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## **The Healing of Troubled Minds**

***By David Wilkerson***

January 18, 1999 A troubled mind is one that suffers from continual discontentment. It is pressed down, disturbed, restless, with no calm or rest. It frets about the future and the past as well as present circumstances. And I'm convinced there are more troubled minds today than in any past generation!

We who live in New York City see evidence of this daily. If you stand outside the theaters on Broadway and watch the patrons leaving the shows, you rarely see a smile on anyone's face. These people paid eighty dollars to find a temporary release from their burdens - but they leave with a heavier load than when they entered!

Apparently many lovers of Jesus are just as troubled in mind as the masses of unbelievers. I see evidence of this in some of the letters our ministry receives. Scores of believers lie awake at night, troubled and distressed. They go to church hoping they'll experience some kind of release from their burdens. But once they leave the service, their trouble returns.

Why are so many people today troubled in mind? Let me share with you some of the reasons I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me:

1. Many People Are Troubled by the Pressures Of the Times. For decades now, secular experts have told us prosperity is the answer to human-kind's problems. A good education, a decent job, a nice house, money in the bank - all of these things are supposed to provide people with dignity and peace of mind. If everyone could just have a slice of the American dream, the experts say, our crime and drug problems would be solved.

This theory states that people end up as alcoholics and addicts because they never had any self-worth. Their poverty deprived them of opportunities that would have provided them with a sense of dignity. So now, if we just provide them with a decent-paying job, a good place to live and a regular income, their lives would be fine.

Let me answer this theory with a personal story. Years ago, Nicky Cruz, a vicious Mau Mau gang leader, was taken to the country for a day to be analyzed by a psychiatrist. Nicky was a fighter who lived like the devil. All who knew him thought he was completely incorrigible, with no hope of ever changing.

After spending hours with Nicky, the psychiatrist confirmed everyone's evaluation. He told Nicky he was utterly crazy, with no hope of rehabilitation. The reason? Nicky's poverty-stricken upbringing in Puerto Rico had deprived him of the opportunities others enjoyed. It was society's fault he was a monster.

Nicky looked at the psychiatrist and said, "Man, you're the crazy one. I just love to jitterbug [fight]. Tell me - how did your mother treat you?" He ended up psychoanalyzing the psychiatrist!

Nicky was right - poverty is not the root cause of sin. Otherwise, why are more and more affluent teenagers getting hooked on hard drugs? These troubled young people have everything they could ever want within their reach. Why would they turn to drugs if they already have the peace of mind that material things supposedly provide?

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Why are growing numbers of doctors, lawyers and business leaders becoming alcoholics? They have satisfying jobs, six-figure incomes, multiple cars, frequent vacations. Yet they increasingly turn to alcohol to numb their troubled minds.

I've been on Wall Street at the end of the workday, when the stock market closes. As the doors of the trading houses swing open, brokers rush out like stampeding bulls, heading for the nearest bar. They pack themselves by the dozens into Wall Street's tiny watering holes, trying to drown their emotions in alcohol.

Why aren't they happy? Why are they so troubled in mind? They have everything they've been told they need to be fulfilled. They make comfortable incomes, own vacation homes, smoke \$50 cigars, drink \$300 bottles of wine, drive expensive cars. Yet they get stoned just to make it through the day. Why don't these people enjoy a calm, satisfied state of mind?

It's because they fear losing everything! They're afraid the economy will crash, and suddenly everything they've worked to accumulate will vanish like a vapor.

Jesus Warned That in the Last Days People's Hearts Would Be Troubled by All the Crises Taking Place In the World. "There shall be...distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

Jesus said the events coming upon the world would be so frightening, people would literally drop dead from heart failure. Right now, we're witnessing the very things he predicted: world chaos, bewilderment, confusion. The news of the past month alone - December 1998 - is enough to distress and perplex even the strongest minds:

- Japan, the world's second-largest economy, fell even deeper into depression. Its second-largest bank went bankrupt, with \$20 billion of bad debts. Now the federal government has moved in to take over the bank - but other Japanese banks are soon to collapse also.
- Alan Greenspan, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, said the American stock market is behaving just as it did before the crash of 1929. According to Greenspan, all the wild speculating we're seeing is the very kind that brought on the Great Depression.
- Five major U.S. industries announced 50,000 job cuts in just two weeks' time.
- The President of the United States was impeached by Congress. Yet most Americans' attitude was, "Who cares?"
- A Republican Congressman said, in so many words, "Forget impeachment, forget the moral issues. If we oust the President, we'll lose our prosperity and end up in a depression." His words reflected the attitude of most Americans. Morals don't count anymore, because the only thing that matters is money. The motto that swept our current President into office was, "It's the economy, stupid!"
- A respected New York City schoolteacher was fired for placing a Bible on his desk and making it available to his students. This man was one of the city's finest teachers; his class performed above the others. If he had set a box of condoms on his desk, nothing would have happened to him. But he was fired for bringing a Bible to school!

All of these things are distressing and perplexing to any lover of Jesus. Indeed, our ministry receives scores of letters from believers across the country who fret over the moral landslide of our nation.

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One such letter came from a preacher in his nineties. He remembers the immorality of the 1920s that brought judgment on America through the Great Depression. He has witnessed two World Wars. He's seen transportation change from horse-drawn carriages to space shuttles. He's seen communication change from crackling radios to the Internet. In short, he's seen it all.

Now he writes that the wickedness taking place in our nation today grieves him more than any he's ever witnessed. He can hardly take it all in, he says, because it's happening so fast, and the depths of depravity are beyond comprehension.

Yet Jesus gives us a word of reassurance in spite of everything we see taking place. He commands, "...see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6). He's telling us, "Let none of these bad things I'm warning you about trouble your mind!"

2. Many Christians Are Troubled in Mind Because They're Perplexed by Their Sinfulness, Weaknesses and Moral Failures. There are many voices in the world today analyzing why people are so perplexed and troubled. But these amount to no more than a Babel of confusing reasons. The fact is, no true lover of Jesus Christ is going to be troubled by the potential loss of material things. Rather, he's going to be plagued by troubles in the spiritual realm!

Paul knew the true cause of our perplexities and distresses. He addresses the subject in Romans 7: "For that which I do I allow [understand] not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I...For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans 7:15, 19).

The apostle is saying, "The very thing I don't want to do, I end up doing. But the one thing I would love to do, in obedience to God, I can't find in myself to accomplish!"

Paul is speaking here for thousands of sincere believers. They're troubled because they simply can't find victory over sin. They want to do right - to live holy and pure before the Lord. And they hate the sin that so easily tempts them and disrupts their communion with Christ. Yet they keep turning back to it!

They end up distressed, troubled and weary, crying, "Oh, wretched man that I am! I don't want to do this anymore. But I seem helpless to resist it! Why am I so weak? And how long do I have to endure this struggle? Will I go through my whole life crying a river of tears, confessing and repenting and then going back to my sin?"

Such lovers of Jesus aren't worried about an economic crash or the world's crises as much as they're fretting over their failures of the past week. They thought they'd conquered their besetting sin, but suddenly it came back upon them with renewed power. Now they're grieved over having wounded their Lord again. And they worry, "Why do I fail so often, when all I want to do is please Jesus?"

There Is a True Measure For Spirituality! I believe we can know our true spiritual state by how troubled we become over our slightest sin against our Lord.

Some Christians grieve only what they consider the "big sins" - adultery, drug abuse, drinking, cursing. But the truly spiritual person knows that no sin is small in God's sight. And so he grieves every time he gossips, tells a dirty joke or has a lingering evil thought. He knows these things spring from his heart, the very center of his being!

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You can disobey God in such "small things," excusing yourself and forgetting all about them. But if you do, you'll never mature in Christ. Your righteousness is measured by your unwillingness to accept anything that grieves your blessed savior!

Not long ago, I said something very un-Christlike to my wife. My words to her were totally uncalled for, and I immediately fell under conviction. I knew I'd wronged her, so of course I asked her forgiveness. Then I hugged her and told her I loved her.

But my mind was still troubled. I thought, "How could I be capable of something so unlike Jesus? After all, I've never been closer to the Lord. I've never prayed more than I have in the past year. I must be utterly wicked to have such a crude thing spring out of my heart."

The very thing I hated, I had done. And I wasn't just disappointed with myself - I was disturbed, perplexed, troubled in spirit. I went to my study and fell before the Lord, calling on the blood of Christ to wash me clean.

In that moment, the enemy whispered to me, "That little slip-up was no big deal. It was such a small thing." But the Holy Spirit immediately rose up in my heart to refute the devil's voice. He reassured me, "David, the very fact you're grieving over this sin is proof I'm at work in you. The more you grieve over even the smallest transgression against my love, the closer you get to victory!"

Because we continue to struggle with sin, however, Paul's words to us in Romans can appear to make no sense. He writes:

"...ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness...and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:17-18, 22-23).

Free from sin? A servant of righteousness, producing holy fruit? You've got to be kidding! As we read this, we have to honestly admit, "I'm not dead to sin. I haven't truly been set free. I'm still under the deceiving power of a secret sin - and that troubles me. If the wages of sin is death, then what hope is there for me?"

Here are two abridged letters from sincere Christians who have struggled terribly with great bondages. The first one comes from a young man:

"I'm constantly tempted by sexual sin, and I always give in. I love Jesus with all my heart, but I feel God's presence slipping out of my life. Even though I love him, I keep going back to my lust. Yet I hate it. I cry like a baby while I'm participating in it, asking God to help me not to do it. But I keep doing it.

"I trust God to deliver me, as Paul says in Romans 7. And I love God with all my heart. Yet I know I'm wrong, and I feel helpless to change. Sometimes I feel okay, but at other times I feel I'm being sifted like wheat. I feel like a Judas who has betrayed my Lord. Sometimes I think suicide is the only way out."

The second letter comes from a married woman involved in adultery with a married man:

"I pray for deliverance, for repentance, for strength. I vow to be strong against temptation the next

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time it comes. But when I see him [my lover], I fall right back into the same old thing. I lived a clean, moral life for years; I never thought I'd be capable of something like this. But now I've fallen into hell, and I don't know how to stop it.

"When I read your newsletters, I get convicted. I've prayed and tried to cast out any demons that may have come in because of my sin. But I feel so doomed. My mind races with all the scriptures that speak against what I'm doing. I feel like a reprobate. I'm full of guilt, fear, panic, disgust. I feel so alone, detached and cut off from God."

We receive many letters like these - cries for help from minds troubled by a besetting sin. Yet I must say to all lovers of Jesus who suffer such turmoil: That troubling, inner cry - that battle in your mind - is the work of the Holy Spirit!

God sent his Spirit to us to wage war against our flesh and its desires and lusts. So, if you aren't troubled when you fail - if you're able to shake off your sin with no sense of guilt, sorrow or regret - then the Holy Spirit is not in you doing warfare.

However, if you're being convicted by even the lightest transgression, you're close to true victory. He's winning the battle in your heart by producing a godly sorrow that leads to true repentance!

God Has Provided an Antidote for the Healing of Troubled Minds There is victory available to us, over all these things that trouble our minds. It's wrapped up in a covenant God made years ago with Abraham and his descendants:

"That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:71-75).

God's oath to Abraham and his children is crystal clear: He will deliver us from all our enemies, so we can live without fear - untroubled and at rest - every day of our lives!

Beloved, this covenant applies to every one of us living today. According to Paul, all who have received Christ as Lord by faith are "Abraham's seed." "...They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Romans 9:8). "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7).

So, how can we lay claim to this covenant promise? Abraham asked a similar question of the Lord, when he saw no release from his dilemma. He asked, "What will you give me, Lord, seeing that I have no child?" Here was God's answer: "...I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1).

The Lord told him, "Abraham, I'm going to give you myself - and that's all. I will be your defender and your great reward - because I am who I am. You need never fear another enemy as long as you live, because I will be God to you!"

The Lord gives us a glorious promise just like this one, in his new covenant. He says, "...I will be to

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them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10). Indeed, from the very beginning of creation, through all of scripture, we hear God making this plea to humankind: "I want to be God to you!"

The Lord's plan for us has always been simple. He has said, "You don't have to fear any power that comes against you. I'll act as your defender at all times. If you'll simply trust my sworn promises, casting yourself into my care by faith, I'll be almighty God to you. I'll conquer all your enemies and cast them down before you. You'll be victorious, more than a conqueror - living out your days in peace, with no fear!"

I ask you: Are you living out your days without fear - with a calm spirit and peaceful mind? Most of us don't live even a fraction of our time that way. We go in and out of our moments of peace, but we don't fully enter into God's rest.

If you're troubled, perplexed, distressed over a besetting sin, you have to understand: God is not mad at you! He isn't wanting to discipline you or judge you. On the contrary - he yearns to infuse you with his omnipotent power!

God says essentially the same thing in all of his covenants: "I'm looking for a people who will believe I'll deliver them from all their enemies!" "The covenant that I have made with you ye shall not forget; neither shall ye fear other gods. But the Lord your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies" (2 Kings 17:38-39).

In the Old Testament, those enemies were heathen nations - Philistines, Moabites, Hittites, Jebusites, Canaanites. All of these evil powers sought to destroy God's people and place them back in bondage.

Today our enemies exist in the spiritual realm - demonic powers, fleshly lusts, evil desires. And in the New Testament, God repeats his pledge to his people:

"I'm going to be God to you - and you're going to be my son, my daughter. In fact, you'll be my child from now through all eternity. Therefore, remember the covenant I've made with you. You shall not fear any man or power, but only me. I will deliver you out of the hands of all your enemies - including demonic harassment, clinging lusts, dominating habits, all besetting sins!"

You May Ask, "Why Then Do I Not Have This Covenant Fulfilled in Me?" If you wonder why you keep falling - why you continue to feel weak and powerless, doing the very thing you hate - it is probably because you have not fully trusted in God's glorious promises.

God made all of these promises to Abraham - promises to be his shield, to be his reward, to defeat all his enemies, even to perform miracles for him, such as giving him a child in his old age. Abraham believed these promises - and God said his faith was credited as righteousness.

Likewise, the moment we give up fighting our spiritual enemies in our own strength - settling in our hearts that whatever God promises, he is able to perform, and trusting everything into his hands - that is the beginning of our righteousness.

God helps us in this by sending his very own Spirit to take up residence in our hearts. The Holy Ghost is the power of God, and that power declares war on all demonic powers: "...the Spirit [lusts, or "fights"] against the flesh..." (Galatians 5:17).

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The Spirit declares, "This is now my dwelling place, devil. I've set up headquarters here, and I'm raising up the banner of almighty God. You no longer rule here. And your battle is no longer against my child. You're up against me now. And I'm going to hunt you down, foil your schemes and fight you on every front. This child is now the temple of the Holy Ghost!"

Walking in the Spirit is not complicated. It is simply believing what God has said: "...Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (verse 16). Simply put, this means, "Trust in the Holy Ghost! Believe in his pledge to take up your cause. Walk in the power of his promise to fight for you!"

God's word gives us an ironclad promise that's a sure cure for all mental anguish:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Do you see what God is saying? His Spirit does all the work in you! He will cleanse you and give you a new heart. He will bring you into obedience and cause you to do right. Your part is to believe he will keep his word, with unwavering faith!

So, will you trust your problems, your future, your life - and your sins - into the hands of almighty God?