

## WORSHIP, MEDICATION & REDEMPTION

By Gordon Bals

AS A COUNSELOR, I AM OFTEN ASKED the questions about taking medication. I am most often asked this question by someone who is experiencing symptoms of depression, and frequently there is a biological component to depression and medications that can help. So for me it is an important question. In order to understand the use of medication we have to understand how our physical body comes into play in our call to worship God with all our heart, mind, and soul (Matthew 22:37).

As humans we are creatures that have been fashioned to arrange ourselves around someone bigger (the Creator). What we do outwardly is always determined by how we are orientating ourselves around God inwardly. Viewing ourselves as worshippers brings the importance of our physical body into the discussion. Our outer man or our body (how we act, what we choose, what we say) is moved by our inner man. (I favor this term over others the Scriptures use like heart and soul.) Winston Smith says, *Whether evaluating the thoughts, desires, fears or intentions of the heart the critical question of Scripture is always, "Whom do you serve?" or "Who is your God?" That is, man is always evaluated and addressed as a creature that worships by nature. Because the outer man is driven by the activity of the heart, a perversion of worship leads to a perversion of behavior. In this way the Bible teaches that all activity of the heart and its subsequent expression in behavior is spiritual in nature. The way to understand human behavior is to recognize that it proceeds from inner to outer as an expression of worship.*

The body is important, because it reflects what our inner man is doing with God. As Christians our inner man

is made up of the mind (our rationality), will (our choices energized by our longings), emotions (our capacity to feel), flesh (our sinful nature) and our spirit (Christ's nature in us). In essence, good worship is when our body is directed by our spirit because our mind, will and emotions are working together to reject the flesh (deception) and follow the Spirit (truth).

Let's consider what worship might look like for a parent whose child just found out they were not accepted to the college of their choice. If this parent forgets the truth that God is in control, she might feed into her flesh and spend an hour telling her child what she could have

that God can redeem such a moment. Then she could follow the Spirit by choosing (will) to sorrow with her child that they would have to let go of the college of her choice. This is an example of the inner man working together and being reflected in this parent's outer man (her body). Since this parent's inner man was embracing truth in every area, she was able to follow the Spirit and worship God by incarnating the Gospel to her child. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship* (Romans 12:1).

As we are thinking, feeling, longing and choosing in accordance with what is true, the Holy Spirit is free to direct our outer man in worship to God. Seeing ourselves as worshippers means we cannot separate one part of our inner man from the other parts. It also means we cannot separate our inner man from our outer man. Our outer man only does what our inner man tells it to do. This is one reason our physical body is important.

Our body is not only important because it reflects how we worship; it is also important because it is the container that houses all the components of our inner man. I want you to understand the different components of our inner man, because we often think our worship is only determined by what we think and choose. We tend to ignore longings and emotions which can be more impacted by our physical body and in turn impact what we think and choose and how we worship. For instance, we know it is wrong to steal. If however, someone is tired and hungry enough, his depri-

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done differently to have gotten into that college. The child leaves feeling condemned and outcast, because the parent is not worshipping well. The parent was not holding onto God's sovereignty in her child's life (rationality), was unwilling to feel her child's sorrow (rejected emotion), and could not let go of control (misdirected will). Since the workings of her inner man were following deception she ended up divided from her child.

On the other hand a mother could worship well by honoring her deep hunger (longing) for her child to reach her goals by feeling sad (emotions) that she did not get into the college she wanted to. In order to do this, she would have to resist resentment and bitterness (the flesh) by remembering (rationality)

vation may entice him to steal. He doesn't make a wrong choice because of knowledge (he knows it is wrong to steal) He makes a wrong choice because of misdirected longing and emotions coming from physical deprivation.

Such a scenario highlights the second reason the physical body is important. It houses our inner man, and if we do not take care of our body, our worship will be diminished. *Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body* (1 Corinthians 6: 13-20). Redemptive living is when our mind, will and emotions are working together *in a temple that is being taken care of*, so that we are freer to follow the spirit and worship God. If we don't take care of our body, it will weigh down our inner man and contribute to us walking in the flesh.

Someone who knows well the truth of God (mind) but consistently gets to bed late (body) may feel more despair (emotions), make poorer choices, (will) and find they are dreaming of illegitimate relief (longing). Their lack of sleep is affecting all their inner parts and diminishing their worship. For them, a means of grace, even a spiritual discipline, would be to ensure a good nights sleep. We often neglect the body, because we don't believe it is 'spiritual.'

Medication is simply a modern way of helping us to take care of 'our temple' that houses the Holy Spirit. Our physical body has been ravaged by the fall in many different ways. There are those who are born with physical deformities, diabetes, and cerebral palsy among many other corporeal troubles. In the same way, there are those who are born with bodies that produce less serotonin. This lower level of serotonin in the brain alters their mood, causing or contributing to depression. Such people 'work' and engage their faith without significantly alleviating their symp-

toms, and yet their efforts are noticeably similar to those who move out of a depressed mood more easily. These same people begin to take an anti-depressant which takes an edge off their lethargy and sadness and as a result they begin to choose, think, long, and feel in such a way that they are walking in the truth... or worshipping more fully than... prior to taking the medication. The medication has helped them experience redemption. An anti-depressant replaced some of the serotonin their body was not producing. Now their inner man is working together much better, and it is noticeable in their outer man.

It may just be the population I work with, but I often find the opposite of people pushing down the doors to get medication. Often they are ashamed to even ask about it or consider it. As humans we regularly refrain from seeing a doctor or taking help because we

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are proud. This tends to be even worse when we are dealing with problems like depression or bi-polar disorder. Often the biological component to these problems is the major contributing factor, among a constellation of factors. Yet, we often neglect the biological part, because we feel like we should do better with the other contributing factors. For instance, someone with depression may feel a lot of self-contempt or have some irrational fears. They know embracing the Gospel can disarm self-contempt and fear and are aware that there is always more they could do to embrace the Gospel. So they keep working on their self-contempt and fear and neglect any attention to their physical body, because that seems less spiritual.

Yet, for a host of people facing a difficulty like depression, the basis is biological. Such a person has almost

always processed an event in a heavier, sadder, and more serious manner than those around them. As a result, they began to dislike themselves or grow self-contempt because of the extra weight and fear they feel in life. Along the way, they began to detest their inability to laugh things off like their family or friends around them. Their depression was spawned from a biological basis, or heavily influenced by biology, and became more entrenched as they matured because of the other troubles their biological depression helped generate. As long as such a person remains focused on a symptom that largely grew out of the depression, like self-contempt or fear, they don't deal with the biological basis to the problem. Often times it 'feels better' to keep working at our self-contempt than humbly taking medication that would hit at the origin of the depression and bring redemption to the way they were thinking, feeling and choosing. Remaining focused on the secondary symptoms of depression, without dealing with the foundational factor (biology), keeps a depression from lifting. Often, pride at being able to do more religious activity and feel spiritual keeps us from taking help with our physical body that would cut through to the heart of the problem and bring real change.

When seeking help with any of our problems, we are called to be discerning. One question I often hear as people are considering medication is, "Isn't taking medication running away from our problems?" In a variety of situations, medication can genuinely help a person. It is good for them to long for and move towards alleviating suffering they are experiencing by taking medical help. (That is redemption.) I have not yet found a medication that takes away our problems. If someone is only taking medication because they think it's a magic cure, soon after they begin the medication, they will have an opportunity to see the foolishness in their choices. A medication used discerningly facilitates redemption – it helps a person's mind, will, and emotions work together to follow the Spirit.

It helps us be more faithful to God's call on our life. Someone experiencing the symptoms of bi-polar disorder will still have a job to face, children to raise, friends to relate to, and a myriad of other possible areas of conflict. The fact that their mood swings are not as great, as a result of taking medication will most likely mean they actually face their problems better.

Others are concerned about the side effects that may come with taking medication. It is important to let your doctor know about any side effects and to see if the medication can be changed or adjusted to alleviate the side effects. But in this fallen world there are no perfect solutions. Take, for instance, someone who realizes their eyesight is getting worse and is prescribed glasses. There are certain 'side effects' to wearing glasses or contacts. Overall, the improved eyesight is worth it, even though there are changes to their way of living. Many redemptive paths have some side effects. The wheat grows among the tares. Medicine is like many other good things we employ in the path of redemption – it is helpful but not perfect.

Those I work with are also concerned about the news they hear about an increase in the use of medication and reports of "over-medication". It is true that the use of medication has grown and that people are being over medicated. Doctors can also misdiagnose or prescribe medication when it is not needed. However, we overuse or misuse many helpful things such as computers, exercise, books and food; and these things are not wrong. It is our use of them that is faulty. We are capable of using any helpful thing in a wrong way. The use of medication has increased, because we have more access to medication, better medications, and more experience with how they work. All these positive advances can lead to the misuse of medication. The use of computers or books has also increased. (And they too can be overused or used for bad purposes.)

I have found others who are concerned about becoming dependent on medication. When someone is taking a medication that helps to alleviate the biological part of their problem, they are not being dependent on the medication any more than someone with poor eye sight is being dependent on glasses. We are more comfortable relying on glasses, because we don't feel like we contributed to any part of our poor eyesight. But with a 'psychoactive drug', we don't want to depend on it because we

believe we 'should' be able to overcome the problems it addresses because we can influence its symptoms in some ways that don't involve taking the medication. When a medication is genuinely alleviating a biological component to a problem, it is wise to take it the same way we regularly employ medication for other physical ailments. There is a difference between dependency (or relying on something to help us) and addiction. The majority of the psychoactive drugs are not physically addictive. Again, our problem is often pride, because we are depending (not addicted) on medication to help us with something we feel as if we should be able to overcome without it.

There are circumstances in which a situational depression (sparked by a difficult situation not biology) develops, and the medication in this instance is like taking something for a stress-related headache. We take something to stop the pain while we consider how to deal with the life issues that contributed to the headache. A person takes an antidepressant because it helps to relieve some of the symptoms and gives them energy to address the other factors. A situational depression often brings to light ways we have been living in the flesh, and the medication provides a helpful edge to facilitate dealing with the uncovered issues.

As believers, we can never run away from our need to be thoughtful and discerning. The world we live in will throw a myriad of choices and possibilities at us that we will have to face and navigate through with discernment. Medication helps to restore "fallenness" in our body the way a thoughtful book helps to restore "fallenness" in our mind. It is not any more unspiritual to get help with our body through medication than it is to get help with our mind through reading. If we are going to worship more faithfully, we have to be alive to redemption in our mind, our will, our emotions and our body. Faithful worship grows out of redemption in all these areas. My prayer is that we would be free to respond to the Lord in whatever way He provides for us to experience redemption.



## DAYMARK NEWS

- This past November many of you received a year-end-letter from GORDON, and we want to update you on the response. It was genuinely overwhelming. Over \$42,000 was given towards the ministry, and about half of that was earmarked for Gordon's writing sabbatical. In addition, about 12 new individuals and/or families committed to give on a monthly or quarterly basis. Coupled with the year end giving, Gordon now has the necessary financial support he needs through 2008. He was able to take a two-week writing sabbatical in February and feels as if the contents for his book, "Every Husband Feels like a Jerk" is coming together. He will be putting together a book proposal in the near future that he will use to show potential publishers. As you remember, please pray for that process.
- DEWAYNE recently sent out a support letter to family and friends. Please pray for him and that his support level would grow enough to sustain his board-approved salary.
- JULIE has taken on some more counseling every other week, and the board is prayerfully considering if it is time to add another staff counselor. Please pray for this and for Julie, Dewayne and Gordon as they counsel.

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