Finding the Way Back
to God and the Church

“I will arise and go to my father,
and will say unto him,
Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,”
Luke 15:18

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Foreword

Dear Applicant,

This little study guide is being given you because you have given evidence that you have interest to be restored into the local, visible, body of Christ. We have seen your penitence and your faithfulness in attendance. We rejoice in the signs we see that you want to return to church membership.

This three lesson guide is designed to bring God’s Word into the process of your restoration with God and the Church.

As one who had fallen away from God, you will discover you have many companions. Some of the greatest heroes in the Biblical record fell away and needed to find their way back to God. They and we will find that God is rich in mercy toward those who are sincere in repentance.

This study guide is also designed to rebuild the bonds of trust between you and your ministry. Your ministry grieved over your fall. Sometimes ministry takes failure among their membership too personally. It is normal for them to feel they must have failed you in some way or you would not have fallen.

As accounts of restoration in the Bible reveal, the way back is beset with problems. Those who have sinned will have a long and difficult journey of learning to say no to sinful self. Those who were sinned against also have their journey of forgiveness and rebuilding trust.

We all need God’s help to make reconciliation complete. When Christ is the truly Head of the Body, healing and restoration will not only be a possibility, it will be a journey of joy for us all.

- H. Stephen Ebersole

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Lesson 1
“I Have Sinned…”

Purpose: to study characteristics of sin, how it deceives us and as what its tragic results are if we yield to it.

Introduction to the Lesson

A Christian is one who has come to an understanding of his sinfulness and turns to Christ for salvation. How then is it possible that he can again return to what he once denounced, a life of servitude to Satan? How can he turn his back on Jesus, the One who has paid such a high price to set him free?

Sadly and tragically, the Bible makes it clear that not only can a person fall away and go back into sin, there is a tendency in men to do so. Strong warnings and tragic examples are given to help us see this reality. We need to be honest with ourselves, we each have besetting sins that will cause us to lose our way if we give them any attention.

As one studies failures, patterns of underlying cause emerge. Unbelief is the core issue for yielding to temptation. And since unbelief precedes all other sins, the answer to victory is to choose faith building activities. Exposing ourselves to the Word of God, (since faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God) is our only hope.

As those who have fallen prey to sin to the extent of needing to be excommunicated, we need to understand the nature of temptation and sin. We need to recognize its small but sinister inroads. We need to learn to hate the pleasure it offers, the intoxication that it proffers. In the example of the prodigal, when we see the filth of the pig pen instead of the glitter of the dance floor, we will understand sin. Only then will we find our way in victory.

Theme Verse:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 1Cor 10:13

Shall We Continue in Sin?

Rom 6:1  What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?
2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?
3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?
4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life...
11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.
12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.
13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.
14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.
Rom 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Every Man is Tempted

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.
13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:
14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.
15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.
16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

They Could not Enter in Because of Unbelief

Heb 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.
13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;
15 While it is said, To day; lest ye, that are today, should perish as they that fell on the day.

Sins of the Flesh and of the Spirit

2 Cor 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,
18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.
Having therefore these promises, dear beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

Sin Shall not have Dominion Over You
1. Is there room for a person who is a Christian to continue living in sin? Explain your answer.

2. What is the power that enables you to say “no” to a sinful temptation you once said yes to?

3. How does one “reckon himself dead unto sin?”

4. What will be the result if one begins to make plans to expose himself to his particular temptation?

5. What are some positive steps we should take in order to have strength to overcome temptation?

Every Man is Tempted
6. Why is it important that we understand the origin of our temptations?

7. Why is it important for us to understand the ultimate result of every sin?

8. Persons who stumbled or fell
After each name given below, write what you think it was that caused this Bible character to stumble or fall. (The account is given in the passage listed.)

9. Cain (Genesis 4)

10. Korah (Jude 1:11)

11. Balaam (2 Peter 2:15)

12. Achan (Joshua 7:1)

13. King Saul (1 Samuel 15:30)

14. King David (2 Samuel 11)

15. King Solomon (Nehemiah 13:26)

16. King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:26-30)

17. King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-20)

18. Judas Iscariot (John 12:1-6)

19. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10)

Causes For Spiritual Failure
After each verse, write the reason why there was failure in spiritual life.

20. Matthew 13:22

21. Hebrews 3:12-15

22. Hebrews 12:15

23. 2 Peter 2:19-22

24. 2 Peter 3:16-18

25. 3 John 1:9

What went wrong in my journey
In the following blanks write the deeper causes in your spiritual life that led you to fall into the sin that separated you from the church. Did you never experience the new birth in the first place? Or did you fall from grace?
Lesson 2

“I Will Arise and Go to My Father…”

Purpose: To study what it means to find the repentance that leads to godly sorrow and yields eternal life.

Introducing the lesson

As the prodigal son found it, there is only one way home. That is right back over the long road that one took in going away from the Father. However, that road will never be taken until a critical event takes place.

The Bible says about the prodigal, “when he came to himself.” Surely there were many times when the prodigal felt remorse. Partying at night meant there were crashes in the morning. But those little crashes were not enough for the prodigal to see where he was going nor for him to choose to turn around. The prodigal needed to come to a deeper level of remorse, the level of godly sorrow.

There are many reasons why one may feel badly. Knowing we have sinned we realize our reputation is going to take a serious blow in the eyes of others. We realize precious time and opportunity have been squandered. We sense that we have opened the door to new temptations. Knowing deeper levels of sin never satisfies, it only brings more serious struggles.

Part of what helped the prodigal return was the clear vision he had of the difference between his life and those who lived at his father’s house. This is where the place of the Word of God comes in. When through the Word of God we have a clear vision of the end of the road, we are empowered to live for Him.

In this lesson we want to discover the difference between the sorrow that says, “how can I look better in the eyes of others” and the sorrow that says, “how can I look better in the eyes of God.”

Theme Verse:

In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. 2Ti 2:25-26

The Place of Discipline

1Cor 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

2Cor 2:6 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

1Tim 1:20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2The 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us...

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, and not after the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Now them that are such we command withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.

And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

What Sin Does to our Emotions

There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.

Psa 32:2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.

4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

What is Godly Sorrow

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

And ye are sorrowful, though now for a while, but by God’s grace will worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

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For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.
carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what
clearing of yourselves, yea, what
indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what
vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what
revenge! In all things ye have approved
yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Accepting That we are Forgiven
1Jo 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is
faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and
to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

The Place of Discipline
1. What are the two reasons for discipline?

of the flesh...
that the may be saved...

2. “________________ is the punishment” implies it is possible to have insufficient punishment to bring the desired results.

3. The group all participated in this punishment to make it effective. What might have happened if some would have stood in defense of the sinner’s transgression?

4. It was time for the discipline to be over and the penitent man to be restored lest

5. In 1 Timothy 1:20, discipline was to teach these two former church members

6. Discipline was to help the slothful brothers at Thessalonica to learn to

7. Give the two virtues that all discipline is to produce.

8. What discipline did the prodigal son receive that helped him find repentance?

What Sin does to our Emotions
9. What ongoing condition do the wicked struggle with in their emotions?

10. From Psalm 32:2-5, what are some of the ways David described the misery of his troubled conscience for his unconfessed sin?

11. What problem does the phrase, “When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” describe? How may this be overcome?

What is Godly Sorrow
Study the chart on the next page. Test your experience by what you read in the chart. How do you view:

12. Your sin?

13. Your guilt?

14. Who is to blame?

15. The amount and severity of the punishment you received?

16. The authorities and the way they treated you?

17. The kind of apologies you made?

18. What you will need to do to regain trust?

Accepting That we are Forgiven
19. How many times do we need to confess our failure to God to be forgiven? Explain.
In Pursuit of a Broken Heart
UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE TEACHINGS OF
PSALM 51 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 7.

It is no great thing if we feel badly after we have done wrong. Since we are created moral agents, this is only natural. However, there is a vast difference between the sorrow of life and the sorrow of death. This chart endeavors to give an abbreviated insight into the difference between a God centered sorrow, and a self centered regret over sin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blame</th>
<th>Toward punishment</th>
<th>Toward disciplinarian</th>
<th>Apology</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Restitution</th>
<th>Long-term consequences</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Sorrow of the World</td>
<td>Godly Sorrow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>How can I look good to others?</td>
<td>How can I look good to God?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the sin</td>
<td>In truth, I love my sin but hate the consequences. I secretly fantasize ways I can resume sin without consequences.</td>
<td>I sense my native attraction to my sin. I refuse to fantasize over the sin. Instead, I contemplate the consequences of wrongdoing.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>I think, “How can I eliminate this bad feeling without making myself look too bad?”</td>
<td>I loathe myself. Thank you God for the pain which shows me how I appear in your sight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confession</td>
<td>I will admit what is known. My confession is forced, slanted so I look good and others are at fault.</td>
<td>Complete, broken. Willing to admit what would otherwise be unknown, including the steps up to the sin.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude toward exposure</td>
<td>I hope to preserve my reputation, and am resentful if I am exposed.</td>
<td>I hope to restore my character, thankful my weaknesses are exposed -to help me to overcome the problem.</td>
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1. Psalm 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

2. Proverbs 23:35 They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

3. Ezekiel 20:43 And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed.

4. Aaron in Exodus 32:22-24

5. 1 Samuel 15:30 Then he said, I have not sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord thy God.”

6. Genesis 3:12 “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.”

7. 2 Corinthians 7:9 “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.”

8. Luke 15:21 “And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.”

9. 2 Corinthians 7:11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.
Lesson 3
“Make Me as One of Thy Hired Servants…”

Purpose: To see what is involved in restoring a relationship with the visible body of Christ.

Introducing the Lesson
When a person breaks a vow, he makes a costly withdrawal from all the relationships that are meaningful in his life. One of the greatest assets in relationships is trust. When there is trust in a relationship, many other things are easy. Communication, responsibility and liberties become easy. When vows are broken, trust is broken. Immediately communication, responsibility and liberties become complicated.

There is no easy way to restore trust. But one way, a very difficult way indeed, is to be open with the failure and how much it has cost everyone. Refuse all bitterness toward any who continue to mistrust you. Restore trust by living a trustworthy, faithful life. Still another way to build trust is to be present at all gatherings in your congregation.

It is true, people have a responsibility to give trust. It is generally true that those closest to the broken trust have the most difficult time giving it again. Whatever you do, do not demand that others trust you. Thank those who give it, but get on with your life of serving the larger community. Do not choose to stay outside the church.

Renewing your vows is an important step forward. When the church hears this renewal and accepts you into their inner circle of trust, you are taking part of an identity that will go with you into eternity.

And then comes appreciation. Perhaps having had to stand outside the warmth of church fellowship for a season will create a deeper appreciation in your heart than ever before for the blessing of Church life. When your really love your church it will be easily known.

Remember, the way you treat your local church is how you are treating the Body of Christ. Be true to your church and faithful in your vows and God will bless your life.

Theme Verse:
Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. 1Cor 3:16-17

Renewing Vows
Before Christ and the Church
Ecc 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.
5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Openness and Accountability
1Jo 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:
7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.
8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Unity and Peace
Mar 3:24 And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.
25 And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.
Phi 3:16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.
17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.
18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ:
19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Love
Jo 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.
1Pe 1:22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

Contribution
1Cor 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.
Ja 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspted from the world.
Questions for Thought and Discussion

The Vows You Made at Your Baptism

Are you truly sorry for your past sins, and are you willing to renounce Satan, the world, and all works of darkness and your own selfish will and sinful desires?

Do you promise by the grace of God and the aid of His Holy Spirit to submit yourself to Christ, His Word, and His Church and faithfully to abide in the same until death or until the Lord returns?

The Questions you Will Be Asked at Your Reinstatement

1. Are you truly sorry for the sins you chose which separated you from Christ and the Church?
2. Can you confess that you are living in victory and are at peace in your Christian life?
3. Are you willing to renew your Baptism vow, to be faithful to Christ, His Word and His Church and to faithfully abide in the same until death or until the Lord returns?

1. What is different between a vow and a word of commitment one might make in everyday life?
2. How much room for one’s selfish agenda can be found in the church membership questions?
3. Why is it important to make the kind of commitment that is stated in the baptism vow?

Openness and Accountability

4. Why might someone who has openly broken his baptism vows need special accountability in the future?
5. What should you do if you see you are beginning to allow “little sins” in your life?
6. What does transparency do for our relationships as brothers in the Lord?

7. How might we provoke someone else to love and good works?

Unity and Peace

8. Mark 3:24-25 Why is it important that we preserve unity in our church relationships?

9. Why might a returning sinner find it difficult to achieve unity with the saints who had never left the fold?

10. What will you do when you feel you have reason to believe you are not really forgiven and accepted?

Love

11. John 13:35 How will persons inside the church and out in the community be able to know you have truly returned to being Jesus’ disciple?

12. What is the right response if a brother in the church throws it in your face that you at one time proved unfaithful to the Lord?

Contribution

13. 1 Corinthians 14:12 How important is it that you find a place to make your contribution in the congregation?

14. What type of service for the congregation should you seek?