

Freedom **from Hurtful** **Behaviors**

What the Bible Teaches
about Liberation and Renewal

CHARLES T. KNIPPEL, PH.D.

*In Memory
of
My Parents,
Arthur and Lois Knippel,
and
My Grandmother,
Dorothy Knippel*



Copyright © 2002 by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • cph.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Excerpt(s) from *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, Copyright © 1986 by Concordia Publishing House. Used with permission.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

Contents

Preface	5
Introduction	7
1. The Variety of Hurtful Behaviors	10
Hurtful Behaviors of the Mind	
Hurtful Behaviors of the Body	
Hurtful Behaviors Dishonor God and Harm Us and Others	
Hurtful Behaviors Enslave	
Freedom Is Needed	
2. Liberating Truths for Hurtful Behaviors	15
Bill W.'s Steps to Liberate Alcoholics	
The Necessity for Christian Truths	
Biblical Truths for Liberation and Renewal	
Benefits of Biblical Truths	
3. Assumptions of Biblical Truths for Liberation and Renewal	23
4. Liberating Truths 1–3: Counting on God, Not Ourselves	29
Truth 1: Admission of Powerlessness	
Truth 2: Trust in God for Help	
Truth 3: Decision for Action	
5. Liberating Truths 4–9: Dealing with Hurtful Behaviors	37
Truth 4: Inventory Preparation	
Truth 5: Admission of Hurtful Behaviors	
Truth 6: Readiness for Removal of Hurtful Behaviors	
Truth 7: Request for Removal of Hurtful Behaviors	

FREEDOM FROM HURTFUL BEHAVIORS

Truth 8: Preparation for Making Amends

Truth 9: Making of Amends

6. Liberating Truths 10–12: Growing and Sharing 50

Truth 10: Looking to God for Daily Help

Truth 11: Using God's Help to Grow

Truth 12: Passing On and Living the Message of Liberation

7. How to Apply the Liberating Truths 57

Conclusion 61

Notes 63

Preface

In recent years I have written two books that have to do with recovery from addictions. In the first, *The Twelve Steps: The Church's Challenge and Opportunity*, I discuss the origins and contents of the Twelve Step Spiritual Program of Recovery of Alcoholics Anonymous. This program has been adapted for use by many mutual-help groups. In addition, I evaluate the Steps from a biblical point of view and offer suggestions about how Christians can understand and respond to the Twelve Step Program.

In my second book, *When Addictions Threaten*, I provide information about both substance and behavior addictions and discuss resources available to Christians for preventing and recovering from addictions. The book offers practical help for individuals who are concerned about their addictions and those of people close to them.

Now I add a third book to supplement the two already published and to provide what they do not include. This third book sets forth in detail biblical truths intended to liberate us from the large number of persistent behaviors by which we disobey God and hurt ourselves and others. These truths are 12 in number and follow the format of A.A.'s Twelve Steps that I evaluated in my first book. However, the truths I formulate and discuss in this book are much different than A.A.'s Twelve Steps. A.A.'s Steps reflect facets of Bible teaching, but they are not explicitly Christian in content and therefore not fully biblical in their message. My book is different. It sets forth God's very own truths,

revealed in the Bible, by which He provides the fullness of His blessings in Christ to liberate us from disobedient behaviors by which we hurt ourselves and others and to empower us for growth in Christian living.

God can and does help us find freedom from hurtful behaviors. In Christ, our lives can and do change. Like St. Paul, who said he often did not do the good he wanted to do (Romans 7:21), we Christians daily sin much. We will not be perfect in this world. Our Christian lives are always a struggle against sin. That struggle is empowered by God's forgiveness in Christ and His gift of the Holy Spirit. We have our successes and failures, our ups and downs. Still, God promises to help us in our daily struggles and give us successes. He promises to lift us up when we fall and to give us successes in the direction of Christian freedom and growth.

God faithfully keeps his promises to us. He liberates and renews us. With God's help many people are overcoming their hurtful behaviors. For example, by God's grace many are recovering from alcohol and drug addictions. We gratefully recall the words of St. Paul, "We were therefore buried with him [Christ] through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

In this book, like the two preceding it, I make use of my doctoral research on the theological origins of A.A.'s Twelve Step Spiritual Program of Recovery. In addition, I draw on my theological and historical studies and my experience in the fields of pastoral ministry, addictions therapy, and seminary education.

Introduction

People from all walks of life yearn to be free from behaviors that hurt themselves and others. We want to live happy and productive lives. But by relying only on ourselves, we find that freedom is impossible to achieve. We find ourselves enslaved by injurious ways of behaving. These hurtful ways have to do with our inaccurate thoughts and beliefs, negative feelings, and wrong actions.

Through the years many have attempted to discover keys of liberation for persons enslaved by hurtful behaviors. Among these persons was Bill W., a cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous. Under the tutelage of Samuel M. Shoemaker, an Episcopal priest associated with the Oxford Group Movement, he discovered principles that afforded him and others freedom from their enslavement to alcohol and launched them on a life of sobriety. On the basis of these principles he drafted a program of 12 steps, or 12 principles, which he called The Twelve Step Spiritual Program of Recovery. Since the 1930s these steps have afforded recovery for millions of alcoholics and others addicted to a variety of substances and behaviors. The steps generate a psychological or personality change sufficient to empower people to recover from addictions and attain improvement of their physical and emotional health.

Because the Twelve Steps were formulated to give aid and assistance to people of various beliefs and of no belief, they speak of God in generic terms—as “a Power greater

than ourselves” and as “*God as we understood him.*” From a Christian perspective, the Twelve Steps are lacking and misleading.

By reestablishing these principles in the fullness of Bible teaching, we are able to possess tools for liberation and renewal that are truly from God and pleasing to God. They make available the benefits for wholeness that God the Father gives to people through the saving work of His Son, Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. They aid us in possessing a full share of the freedom, supplied by Jesus, that continually liberates and renews us at the very core of our being. All of this, of course, is because Jesus came to bring us freedom from our guilt, God’s condemnation, and our enslavement to sin. This freedom from guilt and sin is ours because Jesus fulfilled God’s Law perfectly, having lived without sin among us as a man. It is ours because He died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose from the dead to be our victorious Lord.

With this perspective in mind, my purpose in this book is to provide biblical truths for liberation from hurtful behaviors and to present biblical resources and Christian suggestions for the implementation of each truth for newness of life. People of the Christian faith may use the truths and recommendations of this book in Christian mutual-help groups or use them privately to deal with self-identified harmful thoughts, emotions, and actions. Some may want to use this book to assist them in practicing the Twelve Step Program from a Christian perspective in a mutual-aid group to which they belong.

My hope is that this book, written in everyday language, will be useful to people in all walks of life who desire, or come to desire, freedom from hurtful ways of living and

INTRODUCTION

to caregivers who are committed to helping people who suffer from a lack of freedom in the ways they think, feel, and behave. All of us may most certainly claim the promise of Jesus, “If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

The Variety of Hurtful Behaviors

Hurtful Behaviors of the Mind

In this book I distinguish between mind behaviors (a person's processes of thought and feeling) and body behaviors (physical actions). I view the mind as that part of a person that thinks, reasons, believes, feels, wills, and perceives. I look upon the body as the physical part of a person that is organized for action. As does Scripture, I think of the human person as a unity having the aspects of body, mind, spirit, and soul.

The distinction that I make between mind and body does not intend to indicate that mind and body and their behaviors are not related. They are very much interrelated. Wrong beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes at work within the mind lead to painful emotions and hurtful actions.

In his letters St. Paul identifies a variety of hurtful behaviors of the mind. He mentions bitterness, anger, hatred, rage, malice, greed, impurity, envy, jealousy, and selfish ambition (Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 4:31; 5:3–6; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

We can readily relate to St. Paul's list of hurtful mind behaviors by including other attitudes and feelings associated with negative thinking or inaccurate beliefs. We might add depression, worry, arrogance, paranoia, snobbishness,

resentment, suspiciousness, indifference, fear, shame, obstinacy, sadness, unrealistic guilt, and low self-esteem. This list, of course, is not complete.

Hurtful Behaviors of the Body

St. Paul speaks extensively about hurtful actions. A partial list of such body behaviors includes brawling, slander, sexual immorality, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, fits of rage, drunkenness, swindling, thievery, idolatry, witchcraft, rioting, and factiousness (Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 4:31; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10). Today we might supplement St. Paul's list by adding the abuse of alcohol, drugs, food, work, money, power, and relationships.

Hurtful Behaviors Dishonor God and Harm Us and Others

Wrong beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and actions dishonor God and hurt us and others. They dishonor God and injure us and others because such behaviors are counter to God's will for us. In the Ten Commandments God has shown us a way of living that is both obedient to Him and beneficial for us and others. When we disobey God we sin. We not only dishonor Him and incur His displeasure but, at the same time, inevitably hurt ourselves and others. When we speak of behaviors that hurt us and others, we are talking about sinful behaviors that disobey and dishonor God. These are the behaviors that harm us and others. For example, take King David. He dishonored and angered God and hurt himself and others when he had sexual desire for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and had an adulterous affair with her. He ultimately had Bathsheba's husband killed in battle, so that he might have her as his wife.

Then there is the cowardice and denial of Peter. He thought he was in grave danger, feared Jesus' enemies, and denied Jesus. He sinned, and in pain and repentance he wept. In sadness and compassion Jesus looked on Peter. And there is the story of Judas. He loved money. As a result, he betrayed Jesus to Jewish religious leaders for 30 pieces of silver. This betrayal led to Jesus' crucifixion. Judas was filled with remorse and hanged himself. To the great sorrow of St. Paul, Demas, because he loved the world, deserted Paul and the Christian faith. God was dishonored by his apostasy, and Paul was deeply disappointed and hurt. Demas ruined his spiritual life and well-being.

I am sure we can all recall many times when we disobeyed and disrespected God and hurt ourselves and others because of beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and actions that are contrary to God's will. We believe someone has criticized us unjustly. We feel angry, speak angry words, and break off our relationship with that person. We think someone has been more generous with another person than with us. We are jealous and begin saying bad things about the person we believe has disregarded us. We perceive that someone has kept us from getting a promotion at work. We feel resentment and do whatever we can to hurt that person's reputation. We imagine that we are inferior to other people; feel depressed, helpless, and inadequate; and drink excessively or abuse other drugs in an attempt to feel better about ourselves. In all of these instances we disobey and dishonor God and damage ourselves and others. God is disrespected, and we and those about us suffer severe pain.

Hurtful Behaviors Enslave

The Bible regards the hurtful mental and physical

behaviors of which we speak as sins. As such they are behaviors that have the power to enslave, for it is the nature of sin to enslave us. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of sin as a snare. He writes, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1). As we persist in hurtful behaviors, we readily become obsessed with hurtful mental behaviors—our sinful thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. We run them over and over in our minds. As we persist in behaviors, we easily become compulsively involved in them. We feel compelled to repeat them over and over. We discover ourselves losing control over both mental and physical behaviors. They begin to take possession of us and overpower us.

Repeated sins enslave us. Jesus observed this reality. He said, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). St. Paul characterized sin as reigning in mortal bodies so that people obey its evil desires. He also spoke of sin’s ability to master us (Romans 6:11–14). Paul wrote, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

St. Paul spoke of his own experience with sin as a Christian and at the same time described the experience of every Christian. In his Letter to the Romans he pointed out that as Christians we remain sinners even though our sins are forgiven and we daily are renewed by the Holy Spirit. Sin at work in us forcefully endeavors to take over our lives. We must be careful not to let sin control us. Paul wrote, “I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner