

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

Why Criminals Do the Things They Do



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INTRODUCTION

Guard Your Hearts

Whenever we hear about a crime on the TV, or read about it in the paper, we are left scratching our heads, wondering how on earth someone could have done such a thing. For most of us, it's hard to comprehend an urge to harm someone or steal something that is so strong we actually follow through, especially if we consider the consequences to the victim, their family, and ourselves.

Proverbs 23:7 says, "*For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" What we believe in our hearts affects our thinking, and what we think affects who we are and what we do.

Proverbs 4:23 says, "*Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.*" What is in our heart becomes our thoughts. Our thoughts become our words, what we say becomes our actions, our actions turn into habits, our habits form our characters, and our characters shape our destinies.

The fact is, many criminals have hardened their hearts, their thoughts have developed into a different belief system resulting in different thinking patterns, and these thoughts impacted the choices and actions that led to their incarceration. In this course, we will be studying some of the common beliefs and thoughts of criminals that have come out of a hardened heart, and match them up, one by one, with truths from God's Word.

But this course isn't just for criminals - it's for everyone. If we're honest, we'll be able to see ourselves in some of these thinking errors, and we'll see someone we're counseling in other thinking errors. If we don't examine ourselves and listen to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, our hearts could become hardened, our thoughts set in stone, and we could change our own destinies with these same thinking errors.

1. In Mark 8:17-18, Jesus asked one question right after another. And His questions perfectly described the heart that is hardened. What symptoms did He highlight in His questions?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

- d) _____
- e) _____
- 2. How did Paul describe the hardened heart in Ephesians 4:17-19?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
 - d) _____
 - e) _____
- 3. According to Proverbs 28:14, what will happen if we harden our hearts? _____

- 4. Where do evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander originate? _____ (Matthew 15:19)
- 5. God doesn't drive us to repentance ... He leads us to repentance. However, according to Romans 2:5, what will happen if we harden our hearts and remain unrepentant? _____

- 6. How is the hardened heart described in Isaiah 6:10? _____

- 7. Read Mark 10:4-5. What precept did Moses write because of hardness in the hearts of the people of his time? _____

- 8. According to James 2:15-16, what might be an indication of a hardened heart? _____

9. One of the best examples of hardheaded hard-heartedness is found in the book of Exodus. Pharaoh refused to let the children of Israel leave the land of Egypt as God had commanded. The Bible mentions Pharaoh's heart being hardened 17 times. If this has happened to you, what has God promised to do in Ezekiel 36:26 and Ezekiel 11:19?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

10. What did God promise to do about their hearts in Jeremiah 24:7? _____

11. How can you tell that a person's heart is NOT hardened? (Ephesians 4:2-3 and 1 Peter 3:8)

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

12. Read 2 Chronicles 34:27 and 2 Kings 22:19. What happens to our prayers when God sees a tender, penitent, and humble heart? _____

CHAPTER 1

“It’s All About Me, Me, Me!”

People with this thinking error tend to emphasize their total difference from and superiority to other people. They see themselves as special, even “one of a kind.” They use others to achieve their own ends. They are unable or unwilling to identify with or acknowledge other people’s feelings. They simply cannot (or will not) relate to others’ needs and desires. What they want or need is the thing that is most important in their own eyes, so they usually behave in a selfish and uncaring manner.

People with this thinking error are actually narcissists. The term originated from the Greek mythology, where the young Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. Typical narcissists exhibit a pattern of traits and behaviors which signify infatuation and obsession with one’s self to the exclusion of all others and the egotistic and ruthless pursuit of one’s gratification, dominance and ambition.

“It’s all about me” people are unlikely to generate close, warm, loving relationships. They are impatient, anxious or angry much the time. This has often been seen to result in abusive and dysfunctional relationships, loneliness, temper tantrums and provoking behavior leading to violence and domestic violence and murder, pornography and sexual fantasy addiction, alcohol and drug addiction, adultery, bankruptcy, divorce, child abuse, nervous breakdown and despair.

People who live under the “it’s all about me” misconception will exaggerate their own achievements and talents to the point of lying. They see themselves as more competent than everyone else, and may attempt to assume a leadership position because of this - even though they do not yet have very many achievements under their own belt.

People with this thinking error are falling right in line with Satan’s plan. He wants us to put ourselves first and others last. He loves to see us get “big heads” with inflated egos, and take for ourselves the glory that actually belongs to God. Just remember, but for the grace of God, we would be nothing. Any skills, talents and abilities we have were given to us by God and are to be used to glorify God, not ourselves. We have been put on earth to serve others, not ourselves.

1. Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

a) About what things would a carnal man be likely to boast? (vs. 23)

i) _____

- ii) _____
- iii) _____
- b) If we're going to brag, what does the Lord say we should brag about? _____
_____ (vs. 24)
- 2. 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 is a direct quotation from Jeremiah 9:24. Here Paul was rebuking the Corinthian Christians who were bragging about him being the founder of their church. Paul said he could never boast about what he had accomplished in Corinth, since it was God who was at work through him.
 - a) His only boast, therefore, could be _____ (vs. 17)
 - b) In the end, who is it that is approved? _____
_____ (vs. 18)
- 3. The only proper glorying for the believer is in God. It is God's commendation, not one's own or any other person's, that matters.
 - a) Herod Agrippa I, called Agrippa, is a good example in the Bible of a man who thought it was all about him. When he was forced to take sides in the struggle between Judaism and the new Christian sect, he didn't hesitate a second, but assumed the role of its bitter persecutor. He killed James the apostle with the sword, and harried the church whenever possible (Acts 12).
 - i) What did the people do in Acts 12:21-22 that was so offensive to God? _____

 - ii) How did Herod, puffed up with pride and vanity, respond to their flattery? _____
_____ (vs. 23)
 - iii) What action did God take? _____
_____ (vs. 23)
 - b) Read Daniel 4:28-33.
 - i) What infamous words, spoken by Nebuchadnezzar, brought about his downfall? _____

ii) What happened to Nebuchadnezzar because he thought it was all about him?

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

iii) Read on through the end of Daniel 4. Did Nebuchadnezzar ever break free from his madness? ____ Yes ____ No. Explain what happened next in his life. _____

4. Read Matthew 20:16. We may think it's all about us, and that we deserve to be the first one in line for whatever blessings God has to give out. But In this verse, Jesus said _____

This underscores the essence of God's grace, and the fact that He rewards and blesses man according to His will and pleasure, not necessarily according to what we think we deserve.

5. Much of this thinking error is rooted in pride. What does God say about pride?

a) _____ (James 4:6)

b) _____ (James 4:10)

c) _____ (Philippians 2:3)

d) _____ (Proverbs 16:19)

6. What advice would you give a person operating under the "It's All About Me" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 2

“What’s Mine is Mine. What’s Yours is Mine Too!”

People with this thinking error may not be outspoken enough to say it out loud, but this is what they are really thinking. They think that what's theirs is theirs alone, but whatever is yours is theirs too – if they want it. They understand the concept of ownership, but they just feel that if they really want something – it should be theirs. And they don't think they should have to work to get it. If they don't get what they want, they believe they have been treated unfairly. If other people stand in the way of what they want, they presume they have the right to obtain it – by any means.

This thinking error is connected with a person's mental attitude regarding the work ethic. Those with this mindset show no respect for the efforts, industry, and accomplishments of other people. They don't recognize boundaries. They have a spirit of entitlement – and if they want it, they will simply take it.

Society has contributed to this thinking error. What about the bankruptcy system that forgives our debts if we find ourselves in a financial bind? What about a government that seems to give public assistance forever to individuals and families? What about the medical care anyone can get when they walk into an emergency room, even when they don't pay? What about ministries that give food to the poor, but never really do anything to help them get out of the cycle of poverty?

If we're poor, we believe we deserve handouts from the government. If we're rich, we think we need a tax break. If we're employees, we want our employer to give us better benefits. If we're bankers, we apply for a bailout in tough times. If we're farmers, we expect subsidies. If we're a special interest group, we seek special treatment.

A big spiritual issue for people who feel the world owes them something is that they become dependent on the world to provide for their needs (and wants) instead of God. Another spiritual issue with this thinking error is covetousness.

One key to overcoming this thinking error is to develop a spirit of contentment. If we learn to be content with the blessings God has so graciously given to each one of us personally, we won't be looking at what everyone else has and finding ways to make what's theirs our own.

1. Could you imagine the cultural revolution that would evolve in our country if people began to call anything God gave them beyond their basic necessities "blessings" instead of "entitlements"? Read 1 Timothy 6:7-8.
 - a) What have we brought into this world? _____
 - b) What are we going to carry out of this world? _____
 - c) Today we have a constant hunger for more and more, better and better. What did Paul advise Timothy regarding this? _____

2. Read Hebrews 13:5-6. Often covetousness and greed are excused or even admired in today's culture, and are simply called "ambition." Someone asked millionaire Bernard Baruch, "How much money does it take for a rich man to be satisfied?" Baruch answered, "Just a million more than he has."
 - a) Hebrews 13:5a indicates that contentment includes a freedom from _____

 - b) When we are discontented and dissatisfied, one of the first thoughts that we might entertain is that God has abandoned us, that He does not care about us, that He has not blessed us. Why are we told we should be content? _____
_____ (vs. 5b)
 - c) What will characterize a contented person? _____
_____ (vs. 6)

3. The discontented person seeks to fill the God-shaped vacuum within by acquiring things which never satisfy. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-20 for contentment clues.
 - a) What did Solomon discover about money? _____
_____ (vs. 10)
 - b) In what way did Solomon say riches interfere with a person's life?
 - i) _____ (vs. 12)
 - ii) _____ (vs. 13)

- iii) _____ (vs. 14)
 - c) To what is the attempt to accumulate compared? _____
_____ (vs. 15-16)
 - d) With a sympathetic touch, what does Solomon tells us may be the life even for those who have great wealth? _____
_____ (vs. 17)
 - e) What happens to the contented person according to verses 19-20? _____

4. The Apostle Paul was forced to live in numerous places. Conditions and provisions varied greatly. He traveled back and forth between luxury and poverty. Study his comments in Philippians 4:10-20.
- a) Was Paul a naturally contented person? _____
_____ (vs. 11)
 - b) List the circumstances in which Paul learned to be content. (vs. 12)
 - i) _____
 - ii) _____
 - iii) _____
 - iv) _____
 - v) _____
 - vi) _____
 - c) Why was Paul able to adjust so easily? _____

 - d) What did Paul say to encourage the Philippians who had sent gifts to him? _____
_____ (v. 19)

5. What advice would you give a person operating under the “What’s Yours Is Mine” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 3

“It’s My Way or the Highway.”

With the “it’s my way or the highway” mentality, the person is suggesting an ultimatum to the listener(s) who may be family members, co-workers, or fellow inmates. If you’re about to argue with a person with this mindset, the stakes can be high. What is implied is that you had better do exactly what they want or there will be severely negative consequences.

A person with this attitude is known for his/her stubbornness, unwillingness to listen or even compromise. This is usually the controlling, superior partner, the domineering boss, the close-minded father, the leader of the gang. Such a person is often wrong, but never doubts that he/she is correct. This person has preconceived notions, and can’t be swayed to another way of seeing the situation. He/she has no respect for another person’s opinion or life experience in similar situations. Such people are ready for a fight over every little thing, insisting that *their* position is the only position, and that *their* “right way” is the “only” right way?

Criminals need control and power over others. The need for power, control, and dominance shows up in every area of their lives. Their greatest power excitement comes from doing the forbidden and getting away with it.

The fact is - life is not always going to go our way, we are not always going to get our way, and the people who disagree with us are not always going to hit the highway. With this thinking error, it isn’t what happens to or around criminals that makes them unhappy. It is their way of thinking about the events of their lives that makes them turn to violence or crime when things don’t go their way, when everyone doesn’t agree with them.

1. The theological truth about this lie can be found in Acts. 20:22-24. What was Paul’s attitude, even though the Spirit had warned him that prison and hardships awaited him in every city? _____

2. Read Philippians 4:10-20.

- a) Was Paul naturally a contented person? _____ (vs. 11)
 - b) What were some circumstances in which Paul learned to be content? (v. 12)

 - c) Why was Paul able to be happy, even when things weren't going "his way." _____

3. Read James 1:2-8.
- a) What response did James recommend when things are not going our way? _____
_____ (vs. 2)
 - b) Why does he say this?
 - i) _____ (vs. 3)
 - ii) _____ (vs. 4)
 - c) How can a person handle the pressure in this situation? _____
_____ (vs. 5)
 - d) What enables a person to get help from God? _____ (vs. 6)
4. Read Genesis 15:1-5 and then Genesis 16:1-16. Here we see what happens when someone insists on doing things "her way."
- a) What was Sarah's suggestion for helping God keep His promise? _____
_____ (vs. 1-3)
 - b) How did this alternate plan work out?
 - i) _____ (vs. 4)
 - ii) _____ (vs. 5)
 - iii) _____ (vs. 6)
 - c) Was Sarah's "way" or solution according to God's will? _____

d) What should they have done in this situation? _____

5. Absalom is another good example of a person who believed the “My Way” lie. Read II Samuel 15:1-12.

a) What did Absalom do to promote himself?

i) _____ (vs. 1)

ii) _____ (vs. 2-5)

iii) _____ (vs. 6)

iv) _____ (vs. 10)

b) Now read 2 Samuel 18:1-18 to discover how this young man came to an end.

i) _____ (vs. 9)

ii) _____ (vs. 14-15)

c) Did Absalom accomplish his goals when he set out to make himself happy by seeking “his way?” ___ Yes. ___ No. Explain your answer. _____

6. Read Hebrews 10:32-39.

a) What difficulties did the Hebrews encounter following their conversions?

i) _____ (vs. 33a)

ii) _____ (vs. 33b)

b) How did the Hebrews act in the midst of these difficulties, when things were not going “their way?”

i) _____ (vs. 34a)

ii) _____ (vs. 34b)

iii) _____ (vs. 34c)

c) What two things must accompany faith, if we are to receive God's reward when things are not going our way?

i) _____ (vs. 35a)

ii) _____ (vs. 36a)

d) What reason is there for being confident? _____
_____ (vs. 36)

7. What advice would you give a person operating under the "My Way" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 4

“It’s Not My Fault.”

Excuses, excuses, excuses! We live in an excuse-prone society. Criminals are excused from crimes because society supposedly did them an “injustice” or they had an unhappy childhood. High-ranking officials in government are excused from their actions because of their positions. Crooks are excused from paying honest debts due to the lenient bankruptcy laws.

And it’s not just criminals. We all have a tendency to give a reason for every bad thing that happens. It’s as though we need to defend ourselves or try to paint ourselves in a positive light for every scenario. We seem to come pre-programmed with a need to avoid blame, and at times – we will even throw someone else “under the bus” to avoid getting into trouble.

Unfortunately that attitude is not only used by the world, it is becoming more prevalent among Christians. For example, many will excuse their disobedience in the matter of tithing by saying they just can’t afford it. Others excuse their failure to read their Bibles and pray by saying they just don’t have time.

Since the very first man and woman, it has always been convenient and guilt-relieving to blame someone else for our actions or circumstances. When cornered by God for breaking the commandment God had given Adam, Adam’s excuse was that Eve gave the forbidden fruit to him, so he ate it (Gen. 3:12). Eve’s justification for committing the first sin was, “... *The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*” (Gen 3:13). Too often, the way out of avoiding guilt for criminals as well as ourselves is saying it’s not our fault, and putting the blame on someone else.

As we read what the Bible teaches us about this blame game problem, we will be motivated to quit making excuses for our problems and mistakes (sins), and start serving Him with all of our might. Let’s determine to become problem solvers - not excuse makers!

1. Joseph was a young man who was sold into slavery by his own brothers. Here is a great example of a Bible hero who could have played the “blame game,” and said that everything bad that happened in his life was his brothers’ fault. Read Genesis 45:1-15 to see how Joseph responded when he finally met up with his brothers again.

a) Did Joseph find it easy to admit his identity to his brothers? _____
_____ (vs. 1-3)

b) How did Joseph’s brothers respond to the news? _____
_____ (vs. 3)

c) Did Joseph spend time accusing and blaming his brothers for what had occurred, or did he retaliate for the unfairness he experienced? _____
_____ (vs. 5)

d) What guidance does Joseph provide for responding when we believe something bad that happened to us was someone else’s fault? _____
_____ (vs. 9-15)

2. Read Genesis 39. Again, Joseph experienced unfair treatment when he was unjustly accused by Potiphar’s wife. He ended up in Potiphar’s prison, and it would have been quite true to say it was somebody else’s fault that he landed in jail. However, instead of whining and complaining, Joseph used this time to serve Potiphar within the prison system and to serve God.

a) What was the secret of Joseph’s success? _____
_____ (vs. 2-3)

b) How did Joseph’s success affect Potiphar’s situation? _____
_____ (vs. 4-5)

c) What made Joseph’s responsibilities difficult? _____
_____ (vs. 6-7)

d) Was this an isolated event? _____ (vs. 10-12)

e) How did going to prison affect God's blessing on Joseph? _____

_____ (vs. 21-23)

3. Now read Judges 11. Jephthah had a difficult childhood. His mother was a harlot or, by the terms of today, a prostitute. As if that wasn't enough, he was disowned and disinherited by his family because of it.

But Jephthah didn't sit around complaining, feeling sorry for himself, and blaming others for his bad luck. Instead, Jephthah gathered a band of men, and operated somewhat like David and his men did during the period described in 1 Samuel 25:4-8, protecting cities and settlements from marauders and receiving pay from those whom they helped.

a) When Ammon made war against Israel, what did the elders of Gilead ask Jephthah to do? _____
_____ (vs. 5-8)

b) What did Jephthah ask for in return? _____
_____ (vs. 9-11)

c) Was Jephthah successful? _____ (vs. 32)

d) What are we told about Jephthah in Hebrews 11:32-34? _____

4. One Christian from a less than desirable background used it to excuse his sinful behavior. Another Christian from a nearly identical background used his situation growing up as a motivation to serve God and minister to others. How do you explain the difference? _____

5. What advice would you give a person operating under the "Not My Fault" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 5

“That Wasn’t Fair.”

Fairness is encouraged in the classroom, and at home, and has fostered the belief in some people that life should be fair all the time. The criminal mind tends to harbor a grudge for a past injustice, real or perceived, for years – and at the right moment, take steps to “even the score.” Vengeful behavior may also be targeted at people who seem to have gotten more than they deserve. People with this mindset will believe they put in equal or more effort, and should have gotten at least the same if not more. They keep score, and may steal or destroy the property of others to even things up.

Others become angered, and may even turn to violence, when they perceive a person didn’t get what they deserve or got less than they deserve, perhaps, in the courtroom. One of their family members may have been the victim of a crime, and their friends encouraged them to be patient and let the law handle it. Then, to their dismay, the charges were dropped due to a technicality, or the perpetrator got off with a simple “slap on the wrist.”

A person with the “life should be fair” mindset may decide to take the law into their own hands, rather than waiting on God to take care of the injustice. They may execute what they consider to be a fair punishment themselves, or find/hire someone else to do it. This isn’t a new idea. In America, this practice started back during the time of the “Old Wild West”, when the nearest sheriff may have been a day’s ride away. Lynching parties were common for horse thieves. And hired guns were a commodity for the filthy rich. Today there are still vigilantes, terrorists, and mercenaries who will “take care of business” for a price.

The spiritual issue with always wanting life to be fair is that it tempts us to let anger, resentment, and bitterness take up residence in our heart. Anger itself isn’t a sin, but venting our anger can be destructive. We need to learn to wait on God, and seek His perspective on the situation.

1. When someone is operating under this thinking error, vengeful behavior may be targeted at
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____

2. The theological truth about the thinking error called “The Fallacy of Fairness” is found in Ecclesiastes 8:14. It says that there are 2 seemingly unjust things in life:

a) _____

b) _____

3. Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, “*I also saw other things in this life that were not fair. The fastest runner does not always win the race; the strongest soldier does not always win the battle; wise people don’t always get the food; smart people don’t always get the wealth; educated people don’t always get the praise they deserve. When the time comes, bad things can happen to anyone*” (ERV).

What does this verse say about whether life is fair or not? _____

4. Read John 10:10.

a) What does the thief come to do? _____

b) Who is the thief? _____

c) When a person kills, steals, or destroys to even the score, whose work are they doing? _____

5. In the story of Cain and Abel, we find first story recorded in the Bible where a person who thought, “That wasn’t fair,” acted on his feelings. Read Genesis 4.

a) Why did Cain and Abel bring sacrifices to God? (Num. 18:12, 17; Lev. 3:16; Rev. 13:8) _____

b) Why did Cain kill Abel? _____

c) Why did God prefer the sacrifice of Abel? _____

d) How did Abel offer his sacrifice “by faith?” (See Heb. 9:22 and 11:4) _____

- e) How did God punish Cain? _____

6. We already studied in Chapter 4 how Joseph handled himself in unfair situations. Now let's study Moses' reaction to an unfair situation. Read Exodus 2:11-12 and then Acts 7:24-25.
- a) What did Moses observe that was unfair? _____

- b) How did Moses handle the situation? _____

- c) Did Moses sin?
- i) _____ Moses sinned because he committed murder.
 - ii) _____ Moses sinned because he did not wait on God to handle the matter.
 - iii) _____ Moses committed two sins, first because he committed murder and also because he did not wait on God to handle things.
 - iv) _____ Neither of the above, because Moses knew his calling was to lead Israel from Egypt and the bondage of Pharaoh.
7. Matthew 20:1-16 demonstrates "The Fallacy of Fairness" mindset perfectly.
- a) What did the landlord promise to pay the first group he hired? _____
_____ (vs. 2)
- b) What did he promise to pay those whom he hired later? _____
_____ (vs. 4-5)
- c) How much did he pay the men who had worked only one hour? _____
_____ (vs. 9)
- d) How much did those who had worked all day receive? _____ (vs. 10)
- e) Were all the workers happy with their pay? Did this seem fair to them? _____

f) Was the landowner unfair in the way he treated the all-day workers? _____
_____ (vs. 12-15)

8. This parable leads to a question for all of us today. How should a Christian respond when treated unfairly, especially on the job? Is it wrong to defend yourself or to stand up for your rights? That is the question Peter addresses in 1 Peter 2:18-24.

a) To whom are employees to be subject? _____

b) How are they to respond to both good and bad bosses? _____

c) Summarize what you learn about suffering and/or being treated unfairly in verses 19-24.

i) How is a believer to respond to suffering? _____

ii) How should you respond when you are treated unfairly? _____

iii) How does God view a proper response to suffering? _____

iv) How did Jesus respond when He was punished unfairly for our sins? _____

9. What advice would you give a person operating under the “That Wasn’t Fair” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 6

“Whatever.”

What do people mean when they answer with ... “whatever”? Anyone who hears you say it knows you don’t give a hoot about any decision that needs to be made. The problem is not the word itself. The problem is that any time the word is used it means you are not making a choice — and life is all about small choices. Seemingly small decisions are a part of each and every day, and it is easy to ignore them. When the word “whatever” is used as a reply, you are simply not making a decision.

What is a person really thinking when he/she uses the “whatever” word?

- I don’t care.
- You make the decision for me; I will blame you later.
- If I knew the answer, I would tell you. So leave me alone.
- I am not listening.
- Of all the options presented, none are good, but I’ll make you suffer anyway.
- I am really angry and will hold you responsible for any decision you make for me.
- I don’t have an opinion so I will fill the air with this useless word.
- I am resigned to being a victim.

The “whatever” word is also sometimes used as a “fronting” tactic by criminals. In this case, people use the word to imply they don’t care one way or the other, but they’re actually manipulating that person. They’re saying they’ll go along with you on this, but then you’re going to owe them big time. They’re playing a role, doing something they don’t really want to do in order to bank a favor, to get something back later in return.

From another viewpoint, the “whatever” word takes away responsibility for an action. It wasn’t their idea, it wasn’t their decision, they’re just going along for the ride. If it all goes south and the law gets involved - it wasn’t their fault.

“Whatever” doesn’t work with God. We don’t get an opportunity for “fronting” with Him, and we won’t be able to shirk responsibility when we get caught. He alone makes the rules and determines truth. He requires a definite decision from us one way or the other, and there are only two options. Deuteronomy 30:19 says, *“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live.”*

1. Why won't the "whatever" answer work with God? _____

2. True or False: When faced with a decision, your choices aren't just selecting one option or another. The third dimension of decision-making is saying "whatever" and refusing to select either one – which is actually making a decision.
3. According to Deuteronomy 30:19, what are our two choices?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
4. The phrase "*I call heaven and earth to record against you*" means: (vs. 19)
 - a) _____ No one will ever know the choices you make.
 - b) _____ I ask heaven and earth to be witnesses.
 - c) _____ I ask heaven and earth to bless you.
 - d) _____ None of the above
5. What is the five-fold benefit of making the right choices? (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)
 - a) _____ (vs. 19e)
 - b) _____ (vs. 20a)
 - c) _____ (vs. 20b)
 - d) _____ (vs. 20c)
 - e) _____ (vs. 20e)
6. Joshua gives us a very good example of making good choices. Read Joshua 24:14-18. What four things did Joshua tell people they must do, in order to serve the Lord in sincerity and in truth?
 - a) _____ (vs. 14a)
 - b) _____ (vs. 14b)

- c) _____ (vs. 14c)
- d) _____ (vs. 14d)
- 7. When Joshua gave them two choices, did the people answer with “whatever”? ____
How did they answer? _____
- 8. What reasons did the people give for making that choice? (vs. 17-18)
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
- 9. Now there is actually an instance in scripture where the Apostle Paul in effect said, “Whatever,” and it’s a good example of a person being totally submitted to God’s will. Read Philippians 1:20-25.
 - a) What were the two possibilities that might occur in Paul’s life at that time?
 - i) _____ ii) _____
 - b) Paul knew that the Lord was in control of all events including his imprisonment, so either way he _____

 - c) Although we might see death as a negative, Paul believed his death would be a positive in two ways.
 - i) His death for the cause of Christ would glorify _____
 - ii) If he died, he knew he would to be in the immediate presence of _____
- 10. How would you counsel a person who habitually uses the “Whatever” response?

CHAPTER 7

“I Can’t.”

Do you ever catch yourself using the “I can’t...” excuse when things aren’t lining up the way you wanted? Have you ever refused to take responsibility for the events or circumstances of your life? Or have you ever tried to explain why you didn’t, couldn’t, or simply wouldn’t do something?

With the “I can’t” mentality, people present themselves as being helpless, unable to meet expectations and in need of others’ help. This thinking error is very similar to victim stance. Using helplessness as an excuse, this person will talk about how, “I can’t get a job”, “I can’t find a place to live”, or “I can’t overcome my disabilities.” This is another way of exercising control over others. But if we confront the person for using the “I can’t” excuse, they will accuse us of being discriminatory or uncaring.

With this excuse, a person will often try to avoid doing what is required or expected. For example, a person might say, “I couldn’t possibly keep all those rules. There’s too many and I can’t keep them all straight in my head.” The person who says “I can’t,” often really means “I won’t,” and this excuse could lead to the loss of a job or even the loss of freedom.

In other situations, the person using the “I can’t” excuse is afraid of failing or being embarrassed. Fear can trap people in their comfort zone and leave them locked up while creating an illusion of security. Using this excuse to defend their lack of action, they will cripple their ability to move forward. Unable to advance through lawful channels, they may turn to crime to get what they want.

A few of our heroes in Bible times tried to get out of their assignments from the Lord by using the “I can’t” or “I’m not able” excuse. That rationale didn’t fly with God then, and it still doesn’t work with Him today.

1. Read Judges 6:11-16.

a) What assignment did the Lord give to Gideon? _____

b) What excuses did Gideon offer? (vs. 15)

i) _____

ii) _____

c) How did the Lord respond to Gideon's excuses? _____
_____ (vs. 16)

2. Read Exodus Chapters 3 and 4.

a) What assignment did the Lord give to Moses? _____
_____ (Exodus 3:10)

b) What objections did Moses raise to try to get out of the job?

i) _____ (Exodus 4:1)

ii) _____ (Exodus 4:10)

c) How did God respond to each of his excuses?

i) _____

ii) _____

d) What if Moses hadn't gone? What if Moses had flat out refused? (*Thought question - answers will vary.*) _____

3. Now in Matthew 17, there actually was a situation where the disciples tried to do something and had to admit they had failed.

a) What did the disciples attempt to do? _____
_____ (vs. 15-16)

b) But why did Jesus say they were unable to do it? _____
_____ (vs. 20)

4. The same choice is before us today. God has an assignment for each of us, something we were uniquely created to do. Are we making excuses so we don't have obey? Are we making excuses so we don't have to do what we know God wants us to do or to go where He wants us to go? Are we making excuses for why we will not trust Him for success in the assignment?

You may say “I can’t”, but God says you can. Check out the following verses for God’s answer to many of our excuses.

a) You say, “It’s impossible.” God says, _____
_____ (Luke 18:27)

b) You say, “I’m too tired.” God says, _____
_____ (Matthew 11:28-30)

c) You say, “I can’t go on.” God says, _____
_____ (2 Corinthians 12:9)

d) You say, “I can’t figure things out.” God says, _____
_____ (Proverbs 3:5-6)

e) You say, “I can’t do it.” God says, _____
_____ (Philippians 4:13)

f) You say, “I’m not able.” God says, _____
_____ (Corinthians 9:8)

g) You say, “I can’t because I’m not smart enough.” God says, _____
_____ (James 1:5)

5. What advice would you give a person operating under the “I Can’t” thinking error?

CHAPTER 8

“I Didn’t Do Anything Wrong.”

Everyone has a conscience. Our conscience is a God-given awareness of what is right and what is wrong. In Romans 2:14-15, Paul said that the Gentiles already knew they were sinners because of the unwritten law that was written in their hearts. For believers today, a nudge from the Holy Spirit is what tells us when we have sinned, even when no one else saw it.

Most of us experience a guilty conscience when we’ve done something wrong. It’s that nagging voice in our heads saying we should have or shouldn’t have done something. We may feel like we need to rationalize or justify our behavior, even when we haven’t been asked to ... yet. We might get defensive if anyone talks about it, but when we think back on how we acted, or what we did in the middle of the situation, we dislike ourselves. We blame ourselves before anyone else even finds out. There’s a feeling of guilt we just can’t shake.

But there are criminals who have a deadened conscience. Such a conscience just doesn’t work properly. It’s as if “spiritual scar tissue” has dulled the sense of right and wrong. 1 Timothy 4:2 described it this way. *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”*

In other words, just as the hide of an animal scarred with a branding iron becomes numb to further pain, so the heart of an individual with a seared conscience is desensitized to morality and a sense of right or wrong. The first time I commit a particular sin, my conscience bothers me. In His grace, the Holy Spirit is convicting me of that lapse. But the more I commit a particular sin, the less it bothers me and the more I can tune out God’s input. Eventually I stop feeling any remorse at all about it.

Criminals’ consciences becomes desensitized over time through repetition of their crimes. Depending on their crimes, we may refer to people with such seared consciences as psychopaths or sociopaths, when combined with other key traits. These are the most dangerous of all antisocial personality disorders, because of the way such people can completely dissociate emotionally from their actions, regardless of how terrible those actions may be. We will find examples of such people in the Bible.

1. To what did Timothy compare the conscience of a person who doesn't feel guilty any more when they sin? _____
_____ (1 Tim. 4:2)
2. This seared conscience is the ultimate result of the process Paul described in Romans 1:28. What is the process? _____

3. Following are examples of people in the Bible whose conscience bothered them because they knew they had done something wrong. Who sinned, and what had they done wrong?
 - a) _____
_____ (Genesis 42:21)
 - b) _____
_____ (Exodus 9:27)
 - c) _____
_____ (1 Samuel 24:5)
 - d) _____
_____ (Matthew 27:3-5)
 - e) _____
_____ (Luke 22:61-62)
 - f) _____
_____ (John 8:7-11)
4. Following are examples of people in the Bible with hardened hearts and seared consciences. They didn't lose any sleep at night over their sins. Who were they?
 - a) _____ (Revelation 2:20-21)

b) _____ (Exodus 1:22)

c) _____ (2 Samuel 18:15-17)

d) _____ (Daniel 5:18-20)

e) _____ (Judges 16:19-21)

f) _____ (Matthew 2:16)

g) _____ (Acts 24:24-27)

5. There are people who presume God is so kind and gracious that He would never send anyone to hell. However, what does Paul say will happen to people with hard and impenitent hearts? _____

_____ (Romans 2:4-5)

6. What counsel would you give a person operating under the “I Didn’t Do Anything Wrong” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 9

“Nothing Scares Me.”

Most felons talk tough and put on a big show of being bold and fearless. They tell themselves and others, “Nothin’ scares me, man.” They make threats or brag about violent encounters to intimidate and dominate others, but these events may never have actually happened. They block out from their minds the uneasiness that most people experience when they even think of doing something illegal. Somehow they manage to cut off those feelings of anxiety that prevent the rest of us from doing what we know is wrong.

But the truth is, criminals’ are afraid no matter what they say or how confident they act, and their fears are widespread, persistent, and intense. They are especially afraid of getting caught, injured, or being put down.

In a study of what criminals feared the most, it was found that 57% of criminals fear an armed victim even more than getting caught by the cops. If they hear a 12-gauge shotgun being racked from behind the door, they will quickly leave.

- 81% of interviewees agreed that a “smart criminal” will try to determine if a potential victim is armed.
- 74% indicated that burglars avoided occupied dwellings, because of fear of being shot. They will come in when you’re not home.
- 57% said that most criminals feared armed citizens more than the police.
- 40% of the felons said that they had been deterred from committing a particular crime, because they believed that the potential victim was armed.
- 57% of the felons who had used guns themselves said that they had encountered potential victims who were armed.
- 34% of the criminal respondents said that they had been scared off, shot at, wounded, or captured by an armed citizen.

People on the opposite side of this thinking error will respect God and his laws and turn away from evil. Proverbs 14:16 says, “*The wise fear the Lord and shun evil, but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure.*” In other words, hotheaded fools commit crimes in a confident manner, as if no harm will ever come to them. And they gather followers (gang members) who admire their fearless lifestyle and apparent lack of accountability to anyone. We need to counsel such if they don’t fear man, they should certainly fear God. When we fear God, all other fears are settled.

1. Read Proverbs 14:16.
 - a) What are the two character traits of a fool pointed out in this verse?
 - i) _____
 - ii) _____
 - b) What are the two character traits of a wise man pointed out in this verse?
 - i) _____
 - ii) _____
2. According to Psalm 128:1, who will be blessed?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
3. What three pieces of advice does the Lord give us in Proverbs 3:7?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
4. Read Proverbs 9:10 and Psalm 111:10. What is the starting place of all wisdom and knowledge? _____
5. What advice did Solomon give in Ecclesiastes 12:13 that applies to every man?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
6. Solomon's definition of the fear of God in Proverbs is to hate evil. What are some corresponding actions we will demonstrate in our lives when we fear God and hate evil?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____

c) _____

7. Read Job 1:1. How is Job described in this verse? _____

8. Although Job was a godly man, his friends thought he must be guilty of some unconfessed sin. What did Zophar say would be the result if he would just confess and repent?

a) _____ (Job 11:18)

b) _____ (Job. 11:19)

Would this be good advice for a criminal who can't sleep at night because of fear or a guilty conscience? Explain your answer.

c) _____

9. According to the scriptures quoted above, instead of fearing a victim with a gun or the police, whom should a criminal fear? _____

10. Fearing God means to understand that there are consequences for disobedience. This is not because He is mean or vindictive, but it is simply because when we disobey, our disobedience ushers us out from under His covering of protection. His standard still stands today as a plumb line for all generations. Yet, although He is a just God, because of His mercy and compassion, _____

_____ (Romans 3:26-28)

11. How would you counsel a person operating under the "Nothing Scares Me" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 10

“I Can’t Help It.”

People with this thinking error will tell you they can’t help the way they act, that’s the way they’re wired. Their excuse implies you’ll just have to accept their bad behavior, forgive them anyway, and not expect them to change. Often, when living with someone who says this, others around will actually offer more excuses than the person himself (herself) does.

- “That’s just the way he is.”
- “He can’t help himself.”
- “You know he’s got a short fuse.”
- “That’s the way her mother was.”
- “He’s having problems at work.” “
- “He’s always been that way.”
- “She’s under a lot of stress,”
- “She just acts/reacts without thinking first.”
- “He doesn’t know any better.”
- “Such-and-such just happened, and she’s taking it out on you.”
- “He’s just in a bad mood.”

These are just some of the lame excuses offered to explain unacceptable behavior. In the case of an abuser, it’s the wife who typically makes the most excuses, even though, paradoxically, she will also complain more about his behavior than anyone else.

There was a 62-year old pedophile who was finally arrested and sent to prison after 25 years of raping and molesting dozens of little boys. His wife knew he was a pedophile because he had spent two years molesting her own child, covered for him, and even babysat other people’s children and left them alone with him. When he was finally caught, the wife said, “He has the mentality of a 14-year old”, followed by, “He’s very immature and thinks he’s on the same level as the children he rapes.” In other words, he couldn’t help himself.

Well, nice try. This is just more hogwash invented by self-centered people and their enablers to allow them to get away with murder, so to speak. And it puts the victim in an impossible position. How can we expect people who claim they can’t control themselves, that they can’t help it when they do things that are wrong, to be able to respect our own boundaries and limits?

1. One of the perils all people face day to day is temptation. Where do temptations to sin come from?

a) _____ (Matthew 4:3)

b) _____ (1 John 2:16)

c) _____ (James 1:14-15)

2. Is it possible these excuses are valid – that we just can't help but sin when drawn into or tempted by certain situations? It's our nature to sin, isn't it? Even when we know the consequences, we still do it. What does God say?

a) _____

_____ (1 Corinthians 10:13)

b) _____

_____ (Romans 13:14)

c) _____

_____ (Hebrews 12:1)

d) _____

_____ (Galatians 5:16)

3. Read Genesis 39. Joseph, a young man, in the prime of his life and possessing all the desires young men in the prime of their life possess, avoided the blatant invitation from Potiphar's wife in verse 7. Instead of thinking up reasons (excuses) to accept her offer, list some of the things Joseph did to help himself remain faithful to God and Potiphar in this situation.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

e) _____

f) _____

4. Our Father in his infinite mercy does not expect us to patiently listen to the excuses people give us for sinning, and continue tolerating abuse with no hope of it ever ending. What two things does He tell us to do in Luke 17:3?

a) _____

b) _____

5. What does Titus 3:10-11 say we are to do after we have warned a person two times? _____

6. Matthew 18:15-17 gives step-by-step instructions for dealing with people who sin against us, won't accept responsibility for it, don't repent, and refuse to change.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

7. According to 2 Timothy 3: 5, what should we do when we find ourselves in the company of people people who pretend to be devoted to God and who make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they live the way they want - with handy excuses ready if you challenge them on their behavior? _____

8. How would you counsel a person operating under the "I Can't Help It" thinking error?

CHAPTER 11

“I’m Above the Law.”

You may never have heard anyone say this out loud, but most lifestyle criminals believe that they are entitled to violate the laws of society and the rights of others. They believe that the laws don’t actually apply to them. And the more they get away with breaking the law, the more they do it.

Before you get on your high horse and say, “I would never do such a thing,” examine your own conscience. Have you ever under-reported your income when you submitted your taxes? Did you ever over-claim your expenses? Sometimes we feel “entitled” to do this because we don’t approve of the way the government spends our tax dollars. Or we think we already pay too much in taxes anyway. But if you’re audited, and investigators determine you willfully defrauded the government, you could be looking at 75% in penalties plus jail time.

As drivers, we’ve all subconsciously considered ourselves to be above the law at some point in time. Have you ever parked in a no parking zone or a handicap spot, because you’re “just going to be gone a minute”? When a traffic light turned yellow, did you ever punch the gas and breeze on through the “pink” light instead of slowing down to stop? Did you ever roll through a stop sign without making a complete stop, if no one was around? Have you ever gone over the speed limit because you were running late, or because everyone else was going a zillion mph over? When you were younger, did you ever get behind the wheel after a few too many drinks thinking, “I can drive myself home; I’m not really drunk”? Many of us have routinely broken traffic laws without seeing any consequences and thought, “If no one gets hurt, does it really matter?”

In other words, it’s not just criminals that operate under this thinking error. We’ve been guilty of this as well. But the fact is, no one is above the law, any law ... not a high-ranking politician, not a priest, not a police officer, not a millionaire, not a celebrity, not a lawyer, and certainly not criminals. We are all accountable for our actions.

From a Biblical perspective, submission is the proper response of the believer to those who in a position of authority over us. We are to obey man’s laws as though they are God’s laws. Submission to civil authorities facilitates the task God has given to those who govern, to punish the wicked and protect the righteous.

1. Human government was instituted by God after the Genesis flood. The key verse is Genesis 9:6 which says that the person who sheds man's blood (violent murder), by man shall his blood be shed. God could have Himself punished murderers directly, but instead He chose to delegate this responsibility to man. Human government is instituted and ordained by God, and whether saved or unsaved, all men benefit from government and all men ought to fear the government if they disobey its laws and rebel against its authority.

Read 1 Peter 2:13-15.

a) To whom is the believer to submit? _____

b) Why are we to submit to the authorities mentioned above? _____

c) Who raises up leaders? _____

d) For what purpose are do we have government authorities? _____

2. According to Ephesians 5:21, why are we to obey the law? _____

3. Read Romans 13:1-7.

a) When a man rebels against civil authorities, against whom is he also rebelling? _

b) What happens as a result of this rebellion? (vs. 2) _____

c) How do we get rid of our fear of the governmental authorities? (vs. 3) _____

d) What are the governmental authorities called in verse 4? _____

e) What therefore is the responsibility of the governmental authorities? (vs. 4) _

f) Besides fearing what the government might do to you if the police catch you doing something wrong, what is the other reason we are to submit to the government? (vs. 5) _____

g) According to verse 6, what is the purpose of taxes? _____

h) How does Paul say we should handle paying our taxes? (vs. 7) _____

4. What did Jesus say we should do regarding the tax dollars we owe the government in Luke 20:25? _____

5. What did Paul tell Titus he should do in Titus 3:1? _____

6. What does 1 John 2:4 say about a person who claims they know God but also breaks the law? _____

7. Is there anyone who is above the law? ____ Yes ____ No. Explain your answer.

8. How would you counsel a person operating under the "I'm Above the Law" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 12

“He Only Got What He Deserved.”

Offenders make moral judgments about their own behavior and often rationalize their conduct to "neutralize" what would otherwise be incapacitating feelings of guilt or shame. For example, if they cause physical harm to someone, they may make such excuses as: "He deserved it," "I only slapped her," "He had it coming," "He brought it on himself," "She was just asking for it."

This excuse may even be a maxim by which they live, to justify angry outbursts when they settle matters with their fists ... or a knife ... or a gun. Such a person may appear to be out of control, but they are often using their anger quite purposefully, to remind other people that it is dangerous to cross them. In other words, such actions may be intended to control others.

By contrast, both Christians and morally sensitive non-Christians have trouble with the word "deserve." This is why the grading system in schools today is in a shambles. There is a growing reluctance to reward good work with good grades and bad work with bad grades. Teachers and principals try to avoid saying, "Johnny deserved to fail."

Regarding salaries, there is an aversion to the idea of paying people differently according to the merit of their work. They simply can't say, "Employee A deserves more money than employee B because his work is better." They pay by seniority or job title, routinely give a cost-of-living raise about once a year, but seldom give raises based on the quality of the job being done.

We no longer have penal institutions. Instead we call them correctional institutions. This implies that we no longer punish our criminals; we re-educate them. No one wants to ask, "What does a thief deserve?" We would rather ask, "How can we reshape his thinking so that he doesn't do that again?"

Whether you live by the word "deserve," as do violent criminals or abusive spouses, or if you avoid that word altogether - the Biblical truth is, those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ, and His finished work on the cross, will never get what we "deserve." If we have ever sinned, our just fate is eternal damnation. But by grace, through faith, we have been forgiven and will enjoy eternal life in heaven.

1. Is there anyone besides Jesus who has lived a perfect life without sin? How do these verses answer that question?
 - a) Isaiah 53:6: _____
 - b) Isaiah 64:6: _____
 - c) Ecclesiastes 7:20: _____
 - d) Psalm 130:3-5: _____
 - e) 1 John 1:8-10: _____
 - f) Romans 3:22-25: _____

2. There were self-righteous people in the Bible who claimed they were leading a sinless life without transgressions. Who were they?
 - a) _____ (Luke 15:29)
 - b) _____ (Luke 18:11-12)

3. Why didn't God on one clear day in eternity simply say, "In spite of the fact that the human race in its pride and self-sufficiency has sinned against me and deserves eternal destruction, I will overlook what it deserves and bless it forever and that's that"? Why did Jesus have to be sacrificed? _____
_____ (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4)

4. Why didn't God on one clear day in eternity simply say, "Because the human race in its pride and self-sufficiency has sinned against me and deserves eternal destruction, I will punish them all with eternity in hell?" _____
_____ (John 3:16)

5. On the night before and day of His crucifixion, Jesus actually stood in trial several times before different judges. Before Jesus came to the home of Caiaphas (the official high priest), He was led to the home of Annas, who was the ex-high priest and the "power behind the throne" of the high priest. After the break of dawn, the Sanhedrin gathered again, this time in official session, and they conducted the trial described in Luke 22:66-71.
 - a) When the high priest decided that Jesus had committed blasphemy, he asked the people what they thought Jesus deserved for that. How did they answer?

- _____ (Matthew 26:66)
- b) What was Pilate's verdict? _____ (Luke 23:4)
 - c) Pilate was willing to release Jesus, but what did the Jewish leaders and the crowd insist that Jesus deserved? _____ (Luke 23:21)
 - d) It was obvious to Pilate that a riot was building. And so to please the people, he did as they asked. What did Jesus really deserve? _____
6. When we sin, do we get what we deserve? How do the following Bible verses answer this question?
- a) Psalm 103:10: _____
 - b) Romans 4:5: _____
 - c) Galatians 3:13: _____
 - d) Acts 2:21: _____
 - e) Romans 10:9: _____
7. If salvation were the only blessing we ever received from God, it would be so much more than we deserve. But after we are saved by grace through faith, we become the adopted children of God. And the Lord loves to shower His children with blessings above and beyond salvation. List a few of the blessings God has given to you beyond salvation, blessings you don't really deserve.
- a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
8. How would you counsel a person operating under the "He/she deserved it" thinking error? _____
- _____
- _____

CHAPTER 13

“No One Will Ever Know.”

Criminals are often very secretive. By keeping secrets and sustaining an air of mystery about their comings and goings, they maintain power and control over others. Many criminals believe that if they tell their secrets, if another person gets to know them intimately, they will no longer have power over them.

Others keep secrets because of a fear of rejection. For recovering addicts, it can be embarrassing and intimate to reveal struggles with substance abuse. Someone who is still actively hopped up on narcotics will keep that a secret, because they may be afraid you will turn them in. Sex offenders are the most likely to keep their past a secret, due to the heavy shame and stigma around sex crimes.

On the most basic level, criminals are secretive about their crimes of opportunity. They may see a dangling purse or an unlocked car. They aren't thinking about consequences because they don't expect to get caught. They figure they'll be in and back out before you know what happened. You'll never find out it was them.

Secrecy is a big part of gangs. They get very upset if outsiders somehow get inside information about the way they operate. They like the sense of belonging, the sense of community, the idea that others don't see things the way we do. They like the power, the connectedness, that feeling of finally fitting in and having a purpose. That is what keeps the gang going, and they don't want the secrets of their club to be exposed.

With regard to organized crime, these unlawful acts are well coordinated and planned out in advance. At this level, there is experience and practiced precautions, all the team members have an awareness of the risks, and would never divulge the actions of the others. If they did, they might be killed. Undercover agents who try to infiltrate the organization may also be killed before they can disclose what they learned.

If there's a criminal living next door, he is probably leading a double life. There will be a secretive dimension to his comings and goings. He won't want his neighbors to know what he's up to – even when he is just going about his daily business. How many times have you heard about an arrest on the news, and all the neighbors said the same thing. “We were so surprised to hear this about Mr. Smith. He was such a quiet neighbor, always polite. We never imagined he would/could do such a thing.”

1. What are some of the things a criminal is likely to keep a secret?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

2. We may be able to hide our double life and secret sins from others, but can we hide from these things God? How do each of these verses answer that question?

- a) Numbers 32:23: _____

- b) Hebrews 4:13: _____

- c) 1 Samuel 16:7: _____

- d) Luke 12:2-3: _____

3. Read Genesis 3.

- a) Who were the first persons who tried to hide their sins? _____
- b) What was their sin? _____
- c) How did God respond? _____

4. What will God one day judge?

- a) Ecclesiastes 12:14: _____

b) Romans 2:16: _____

5. No sin, not even a whispered curse or a fleeting evil thought, is hidden from the view of God. 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the _____, but the Lord looks at the _____."

6. It is the very height of foolishness to convince ourselves that we can get away with sin by covering it up. What does Proverbs 28:13 say about those who try? _____

7. All sin is an assault against our holy God, whether it is done in public or in secret. And God, Who sees even the innermost secrets of the heart, views our sin clearly, no matter how well we think we have covered it. Don't let unconfessed, secret sins come between you and God. In 1 John 1:9, what wonderful promise is given to believers? _____

8. Your secret life is the true ultimate test of your character. What you do when no one else is looking is the best measure of your integrity. Do you want to know who you really are? Take a hard look at your private life, especially your innermost secret thoughts. Proverbs 23:7 says, _____

9. How would you counsel a person operating under the "No One Will Ever Know" thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 14

“I Won’t.”

A person who refuses to obey the law, likes to challenge authority and flout regulations, and frequently crosses the line of acceptable behavior may enjoy watching the frustration grow within others. Such a person will often get very quiet, and decline to explain their position or reason for refusing to do what is lawful or expected. It generates within themselves a feeling of silent power over others.

Disrespect for the law and refusal to obey has become common in America, and started at the top. The Obama administration announced it will no longer enforce immigration laws. Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, has suspended deportation proceedings and is granting amnesty to those who appear to fit the criteria of the Dream Act – a bill that was defeated with the overwhelming support of Congress. By this, our leaders have declared to the country that our laws will not be executed faithfully.

What sort of message does this convey to our citizens, especially our youth, regarding the inviolability of the rule of law? With our leadership flouting the law, how can we expect the man on the street to have respect for those who enforce the law?

Disrespect for and refusal to obey law enforcement officers has become so common that there is a new term used to label it ... "contempt of cop." The phrase is a play on the words "contempt of court", and refers to people who challenge authority and refuse to obey police officers. The "Black Lives Matter" movement developed as a protest against the actions police have taken when a black person was killed who appeared to be threatening the life of another. Cops are being killed as a result, and in response there is now a movement called "Blue Lives Matter."

The spirit of anarchy is permeating all nations, not just America. We are living in an epidemic of crime, with so many refusing to obey their country's laws. Too many are like a rebellious Rubik's Cube – no matter which way you try to turn them, you can never get them going in the right direction, doing the right thing.

Thousands are living in transgression of God's laws as well as their government's laws. And this isn't just a legal issue - it's also a spiritual issue. The absolute holiness of God demands a standard of holiness and obedience from those who worship Him. He has expressly commanded this of His people: "*Ye shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy*" (Leviticus 19:2; 20:26).

1. God is holy. In order to please Him, nothing less than holiness will do. God commanded Israel, through Moses, to obey His commands completely and worship Him exclusively. As you have read through the Old Testament, did you find that the Israelites were obedient? Did they worship Him exclusively? _____ (Judges 2:10-13)
You would think, after all God had done for them, the Israelites would eager to obey Him. But what did they do? _____

2. What did Samuel learn about the importance of obedience? _____
_____ (1 Samuel 15:22)
3. The best sacrificial offering we could bring to God is
 - a) _____ (Psalm 51:17)
 - b) _____ (Psalm 51:17), and
 - c) _____ (Romans 12:1)
4. If it were possible to be perfectly obedient to God's laws today, would our obedience gain our entrance into heaven? How do these verses answer that question?
 - a) Galatians 2:16: _____
 - b) Philippians 3:9: _____
 - c) Romans 10:3: _____
 - d) Ephesians 2:8-9: _____
5. If salvation isn't our reward for obedience, why bother to obey God's or man's laws? When the Apostle Paul was saved, God rewired his heart so that he felt compelled to obey. What was his motivation? _____
_____ (2 Corinthians 5:14)

6. What makes it possible for us to turn from a life of disobedience and become obedient to God? _____

_____ (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 14:15)

7. The right way to live, to experience the abundant life that Jesus talked about, is to:

a) Psalm 119:1-4: _____

b) John 15:10-11: _____

c) Matthew 6:33: _____

8. How would you counsel a person operating under the “I Won’t” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 15

“I Don’t Get Mad. I Get Even.”

This thinking error actually doesn’t make sense, because the only reason a person would decide to get even is if they got mad. But with this mentality, people focus on their anger instead of finding a solution for the problem that set them off. They try to avenge themselves by retaliating in kind, to the same degree as what happened to them. In other words, they find something they can do to the other person that will anger or hurt that person just as much as they have been angered or hurt. If they decide to extract retribution in a violent manner, when they destroy property or harm the other person, they will keep that person focused on their anger too, instead of the real issue.

People who are more vengeful tend to be motivated by power, by authority and by the desire for status. They will say “I don’t get mad; I get even,” to intimidate others. It’s an enforcement technique employed to guarantee cooperation. The intimidator always “wears the pants” in the relationship. Intimidation through any kind of threat is to teach others that they don’t matter and their needs don’t matter. The intimidator lays down the law and expects you do whatever they want. If you don’t, you should expect to suffer the consequences.

The threat of revenge may also serve as a form of self-protection, to make sure others don’t get to them first. But the fact is, people who try to control others through vengeful acts are usually out of control themselves. Back and forth retribution, attack and counterattack, getting trapped in a circle of retaliation can destroy the lives of all involved, both from a personal and a legal standpoint.

If you ask someone why they are seeking revenge, they’re likely to tell you their goal is catharsis. But instead of giving satisfaction and closure to the person(s) who “got even”, revenge actually keeps the wound open and fresh.

Getting even isn’t a legal or moral issue as much as it is a spiritual issue. The uniqueness of Christianity should stand out in the way we treat our enemies. But sad to say, even in the church, the vigilante spirit is still alive and well. Christians sometimes attempt to sanctify their anger and urge to get even by calling it righteous indignation, and we have all been tempted to retaliate against those who mistreat us. Paul’s teaching about this in Romans 12:17-21 is not popular, because it runs contrary to the inclinations of our flesh.

However, remember that God's thoughts are above ours and His ways are above ours. It is only by His strength that we can live as He requires. With God's mind-set, instead of seeking revenge, we will do good to our enemies, looking for the most practical ways we can help them.

1. What does the Lord say about using revenge to settle a matter?

- a) _____ (Romans 12:19)
- b) _____ (Matthew 5:38-39)
- c) _____ (Ephesians 4:26-27)
- d) _____ (Leviticus 19:18)
- e) _____ (Ezekiel 25:17)
- f) _____ (Hebrews 10:30)
- g) _____ (1 Peter 3:9)
- h) _____ (Proverbs 24:29)
- i) _____ (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

2. What does Luke 6:27-28 tell us to do when people have hurt us?

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

3. Luke 6:35 goes even further, and says _____

4. Instead of getting even, what should we be doing? _____
_____ (Mark 11:25)

5. What will be the result if we show mercy to someone who has hurt us? _____
_____ (Matthew 5:7)

6. Many people have ruined their health and their lives by hanging on to the poison of bitterness, resentment and unforgiveness, and plotting revenge. Read these scriptures, and tell who in the Bible gave us great examples of forgiving their enemies, and what had been done to them?

a) Genesis 33: _____ forgave _____ for _____

b) Genesis 50: _____ forgave _____ for _____

c) Luke 15: _____ forgave _____ for _____

d) Luke 23:34: _____ forgave _____ for _____

e) Acts 7:59-60: _____ forgave _____ for _____

7. If there is revenge on our minds and unforgiveness in our hearts when we start to pray, what should we do first?

a) _____ (Matt. 6:14-15, Mark 11:25-26)

b) _____ (Matthew 5:23-24)

8. How would you counsel a person operating under the “I don’t get mad. I get even” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 16

“Man ... This Is a Drag.”

Criminals are not interested in doing responsible tasks that don't offer immediate excitement. They find going to work, going to school, going to church a drag. The entire concept of being responsible is mind-numbing to them. If they do become interested in a worthwhile project, their interest is short-lived - unless there is a chance they'll gain recognition from others by completing it. Most of the time, you'll hear them say things like ... "It's dullsville around here. Color me gone!" Or ... "Man! This job is a drag. I'd rather lay back and just sell some dope." Or ... "These classes are too much work and totally boring. I'm dropping out." Because they can't focus on and stay connected with a task for any length of time and thus can't hold down a job, they may turn to crime to meet their financial needs.

Over the past number of years, I honestly cannot count the number of times that I have seen someone begging for money. There he is, standing with a sign on the side of a busy intersection in big cities as well as small towns. And people saying they only need some change have approached me in shopping mall parking lots. I don't know if it is just me or if you feel this way, but I am leery of tossing money in the hands of strangers. I always wonder if they can stand on the corner and beg, why can't they spend the same number of hours on a job. Everywhere I go, there are "Help Wanted" signs.

Now we all have friends who are disabled, and would trade their disabilities in a heartbeat for the opportunity to go to work and make a living for their families. That's not who this is about. And there are some who are legitimately down and out, who have "fallen on hard times," who have lost their jobs through downsizing or some other unexpected disaster. It's up to us in the body of Christ to help people through such tough times.

This lesson is about people who find going to work a drag, and so turn instead to crime or begging. Not being willing to accept responsibility and work for a living has as much to do with our spiritual condition as it does our secular mindset. As we read the scriptures for this lesson, we will see God is quite adamant that each of us has a responsibility to do our best to hold down a job, and provide for our family and ourselves to the best of our ability.

1. First, let's see what God says about people who won't work.

a) 2 Thessalonians 3:10: _____

b) Proverbs 21:25: _____

c) Proverbs 18:9: _____

d) Proverbs 10:4: _____

e) Proverbs 14:23: _____

2. Instead God says we are to give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. Paraphrase these verses in your own words.

a) Ecclesiastes 9:10: _____

b) 1 Thessalonians 4:11: _____

c) Ephesians 4:28: _____

d) 1 Corinthians 15:58: _____

3. What are some other dangers of not working?

a) 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12: _____

b) 1 Timothy 5:8-9: _____

4. What is to be our attitude when working?

a) 1 Corinthians 10:31: _____

b) Colossians 3:23-24: _____

5. How would you counsel a person operating under the “Man...this is a drag.” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 17

“That's None of Your Business.”

Criminals with this thinking error are good at pointing out others' problems, giving feedback on the faults of others, but want you to mind your own business when it comes to your offering advice on their own issues. When everyone else is talking about personal subjects, they will typically hang back and not contribute, change the subject, give vague or evasive answers, or decide this is a good time to get up and leave.

They're usually a little on edge in a group, because they don't know when the attention might turn to them, and uncomfortable questions arise. They become touchy and defensive when people try to ask about their lives. They even clam up when asked for details about themselves that most people would share freely with anyone – like what kind of movies they like, or what they did or where they were last week. This tendency to keep things close to the chest may have started in childhood, when they got proficient at covering up family problems such as an alcoholic father or physical abuse, and it just became second nature by adulthood.

Such a person also lies by omission; they don't give you the full story. For example, they might defend themselves by saying, “I didn't lie. I said I wasn't at work on Friday. I just didn't tell you I was fired for being late again.” Or you might hear, “That's stupid. You don't know what you're talking about.” But they decline to give you the rest of the information you need to make an informed judgment about a situation.

Such people are usually also emotionally closed off, and don't allow themselves to be affected by your needs or desires. In fact, they may be downright cold and unfeeling. They can be emotionally abusive, manipulative, controlling, and passive-aggressive.

Erecting a protective shell about themselves, and keeping their personal plans private, are elements of the secretive nature of a criminal. If you simply accept it as an integral part of their personality, it gives them the freedom to do as they wish without argument.

One spiritual issue with this character trait is that they may also have closed themselves off from God and the saving grace of Jesus Christ. They are unable to allow themselves to be transparent with God about their sins, or draw close to Him. They have never experienced “the peace that passes all understanding.” Scripture doesn't comfort them, and your prayers bore them. But they know something is missing.

1. If believe the older brother of the prodigal son was somewhat like this. He wasn't a criminal – he stayed home and did everything his father asked. But I find it strange that he was all by himself during the first part of the story. Read Luke 15.

a) What was the older son doing when his younger brother returned home? _____

b) What did he hear when he came home at the end of the day, tired and dusty? ____

Did you ever wonder why no one had run out to the field to give the owner's son the exciting news about his younger brother and the party? Perhaps he had distanced himself from other people, rebuffed their efforts to be friendly, and they had learned it was best to just leave him alone unless absolutely necessary.

c) Why did his father come out to speak to him in verse 25? _____

d) Do the scriptures let us know if the older son attended the party? _____

e) It's easy to see ourselves as the prodigal son, but have you ever compared yourself to the older brother? It's all a matter of focus. The father's focus was on his prodigal son, and the younger son's focus was on his father. On what was

the older son's focus fixed? _____

f) On what is the closed-off person's mind fixed? _____

g) To correct this thinking error, on what should the closed-off, "mind your own business" type of person focus? _____

2. David knew how it was to feel distant from God and others. He probably would have related to the older brother. Share some of what he was feeling in these verses.

a) Psalm 13:1

i) _____

ii) _____

b) Psalm 22:1

i) _____

ii) _____

3. Jesus experienced this when He said, “_____

_____ (Matthew 27:46)

4. Even those of us are not the “closed off” personality type may feel periods of spiritual loneliness as Jesus did. But as we learn to draw closer to God, we will find ourselves able to draw closer to others as well. Every relationship takes time to develop. You have to spend time with someone before you can take that relationship deeper and feel free to open up with him/her. It’s no different in our relationship with the Lord.

How can we get closer to God?

a) **Meet with God first thing in the morning, and talk to Him about your plans for the day (pray).** Name some heroes in the Bible who spent time alone with God in prayer.

i) Gen. 21:33: _____
He planted a grove so that he would have a secluded place where he could pour out his heart before God.

ii) Gen. 24:63: _____

iii) Exodus 24:14-15: _____

iv) 1 Samuel 1:9-13: _____

v) Daniel 6:10: _____

vi) Mark 6:46: _____

vii) Acts 10:9: _____

b) **Get into God’s Word every day.**

i) We need nourishment from God’s Word to grow. “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by _____ (Matthew 4:4)

ii) If we draw near God in His Word, He will _____
_____ (James 4:8)

iii) The Word is our best defense against _____ (Ephesians 6:13)

iv) Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by _____ (Romans 10:17)

v) We need to be corrected when we sin. Job 6:24 says, “ _____

c) **Just mediate.** God speaks about meditation in several places throughout the Bible, encouraging us to get quiet, and just think about His Word. Our thoughts determine our behavior, and so what we think about is very important.

i) When are we to meditate? _____ (Psalm 1:2)

ii) On what are we to mediate? _____ (Joshua 1:8)

iii) What are we to be thinking about while we are meditating? (Philippians 4:8)

(1) _____ (5) _____

(2) _____ (6) _____

(3) _____ (7) _____

(4) _____ (8) _____

iv) What are some benefits of meditating on God’s Word? (Jeremiah 31:33)

(1) _____

(2) _____

5. Would might you suggest as a first step to someone who is completely closed off, operating under the “That’s None of Your Business” thinking error? _____

CHAPTER 18

“I Want It NOW!”

This thinking error related to this statement is referred to as “lack of time perspective.” A criminal often demands immediate possession of what he wants. He interprets “wants” as needs, and refuses to wait and work for them. Criminals with this thinking error will often decide to go ahead and take by stealth or force what they want, especially if they don’t have the cash on hand to buy it.

Another thinking error to which this statement relates is “materialism.” This is the tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual or moral values. The law has no impact on their thinking when they decide to go ahead and acquire something they want.

Sometimes people with the “I want it now” thinking error turn to shoplifting. They basically say to themselves, “If I can take it, I will take it.” For many, it's an irresistible urge. There's something in their brain telling them, “You want it, right? So go ahead and take it.” Shoplifting can become a genuine addiction that stems from the same issue as a gambling or drinking addiction. These people shoplift because they feel compelled to, rather than for financial or material gain.

We shouldn’t point an accusing finger at these people. Wanting what we want right now, rather than waiting for it, may have gotten some of us in trouble with our credit cards. The reality of high credit card debt for many people is that they spent money they didn’t have and don’t have a way to pay back. They max out their credit line to have what they want right now. Thinking that \$2,000 flat-screen TV only costs \$20 per month in payments is dangerous, and can quickly lead to overwhelming debt.

Debt is an unwelcome guest in the home of many Americans. The average U.S. household with debt carries \$15,310 in credit card debt and \$132,086 in total debt (auto loan, house mortgage, and credit card combined). The average number of credit cards owned by each adult American is 3.7. According to 2015 statistics, the average household is paying a total of \$6,658 in interest per year. This is 9% of the average household income (\$75,591) being spent on interest alone.

I see at least spiritual issues with this thinking error. One is failure to recognize that God is our generous Provider. We don’t have to go out and get everything ourselves. He will give it to us when the time is right. Which brings us to the second spiritual issue ... failure to wait on God. Let’s examine both in the Word.

1. Read Genesis 22.

a) What instructions did God give Abraham to test his obedience? _____

b) After a three-day journey, Abraham took his son to the top of a mountain to carry out this act of obedience. What was the name of the mountain? _____

c) When Isaac asked where the sacrifice was, how did Abraham answer? _____

d) Abraham was completely willing to plunge the knife into Isaac, because of his faith. But when Abraham displayed his obedient heart towards God, what did God do? _____

e) What did Abraham call the name of that place from then on? _____

I might have named the place “Agony Hill,” or “Obedience Testing Ground.” But Abraham named it in honor of what God has done for him. The translation of his name is “The Lord will provide; in this mount, it shall be provided.”

2. What are some of the ways God provides mentioned in Psalm 65:9-13.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

3. In Matthew 6:26, Jesus told the people to look at how birds are provided for by God.

If He takes care of even the birds, we should expect that _____

Note: Birds don't just sit around with their beaks wide open. They actually work!

4. In Luke 9:11-17, we see that Jesus doesn't just care about our spiritual needs. He also has a real concern for our physical and material needs as well.

a) How many loaves and fishes did the disciples have to feed the 5000? _____

This account of Jesus feeding the five thousand may be the best known of Jesus' miracles. It is the only miracle recounted in all four of the Gospels.

b) How many basketfuls did the disciples gather after the crowd was fed? _____

Each disciple could feel the weight of his own basket of bread as he carried it back to Jesus and they would never forget the abundance of that day.

c) Why did Jesus use the boy's lunch to feed the people? Why didn't he create their lunch from nothing? (*Thought question – answers will vary.*) _____

5. To wait on the Lord is to trust Him completely with our lives. It means looking to Him as the way, the truth, and the life. He is our source.

a) Waiting is not a virtue at which most of us excel. What is promised to those who wait upon the Lord? (Isaiah 40:31)

i) _____

ii) _____

iii) _____

iv) _____

b) David knew personally the need to wait upon the Lord. What character trait did he instruct us to exhibit as we wait? (Psalm 27:14b) _____

c) What will the Lord do when we courageously wait on Him? (Psalm 27:14c) _____

6. The advice to wait on the Lord is a recurring theme in the book of Psalms. What are some of the benefits of waiting on the Lord, instead of charging ahead and taking care of things ourselves?

a) Psalm 25:3a: _____

b) Psalm 25:21: _____

c) Psalm 27:14, 31:24: _____

d) Psalm 33:20: _____

e) Psalm 37:9, 34: _____

f) Psalm 39:7: _____

g) Psalm 40:1: _____

h) Psalm 62:1: _____

i) Psalm 104:27: _____

j) Psalm 106:13: _____

7. What Biblical advice would you give to someone who wants everything RIGHT NOW? _____

CHAPTER 19

“I’ll Git’er Done Tomorrow.”

Another example of this same thinking error, the lack of time perspective, involves the tendency to say, “Why worry about that now? I’ve got plenty of time.” Children demonstrate this thinking error when it comes to weekends and doing their homework. They want to wait until the last minute on Sunday night to get it done. As adults, we might put off paying bills, until they’re delinquent. We wait to get caught up until the debt collectors have handed over our bills to collection agents and the pressure to pay has increased.

We see this in criminals when they dilly-dally around, and come up with one excuse after another, to put off doing responsible things – like get a real job. Procrastination is actually fear cloaked in nonchalance. They know that if they never start a job, they’ll never have a chance to fail and get fired from the job. But if they don’t go for the job, they’ll never have a chance to succeed, either.

You will also see this in ex-offenders lives when they keep putting off meeting with their probation or parole agent, because it could be unpleasant ... or it takes time out of their day ... or they don’t have the money. It is usually a condition of probation or parole that an ex-offender pays for the cost of supervision, or at least a portion of what it costs to supervise a probationer or parolee. My granddaughter ran from the law one time because she didn’t have the \$50 to pay her parole officer. Finally, an ex-offender will show up at their meeting because it has become a priority; not showing up could mean the loss of their freedom with no more opportunities for parole.

Procrastinators’ problems run deep. The more they ignore their responsibilities and keep putting things off to tomorrow, the more they spend their time in a state of urgency, and even panic, trying to address the things that have gotten out of control in their lives. It takes something more than “being more self-disciplined” or “changing bad habits” for the procrastinator to change his/her ways. It takes God.

This thinking error points to an issue of time management beyond how we use our time every day. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” Paul isn’t just telling us to make the most of every moment in every day, although that is certainly good advice. He is telling us to make the most of the time we have left on earth, because time is running out and we need to share the good news of the Gospel with everyone we can.

1. The older we get, the more we think about using our time wisely in light of eternity. We try to evaluate what really matters. Moses must have been feeling this when he prayed the words recorded in Psalm 90.

a) How did Moses spend his first 40 years? _____
_____ (Exodus 2:1-15)

b) How did Moses spend his next 40 years? _____
_____ (Exodus 2:11 – 7:7)

c) How did Moses spend the final 40 years of his life? _____
_____ (Exodus 7:8-13 to Deut. 34:12)

2. Ephesians 5:15-16 tells us how to walk wisely, so that we make good use of the precious years that God allots to us count for His purpose and glory. Jesus lived to accomplish the Father’s purpose and knew that He had done so as His short life neared the end (John 17:4). What are some of the things He accomplished during His 3 short years of ministry? (*Thought questions – answers will vary.*)

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

3. The apostle Paul was also a man of godly purpose. He lived to exalt Christ and to know Him. At the end of his life, as he faced execution, Paul knew that he had ... (2 Timothy 4:7)

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

4. What did Paul know would be his reward, for making every moment count in serving His Lord and Savior? _____

5. Read Ephesians 5:16 again, and then read Colossians 4:5.

a) What phrase is the same in both verses? _____

b) The Greek word for “time” in these verses is *kairos*. That isn’t referring to time as in, “What time is it?” It speaks of a point in time that is eventually going to slip away. For example, it could be used in the phrase “harvest time.” *Kairos* is the time when you’d better get moving. Those crops aren’t going to harvest themselves. It is the appointed time, the proper time, the slice of time where you have an opportunity – but that *kairos* is going to eventually slip away.

Why did Paul say we are to make the most of every minute? _____

6. To redeem the time, we must know what God wants us to be and what He wants us to do. What are some ways we can use our time for His glory? (*Thought questions – answers will vary.*)

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

7. How would you counsel a person who thinks they have all the time in the world, who has problems with time management, who wastes time, and always promises to

“git’er done tomorrow? _____

CHAPTER 20

“I Won’t Get Caught.”

Criminals strategize every move while planning crimes. They envision what will happen from the moment they dream up their escapade until after they make their getaway. They know the occupational hazards of the crime include the possibilities of getting caught, convicted, wounded, or even killed.

By the time a criminal is prepared to carry out his crime, he is certain he will succeed and he has completely eliminated these possibilities of failure from his mind. He is operating under the thinking error known as “superoptimism,” and regards the crime as not only completed, but completely wrapped up as an unqualified success.

The criminal with the “superoptimism” thinking error believes that if he decides he wants to do something, he can consider it as good as done. As he plans his next illegal offense, he lives in a state of absolute certainty that he won’t get caught, no matter how ridiculous his plan. He doesn’t entertain reasonable doubts about anything he wants done.

His experience supports this certainty. He knows the likelihood of being arrested is low. He previously has gotten away with crimes without anyone suspecting him as the perpetrator. Although he is aware of the possibility that he could slip up, that things can go wrong, he is absolutely certain that it won’t happen “this time.”

Inmates have come to understand that superoptimism is the thinking error that kills criminals more than anything else. As an offender gets away with more and more crimes, he becomes more and more emboldened and develops a sense of invulnerability. He will begin to take greater and greater chances. In some cases, drug usage has contributed to this recklessness. Sometimes criminals who got away with complicated crimes in the past become overconfident and let down their guard, getting caught while committing a relatively minor offense.

If he plans to “one day” become a responsible person, he feels confident he will succeed at that too. He uses super optimism to convince himself that he doesn’t really have to work at things to make them turn out all right ... he believes things will just fall in place for him without effort. He doesn’t see the connection between work and success ... whether relating to a job, a relationship with someone he cares about, or staying out of prison upon release.

1. Criminals operate under the thinking error that they won't get caught. But in the Old Testament, God knew people would get caught and decreed the punishment for each crime in advance. What was the penalty for stealing in these verses?
 - a) Proverbs 6:31: _____
 - b) Exodus 22:1: _____
2. What was the penalty when someone was caught murdering another?
 - a) Genesis 9:6: _____
 - b) Exodus 21:12: _____
3. What was required before the sentence for murder could be carried out? _____
_____ (Numbers 35:30)
4. What was the penalty when someone was caught in a sexual sin?
 - a) Leviticus 20:13: _____
 - b) Deuteronomy 22:20-21: _____
 - c) John 8:4-5: _____
5. Is it possible to "get away with murder" here on earth? _____
6. We may be able to hide our sins (crimes) from man. But what do the following verses say about the possibility of hiding our sins from God?
 - a) Genesis 3:8-10: _____
 - b) Jeremiah 16:17: _____
 - c) Jeremiah 23:24: _____
 - d) Psalm 69:5: _____
 - e) Hebrews 4:13: _____
7. A 20-year study found that 30% of the population will steal, not only if the opportunity arises, but also will create the opportunity whenever possible. The study found 40% will steal if there's little danger of getting caught. Only 30% won't steal at all, according to the study. What was a typical reason given for stealing when caught?

- a) ____ It's a small item that won't be missed.
 - b) ____ The company or government agency can afford it
 - c) ____ Everyone else takes little things.
 - d) ____ All of the above
8. As believers, how should we respond when someone is caught in a sin?
- a) Galatians 6:1: _____
 - b) Matthew 18:15: _____
 - c) 2 Corinthians 2:7: _____
 - d) 2 Timothy 2:25: _____
9. How would you counsel someone operating under the "I Won't Get Caught" thinking error? _____
- _____
- _____

CHAPTER 21

“I’m Basically a Good Person.”

Most offenders see themselves as good human beings. No matter how long their list of crimes, no matter what suffering they have caused others, they will almost always claim that they are really good people. The criminal who operates under this thinking error will say things like, "In spite of my six arrests, I am basically a good person. I don't commit crimes all the time." "There's nothing wrong with me. All I did was sell a little dope." "I'm not a bad mother/father. My kids have never lived on the streets."

Some list their daily activities as evidence. They go to school or work most of the time, and take their family to church on Sundays. Others say they are good because they provide very well for their family. Some believe that, if God has blessed them with a special talent such as a musical ability, they must be basically good. Others figure that if they haven't hurt someone in the commission of their crimes, if they can pull off a robbery without pulling the trigger, they are "good people". A few believe that their violent acts were justified, that they did society a good service when they "offed" someone, and we should be thanking them instead of arresting them. Normally, criminals don't look in the mirror and see themselves as the villains that they really are.

And it's not just criminals who operate under this thinking error. There is a common perception that as long as a person leads a generally good life, they will get into heaven. You probably know people who say they are entitled to heaven because they read their Bible, go to church on Sundays, and live a moral life. And it's true - they haven't murdered or robbed anyone at gunpoint, they will give to charities now and then, and treat other people with respect. They honestly believe that hell is only for those few folks who have committed particularly evil acts.

This is as much a thinking error for you and I as it is for the criminal. Biblically speaking, when lined up against the plumb line of God's standards, no one is "good." To one degree or another, we all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This does not mean that we are always actively engaged in committing crimes or have ever participated in a depraved act. But it does mean that in our very nature we are "fallen," in rebellion against God and incapable of saving ourselves.

1. How good is good enough to go to heaven? The Bible says God is good, and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) are His plumb line for measuring our personal goodness. Is there anyone who has perfectly kept all the commandments?

_____ Yes. _____ No.

Explain your answer. _____
_____ (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23)

2. If we trust in our own goodness to enter heaven, we are saying to God, "I should enter Heaven because I have earned my way in." Is it possible to be good enough or to do enough good works to earn our way into heaven? _____ Yes. _____ No.

Explain your answer. _____
_____ (Ephesians 2:8-9)

3. In Philippians 3:9, Paul said that because he was in Him, he (Paul) could renounce his own _____, and live by the righteousness which is through _____, which is of God by _____.

4. Romans 11:6 explains this concept further. Grace and works don't go together. If our salvation is of grace, it cannot be of _____, and if it is of works, it cannot be of _____. Salvation must be by virtue of one or the other.

5. In Galatians 2:16, the word "justified" used by Paul is a legal term, well understood by the Jews of that time. The person who was 'justified' was the one who received the verdict in a court of law. Used in a religious sense it means the getting of a favorable verdict before God on judgment day. What is the ONLY way we can be justified? _____

6. The most important question we can ever ask in our lives is, "What must I do to be saved?" What is the answer?

a) First _____ (1 John 1:9)

b) Then _____ (Acts 3:19)

c) Finally _____ (Acts 16:31)

7. How would you counsel a person, offender or not, who says, "I'm basically a good person"? _____

CHAPTER 22

“He Did It.”

Cheaters always accuse others of cheating. Liars always accuse others of lying. Insecure people always try to make you feel insecure. And criminals like to accuse others of the very things they have done themselves. Their purpose in doing this is to deflect attention away from themselves and grab control over the situation.

Such a person has the bizarre ability to be able to make you feel guilty, to put you in the position where you feel the need to defend yourself for something you hadn't even thought of doing ... when he/she knows very well he is the person who did it. He knows that while you are so busy standing up for yourself and trying to prove your own innocence, you will forget the real issue – the fact that the person pointing the finger at you should actually be pointing the finger at him or herself.

Being accused of a crime can have as much impact as a physical blow to the body, especially when the accusation is false. But it's all a game to the criminal mind. While sticking up for yourself, you will probably end up ...

- feeling confused,
- feeling violated,
- feeling misunderstood,
- feeling unheard,
- feeling guilty,
- and feeling isolated.

If you catch such people in their lies, they neither win nor have control. So they don't play fair. They do anything they can to come out victorious, by leaving everyone confused about who is the true guilty party, and thereby maintaining control. While you are feeling blindsided by the accusation, they are feeling smug and satisfied – seeing the drama they created that messed with your head, leaving you totally stressed out and frustrated.

Occasionally people aren't aware they're doing this. They may be unaware of the manipulative games they are playing, because liars will lie to themselves first before lying to others. When they lie to themselves long enough, the lie becomes the truth in their own minds.

1. There is a great power in the tongue and people have been falsely accusing others throughout the ages.

a) How will the righteous be delivered from false accusations? _____

_____ (Proverbs 11:9)

b) In Isaiah 54:17, the Lord spoke to Israel and told her not to be concerned about the lies being told about her because ...

i) _____ and

ii) _____

c) When we are persecuted, insulted, and lied about for the sake of Jesus, we will be ... _____ (Matthew 5:11)

d) When we are lied about and abused verbally, what should we do? _____

_____ (1 Peter 3:9)

e) Will it help the situation if we go around spreading lies about the person who has falsely accused us? _____ Yes _____ No. Explain your answer. _____

_____ (Romans 12:19; Luke 6:27)

2. Our primary spiritual enemy and accuser is Satan.

a) What trait is at the root of his character? _____ (John 8:44)

b) What is the first lie Satan told that we know about? _____

c) How does he disguise himself so he can more easily deceive people? _____

_____ (2 Corinthians 11:14)

d) What does Satan spend his time doing?

i) _____ (1 Peter 5:8)

- ii) _____ (Revelations 12:10)
 - e) Who are some others that we have on record as being falsely accused by Satan?
 - i) _____ (Zechariah 3:1-2)
 - ii) _____ (Job 2:1-6)
 - f) How can we defend ourselves against the schemes, lies, and accusations of Satan? _____ (Ephesians 6:11)
 - g) Satan works on earth to turn God's children against God and in heaven to turn God against His children. But, he doesn't stand a chance of succeeding because _____ (Romans 8:31)
3. How would you counsel a person who, when backed into a corner, tends to point the finger at others, and accuse them of the very thing he/she has done? _____
- _____
- _____

CHAPTER 23

“I Didn’t Mean To.”

You have probably heard it said, "That was an accident. I didn't mean to do it." This is a defense that felons might actually believe themselves. For example, if someone was injured or killed in the commission of their crime, they may offer that excuse, but weren't they aware something like that could happen beforehand? You may also hear ...

- I didn't do it on purpose.
- I wasn't trying to ...
- It was a mistake.
- Oops! That wasn't supposed to happen.
- I only meant to ...
- I didn't know that would upset you.
- It just slipped out.
- That's not what I meant.
- I didn't plan it that way.

But how is that possible? If we didn't mean what we said, or didn't mean what we did, why did we do it? And then why make up such a ridiculous excuse? I believe that excuse is offered because it turns the table on the accuser. Now you look like the bad guy if you don't say, "Oh, that's all right. I understand." It's actually another way to grab a position of power in a potentially explosive situation.

Criminals aren't the only ones who fall back on this excuse. Let's say that a man made an extramarital sexual connection on his business trip. If his spouse finds out, the first thing you might hear him say is: "Oh honey, it didn't mean anything. It was just sex." That excuse is supposed to take all of the bite out of his spouse's righteous anger, and get her to calm down. Or, imagine he got drunk and said some abusive things to her. Later he apologized saying, "I was just drunk, baby. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." Or, he got really angry, blew his stack and later said, "I was just mad, sweetheart. I didn't mean any of it." Such a lame excuse actually makes it worse.

Bottom line? We say what we mean, mean what we say, and we intended to do what we did. We might try to imply certain actions or words were unintentional, but the Bible says they are always intentional. Proverbs 23:7 says, "*As a man is in his heart, so is he.*" Whether in town or out, whether sober or drunk, whether angry or not - what is really in our hearts is what will show up in our words and actions.

1. Will making excuses for our sins ever work with God? Proverbs 21:2 says that we may deceive ourselves with our excuses, to justify remaining in sin and committing more sins. But God looks beyond the excuses and sees the very root of our sins,

our _____.

2. What could help you determine if the excuse given is the truth or a lie? _____

_____ (Luke 6:43-48)

3. Read Luke 14:16-20. Just like today, to not attend a banquet when one had previously accepted was a grave breach of social etiquette and an insult to the host. The host had planned the banquet based on the number of guests invited. Once the RSVPs were in, and the host had determined how many guests would be there, he had known exactly how many animals should be killed and cooked.

a) What were the excuses people gave for not attending the banquet?

i) _____

ii) _____

iii) _____

b) Likewise, people offer excuses today for not accepting Jesus' invitation to be saved. If Christianity is so true and so good, why don't more embrace it? Why

give excuses instead of accepting Jesus' invitation? (*Thought question*) _____

4. Sometimes when we do something wrong, we claim ignorance. We might say, "But officer, I didn't see that stop sign!" Another common line of defense points to our intentions: "But I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." In fact, the lack of intention excuse is usually combined with a profession of ignorance. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I didn't know you'd be upset if I did that."

Leviticus 4 takes into account the likelihood that people will do things that are wrong without knowing it or without meaning to do wrong.

a) What if the priest sins unintentionally through ignorance? _____

_____ (vs. 2-3)

- b) What if the entire congregation sins unintentionally? _____
_____ (vs. 13-14)
- c) In the verses above, we see that even inadvertent, unwitting sin defiles us. What if we continue sinning after we have learned the truth? _____
_____ (Hebrews 10:26)
5. What about God? Does He ever look down from heaven and say, "Oops! I didn't mean for that to happen"?
- a) Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God has plans for us. Describe His plans. _____

- b) But not everything that happens is God's will or plan for our life. For example, it is not God's will that _____ (2 Peter 3:9), but some have in the past and certainly more will in the future.
- c) Why do bad things happen to good people?
- i) First of all, we need to be clear - there are no "good" people. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that all of us are tainted by and infected with _____. (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8; Romans 3:10-18). Not only that, we also have a free will and this will cause problems, not only for ourselves but also for those around us.
- ii) After we become believers, we may bring fewer problems down on ourselves, but Jesus clearly warned us, _____
_____ (John 16:33)
- iii) But for those who love God, _____
_____ (Romans 8:28)
- d) The whole story of Ruth, from her husband and father-in-law dying and her staying with her mother-in-law Naomi, seemed to be an account of one disaster after another - until she went to the field and met and married Boaz.

How did all this work together for good in God's plans? _____
_____ (Matthew 1:5-6)

e) Consider this account in Acts 28. First, Paul was on a ship for Rome that sank in a storm off Malta. Next Paul got bitten by a viper. Then, the father of the ruler of the island got sick while they were there and Paul was able to heal him. How did all this work together for good? _____

6. How would you counsel the person who habitually falls back on the excuse, "I didn't mean to"? _____

CHAPTER 24

“I Was Desperate.”

It's a common belief that if you do the crime, you should do the time. And why not? If you have made the decision to commit a crime — no matter what that crime is — then you should be punished for the pain, suffering, and financial loss you have caused victims and their families. But there is a disproportionate number of crimes being committed today by single mothers recently. These women are resorting to crime just to provide basic needs for their family, and crimes of this type are now being referred to as "crimes of desperation."

As the slumping economy has taken its toll on people's lives, police departments all across the country are reporting a jump in crimes of desperation including robberies, burglaries, car thefts and shoplifting. They're seeing homeless transients who are sleeping on park benches, hungry, and cold trying to get arrested - simply as a way to come in out of the cold and get a few free meals. They're seeing an increase in "white collar" crime by people with relatively easy access to enormous amounts of money, who feel compelled to embezzle funds to clear up a pressing financial obligation.

Another common scenario is the drug addict who is in desperate need of money for his next fix. He decides the quickest way to get money is to hold up a convenience store. As he's demanding cash from the check-out clerk, a customer confronts him and, feeling threatened, he shoots the customer impulsively.

We've all seen TV shows where a compulsive gambler owes a large amount of money to some organized crime organization. He's been warned that he better pay off the ever-growing loan or get his knees broken. So he kills his wife or burns down his own house for the insurance money.

These are sobering times that we live in today. Many people have lost their jobs and can't find another one. Others are underemployed and are just barely making it. The unemployment rate is soaring, the stock market is highly volatile, and famine is spreading worldwide. People who commit crimes of desperation are in crisis mode. They feel they have run out of options. They commit crimes to resolve what seems to be an unresolvable predicament.

The spiritual issue with committing a crime in a desperate situation is that we are taking matters into our own hands, instead of trusting God to bring us through.

1. What can we do when our backs are against the wall and there is nowhere to turn?
 - a) God's desire is that we _____. (Psalm 50:15)
 - b) Because He loves us, when we call on God He will _____
_____ (Psalm 91:14-16)
 - c) 1 Peter 5:7 says that when we are anxious we should _____

2. Some find it difficult to trust God when everything seems to be caving in around them. How do the following verses reassure us?
 - a) Isaiah 41:13: _____
 - b) Proverbs 3:5-6: _____
 - c) Romans 8:31: _____

3. Because we have a High Priest who is both omnipotent and compassionate, what attitude should we have when we come before His throne with a desperate request?
_____ (Hebrews 4:16)

4. The Bible has recorded seven separate occasions when Saul attempted to kill David (1 Sam. 18:11; 1 Sam. 18:25; 1 Sam. 19:9-10; 1 Sam. 19:11, 15; 1 Sam. 20:31-33; 1 Sam. 23:9; 1 Sam. 23:25-26). This was surely a desperate situation for David.

David had at least two opportunities to kill King Saul, recorded in 1 Samuel 24 and 1 Samuel 26, yet both times, David refused to kill Saul himself and David refused to allow his warriors to kill King Saul. Why did he refuse to commit this crime of desperation?
 - a) _____ (1 Samuel 24:6)
 - b) _____ (1 Samuel 26:9)

5. People often approached Jesus in desperation, asking for His help. Give an example and how He responded. _____

6. If a single mother shoplifts school supplies and school clothes for her children, should she receive a lighter sentence than someone who shoplifts for the thrill?

(Thought question – answers will vary.) _____

7. How would you counsel a person who is considering committing a crime, because he is in a real desperate situation? _____

8. Finally, in conclusion, is there any reasonable excuse we can offer God that will justify our committing a crime? ____ Yes ____ No

Explain your answer. _____
