

A close-up photograph of a person's hands shaping a piece of light-colored clay on a pottery wheel. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The clay is being formed into a cylindrical shape with a slightly flared rim. The pottery wheel is a light gray color. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# **The Potter's Work**

**God's Process of Sanctification**

## **PREFACE**

The following message has been evolving over a period of several years, the “theory” being proven to me over time through multiple difficult situations in my own life. In this message I describe my personal journey through sicknesses I’ve faced and been healed of, including cancer and asthma. I’ve shared variations of this message (also entitled “The Benefits of Sanctification”) beginning at a Pastor’s Conference in Hyderabad, India (Feb. 2012), in churches in Guantanamo & Havana, Cuba (Oct. 2012) and in Lima, Peru (July 2013).

I marveled at how God used this teaching in Lima because—without anyone laying hands on and praying for the sick—many people received miraculous healings just by following through with the Biblical principles shared. The pastor of that church reported that at least ten people received healing from various sicknesses within three days; at least two during that morning service. For that I point to God and give Him glory.

It’s so simple, yet most Christians are clueless about these basic principles for receiving healing and staying healthy. Sadly, some who are immovable in their iron-clad theologies and church doctrines are offended and turn a deaf ear despite the fact that many believers are finding freedom and healing through these Biblical truths. I myself am slowly learning to put these truths into practice, and expecting more progress. Giving honor to whom honor is due, besides the Holy Spirit’s illumination of His Word, much of these insights I’ve gleaned from two “radical” pastors, Henry Wright (“Be in Health”: [www.beinhealth.com](http://www.beinhealth.com)) and Thurman Scrivner (“The Living Savior Ministries”: [www.tlsm.org](http://www.tlsm.org)).

- Roland Heddins

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## **The Potter’s Work – God’s Process of Sanctification**

### CREATED FOR GOOD WORKS IN CHRIST

Have you ever thought about why you’re here in this world? Is it really merely to work, eat, sleep, have a family and have a nice life? Is that what it’s about? Ephesians 2:10 tells us the real reason we’re here: *“We are His workmanship created for good works in Christ.”* Have you ever thought about that, that we’re His craftsmanship? God’s work of art! There are many insights and analogies in the scriptures about how God creates us and works purification and sanctification in our lives. One analogy is the Refiner’s fire in which the silver or gold is heated up to remove dross. Another analogy from which we can get much insight is that of the Potter and the clay.

*“O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our Potter; and we all are the work of Your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)*

The Potter carefully selects a piece of formless clay, and from the very beginning has in mind exactly how He will mold it into a thing of beauty, a vessel He will enjoy for Himself and to bless others with. The spinning Potter’s wheel is His venue of creativity, and in order to carry out His dreams He has to begin by making the clay pliable. That requires pouring on some water, doing some pounding and kneading, and when it’s pliable enough He places the clay in the center of His wheel where He starts applying gentle pressure to create the shape that He has in mind. And of course, when all the shaping is done, it’s time for the heat of the kiln.

It’s that way in our lives too, and the process will go relatively smoothly if we continually submit to the Potter’s will. But it’s not human nature to surrender and give up control. If we resist His molding hand or try to escape the wheel, our Father will have to resort to more painful means to carry out His plans for us.

Our loving Father uses pressure, difficulties, suffering, even sicknesses in the process of shaping us. It can be a painful process of purification and sanctification. From our perspective it might appear that God—the Master Potter—is hurting us, treating us badly, and causing us much pain, but from His perspective He is doing what’s necessary to bring about positive change to His creation.

The Master Potter knows all our weaknesses, faults and impurities, but His goal is to change that. Positive change in our character requires that we cooperate with our Creator—not fight against Him—and that involves plenty of pain and suffering.

Hebrews 5:8, referring to Jesus, says *“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered”* or another way of saying it is *“He understood submission from the things He suffered.”* Of course, Jesus was always submitted and obedient to the Father. We too learn obedience through suffering.

Being submitted includes being grateful; not grumbling or complaining; not comparing ourselves to others. Romans 9:20 tells us

*“Who are you who replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him who formed it, Why have you made me this way?”*

Our human tendencies are to avoid pain, to escape from the spinning wheel. But the fact that we're still here in this world—this virtual reality training program—indicates that He's not finished forming and training us. This sanctification process is uncomfortable, but the sooner we stop pushing against His molding hand, the less He will have to discipline us.

In Revelation 3:19 He tells us, *“As many as I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.”* Psalm 30:5 says *“For His anger is only a moment; in His favor is life. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”* Be encouraged: there is an end to the pain.

Psalms 89:30-34 describes how in love God disciplines us: *“If His children forsake My law and do not walk according to My rules, if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes, **but I will not remove from him My steadfast love** or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from My lips.”*

Do you see correction as negative or positive? I think we know with our heads that correction is positive, but we feel that it's negative. God's ultimate purpose in disciplining His children isn't to punish and bring judgment, but in love to get positive results.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that *“it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”* He's the one doing the work in us, not us. *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Eternal life is a gift of God. To receive it we just need to stop fighting against Him and surrender. At the moment the Spirit of God enters, our spirit is changed—made alive—and we're made new.

But are our souls made new? Our minds and thoughts? Our emotions? Our habits? The reality is that the change in our souls—the renewing of our minds—is a process that lasts all our earthly lives. Romans 12:2 tells us *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God.”*

Our spirits are saved instantly by grace through faith, but the “working out of our salvation” (Phil. 2:12) takes some time. God is patient and He uses different situations in our lives to conform us to His image, slowly but surely, and always lovingly.

Did you know that in this school of life, God has given us a scholarship—paid in full. The Holy Spirit is our personal tutor who guides us and teaches us, and He even gives us the answers to the tests. But it is necessary for us to stay in school to receive the diploma. We need to submit and stay on the Potter’s wheel for that work to be completed in our lives.

This life has everything to do with change. Many of us don’t like change because change is too uncomfortable. *“If everything stays as it is,”* we might say, *“I’ll have control, without insecurities. I prefer my way.”* But like a piece of clay, if we don’t change we’ll be useless, and won’t glorify God.

The center of the Potter’s wheel isn’t the most comfortable place in the world, but if we stay there and allow God to change us, not only will this walk be more fruitful, but also healthier and we’ll have joy in the midst of the suffering.

But what happens if we don’t cooperate with God in the process of sanctification? It’s the same if we don’t obey our parents, right? Hebrews 12:5 says *“My son, don’t despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”*

We want everything to go well with us and our families, but if we don’t follow God’s principles, it won’t go well. But it’s not because God is cruel. He’s a loving Father, but we need to do it His way or there will

be repercussions. God is training us to do life His way, not ours; under His conditions, not ours.

### PLAYING ON THE TRAIN TRACKS

If your child was playing on train tracks and you saw that a train was coming, you would yell, *“come here son, get off the tracks!”* If he refused to listen to you, you would run and push him off the tracks with all your strength—sacrificing your own life—to save his life. Sometimes it’s necessary for God to cause us harm in order to protect us, like pushing us so forcefully to the point of breaking ribs in the process of saving us from the train’s impact, simply because we’ve chosen to ignore His voice. But when God treats us that way, somehow we think He doesn’t love us.

We find in Psalm 51:6 that God actually loves us enough to break our bones when necessary: *“Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.”*

### A THORN IN THE FLESH

There is plenty of scriptural evidence that God uses even sickness and tragedies to discipline us and get our attention. One such scripture is Job 33:19: *“He [man] is also chastened [disciplined, rebuked] with pain on his bed, and enduring strife in his bones.”* Sometimes God will use sickness & suffering to stop us in our tracks if we’re not letting Him form us as He wants. Over and over I’ve heard people say that through a terrible car accident or a certain sickness God drew them to Himself and changed their lives. That progress itself is evidence that they weren’t where they were supposed to be before the tragedy or sickness, and it took that suffering to teach them, change their course and train them in some way.

The Psalmist writes about it this way in Psalm 119:67, 71, 73 & 75: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.” “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes.” “Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.” “I know, O Lord, that Your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.”*

The well-known British revivalist preacher and author, Leonard Ravenhill, whom I was blessed to know as a grandfather-figure the

last ten years of his life, while ministering with A. W. Tozer during the 1950s in Chicago, jumped from his burning hotel room and broke his back badly. Certainly God could have prevented that tragedy, but He used it to make Leonard into a great man of prayer. Because of the pain he suffered over the ensuing years he could only sleep short lengths of time until his death in 1994, so he would get up in the middle of the night to pray for hours. That suffering was not given to him as punishment because God was angry at him, but He knew it was what it would take to create him into a mighty man of prayer.

The Apostle Paul also had a thorn in the flesh that God wouldn't take away. *"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!"* (2 Corinthians 12:7) Here we have evidence that Paul himself was still being taught obedience through the things he suffered. Apparently his weakness was self-exalting pride, so we can surmise that if he had been completely freed from the sin of pride, God would not have given the tormentor access to him.

### CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Farmers utilize barbed-wire and electric fences to keep their livestock in the safety of their farms. Once the animals learn that the fences produce pain, they respect the boundary. Likewise the purpose for pain and suffering in our lives is to keep us from crossing the boundaries God sets up for our own safety. God doesn't cause us pain and suffering because He is cruel or angry. Just like God requires the boundary of marriage for sexual expression, if that boundary is repeatedly crossed without repentance there will be consequences.

### CONDITIONS AND CONSEQUENCES, CAUSE & EFFECT

The Bible is full of "if - thens," like "if you will do *thus-and-such*...then I will fulfill this promise." 2 Chronicles 7:14 is one of those classic examples in scripture of conditions for receiving God's promises: *"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, pray, seek My face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."*

2 Corinthians 9:6 tells us that “He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” And Luke 6:38 says “*give...and it will be given to you...*” But if we DON’T give, will we receive the abundance promised? No. The condition for receiving is *giving*.

James 1:6-7 says, “*Let him ask in faith, not doubting or wavering. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. For do not let that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord.*” Receiving what we ask is conditional on having faith that He will answer us.

1 Corinthians 11:28-31 tells us that before we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord during communion, “*Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation or condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [die].*” This is another example of conditions. If we are sick it could be because of this reason.

Another condition in receiving answers to our prayers is found in 1 Peter 3:7. Peter wrote about the importance of giving honor to our spouses “*so that your prayers be not hindered.*”

Being forgiven is conditional on us forgiving. If we don’t forgive, we won’t be forgiven. In Matthew 18:34-35 Jesus said of the man who wouldn’t forgive, “*And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also to you, unless each one of you from your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses.*” Who are the tormentors? They are evil spirits, and the effects oftentimes include a variety of physical, mental, spiritual & emotional illnesses. Our disobedience opens a door for them to torment us.

In Deuteronomy 11 and later 26 we get a glimpse of the many blessings that come with walking in God’s ways, versus the curses that result from disobedience. In 11:26-28 He says, “*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding*

*you today; and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today...”* And God told His people in Exodus 15:26, *“If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the Lord, am your healer.”*

One thing for certain that is not conditional is His love for us. No matter how rebellious we’ve been, He loves us beyond measure, and His heart is always to lovingly draw us to Himself.

Jesus came to redeem us from the curse of sin and He absorbed all our guilt and shame, so these “if-then” conditions found both in the old and new covenants, are not about saving us or keeping us saved. In the new covenant our eternal life is already secured *“by grace through faith.”* Conditions and consequences are the “here and now” guidelines—life’s electric fences—and if we don’t abide by God’s principles we’ll experience plenty of trouble in this life, and we certainly won’t receive many answers to prayers.

We’re not talking about the work already done in our spirits, but the work being done in our souls. Don’t make the mistake of equating these conditions with salvation requirements. While the conditions and consequences don’t affect our spirits already made perfect, our souls as well as our bodies oftentimes feel the pressure of the Potter’s hand when we’re not lining up with His ways.

### SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF DISEASE

For over thirty years studies and case histories have shown that at least 80% of sicknesses have spiritual or emotional causes. Not all diseases have spiritual roots because some illnesses & physical conditions are due to bad nutrition, toxins, substance abuse, etc., but the majority have been found to be the result of spiritual curses. Scripture tells us that those curses are the result of disobedience, and they can affect not only the disobedient person but also his or her children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren: *“The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the*

*iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.” (Numbers 14:18)*

Proverbs 26:2 says *“As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse without cause shall not come.”* This scripture tells us that no curse can come unless there’s a specific reason, an open door for it. Isn’t that what it says? Sickness is certainly not a blessing; on the contrary, it’s a curse.

Proverbs 14:30 gives us a clue about the consequences of envy and jealousy: *“A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.”* Keep in mind that our immune system’s red blood cells are produced in our bones, so if there is rottenness in the bones, our immune systems are compromised, opening the door for diseases to flourish. *“Disorders of the immune system can result in autoimmune diseases, inflammatory diseases and cancer.”* (Wikipedia article)

### BITTERNESS LINKED TO CANCER

It has been discovered that cancer thrives in an acidic environment, and there are all kinds of special diets they say we need to adhere to in order to reduce the acidity in our bodies. However, guess what causes our bodies to become more acidic than anything and everything combined. Bitterness & unforgiveness. Bitterness is toxic to our immune system. Bitterness sets the stage for cancer and disables our immune systems from fighting it off as God designed.

This includes forgiving everyone who has hurt us, stolen from us, cheated on us, said hateful things to us and treated us badly. This can certainly be a daunting task, especially when there have been deep emotional, sexual & physical violations in our pasts. Father God is touched by these painful realities and He’s here to heal our wounds, but forgiveness is key.

Besides forgiving others we also have to forgive ourselves. That is, we have to stop beating ourselves up about something we regret we did or said in the past. Many people are not happy with themselves. They’re dissatisfied with their personality or physical appearance, and there’s an internal self-rejection going on that is toxic. Autoimmune diseases are physical manifestations of internal self-rejection. Just as we attack ourselves mentally and emotionally, our bodies in turn

attack themselves, resulting in autoimmune diseases like lupus, diabetes and neuropathy.

Thirdly, we have to “forgive” God; that is, not become embittered against Him. Needless to say, God has never done anything wrong, but we should never hold a grudge against our loving Father, because He always has our best in mind.

We shouldn't hold a grudge against others, ourselves or God. We need to release the grudges and forgive...70 times 70, right?

I want to walk in complete forgiveness not only to be obedient and pleasing to the Lord, but I also want to forgive because I want to avoid diseases like cancer and rheumatoid arthritis, two of many diseases that are common when we harbor bitterness.

#### HEART FAILURE LINKED TO FEAR, STRESS & ANXIETY

Even the medical world has found emotional roots of many diseases. Medics say that the primary cause of heart disease and heart attacks is fear, anxiety and stress. Fear is also the root issue behind high blood pressure, asthma and allergies. Jesus made reference to the connection between heart failure and fear in Luke 21:26: “...*men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth...*”

We weren't designed to live in fear & anxiety. We weren't designed to live in a state of constant “fight or flight.” Our bodies can't handle it. Fear, stress & anxiety weaken our immune system so it can't function as God designed it to.

The truth is that anxiety and stress are a form of fear. Fear and faith are exact opposites, aren't they? “*Without faith it's impossible to please God,*” right? That's what we're told in Hebrews 11:6.

Pastor Henry Wright of *Be in Health* says, “*Faith represents your future. Fear represents the destruction of your future. Faith and Fear are equal in this dimension: they both demand to be fulfilled.*”

How many times in the Bible are we told “*fear not*” and “*don’t be anxious*”? So if we live in fear, anxiety and worry, isn’t it true that we’re disobeying the Lord who told us not to fear?

Fear is certainly a very common thing in our lives. Do you think we should repent for not trusting God by our worrying...or should we keep living in this disobedience?

### SALVATION AND HEALING BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH

3 John 1:2 says “*Beloved, I wish above all things that you would prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.*” Is it true that we can be physically healthy just like we can have healthy souls?

Jesus provided for both. On the cross Jesus provided for our spiritual salvation, and by the stripes He bore He provide for our healing. Just like we receive salvation by repentance and faith, we receive physical and mental healing by repentance and faith.

When we find that we’re not experiencing the blessings and promises of health that God’s word promises to the righteous, the first thing we need to do is examine our hearts and make sure we’re not walking outside of His loving boundaries. If things are constantly going wrong in our lives—whether it be health-wise, financially, relationally or even mechanically—it would behoove us to make sure we haven’t stepped out of the center of the Potter’s wheel. If we’re not forgiving, not giving, not loving ourselves or others, we may be blocking God’s hand of protection, provision and blessing.

### HUMILITY: A KEY COMPONENT FOR HEALING

I’m convinced that besides faith, a very important key for opening the door for healing is humility. James 5:16 tells us, “*Confess your sins [faults] one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” Notice that before healing comes confession and prayer. Humility and confession is to come even before prayer. That’s what it says.

James says more about the conditions in chapter 4: “*But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up.*” God is attracted to humility.

## MY OWN BATTLE WITH CANCER

I'm a cancer survivor. Cancer began spreading in my body during a difficult situation in my life. I was in a state of frustration with God and myself. I was unhappy with my lot in life. My reaction was like that of the clay in Romans 9:20, "*Why have you made me this way?*"

Although it wasn't obvious on the outside, there was ungratefulness and self-bitterness in my heart, and I was also broken-hearted and depressed. Depression weakened my immune system, and because of bitterness my body became acidic which created a perfect storm for Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer to invade my body. Scans showed that cancer was in most of my organs. I had stepped out from under God's protective umbrella. It was MY fault, not God's.

When the Holy Spirit revealed my sin to me, I repented of self-rejection and for not being grateful to God. He forgave me and freed me from the tormentors. Many people prayed for me, and in the last stage of cancer—when the doctor said I had less than a month to live—God lifted me up and completely healed me. Within three months a scan showed no evidence of cancer whatsoever. Over a decade has passed since that time, and I'm still healthy. By His grace I'll continue to be cancer-free!

In John 5:14, after having healed the man, Jesus told him, "*go and sin no more lest something worse come upon you.*" That's what I try my best to do now. When someone hurts me, I do my best to forgive them as quickly as possible, even asking God, "*Lord help me forgive them and bless them.*" Many times I say out loud, "*I forgive so-and-so in the name of Jesus Christ*"... because I don't want to be turned over to the tormentors again. If I don't forgive, I'm opening the door to the devil. Don't hold a grudge; just let it go!

## ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES: ROOTED IN FEAR

Also during the past decade God healed me of asthma and severe allergies. It has been discovered that asthma has spiritual & emotional roots in anxiety and fear of abandonment. It's especially common with children without fathers in the home. This type of insecurity affects the immune system which affects the respiratory system.

The basic problem is fear. Again, what did God say to us regarding fear and anxiety? *Don't fear; don't be anxious.* Right?

So, how can we be free from fear? 2 Timothy 1:7 says that *"God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind."* Then in 1 John 4:18 we're told *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love."*

We have to receive God's perfect love to be free from fear. And since fear is the opposite of faith, when that spirit of fear leaves, we'll have more faith.

That's what happened to me. Over a period of years I had to repent over and over again for living in fear and anxiety, and when I was finally able to receive Father God's perfect love, I had faith to believe He was going to heal me. When I finally "got it" He healed me instantly. Being able to breathe freely without the need for medication has been a dream come true!

#### HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE: STRESS AND ANXIETY

A couple of years ago I was experiencing a stressful situation in my life. My Dad was on his deathbed and that was stressing me out, which led to elevated blood pressure. The high blood pressure began to affect my right eye. A large spot appeared and I had distorted vision. One day I told my office mate Phil what was happening. He checked my blood pressure with a portable tester and we found that it was really high.

His immediate response was, *"let me pray for you right now."* That was great, but I knew if I didn't deal with the root issue of anxiety and fear, prayer wouldn't do much good. So I prayed first, *"Lord, forgive me for walking in anxiety and for trying to carry this load myself. I give it to you, Lord."*

Then Phil prayed a prayer of faith over me, asking God to heal me. When he finished we checked my blood pressure again. Within two to three minutes my blood pressure had come down to normal and the spot in my vision went away and hasn't returned.

Did you notice the sequence that led to this and other healings? 1. humility (confession), 2. repentance, 3. prayer of faith, 4. God releases healing. As described in James 5, sometimes besides confessing our sins to one another and praying for each other in order to be healed, we are told to call for the church elders, anoint with oil and pray the prayer of faith.

### THERE'S A BETTER WAY

We have promises of God regarding healing, but we cannot receive these promises if we are not walking in God's principles. Many times we want to take medications and strong drugs to alleviate physical symptoms, and sometimes on a temporary basis that's fine, but there is a more excellent way.

One of my favorite examples is this: Imagine if you're drawing drinking water from a creek, but the water is filthy and putrid. You could clean the water with filters and boil it, and although that would take a lot of time and effort, it would work. But there's a better way. Go upstream and remove the dead animal from the creek!

That's the way it is with a majority of our sicknesses. Remove the anxiety; remove the bitterness...ask God to forgive you, and the devil will have no legal right to torment you with diseases. And our immune systems will take care of the majority of our problems, as God designed them to.

### THE MEDICAL SYSTEM OR OUR GREAT PHYSICIAN?

When we get sick most of us automatically go see our doctor and take the treatments and pharmaceutical drugs he or she prescribes. Most Christians thank God He has provided that means for disease management. I've been the grateful recipient of modern medical care myself many times.

But is that the way God intended us to receive healing? There are certainly some instances in the scriptures where we're told how to alleviate physical issues, like when Paul told Timothy in 1 Tim. 5:23 to *"use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."* In Matthew 9:12 Jesus—referring to Himself—said, *"The ones who are whole do not need a physician, but the ones who are sick."*

The problem is, in our day most people have made gods of “practicing” medical doctors, believing every word they say and following their advise above God’s, but God wants us to seek Him first for all our needs.

Another problem comes when we depend on pharmaceutical drugs to mask the symptoms that are likely present because of living in bitterness, anxiety or some other disobedience. In many cases illnesses, constant poverty, multiple failed relationships, and even being “accident prone,” are actually warning signs from God that in some way we’re not walking in His ways.

Years ago miners kept a canary in a cage deep in their mine tunnels so that if poisonous gases began to leak into the mine the canary’s sudden death would serve as an early warning so they could escape unharmed. Staying on constant medications without dealing with our underlying issues is like ignoring the canary’s demise. Taking painkillers can alleviate the pain of rheumatoid arthritis, for instance, but the best way is to walk in complete forgiveness and get rid of all bitterness, which will naturally reduce the inflammation and eliminate the pain.

We have record in scripture where we see that God wants us to seek Him first concerning our sicknesses: *“And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa was diseased in his feet, until his disease was very grievous. Yet in his disease he did not seek help from the Lord, but the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers and died in the forty-first year of his reign.”* (2 Chronicles 16:12-13)

The point is, as a child of God you should go to Him first, ask Him to reveal what might be the root cause, and if He releases you to get medical attention, go for it. The instructions in James 5 concerning the sick aren’t “call your doctor,” but “call for the elders of the church” for prayer. We have it backwards when we start getting treated for our diseases by a physician without it ever crossing our minds to seek God and deal with the spiritual issues that are probably the cause of the disease in the first place. What if all it took to get you healed of breast cancer was forgiving your mother or your sister? Believe it or not, it can be that simple, and there are thousands of such case histories to back up that statement.

## BYPASSING GOD?

Shouldn't we "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*" in turn receiving what we need from our Father (Matt. 6:33). Why is it that even the church so often thoughtlessly bypasses Him and runs to money, shopping, food, relationships and even pharmaceuticals to try to fill our God-shaped voids?

Imagine if your Dad was a brilliant mathematics professor and instead of going next door and asking Him for help on your schoolwork you went across town to get help from a classmate. Wouldn't that make your Dad sad or even jealous? What if your wife was an amazing cook and loved to cook for you and your family, but instead of coming home to enjoy her cooking you frequently asked your next door neighbor to cook meals for you, how would that make your wife feel? Our Father is a jealous God (Deut. 4:24), He's relational, and He wants us to go to Him first with our problems.

Psalm 103:1-5 says "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*"

If there's havoc in our lives, if we're always having trouble making ends meet financially, experiencing ongoing broken relationships, things are always breaking down, there's always a reason. God said he would send angels to keep us from stumbling (Psalm 91:11-12), so if we find ourselves stumbling frequently, we need to figure out what's preventing the angels from protecting us. We need to just stop and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what the root issue is. What's giving the devil legal right to beat us up?

We've all fallen and sinned—even as believers. But when we humble ourselves, God lifts us up, cleanses us, heals us and then oftentimes uses us to console and train others. We're in school to be formed, trained and prepared to be a pure bride for the Lord.

So, be encouraged when you're experiencing difficulties in life because that means that Father God the Potter is working on you.

Just make sure you're not working against Him. God has wonderful goals for you if you'll stay in the center of the Potter's wheel.

Is there some area in your life that is blocking the blessings and promises of God? Have you forgiven everyone from your heart? When you hear the name of someone who has hurt you, are you in peace and feel no grudge or ill feelings?

Is there fear in your life? Are you being still in the center of the Potter's wheel or are you always trying to avoid the change He wants to bring about in your life? God says, "*Be still and know that I AM God.*" Give control to Father God, and embrace His will for your life.

If a trial is upon us, needless to say, since He's in control, Father is fully aware of it. Yes, He could remove the trial, but perhaps He's trying to get our attention, putting an obstacle in our way to get us back on track. The first thing we should do is to search our own hearts—our thoughts, emotions, and motives—and ask the Lord if there is some way we are "off center." Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what the root of the issue is and when He reveals it, just surrender. Humble repentance on our part will move God's hand to close the door on the tormentors.

What does repentance look like? Surrendering and telling our Heavenly Father you're sorry for your disobedience, then making a conscious choice to obey Him. Forgive the unforgiveable, love the unlovely, walk in faith rather than in fear & anxiety, and thank God for blessing those you're jealous of. Does any of that sound impossible to do? Don't worry; ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Remember, He's your personal guide and tutor, and He loves you dearly.

*"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:15-16)

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