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Spiritual Interventions - Chapter 10 of "Counseling and the Demonic"

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CHAPTER TEN

SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS

In this chapter the focus is on some of the practical ways in which we may help our counselees prepare for and engage in spiritual warfare by making use of the protective resources God provides. As has been suggested throughout, in approaching counseling with those under demonic influence, it is important to remember that we function as psychophysical and spiritual wholes, and that there is continuous and complex interplay among the biological, social-emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the person.

As an organizational convenience, spiritual and nonspiritual interventions are presented in separate chapters. However, the ideal is that the two kinds of help occur together and move

forward more or less simultaneously. In some circumstances, both forms of intervention, together with any needed medical help, may be provided to a substantial degree by one person, though my experience suggests that there are at least two benefits from working as a team.

First, it is very unusual for any one individual to have the range and degree of competence required to deal with all of the many facets of mental disorders and demonic influence, especially when the two are intertwined, as is sometimes the case. Second, the effectiveness of the intervention is greatly enhanced by combining the efforts of several people who work well together.

In this chapter we will examine spiritual warfare, explore methods for dealing with the sins of commission, address other spiritual interventions, and examine deliverance or casting out. More traditional counseling approaches will be examined in the next chapter.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The first approaches that come to mind for most believers in considering how to deal with demonic influence are those of deliverance, casting out, or exorcism. It is important to recognize that there is no biblically prescribed pattern for exorcism. It is true that a number of biblical examples may be cited of the casting out of demons. Most of these, as we have seen in chapter 3, occurred during the life of Christ, and the remaining instances occurred during the apostolic era.

The fact that the Scriptures lack specific instruction regarding the practice of exorcism, or the casting out of demons, presents us with a bit of a dilemma. First, we must beware of adopting any narrowly prescribed approach. And second, we must begin with those things that are clearly taught in Scripture. Only when we have done what God clearly commands, and have ceased doing what God clearly forbids, ought we to consider doing things about which the Scripture does not speak. We must consider these latter things—about which the Bible is silent—as matters of judgment in any event.

Since the Bible is silent about procedures for exorcism, we will begin with the clear commandments and prohibitions

regarding how we are to deal with demonic influence. Later we will return to the question of exorcism.

The basic biblical teachings regarding the believer's means of becoming free from demonic influence involve seven aspects which commence following the new creation.

1. considering ourselves dead to sin;
2. being filled with the Holy Spirit;
3. fleeing from temptation;
4. submitting ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness;
5. practicing righteousness;
6. regular, ongoing confession of sin;
7. resisting Satan and his demons by the power of our testimony and with the armor of God.¹

In contrast to the absence of biblical instruction regarding exorcism or deliverance, numerous Scripture passages address the above matters. We are instructed: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7–8). We are to "put on the full armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Having been freed from sin, we are to become slaves to righteousness, knowing that God has called us to such and that the result is beneficial in sanctification and eternal reward (Rom. 6:11–22).

These basic instructions are repeated throughout the New Testament epistles: submit to God, resist the devil, and use the resources God provides for the life we are to live as believers. In his high priestly prayer just before his crucifixion, Christ prayed that his disciples would be protected from the evil one (John 17:15). This prayer was not only for the disciples, but for all believers (John 17:20). Thus, God's goal appears to be to protect us through the means outlined above, rather than to remove us from the world, which is the sphere of Satan's influence.

Submit and Resist The first step in the process of becoming free from demonic influence involves submission to God and resistance to Satan. For the unbeliever, this means, first of all, acknowledging his or her sinfulness and receiving God's salvation. Since the unbeliever belongs to Satan's kingdom, he or she cannot expect to be free from demonic influence apart from this

radical change of allegiance. For the believer, such a change of kingdoms is not necessary, but believers must nonetheless repent, confess, and seek the filling of the Holy Spirit as they choose to commit their ways to God (i.e., as they submit to God).

As Scripture repeatedly illustrates, this process of submission to God is not easily accomplished. Both the Old and New Testament historical accounts are filled with examples, several of which were presented earlier (see chapter 3). Nonetheless, submission to God is the first step toward freedom from demonic influence.

The Armor of God In Ephesians, Paul presents a brief summary of the resources that God has provided for us in our struggle against satanic and demonic influence. In his description of the armor of God, Paul draws a parallel between the equipment of a soldier prepared for battle and the equipment of the believer for spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:12–17).

A careful study of Ephesians 6 will be of great value in preparing to deal with demonic influence. Here we can only outline the major elements.

First, we notice that the warfare is spiritual, thus the equipment must be spiritual. Its employment enables us to resist and to stand firm.

We are to wrap ourselves with the truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, cover our feet with the gospel of peace, take up the shield of faith, wear the helmet of salvation, and take up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. It is noteworthy that the major elements of this warfare are defensive, with one exception, the Word of God.

Notice again the armor: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God. In appropriating the armor of God we must begin with these. I'm tempted to say that we begin with one, adding others one by one. But it is not so simple. Salvation is not possible apart from a knowledge of and faith in the truth; the moment salvation is taken up it begins to produce righteousness and peace with God. Thus, these qualities, these pieces of armor, cannot ultimately be thought of as separate elements from which we may pick and choose those we would use on a given occasion. Rather, there is an intimate

interconnectedness among them; we must appropriate all of them if we are to be protected effectively from demonic influence; the alternative is to risk more serious demonic influence (see Luke 11:24–28).

Slavery to Righteousness It is not enough for demons to be cast out of a person. Something has to take their place before he or she can be assured of ongoing freedom from demonic influence (see chapter 3).

The process of becoming free from demonic influence requires developing new patterns of living which replace the old sinful patterns associated with demonic influence. This involves spiritual growth, and the discipline of righteousness. The Bible speaks of this process as that of becoming slaves (or servants) to righteousness.

This transformation from sinful to godly patterns of living takes time. Only through the repeated experience of testing and trial are we able to cultivate the specific pattern of righteousness we need, or develop more fundamental traits of patience, hope, endurance, and the love of God, which characterize maturity (Rom. 5:1–5; James 1:2–4).

There is a bit of a paradox here. Human freedom is not freedom in an absolute sense. Rather, it is freedom from the penalty, power, and presence of sin, freedom to respond as servants to God. It is to this freedom, and only to this freedom, that those enslaved by demonic influence may be delivered.²

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

The counselee needs to personally receive Christ if he or she is not a believer. As we have earlier said, if not a Christian, the person belongs to the kingdom of Satan. This has two major practical implications. First, the person may not desire to change, and second, even if the desire is present, without the presence of the Holy Spirit he or she may lack the necessary spiritual resources to make the needed changes.

The counselee needs to be active. He or she must confess and renounce all sin and occultic involvement; all objects or connections with the spirit world must be removed and, preferably, destroyed (see Acts 8:9–25). Satan and demons must be actively resisted. Conscious commitment to Christ and to following the

commands of Scripture should be reflected in reading and memorizing Scripture, praying for personal growth and deliverance, participating in Christian fellowship, serving in whatever capacity is suitable, and in sharing the gospel. He or she should solicit prayer from understanding fellow-believers.

Two major dimensions underlie this activity. First, the person must actively bring his or her will, attitudes, and personal conduct into conformity with the commandments of God, thus carrying out the injunction “submit therefore to God.”

Second, there must be a practical outworking of the instruction to “resist the devil.” This involves forsaking former companions and haunts, diligently changing habits from sinful patterns to godly ones—especially in the most needful areas—laying aside the old self and putting on the new self, which is in the likeness of God (see Eph. 4:22–24). In particular, any known sinful habit must be confessed and renounced. Any repetitive sinful pattern, as we have noted, provides an avenue for invasion by the demonic for influence or control.

While God is able to remove old patterns of behavior and old attitudes instantly, he does not normally do so. Rather, he calls us to work out our own salvation in this regard, while he graciously motivates us and gives us the power to change through the Holy Spirit (see Philippians 2:12–13). Just as God allowed the nation of Israel to conquer the land of Canaan bit by bit, so he allows us to gradually gain control over ungodly patterns of living in a progressive fashion. These old patterns of sinful thoughts and behavior are like a part of “Canaan” still held by the enemy. Only through the consistent practice of godliness do we gain complete freedom from demonic influence in these areas of our lives. The same is true for counselees. As Dickason notes, “Practicing these things will assure growth and deliverance from the enemy at the proper time.”³

Be aware that just as submission to God is a process that may vary in terms of degree, so resistance to Satan may vary in degree, and deliverance may also be a matter of degree.⁴ In his high-priestly prayer, Jesus did not pray that God would remove his followers from the world, but that God would protect them from “the evil one” (John 17:15). In a sense then, while this life

lasts, all protection is a matter of degree, that is, the degree to which we cooperate with God.

Since the transformation toward righteousness is not instantaneous, absolute, or accomplished in isolation, the counselee needs to be involved in a supportive community, in fellowship, individual and corporate prayer, Bible study, worship, and service to others. Counseling from professionals may be needed, and will be much more effective if it occurs along with this process of spiritual transformation.

SINS OF COMMISSION

Many of the avenues into demonic influence involve the commission of overt sinful actions. Due to the limitations of space, we will only be able to present illustrative examples of these patterns here. The New Testament is replete with instructions to cease practices that are sinful and ungodly. Many of these commands are followed by directives to initiate an alternative pattern, thus moving in the opposite direction. This is the essence of repentance.

The practice of repentance is a key to the elimination of many problematic behavior patterns that contribute to demonic influence. Repentance carries with it the notion of making an about-face and proceeding in the opposite direction. We are told, "Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hand what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need" (Eph. 4:28). As Adams puts it, "When is a thief not a thief? When he works and gives." Otherwise, he is merely a thief on vacation.

The degree of demonic influence may be small or great; the sinful pattern associated with demonic influence may be subtle or overt. But the pattern the Bible prescribes for freedom always involves repentance.

Cindy Cindy was a woman in her early forties, married over twenty years, with two teen-age boys. Her husband was emotionally aloof, but critical, somewhat like her father. Cindy suffered from low self-esteem, and found this unsupportive relationship very painful. She first came to me complaining of a chronic and moderately severe depression. As I came to know

Cindy, I discovered that over the years she had begun to seek affection and encouragement outside the marriage relationship, entering into several affairs.

At the time Cindy came to see me she had been involved for a couple of years with a former high-school boyfriend who was now three times divorced. She had broken up with him during high school because her father insisted that Larry was no good. Her depression stemmed from at least three factors: self-esteem problems, guilt, and conflict which developed with Larry as she began to discover that he was lying to her and probably involved in relationships with other women as well.

The extent of demonic involvement in Cindy's problems was probably moderate. It was not an issue that either she or I identified in the counseling relationship. Yet we both recognized that what she was doing was wrong, and that it needed to change. She had believed the satanic lie that the only way to happiness was by means of a more satisfying relationship with a man, even though that man was not her husband. Having begun the pattern of involvement, she was entangled in a steadily worsening cycle of transgression, guilt, exploitation by Larry, and discouragement deepening into depression. As a result, she felt the desperate need for Larry even more keenly. Only in retrospect did Cindy come to believe that adultery, the solution that she had chosen, not only failed to cure her self-esteem problems, it made things worse.

For Cindy to become free from this pattern, it was not enough to stop seeing Larry, though that was one step. She also needed to begin to seek social-emotional relationships and intimacy in other ways, especially to seek reconciliation with her husband. Only by becoming a servant to righteousness could this woman become free from slavery to sin and begin to develop a healthy view of herself.

Numerous other examples of sinful patterns are given in the last three chapters of Ephesians, and throughout the New Testament Epistles. We are to cease lying, bitterness (being unforgiving), filthy talk, outbursts of anger, sexual immorality, gluttony, gossip, covetousness, idolatry, drunkenness, malice, selfishness, pride, disobedience to authority figures, seeking to

please men rather than God, anxious worry, and a host of other sinful patterns.

The Bible suggests a variety of approaches that one might use in helping counselees give up sinful patterns. The particular one chosen must be fitted to the needs of the individual. Counselees may need to be taught the Word, to be encouraged, exhorted, reproved, rebuked. At times, witnesses may need to be brought into the situation. At other times the person may need to be brought before the church and even to be removed from the church body and treated as an unbeliever. These latter two approaches rarely fall within the role of the counselor, and may even be unethical under the normal confidentiality agreements of counseling. However, they are tools that need to be used in our churches and personal relationships when appropriate.⁵

Most often, those who come seeking counseling on their own initiative need to be approached gently. Although they may recognize that they are involved in sin, and experience considerable guilt, they nonetheless seem to be caught in an inextricable web. The web may be of their own making, yet they need help in escaping.

There are four important dimensions to the problems of such individuals: thoughts, behavior, emotions, and relationships.

1. *Thoughts.* Part of Satan's character is that he lies; this is one aspect of demonic influence that is both subtle and pervasive. As C. S. Lewis suggests, blatant lies do not succeed in deceiving most people; rather, truth with a twist is what Satan uses. Thus, a first step in freeing people from demonic influence in this regard is to help them comprehend the truth and recognize the lies they hear from others, or all too often tell themselves (see Jeremiah 17:9).

In this process of moving from lies to truth, the use of Scripture is of great value. Often I ask a person to go home and read a chosen passage of Scripture daily, even several times a day, for a week or more. I may also instruct the person to record thoughts, feelings, and reactions to this reading. Memorizing and pondering (meditating on) Scripture is of even greater benefit, though it is harder to get cooperation with this more difficult task.

At other times, a line or phrase may be quoted with great benefit. One of my colleagues, when confronted with people who face the dilemma of unpleasant events that are beyond their control, listens to them tell of their fears. He then encourages them to accept what they must face, concluding with, "Sometimes all you can say is "Thy will be done."

The approach of Larry Crabb is somewhat similar to this. The first step Crabb advocates is transformation of thinking, through learning and applying biblical truth. In Crabb's model, the transformation of behavior and feelings follows transformation of thought.⁶ This approach is especially helpful with bright verbal people who have a reasonably good understanding of their own functioning. For others, however, the approaches which follow may be more effective.

2. *Behavior.* Problem habits (or behaviors) are often inextricably linked with thoughts and beliefs. God made us to be creatures of habit; that is both a strength and a problem. Without habits it would take forever to get dressed in the morning. Habits serve us well, but also cause great difficulty. Habits enable us to carry out routine tasks quickly and efficiently, with little thought. They are hard to form, and also hard to eradicate. More significantly, habits are easier to replace than to merely discard.

The nightly habit of going to the tavern and drinking is not easily eliminated by a person's determining to stop going to the tavern. Usually, such a person skips a night or two, perhaps even several, then resumes drinking more strongly than ever. This pattern may be eradicated more successfully if replaced by another activity, e.g., attending AA meetings on a nightly basis. Other new habits may also work to eliminate the custom of drinking at the tavern, provided they replace (compete with) the tavern-drinking pattern effectively.⁷

It may seem surprising to some, but it is often easier to change thoughts through changing behavior than it is to change behavior through changing one's thoughts. For example, a person is more likely to adopt an antiabortion view if he or she is asked to develop a talk arguing against abortion than if required to listen to antiabortion lectures.⁸

Tammy Tammy was a young woman who came for counseling at her husband's encouragement because of a compulsive

spending problem. She had an indulgent mother for whom money was never a problem, and had developed the view that she could always get anything she wanted. She also was lonely, isolated from family, and uninvolved in church activities because of a recent move. As a result, she had become depressed. Her way of coping with the emotional poverty of her life was to buy things, especially clothes.

Tammy's spending was a definite problem, and had resulted in considerable debt. However, it quickly became apparent that to deal effectively with her compulsive spending, it would be necessary to address the underlying depression, loneliness, and frustration. For the buying sprees to be eliminated, Tammy needed to develop new relationships that replaced those she had given up for the move.

She recognized that her spending was a problem, and was motivated to change, but seemed incapable. My task was to help her constructively focus her efforts on the larger problem, of which she was almost completely ignorant. Thus, almost paradoxically, though her buying sprees were the initial focus, exploring the factors that prompted them led us to her problem emotions of loneliness and depression. Only when these emotional roots were clear was it possible to identify the need to develop satisfying relationships as the solution. Changing her lonely, isolating behavior led to changed thoughts and feelings about spending money, resulting in changed spending habits.

3. Emotions. As we have just seen, thoughts and behaviors are linked to emotions in an intricate manner. In dealing with emotions, the first thing we often need to do is face the truth regarding emotions. Sadly, in some churches emotions are treated as if they are at best trivial consequences of thought and action, or even something to be avoided as if a curse. The truth of the matter is far different. Emotions may be either good or bad, depending on how we use them, just as is true for the rest of God's creation.

In understanding emotions, we must begin with some basic facts. First, God himself is portrayed as emotional (see Deuteronomy 9:7–8, 19–20). Second, God made us to be emotional creatures (see Genesis 1:26–27). Third, when God finished the Creation, he pronounced it good (Gen. 1:31). Fourth, we

are instructed at numerous points in Scripture to experience certain emotions: to mourn and to be miserable, to rejoice, to celebrate, to encourage and be encouraged, to be joyful (for example, see Joel 2:12; Philippians 4:4; James 4:9).

Emotions are a God-given resource.⁹ The problem emotions, such as anger, fear, and anxiety, are like the warning lights on the dashboard of a car. They warn that something is wrong; failure to heed the warning may result in serious problems. Conversely, the pleasant emotions are a signal that things are going well. Naturally, false signals can be received. People may feel guilty when they have not transgressed (even so, the emotion may serve a useful warning function). Thus we do well to examine our emotions and their sources; we ignore them at our peril.

Another problem emotion is doubt. Habermas points out that doubt is multifaceted; it may be cognitive-intellectual, volitional-behavioral, or emotional in nature, or it may be a complex combination of two or more types. Emotional doubt is exhibited, for example, when persons profess to know that God loves them and has forgiven them, but they just don't feel God's love and forgiveness. Such doubt may pose a serious problem for the life of a believer.

For a person who experiences emotional doubt, it is often helpful to begin with a review of the facts of his or her relationship to God and with biblical teachings which indicate that God's forgiveness is certain and that he will not refuse any who come to him in repentance (for example, John 6:37). Frequent reminders of these facts may go a long way toward dispelling doubt.

In addition to reviewing biblical reassurances, the person needs to be encouraged to begin practicing those things that God calls him or her to do. The possibilities are numerous, but can be briefly summarized as loving God and loving one's neighbor. There is nothing quite like performing practical deeds of love to dispel doubts about forgiveness (see 1 John 3:14-24).

One emotion which I believe is too much neglected is that of joy. I find nothing in Scripture that encourages us to seek happiness, though happiness seems to be a common human pursuit.

The “pursuit of happiness” is even addressed in the U.S. Constitution. However, the kingdom of God is “righteousness, peace, and joy . . .” (Rom. 14:17). A question which I have found helpful personally and with counselees is “what brings you joy?” When I ask that of myself, the answer is far different from the answer to what makes me happy. I may be happy when I walk on the beach, or when I finish a good game of racquetball, or when I’ve had a few hours away from work.

What brings me joy is another matter. It is confronting a student with serious problems in his or her preparation, proposing needed remediation, and warning that an unsatisfactory grade or even dismissal may occur if such steps are not taken, and then finding that the counsel has been heeded, and the problems addressed.

Tears of joy came to my eyes the day I discovered my daughter, then about two and a half years old, poised at the end of the driveway, watching her friends disappear into the backyard across the street. She was left there alone because she had obeyed my instruction that she was not to go into the street. I could continue with other examples. What links them is doing right in difficult situations and helping others to do so. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, experienced when we are in a harmonious relationship with God. What brings you joy?

The traditional Hebrew greeting, Shalom, is at once a blessing, a greeting, and a wish for a pleasant emotional condition much like that of joy. It is difficult to define briefly. In summary, it is a wish that the person so greeted would experience a comprehensive sense of peace, health, and well-being in the physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions. To cultivate Shalom and be involved in all those activities that bring it about is to move in the direction of joy; that direction is diametrically opposite to that which brings one under demonic influence.

As noted earlier, overt demonic influence (or possession) is not the only way Satan and his agents work. Satan’s work is not only more often subtle than overt, it is also more common and widespread than is generally believed. While demon possession may simulate mental disorders, and may occur together with them, this is likely to be the exception rather than the rule. Thus, those who are demon possessed are not likely to show up very

often in the offices of pastors, Christian counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health workers. Nonetheless, the counselor often deals with those who experience more limited degrees of demonic influence. He or she must be prepared to recognize and deal with those whose lives are affected by persons who are under demonic influence or are possessed.

Scott Peck, in his book *People of the Lie*, suggests that in his experience “truly evil people” tend to be family members of those whom he sees rather than persons who seek therapy for themselves. Often these truly evil people appear to be strikingly successful in a variety of ways. Yet, behind the scenes, someone is paying the price for their evil. It is their victims, often family members, who manifest mental disorders. Such has been my experience as well, as the following cases illustrate.

Angela Angela was a fourteen-year-old junior-high student when she was first seen for counseling. The presenting complaint was that she was in constant conflict with her mother; she had begun to run away, and to express suicidal impulses. Though she was quite desperate, Angela was also reluctant to participate in counseling. She complained repeatedly that it was her mother who was the problem, explaining that Mom would become capriciously hostile with her and would physically abuse her; she would make promises to her and then break them. Thus Angela was constantly angry with her mother.

At one point Angela ran away from home, refusing to return or to let her parents know where she was, though she called the counselor to relay to her parents the message that she was safe. Tentative arrangements for her return home were negotiated, but broke down. The condition her parents required was that Angela firmly promise to stop provoking her mother. But Angela declined, claiming that nothing she could do would prevent her mother’s rage.

During this period Angela’s father was seen alone. When confronted about Angela’s view, he readily agreed that his wife had a serious problem, but indicated that he was committed to taking his wife’s side in any disagreement between her and Angela.

Eventually Angela returned home, but things continued to be very chaotic. It became clear from continued work with the

parents that Angela's mother was a closet alcoholic and her raging outbursts occurred when she had been drinking. Angela doubtless provided minor provocations to her mother, but her mother's responses were highly unpredictable since Angela did not know when she had been drinking.

Sadly, Angela received limited help, though she was able to be somewhat more effective in avoiding provocation of her mother. She also became less suicidal as she gained some support in affirming that she was not "crazy."

In this case, while Angela was by no means innocent, the real evil lay with her parents. Her mother was an alcoholic who chose not to face her drinking problem. And her father was unwilling to risk his wife's hostility even to protect Angela from the injustice of her mother's outbursts of rage.

Jill Jill was first seen for counseling as an adult in her mid-twenties. She had graduated from college, and was working as an accounts clerk, a job that was probably well within her abilities. An only child who lived with her parents, she came complaining of depression and difficulty handling her work responsibilities. The initial phases of counseling were extremely difficult, particularly because this woman was almost uncommunicative despite her professed desire for help. In the early weeks Jill reported that she had been sexually assaulted on a date while in college; later she had been sexually exploited by a male passenger in the adjoining seat while on a lengthy bus trip (in DSM-III-R this man's behavior might be diagnosed as Frotteurism). In each case Jill had told no one.

After several months of extremely slow progress, this woman continued to have difficulty performing her work, was very depressed, and had occasional suicidal thoughts. Eventually it was revealed that she had been sexually abused by her father. Jill's father had explained his behavior by telling Jill that some fathers had a "special love" for their daughters, and that that was the nature of his relationship with her. Following this discovery, she was encouraged to move from her parents' home, which she had done.

Several months later, it was learned that the sexual abuse by her father was still ongoing, though at much reduced frequency. A major breakthrough came when Jill confronted her father,

telling him that she loved him, but that this was not an acceptable way to express it; she let him know that she would call the authorities and press charges if it occurred again.

Subsequently, it was learned that Jill's father had sought her for sexual purposes following conflict between him and her mother; thus, there was an element of overt hostility in his sexual relationship with her. Though Jill had come to perceive this relationship as exploitive, it is doubtful that she ever recognized the veiled anger in her father's actions. It is difficult to be certain, but it is suspected that her mother knew about her father's sexual exploitation, but chose not to confront him with it because then she would have had to deal with his anger. While other factors were involved, a major part of Jill's difficulties was the result of the sin of others.

4. Relationships. Since human evil most commonly involves relationships with other persons, it is important to address not only the thoughts, feelings, and behavior, but also the relational aspects of personal difficulties. Also, since God is a person, our interaction with him is relational; most fundamentally, sin affects our relationship with God.

The problems of Cindy, described earlier, were also problems of relationships: a critical, fault-finding father and an uncommunicative husband. Because she did not find emotional closeness in relationship with them, Cindy spent years seeking it in other relationships.

So then, thoughts, feelings, behavior, and relationships all are important. A common error is to focus on one or another of these dimensions and to largely neglect the others. Yet Scripture clearly teaches that it is important to deal with all of these dimensions of personal functioning. The commandments to love God and our neighbor are comprehensive commandments that involve the whole person: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). Entering into relationships is central to love.

Much of the work of counselors involves teaching counselees how to deal with relationships and with the evil of those around them. We need also to teach people how to protect themselves so that they experience God's mercy rather than

the more predictable outcome of “the sins of the fathers”—evil results that carry down to the third and fourth generation (see Exod. 20:5–6).

When the opportunity presents itself, it may also be possible to deal directly with those who are evil by working with the spouses or parents, or with others involved in the lives of counselees who are troubled. Such opportunities are more often afforded to pastors and laypersons within the church than to professional counselors since pastors and lay counselors are much more likely to know the families of those who are experiencing chronic depression, low self-esteem, and other mental disorders that are the result of being victimized.

OTHER SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS

To free a person from demonic influence, one vital aspect of spiritual intervention involves encouraging the individual to become actively involved in a local church body. This is a natural next step for new believers. For those who are believers, and thus may already be a part of a church community, it may be necessary to encourage more active personal involvement.

Our relationship with God also involves relationships with others. The second great commandment is to love others as we love ourselves. This requires association with them in an intimate and comprehensive manner. Sadly, in our individualistic culture we tend to neglect this interconnected or corporate aspect of faith which is ours in the body of Christ. Unfortunately, this results in many persons’ being isolated from the healing capacity of relationships.

Several aspects of local church involvement are vital. First, this is a natural way to begin the process of mental transformation from an ungodly to a godly viewpoint. Second, it is in such community life that true purpose and meaning in life may be found. Third, churches provide a natural context for involvement in meaningful support groups, especially when the church fosters small-group fellowship and study. Fourth, the humble and gentle practice of church discipline may support the transformation that is needed. Finally, the local church is a natural context for deeds of practical service to God and fellow humans.¹⁰

The only true basis for meaning and purpose in life is a saving relationship with the God of Creation. For this relationship to grow and mature, it must be nurtured in the context of the local church. However, we live in an age of spiritual orphans; “baby” Christians may be related to their “spiritual parents” for only a brief period of time before a move, a job change, or personal choice separates them. It seems little wonder that many starve and some are snatched away by the evil one. Involvement in a local church family where the Bible is taught and practiced is a necessary part of the effort to grow up into maturity, and thereby become free from demonic influence.

Support Groups

In this day of mega-churches, it is easy for the individual to become anonymous and uninvolved. Small groups within the church are one effective way of minimizing this problem. Placing a counselee in a group of people who worship, study, pray, and minister together and to each other is one of the most helpful interventions I have found. This is true both for those with mental disorders and demonic influence. God’s method for healing is through people who are his representatives.

A key dimension of support groups is fellowship, sharing in the lives of others. In this context many of the other spiritual processes important to spiritual and emotional healing occur naturally. In such groups one can experience corporate prayer, group Bible study, mutual encouragement, exhortation, service, and even practical discipline.

Prayer

Entering into communication with God, both on an individual and a corporate basis is a vital part of the healing process for those who struggle with demonic influence. However, certain safeguards are essential. It is quite possible for a person to actively contemplate and plan his or her next transgression while supposedly confessing past sins to God. Therefore, prayers of confession should be candid and brief. These ought not to become the central point of one’s prayer life. It is significant that in the model prayer which Jesus taught, one moves

from confession of sins to granting forgiveness to those who have sinned against one.

Many additional matters of prayer are called to our attention in this brief model prayer. The focus is not only on our own needs for forgiveness and daily care, but on the needs of others. Another important focus is on exalting God and submitting to his headship, bringing our motives into conformity with his wishes. Consequently, we come before God and invite him to search our hearts and reveal wicked motives, and then guide us into pure ones.

Paula Paula provides a practical example of intervention in which prayer was used. This woman came to see me because of discouragement. She had been unable to work for over two years due to a degenerative disease, but had only recently learned its true nature and that its effects were not reversible; she experienced chronic pain, deteriorated mental functioning, and reduced energy. She expressed the desire to serve God during what remained of her life, but seemed unable to see any way in which she could serve. Paula also struggled with chronic guilt feelings regarding past sins, and the fear that God was punishing her for them.

As we explored her concerns, Paula's desire to serve God seemed genuine. She reported that she had confessed her former sins, and knew that God had forgiven her, but she still had nagging guilt feelings. She also reported that she had lost her self-esteem. It seemed that she had formerly derived much of her satisfaction in life from her job, which required intensive involvement with people, but now she was isolated and missed the social interaction and support.

As we explored what Paula could do now, I suggested that she consider discussing this with her pastor, and that she begin to pray that God would show her someone who needed her. During the next week she spoke with her pastor, but came away feeling that he was not very encouraging. He had suggested that she write a letter to the elder board describing her circumstances and expressing her desire. Seeing that she seemed reluctant to do so, I sought to encourage her.

The next week Paula reported that she had decided not to write the letter to the elders. She wasn't sure that it would be

helpful, and she was aware that she probably had not recently been manifesting the quality of spiritual life that would inspire confidence in her ability to minister to others. Because she had been experiencing considerable grief regarding her poor health, she was in need of support and encouragement herself. I encouraged her to continue to pray that God would show her someone who needed her. She agreed.

The next time I saw Paula she reported having talked with her sixteen-year-old son from a former marriage, who had just made an unsuccessful suicide attempt and was quite depressed. The boy had left Paula's home and had gone to live with his father in another state about three years earlier because of conflict with Paula's second husband. Things had become so bad then that some physical abuse had occurred and threats of more harm had been made. In the interim, however, forgiveness and healing had taken place and the new husband had shown definite spiritual growth. Now the son was asking if he could once more live with Paula and his stepfather.

As we reflected on this, it was not clear that an immediate move was wise. Perhaps the boy could return to his mother later, after the school year had ended. Regardless, it was clear that he needed her. God had given Paula a person to whom she could minister! It seemed providential that he was one of the persons about whom she felt the most guilt for her past failures that had permitted the abusive interaction to occur.

Though it is doubtful that any individual in this family is demon possessed, there are clear patterns of sin involving each family member as they have interacted with the others. Satan has been successful in undermining this woman's effectiveness as a spiritual guide to her son in the past. Just as clearly, Paula's prayer for God's guidance in finding ways to show his love to others had produced a change in and for Paula.

Worship

The worship of God is another important aspect of spiritual intervention. Anyone who desires to become free from demonic influence must regularly worship (acknowledging God's worth), both individually and corporately. Jesus warned in a parable that a house that had been swept free of evil

influence must be filled with good; worship of God is one aspect of that good.

Worship can, and should, take both individual and corporate forms. The settings may be quite varied: in a church, in one's home, on the beach or in the woods, even in one's car on the way to work. What is essential to worship is the conscious acknowledgment and expression of God's qualities—patience, mercy, justice, goodness, and others. The methods also are varied.¹¹

Use of Scripture

Scripture is God's guidebook for living, as it reveals the truth that is essential to spiritual freedom. Reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating upon Scripture is another essential element of spiritual intervention for those who desire freedom from demonic influence. Sadly, all too few are willing to spend even a few minutes a day in such activities. Yet we are told that God's Word is the light for our way, the means of cleansing, a resource for the renewal of our minds. While not every person can reach the same level of biblical knowledge, all can become actively involved in seeking to know God's thoughts, words and ways. It is especially through memorizing and meditating that God's Word speaks to us, enlightens us, and guides us at crucial moments in our lives.

The Practice of Godly Living

Knowledge of Scripture is not enough in itself; it must be practiced. Indeed, there is much in Scripture that suggests that if we are to know it, we must come to know it through experience so that our comprehension is broadened by our actions and deepened by our experience of God's faithfulness as we respond in obedience to him.

Such disciplines as loving those close to us as we love ourselves, regarding their concerns as paramount, respecting their opinions as highly as our own, and giving them first place rather than ourselves, have a dual effect. By our obedience we are drawing closer to God; and his promise is that as we draw close to him he will draw near to us. Like any other human faculty, this aspect of faith grows strong only when it is exercised regularly. Put differently, godly living is the exercise of living faith.

Many of the spiritual interventions presented in this section are actually aspects of such living faith.

Spiritual Giving

Another dimension of becoming free from demonic influence involves the faithful, regular practice of returning to God's use a portion of his material blessing to us. It is widely agreed that the tithe, literally 10 percent, is a good guideline for giving; some may be able to give far more while others may, because of limited resources, sacrifice even to give less. Freedom from demonic influence involves such regular giving.

Jesus said that our hearts are in the same place as our treasure. Again and again experience shows that our efforts and attention are focused where we make monetary investment. Such a focus reduces focus on self or on the demonic. It is not possible to serve God and mammon (see Matthew 6:24).

Service

As was suggested earlier, in our discussion of doubt, practical deeds of loving service to others are among the most fundamental of God's commandments. Service is also one of the major elements of dealing with demonic influence. The person who would be free from such influence needs to be encouraged to begin serving in whatever capacity he or she is initially able. No task, when done in service to God, is without its reward (Matt. 10:42). Moreover, such service is a part of the process of submission to God and resistance to Satan.

Church Discipline

It is unfortunate that we live in a day in which church discipline is seldom practiced. As a result, petty sins or minor failures tend to become established habit patterns. The problem could be gossip, pride, haughtiness (lack of submission), or a host of other sinful patterns. When unchecked, these result in openness to demonic influence on the part of those who practice them. As noted above, often those who are around such individuals suffer most. But the individual also suffers.

George George's problem was pride. He was highly capable and intelligent, but because of pride found it difficult to get

along with others. As a consequence, in his work George was frequently passed over, and others of lesser abilities were promoted. This resulted in bitterness and many job changes for George.

At the same time, members of his family suffered because George had little tolerance for even the smallest imperfection among them. The problem was sufficiently obvious that one wonders that the leaders of the churches which George attended seemed not to have addressed it. Perhaps prayerful encouragement, remonstrance, rebuke—that is, church discipline—might have had beneficial effect, particularly since George was quite concerned that he be regarded as an outstanding Christian.

The practice of church discipline may also be an important factor in dealing with those who habitually neglect or abuse people around them. I have observed a few occasions when such discipline has been exercised with good effect.

CASTING OUT AND EXORCISM

By this point, it should be clear that the practices of casting out demons and exorcism are not generally the preferred approach in dealing with demonic influence. Rather, one begins with submission to God and resisting the devil; one takes advantage of the whole armor of God, and disciplines oneself to godliness through the practice of righteous deeds.

However, as in alcohol and drug abuse an individual can reach the point where the ability to make meaningful choices is so clouded that he or she can no longer realistically consider changing, so persons who are demon possessed may have diminished capacity for meaningful choices.

In demon possession, the individual may be so strongly influenced by the demon that he or she is unable to think clearly or make an independent decision. The demon is quite readily able to maintain control, and thus to effectively block the person's efforts to break free.

In such extremes, exorcism or the casting out of demons seems most appropriate. At this point Dickason makes the observation that while the Bible does not advocate exorcism, it

likewise does not forbid it. Before we address this process, however, one clarification is needed.

Michael Green draws what he considers to be an important distinction between exorcism and deliverance. Exorcism in Roman Catholic theology is reserved for those who are so dominated by demons that they are no longer able to exercise their own decision-making capacity.

This rare and extreme situation may only be handled by priests specially authorized by the local bishop. The Church of Rome requires that such exorcism be done in the name of and with the authority of the church.¹²

By contrast, “deliverance” for the relief of believing Christians may be practiced by priest and laity alike. In deliverance, Green recommends a simple formula: “In the name of Jesus Christ, unholy spirit, I command you to depart from this creature of God.”¹³

The distinction which Green draws appears to have both validity and value. In simpler cases, involving minor degrees of demonic influence, the personal disciplines of godliness, perhaps with the support and encouragement of one or two fellow-believers, may be adequate to win deliverance from demonic influence. However, in cases involving “inhabitation,” possession, or complete dominance of the person by the demon or demons, it may be important to involve others in more sustained prayer support and in the actual casting-out process. An example that underscores this distinction is that there were some demons which the disciples were unable to cast out, although they clearly had been successful in other instances (see Matt. 17:14–21). It appears that more difficult cases require special preparation.

It is important to recognize that deliverance and exorcism are more similar to each other than either is to the approaches we have considered to this point. It is also important to recognize that both should be reserved for difficult cases. These include instances in which the general methods of submission to God and resisting the devil, utilizing the armor of God, and discipline for godliness have been ineffective, yet the afflicted individual

sincerely is seeking to be freed from demonic influence to honor God. This is especially relevant when the person is so completely under the control of demonic influence that he or she seems unable to choose.

Even when casting out or exorcism of demons is appropriate, all the practices that have already been described need to precede and follow the actual act. Further, if the casting out has been done without the individual's clear request and consent, we must be aware that he or she may choose to be possessed once more rather than take advantage of the freedom thus granted.

Several elements appear essential in the lives of any who would attempt to deliver others from demon possession. The first is the personal salvation of the individuals involved in the process. Second, there should be a consistent life of personal holiness. Third, there should be a significant degree of personal spiritual maturity. Fourth, there should be confession of all known sin. Fifth, it is wise to make a renewed personal commitment to God, affirming his sovereignty, and submitting to his will. Sixth, it is important to have a good biblical knowledge of the character of Satan and demons. Seventh, it is important to pray for spiritual wisdom, including the gift of discernment of spirits. Finally, it is wise to arrange a support team of other individuals with similar spiritual maturity who are prepared to help in the process of casting out the evil spirits.¹⁴

It is important to note that there is no magic in such a procedure. What is required is disciplined, obedient submission to God and the active seeking of his will in our lives.

Dickason's comments are helpful at this point. He encourages the use of counseling of all sorts, and reports working cooperatively with a variety of counselors. He notes:

Actually all forms of good counsel may be heeded—medical, psychological, and pastoral. Anything that improves the ability of a person to function psychologically, spiritually, and socially is of help in battle with demonic forces.

Pastoral counseling is most appropriate in spiritual warfare, since this should be the special concern of such counseling. . . . There are several reasons for this. First, the

person who suspects he is demonized should have his condition evaluated by a counselor with skill and experience in this area. There must be proper diagnosis as to whether he really is demonized or not. The diagnosis determines the approach taken to getting help. Second, a skilled counselor can help the counselee to clarify and examine symptoms and evidence. He would seek to help him distinguish between his own thoughts and demonic thoughts. Third, the pastoral counselor aids in gaining perspective and gives encouragement regarding the warfare. Finally, he may help the counselee in actual confrontation and dismissal of spirits.

The major purpose in counseling and confrontation is not to expel the demons but to facilitate dependency upon God and personal development of the counselee.¹⁵

The key issues are the individual's personal relationship to God, and that glory be drawn to God. Also, we must remember to submit ourselves to God, even in the matter of deliverance, affirming as Jesus taught us, "thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10).

Delay in the removal of demons from believers is not uncommon; it may even be a good thing. Jesus and his disciples at times encountered resistance and delay. Dickason reports, "Several counselors have noted that delay is rather normal today, since we are not working miracles to prove the deity of Christ and are not invested with miraculous gifts."¹⁶ Dickason cites Conrad Murrell, Grayson H. Ensign, Edward Howe, and Merrill F. Unger as those who agree with this view. Such has been my experience as well.¹⁷

Several principles must be considered concerning God's purposes in allowing demons to remain influential in the lives of believers.

First, it is helpful to reflect on the process of occupation of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. God did not give the entire land to the Israelites at once. Rather they had to fight for possession. The fight itself was beneficial in producing toughness, persistence, faithfulness, and unity among the Israelites. So, too, God expects you and me to be involved in spiritual warfare in an ongoing manner, thus growing tougher and

wiser, as well as more dependent upon the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Second, even as occupation of the land progressed, pockets of resistance remained that were yet to be eradicated. So, in the life of the believer, the transformation to godly living is an ongoing process. It should not be surprising that it takes time to eradicate lifelong, sinful habit-patterns and replace them with patterns of godly living. We should recognize that the world, the flesh, and the devil work together in resisting this process of transformation toward godliness. We, too, are involved in a battle.

Third, God suggested to the Israelites that it would not be good for the land to become uninhabited, lest it become overgrown by thorns and invaded by wild animals. This is true for the believer as well. We are warned that it is not enough to cast out demons. It takes time to develop the godly patterns of living that must take the place of evil lest there be even worse demonic influence (see Matthew 12:43–45).

Fourth, God does not work in our lives against our wills. The delivered person must be committed to renouncing the patterns of sin that have given a place for the entry of demonic influence before that person can be fully freed.

There may be other purposes as well, such as the development of spiritual discipline, the strengthening and sensitizing effects of affliction, the need to learn to rely and depend upon God, and/or other specific divine purposes, such as were described in the life of Job.

We also need to understand God's purposes in deliverance. Foremost among these is that God's will be done and that glory and honor be given to his name. This has important implications for us, including many of the factors just discussed.

Successful deliverance will have a number of effects on the person freed from demonic influence. Not all of these effects seem immediately pleasant, though all lead toward honoring God. Among the less pleasant effects are emotional and physical weariness; loss of various occult powers, such as clairvoyance and secret knowledge; the loss of the ability to speak in unknown languages; and reversal of "charmed" healings.

Positive changes include a new sense of freedom of thought

and action; renewed capacity for peace and love, though the initial process of deliverance may involve great turmoil; freedom from voices in the mind which may accuse of wrongdoing, or incite to hatred and violence; freedom from suicidal impulses and depression; freedom from demonically induced ailments; restoration of personal worth and identity; ability to choose; improved social relationships, including marriage; increased trust and respect for Christ; increased awareness of and resistance to evil; and, most importantly, freedom for spiritual growth.

Successful deliverance will be accomplished with greater or lesser speed depending upon such factors as the determination and spiritual maturity of the counselee as well as the experience and wisdom of the counselor.

As was emphasized earlier, our first focus ought always to be on carrying out fully that which is clearly and explicitly taught in Scripture. To fail to do so is to join with King Saul in his rebellion toward God, a rebellion which occasioned God's rejection of him as king. Saul's initial sin was that he did not carry out God's command to "utterly destroy" all in Amalek. God's judgment of Saul, in turn, deserves our attention:

"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king."
(1 Sam. 15:22-23)

As we have seen, idolatry involves the worship of demons, and ultimately of Satan, their head. With Saul, Satan succeeded by encouraging him that he need not fully obey God, rather than by inviting Saul directly to worship Satan. Notice that the failure to obey God is described as divination (or witchcraft) and idolatry. Perhaps this is an example of the subtle working of the deceiver; rather than enticing us to worship a false god, he encourages us to set ourselves up as gods.

It should come as no great surprise, then, that God chooses not to deliver us from demons while we are actively involved in worship of them! Renunciation of all sin and false worship is vital to any true deliverance. But beyond that, there must be submission to God in a loving and obedient manner.

SUMMARY

Because people function as wholes, there is an interaction among the various aspects. Effective counseling must deal with all the aspects of the person. This means that teamwork is normally the preferred mode of help.

The basic spiritual resources provided for becoming free from demonic influence include the process of submission to God and resisting the devil; equipping oneself with the armor of God (which includes salvation, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and the Word of God); and becoming a slave to righteousness. These require continuing personal involvement on the part of the individual who desires freedom from demonic influence. As we engage in this process, we progressively gain freedom from habitual sinful patterns and desires, and from Satan's ability to exploit these to control us.

God has provided numerous spiritual resources to aid us in submitting to him and resisting demonic influence. These resources begin with the meaning and purpose in life which God gives to each of his children. There is also the support and help of others, prayer, fellowship, worship, service, and the study, memorization of and meditation in Scripture. Regular use of these resources is clearly and consistently taught in Scripture as the means of gaining freedom from the bondage of sin and Satan.

Although exorcism or the casting out of demons is never explicitly commanded by Scripture, and no specific techniques are offered, it appears that a legitimate role exists for these practices. In those instances in which the individual is so dominated by demons that he or she is unable to choose to engage in the other processes, exorcism or casting out is appropriate. While no specific ritual can be established from Scripture, the basic elements involve commanding the demon or demons to

depart from the individual in the name of God. Both before and after this process, all involved should examine themselves to see that they are submitted to God, resisting the devil, and equipping themselves with the armor of God.

In addition to dealing with the spiritual needs of the person, concern must also be addressed to other personal needs, including physical, psychological, social, and occupational functioning. Often, problems in these areas contribute to demonization or result from it. It is to several of these issues that we turn in chapter 11.