of monarchs on their thrones. It can make multitudes tremble and shake before a few bold friends of truth like a flock of sheep. Blind and mistaken as conscience often is, unable to convert a man or lead him to Christ, it is still a most blessed part of man’s constitution, and the best friend in the congregation that the preacher of the gospel has.<sup>9</sup>

— J.C. Ryle

it with alcohol and drugs.

The word itself means “to know together with.” Theologian Ole Hallesby explains the significance of this definition:

It is, then, not merely a knowing, a consciousness, but a *knowing together* with something or someone. Nor need we be in doubt as to what it is that man in his conscience knows together with. Among all races...it is a charac-

teristic of man that he in his conscience knows together with a will that is over and above his own...This will, which is the will of God, is what men call the law or the moral law, that is, the law according to which man’s life should be lived.<sup>10</sup>

Though unbiased, conscience is not infallible. It may be misinformed. It may be overly sensitive. Or, if it has been routinely repressed, it may no longer be sensitive at all. A person who ignores his conscience is headed for disaster. He will soon lose the ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil. This explains a lot about our society...and about my initial exposure to drugs.

When I was eighteen years old a friend gave me a joint of marijuana. It was 1968 and drugs had just started to filter into the suburbs of Washington, D.C. where I lived. I knew it was illegal. I knew it was wrong. My conscience was screaming at me...but I did it anyway. A couple of days later I smoked another joint, and again the siren of my conscience went off. Only this time it wasn’t quite so loud. After a half dozen times, I could hardly hear it at all. As a result, I gradually lost my moral compass. On those rare occasions when I could faintly detect the voice of conscience, I regarded it as a nuisance and a killjoy.

If a man sears his conscience he will soon come to view it as a curse. But God endowed us with conscience in order to bless us. It’s not always the bearer of unpleasant news. It can excuse as well as accuse, congratulate as well as condemn. And as Paul told young Timothy, conscience is an essential safeguard of the Christian life:



Timothy my son, I give you the following charge. And may I say before I give it to you, that it is in full accord with those prophecies made at your ordination, which sent you out to battle for the right armed only with your faith and a clear conscience. Some, alas, have laid these simple weapons contemptuously aside and, as far as their faith is concerned, have run their ships on the rocks. (1Ti 1:18-19 Phillips)

Conscience may be a simple weapon, but it is highly effective in the battle against sin. To lay it “contemptuously aside” is akin to spiritual suicide.

**3** Read Ephesians 4:25-32, then take a minute to listen to your conscience. Are you aware of any unconfessed offense against God or man?

A clear conscience is one of the most precious benefits of the new birth. “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,” says the writer of the book of Hebrews, “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience” (Heb 10:19,22; cf. Heb 9:14). How gracious of Christ to scour away the foul stains of our past sins with his blood!

Now that we have a clean conscience, we must put forth the effort to keep it that way.

Conscience acts as a warning light on the dashboard of our lives, and we need to heed its flashing. The procedure is the same as any auto mechanic would follow: determine the source of the difficulty and then set about to correct it. Usually the solution involves confessing sin and asking forgiveness.

After committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah, King David chugged along for months ignoring the red light of his conscience. He recounts his experience for us in Psalm 32:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

**Meditate on Acts 24:16.** Did Paul take conscience for granted?

**For Further Study:**

Write Psalm 139:23-24 on an index card and put it in a place where it will serve as a daily reminder.

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. (Ps 32:1-6)

As long as David was silent, his conscience wasn't. Unconfessed sin led to spiritual and physical affliction. But as soon as he acknowledged his deeds and repented, forgiveness and deliverance came. David's testimony shows that a clear conscience could cure a lot of the problems we have, including many labeled "mental illness" or "depression."

“ It is time for us Christians to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are 'defeated' by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient. It might be well if we stopped using the terms 'victory' and 'defeat' to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms 'obedience' and 'disobedience.'<sup>11</sup> ”

— Jerry Bridges

When a Christian has a healthy conscience, it will warn him *before* a wrong action is initiated. *During* the action one's conscience may be very quiet. But *afterward* you'll really hear from it. Words, thoughts, attitudes, and motives also come under its relentless scrutiny. Remember—this is a blessing. An active conscience fosters the self-examination which marks a

growing Christian. It is a tremendous ally for truth.

As mentioned above, the chief danger is that we fail to heed conscience and it becomes seared. The Christian without a clear conscience is liable to be blackmailed by the enemy. Having lost such crucial navigational equipment, he can no longer discern the right course, and runs the risk of shipwreck. This is no small thing.

But a hypersensitive conscience can be as big a problem as one that has been seared. This is not unusual among serious-minded Christians, especially when they are newly converted. Those having what is sometimes called an overly scrupulous or weak conscience live in a continual state of unwarranted guilt. "Here the most insignificant little thing can produce an evil conscience, in fact, a most unbearable anxiety. It may be either an insignificant act or an unguarded little word or thought."<sup>13</sup> A piece of trash on the ground not picked up becomes a major sin because "anyone... who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (Jas 4:17). Or an offhand comment that is not absolutely accurate becomes a premeditated lie.

As these examples illustrate, those with an overly

**For Further Study:**

To understand Paul's views on weak conscience and strong conscience, see 1 Corinthians 8:4-13 and 10:23-33.

“ During such attacks of doubt, when the believer in an exceptionally marked degree loses contact with grace that he can feel, his whole life in God is thrown out of balance, as it were. All spiritual values become distorted, and he tends to lose sight of them altogether. He does not seem to be able to profit any longer by his earlier Christian experiences and his previous insight into spiritual matters. Essentials and non-essentials become one confused mass as far as he is concerned. God would teach him at such a time how impotent he is in himself in both morality and religion.<sup>12</sup>

”

— Ole Christian Hallesby

scrupulous conscience err by exalting the letter of a Scripture verse above its spirit. Remember, God is more interested in the motive of the heart than the outward details.

It's also possible that they fail to distinguish temptation from sin. The one often leads to the other, it is true, but they are not the same. Temptation is unavoidable, but it need not give birth to sin. As Luther said, "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."

My advice to those with a hypersensitive conscience is to seek the counsel of a mature Christian—a pastor or small group leader who can provide some help in sorting out essentials from non-essentials. Also, active involvement in your church's small group ministry is indispensable for maintaining a healthy conscience.

**4** Which of the following would you consider sins worthy of repentance? (Check all that apply.)

- Leaving a wad of gum under the seat in front of you at church
- Briefly fantasizing that your mother-in-law has moved to Nepal
- Making a left turn on red at the only stoplight in town at 2:47 a.m.
- Letting your toddler go a full week without a bath
- Throwing away a soda can that should have been recycled

## Prayer

Prayer is our lifeline of communication with God. Through prayer we have an avenue of approach to our heavenly Father by which we may express our gratefulness and tell him our needs. It's a multi-faceted opportunity to commune with the Creator of the universe. Consistent, persistent prayer changes us as profoundly as any other means used by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible encourages us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With

this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph 6:18). There are at least three kinds of prayer that contribute greatly to our sanctification. Let's look at them individually.

**Prayer as a cry for deliverance from sin.** It's hard to

imagine a more desperate situation than the one Jonah faced. Having disobeyed God's command to go to Nineveh, he wound up in the belly of a huge fish. Prayer was his only hope:

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry." (Jon 2:1-2)

No matter how dire the predicament, our first step in deliverance from sin is always toward the Lord. This step

“ Don't just sit there by yourself or off to one side and hang your head, and shake it and gnaw your knuckles and worry and look for a way out, nothing on your mind except how bad *you* feel, how *you* hurt, what a poor guy you are. Get up, you lazy scamp! Down on your knees! Up with your hands and eyes toward heaven!<sup>14</sup> ”

— Martin Luther

is accomplished through prayer. When I know I've sinned, the way out is not complicated—just hard. The Holy Spirit directs me to cry out for mercy, to confess my sin, and to ask for forgiveness.

God's promise is clear: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteous-

ness" (1Jn 1:9). The Greek word translated here as "confess" means "to say the same thing"—to agree with God that we have indeed sinned. He already knows what our sin is. He is merely waiting for us to own up to it. Once we do, he promises to forgive and purify us. I find it interesting that the basis for God's forgiving response is not his mercy, but rather his faithfulness and justice. We can submit our petitions to God confidently because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Prayer for deliverance from sin is a manifestation of true humility. And humility is necessary for experiencing grace.

**Prayer as a request for guidance.** I recall the period of time just before I asked my wife to marry me. Boy, was I ever serious about receiving direction from God! Just the sheer number of prayers for guidance must have impressed the Lord that I really wanted to know *his* will.

Receiving guidance involves more than prayer, of course. For instance, it requires biblical study and faithful application of the wisdom we already possess. It anticipates our having a sincere determination to do God's will no matter what, and a willingness to heed the multitude

### Meditate on Psalm

**86:1-7.** Though we deserve his wrath, God is "abounding in love" when we cry out for deliverance from sin.

of counselors he mercifully places around us. But prayer is primary in guidance simply because it keeps us in constant contact with the One who guides us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Ps 23:3).

No one can reduce true guidance to a formula. It consists in hearing and obeying, a steady relationship reinforced by regular communication and resting on the sure promises of God. My own opinion is that a Christian intent on doing the will of God will find it difficult to miss that will if he or she is a person of prayer.

**Prayer as submission to the will of God.** In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed the most poignant of all prayers: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). It was accompanied by strong crying out to God and a stress so

intense that Christ sweated drops of blood. It was uttered when he was without human companionship, because those nearest him had fallen asleep. Our Lord was alone. Here, in his hour of greatest testing, Jesus gave us a model of true submission, a meekness that qualified him to inherit the earth.

Toward the end of World War II, allied aircraft pounded Germany with heavy incendiary bombs. Cities such as Dresden and Hamburg were completely leveled. One of the survivors of Dresden was John Noble, an American citizen placed under house arrest along with his family when the war

broke out.<sup>15</sup> He was 22.

After the Axis powers surrendered in 1945, John hoped to return to America. But the Soviet Communists now controlled that part of Germany, and they had different plans for him. He was thrown in prison under a pretext and for the next ten years was subjected to some of the most inhumane treatment imaginable. Only a tiny fraction of those imprisoned survived. Those who had suffered under both the Germans and the Communists said that while the Nazis were much more cruel and vindictive in their treatment of prisoners, the Communists were more deadly, since they systematically starved most of those in their grasp.

Though Noble had been raised in a Christian home, his faith didn't extend much beyond superficial church atten-

**5** Briefly describe one incident when you received deliverance or guidance from God as a result of prayer.

**For Further Study:**

Read Hebrews 12:7-13. What promise do we find here that motivates us to submit to God?

**Meditate on  
Philippians 1:20-21.**

Once again, Paul serves as a perfect role model. What was his one concern as he faced the likelihood of execution?

dance. Grace was said at mealtime, but prayers, if said at all, were not heartfelt. His father, a former minister, had become increasingly materialistic over the years. He took the family to Germany in the mid-thirties to run a camera factory. That's how they happened to be stuck in Germany when Hitler's troops started marching.

In the prison all captives were repeatedly denied food for long stretches of time. Then came a crushing twelve-day period with nothing except a little coffee-flavored water each day. Many of the men died. From his solitary cell, John could hear bodies being dragged out, their heads thumping on the stairs. Hopelessness and despair hung like a cloud all around. But during that period of slow, painful starvation, God graciously revealed himself to John Noble.

He had of course prayed during the earlier period of his captivity. In fact, he had prayed often, asking God for food, safety, and deliverance. When he was given faith to trust in Christ, however, the focus of his prayers changed from self-preservation to a humble submission to the will of God. Now, whether he lived or died, he was submitted to God. He was no longer his own. As a result, he was no longer fearful. A peace surpassing human comprehension settled over his soul.

John's father, a fellow inmate in the Dresden prison, also rededicated his life to Christ and received the same

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”<sup>16</sup>

— John Bunyan

grace to pray, “Not my will but yours be done.” While they were to spend several more years in prison, they later wrote of having no regrets. They never felt spiritually richer or closer to Christ than when, naturally

speaking, things seemed most grim. And their trust in Jesus, which was so precious to them, empowered them to reclaim the miserable lives of many others. Throughout their ordeal, the humble prayer of submission to the will of God kept their hearts tender and close to him.

As you can see, prayer—together with God's Word and a regenerated conscience—are powerful tools in the Spirit's hand. They have amazing potential for conforming us to the image of Christ. Now that you've gotten some idea of how these work, let's rummage through the rest of the toolbox. ■

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Martin Luther once said, “A man is justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.” How might that apply to the author’s pre-conversion questions about smoking? (Pages 53-54)
2. What sins would you consider to be among the most controlling or addictive? Why?
3. Can you recall specific ways in which the Holy Spirit worked to sanctify you after your conversion?
4. How is your expectation of change affected by the knowledge that God himself is working in you?
5. Think of an underground cave, hollowed out over centuries by the steady trickle of water. At the rate God’s Word is “trickling” into your life now, how long will it take to produce visible change?
6. What would it take to insure that you are reading—and applying—God’s Word on a regular basis?
7. How would you rate your conscience? (A) Too callous, (B) Too sensitive, (C) Just right
8. “When I know I’ve sinned,” says the author, “the way out is not complicated—just hard” (Page 64). Why is it difficult to pray for God’s deliverance?
9. “Prayer Changes Things” announces a familiar billboard. In what ways have you found that to be true in your life?

**RECOMMENDED  
READING**

*Tabletalk*, a monthly Bible study guide published by Ligonier Ministries, 400 Technology Park, Suite 150, Lake Mary, Florida, 32746, 1-800-435-4343)

*Daily Walk*, a monthly Bible study guide published by Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, P.O. Box 478, Mt. Morris, IL 61054-9887.

*Daily Readings from J.C. Ryle*, compiled by Robert Sheehan (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1982)

*How to Pray Effectively* by Wayne Mack (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1977)

*Honesty, Morality & Conscience* by Jerry White (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1977)

## NOTES

1. John Piper, *The Pleasures Of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991), p. 252.
2. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), p. 29.
3. John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, p. 56.
4. Jerry White, *The Power of Commitment* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985), p. 57.
5. A.W. Tozer, *Gems From Tozer* (Harrisburg, PA: Send the Light Trust/ Christian Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 4.
6. Jerry Bridges, "Declaration of Dependence" in *Discipleship Journal*, Issue 49, 1989, p. 28.
7. Quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 185.
8. Ole Christian Hallesby, *Conscience* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1933), p. 14.
9. J.C. Ryle, *Daily Readings From J.C. Ryle*, compiled by Robert Sheehan (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1982), p. 338.
10. Ole Christian Hallesby, *Conscience*, p. 12.
11. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1978), p. 84.
12. Ole Christian Hallesby, *Conscience*, p. 144.
13. *Ibid.*, p.142.
14. Quoted in Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), p. 86.
15. John Noble, *I Found God in Soviet Russia* (London: Lakeland, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1959)
16. Quoted in *Gathered Gold*, John Blanchard, ed. (Welwyn, Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1984),p. 226.