



**North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)**  
PO Box 121; Botsford, CT 06404 \*\*\* Phone/Fax (tollfree): 888.426.4712  
Email: [info@nacsww.org](mailto:info@nacsww.org) \*\*\* Website: <http://www.nacsww.org>

*“A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work”*

**THE HEART EXAMINATION: A TOOL TO INTEGRATE BIBLICAL  
CONCEPTS INTO THE HEALING PROCESS**

**By: David Sedlacek, Ph.D., LCSW**

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# **The Heart Examination: A Tool to Integrate Biblical Concepts into the Healing Process**

**David Sedlacek, Ph.D., LCSW**

## **Introduction**

The Heart Examination is a biblical tool developed by the author that has been used for many years with great therapeutic benefit to Christian clients. It was developed for use in intensive residential treatment experiences, but has also proven to be a useful framework in outpatient settings. Christian social workers often desire to use the power available to them in the Scriptures, but there is a dearth of clinical frameworks in which to hang powerful biblical realities. There are several perspectives related to biblical counseling that have been well established. They range from Nouthetic Counseling (Adams, 1962) and Spiritual Warfare perspectives (Anderson, 2009) to those that are more relational in nature. While this author values each of these perspectives, he has chosen an eclectic approach in the development of this instrument. In this article, biblical concepts and therapeutic approaches will be connected with several classic social work theories resulting in a powerful therapeutic framework that is true first to the Bible and secondly to sound, theory-based social work practice.

The name “Heart Examination” was chosen for this instrument (See Table One) in recognition of the biblical reality that the root of human difficulties is in the heart. (Jeremiah 17:9-10, Proverbs 4:23, 16:9, 18:2, and 20:9, Matthew 15:19). Oswald Chambers states that the heart is the center of the human being. (Chambers, 1986). The human heart that was once in perfect harmony with the Creator’s Heart, through sin, was disconnected. The longing of God’s Heart is the restoration of complete oneness with human hearts once again (atonement). David prayed “Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” God wants to take up residence within our hearts completely once again (Ezekiel 36:26-27, John 14:17, Colossians 1:27). Although God is quite capable of miraculous intervention to cleanse our hearts, He respects not only our freedom of choice, but also our need to grow in character. Therefore, heart work is a process that takes time and effort. Just as intimacy in a human-human relationship takes time and effort, so it is with a divine-human relationship. This intimacy involves conversation, or prayer which will be discussed next.

## **Prayer**

It is important to understand at the outset that the Heart Examination is merely a tool to connect clients with God in a very personal and specific way. God is the Healer. Christian social workers are instruments whose privilege it is to connect hurting ones with the Great Physician. As a means of acknowledging our dependence upon God, it is necessary to begin with prayer. The Scripture we suggest starting with is Psalm 139:23-24. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” There are five columns in the Heart Examination. Each column represents a more or less discrete step on the healing journey. As such, each provides an opportunity to connect with the Lord in that specific area of need. Talking with God (prayer) about that specific area is always appropriate. In this article, each column of the Heart Examination will be discussed separately, and a specific prayer focus will be suggested for each.

Table One

## The Heart Examination

Directions: Ask the Lord to search your heart (Psalm 139:23-24). Pray that He will reveal to you everything that He knows you need to see now.

<b>Events of Life</b>	<b>Wounds</b>	<b>Fallen Responses</b>	<b>False Beliefs</b>	<b>Structures of Self</b>
<p>List the painful events in your life as you remember them, especially from your childhood years since these are often the most formative. Also try to identify common patterns and themes in your home. Begin with one painful event or theme as you experienced it. Focus on one person who hurt you at a time (e.g., parent, school mate, or sibling). Go through the entire Heart Examination focused on this event or theme. Then go on to the next one. Be sure to complete this assignment on all who raised you or who had that responsibility. Include any others who caused significant pain. Focus on those events that caused painful feelings such as fear, confusion, or shame.</p>	<p>Focus on your feelings about the painful event or theme as best you can identify them. If you have difficulty getting in touch with your feelings, ask the Lord to help you. It can also be helpful to imagine what the feelings of a normal child or person might have been going through your experience. Also, think of how you feel now when you see children exposed to the same or similar events. What losses you have had as a result of your life experiences (e.g., loss of parents, childhood, innocence, virginity, capacity to trust, zest for life, intimacy with God or others). Describe these losses in as much detail as possible.</p>	<p>As unconverted children, we respond to being hurt with a lack of honor toward our parents. We therefore bring upon ourselves the negative consequences of life-shortening attitudes and behaviors, as well as life not going well for us in the very areas we struggle to honor our parents. (See Deuteronomy 5:16). In addition, we judge our parents and find that those judgments come back on us (See Matthew 7:1-2 and Romans 2:1) Examples of judgments are that our parents were controlling, weak, abusive, stupid, etc. We also often make inner vows to which we are bound. (I'll always ..., or I'll never....) These vows must be identified and broken.</p>	<p>False beliefs are lies that we believe about ourselves connected with painful events. Believing these lies calls into question our personal worth and value. If I was treated shamefully, I might conclude that I am essentially defective, unlovable, will never amount to anything, am ugly, stupid or do not deserve to live. These lies keep us from embracing to truth of how God sees us. Instead we believe Satan, the father of lies who seeks to destroy us. These lies can affect not only how I see myself, but also how I see other groups of people (all men ... or, all women...). We may also have distorted views of God or of life itself.</p>	<p>A structure is a habitual pattern of responding to life that a person builds into their character. These understandable survival mechanisms give a message to God that in these ways He is not enough. Death to self means asking God to remove these structures. A partial list of structures includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Control/controlling</li> <li>2. Self-dependence</li> <li>3. Negativity</li> <li>4. Self-righteousness</li> <li>5. Judgmentalism</li> <li>6. Victim/victimizer</li> <li>7. Performance orientation</li> <li>8. Shame core</li> <li>9. Noble martyr</li> <li>10. Self-sabotage</li> <li>11. Self-comfort through addictive processes</li> <li>12. Fear of rejection</li> <li>13. Fear of abandonment</li> <li>14. Caretaking</li> <li>15. Enabling or other dysfunctional family roles.</li> </ol>

## Events of Life

Each of us has a story that is composed of the events of daily life as we have experienced them. Some events are traumatic, others are more mundane; some evoke joyful memories, others are associated with negative memories and emotions. Some clients will report no single event that stands out to “define” their life story, but rather a more chronic dysfunctional set of patterns that have contributed to present heart issues. A useful theoretical framework for examining our life stories is narrative theory. “Narrative theory holds that it is through stories that we weave life's events together and make them into a recognizable whole. Be it written in the form of a parable, novel, or play; conveyed orally through the recounting of one's life story or a simple incident on the way to work; or presented visually through a film or a report of a disaster victim's rescue on the nightly news, narrative provides the language and structure that help us interpret our own or others' experiences.” (Jones, p. 229) According to George Stroup, a constructed narrative contains both “chronicle” and interpretation.” (Stroup, p. 112-113). “A chronicle is simply the sum of those events and experiences which constitute an individual's personal history.” As we see from the model of the Johari Window, our chronicle includes events that we remember as well as those we don't. (Shapiro, et. al., p. 289-290) However, without interpretation, a simple chronicle does not tell the complete story. “To become history, it needs to be interpreted. You don't get to *know* someone just by finding out about her past. To know the *person*, you need to find out what the past means to her. We need to know what ‘form or shape or pattern’ she culls from the chronicle and projects over the whole.” (Stroup, p. 115) As stated by Bruner (1986), “stories make meaning” (p. 140) and therefore are subjective in nature. Bruner notes that narratives possess a beginning, middle, and end. “We interpret the past and anticipate the future on the basis of our current experiences. Thus, stories or narratives lend a sense of continuity to our lives” (Jones, p. 229).

Christian social workers have an advantage in processing client stories from two perspectives. First, it has been well documented that human memory is not entirely reliable. In the Preface to his book *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adults Victims of Sexual Abuse*, Dan Allender does a masterful exposition of the role of memory in the healing process. However, in a very real sense, it is the client's perception of an event that is important. Therefore, as social workers, we start where the client is. However, in working with Christian clients, we have an additional powerful tool. Paul states in Hebrews 4:13, “nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes.”(NLT) This tells me that God has seen every event of my life including those things that have been too painful for me to remember. If God knows in his wisdom that it is important for my recovery journey to remember something, he will one way or another bring it to my memory. He promises “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26) In examining this verse, some might conclude that it refers only to things that Jesus said to his disciples. However, this verse points us to a more powerful reality open to today's Christian social workers.

That reality is that God also has a story about our story. His story consists of every way he has been involved in our lives at every moment. When a person is hurt, God is not absent from the scene, but is actively involved doing everything he can to help, limited only by his unwillingness to violate the free will of human beings. Every time we are hurt, he is hurt (See Isaiah 63:9). God's dynamic involvement in our story includes his attempts to comfort and speak to us today because he is still Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). So we need not fear as Christian social workers, that our clients will not be able to remember what they need to remember, when

they are ready to handle it. We can trust God with this process and not resort to helping him out with techniques that could harm the client in the long run.

### **Wounds**

There is a very subjective element to the wounding that accompanies adverse life events. This subjectivity is related to the unique characteristics and resiliency of each individual. In one sense, all of us are victims since we live in a fallen world. However, we do not all respond to the pain of life in the same way. Some types of wounding, however, typically result in a deeper brokenness than others. For example, incest, molestation, and rape severely undermine a person's capacity to feel safe in the world and to trust anyone, even God. There are often deep questions that a person who experiences tragedy has but may have difficulty expressing. "God, where were you when this happened to me?" "Why did you let it happen if you are God?" "Have I done something so bad that I deserve this type of abuse?" God is not offended by these questions. Rather, He invites us to come to Him personally and ask the hard questions we have of Him. In my experience, God is more interested in intimacy with Him than with us approaching Him perfectly. In other words, even if we are angry at Him for letting the event happen, He's happy that we share even that. Anger is often directed at those we love. It can be a sign of intimacy in relationship. God also delights to answer the hard questions. Diane Langberg, Ph.D., noted therapist specializing in helping victims of sexual trauma, stated that when we share our story, we open ourselves to feel the pain, and that is when healing begins. She quotes Isaiah 45:3 "And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness – secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name."

God has often given individuals I've worked with a picture of themselves in their mind's eye of a time when they were hurt. He shows them not only themselves but also Himself, and helps them to see what He was doing at the time of the abuse. This is a powerful healing experience. It is one of the "treasures hidden in the darkness." Hosea 2:14-15 states "I will lead her out into the desert and speak tenderly to her there. I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope." The desert times in our experience that were meant by Satan to destroy us, God transforms into gateways or doors of hope. Ministering to clients in the deep places of brokenness often benefits from the strategic use of healing Scriptures. The Lord often leads me to a Scripture that speaks perfectly to the situation of the person I am ministering to, which highlights another essential point. That is that this healing ministry is really God's ministry. Our primary job is to be open to the prompting of His Spirit. Many times when my professional training might have led me down one path, God took the process an entirely different direction because everything is naked and exposed before His eyes (Hebrews 4:13). He knows the innermost thoughts, motivations and needs of each client.

For those who have the courage to walk through "the valley of the shadow of death," (Psalms 23:4) we suggest the following exercises related to wounds: When you have listed the painful experiences of your life, how has each of them hurt you? What wounds are connected with each experience? What losses have you experienced related to each hurt? We strongly suggest that the client get a sheet of paper and write them down. This is where Jesus wants to touch and heal the client. If working in a group setting, it is important for the group members to share their stories with one another. This helps clients to see that they are not alone. Most of the time, clients will not be able to share the entire story right away because of the erosion of trust. More elements of the story surface after a repeated telling of it. Sometimes, one group member's story will trigger another member to recall a forgotten element of her story. Often, a person will not

see the negative significance of a painful event because they are so accustomed to abuse that it has become normal. Feedback from the therapist or other group members can help put this into perspective.

Whenever a client surfaces a painful memory, it is an opportunity to pray for healing. However, the purpose of the prayer is not to give a “pat” biblical solution nor to take the client out of pain, but rather to meet them in their pain. Not all clients are open to prayer at this point. Some are too angry at God. In my experience, God is very tender, gentle and patient. He is willing to wait until we are ready to approach Him.

### **Fallen Responses**

It is almost universally accepted in the Christian world that human beings are born with a fallen human nature, and that “we become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) at the time of conversion (John 3:5-8). When children are hurt, they can only respond to that hurt in the context of the nature they possess. Another way of stating this is that children will respond in a fallen or sinful way when hurt. Even more mature Christians often respond sinfully to being hurt instead of loving their enemy (Matthew 5:43). But what is sin? It is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). There are laws that cover the working of the human mind and heart just as surely as there are laws that govern physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. These laws are statements of and predictors of the way life works. The essence of “law” is that it is a command of God that he has given us for our good (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). Paul calls the law a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The Bible also teaches us that there are blessings (positive consequences) and curses (negative consequences) to either obeying or breaking the law (Deuteronomy 28). It is important to note that for children who are hurt, violation of law does not result in condemnation but in consequences. God is not unfair. If we use an illustration of nature to make the point, children are subject to gravity just as adults are, even if they have never heard of gravity. If children get hurt when they fall because of the law of gravity, would they be justified in condemning the law of gravity? Thoughtful persons also see the benefits of the law of gravity. In other words, all law works regardless of the knowledge or intent of those subject to it. This positivist argument (Payne) is based upon the premise that there is an ultimate authority Who has created the universe and upholds it moment by moment (Psalm 19).

In the realm of the human mind, three laws are the focus of the Heart Examination. The first is the fifth commandment: “Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee, that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Deuteronomy 5:16). Ephesians 6:2 says that this is the first commandment with a promise attached to it. There are actually two promises, or blessings, attached to this commandment. The first is long life, and the second is that life will go well. Therefore, if a child honors father and mother, they can expect a long life that goes well. However, let’s unpack this a bit more by giving just one example. Can a child who was molested by her father, honor her father? Unless that child is converted, it is a virtual impossibility. Given the dynamics of abuse, there may be an external appearance of honor due to the intimidation and control of the perpetrator, but this is not true honor. Honor is a willing decision of the heart to hold a person in high esteem because of that person’s position, not because of how that person has functioned in that position. God places human beings in positions of authority (parents, government leaders, church leaders, etc.) and requires that they be respected because of that position.

When children are hurt, they typically sin against those who hurt them by virtue of their fallen human nature. The result is that they are robbed of the blessings of long life and life going well. Instead they are condemned to the negative consequences of a life of negativity, self-pity, rebellion, addiction, depression and fear, all of which are life shortening. In addition, we find that life does not go well with them in the very same areas that they struggle to honor their parents. For example, children of addicted parents will struggle with addictions or codependency. If a child struggles to honor parents who have financial challenges, they will likely have issues with money themselves. The fifth commandment governs all relationships. It predicts how life works in this area.

A similar commandment is found in Matthew 7:1-2: “Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. For others will treat you as you treat them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged” (NLT). This is another example of a positivist principle that simply describes how life works. How many of us have judged our parents harshly for their lack in an area, and found ourselves doing the same thing when we were parents? Our judgments always come back on us, some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some a hundred fold. A hurt child might consciously or unconsciously judge a parent as mean, uncaring, a poor provider, untrustworthy, weak or a host of other judgments. A judgment is more than an observation about another human person. It is a thought filled with negative emotion, bitterness or resentment against that person because of what they did to hurt me. When we are judgmental, we also put ourselves above the other person and presume to be able to judge their motives. Children who judge their parents condemn themselves doing the same thing they hate the most in their parents.

The final universal principle or law that we identify as a fallen response is the law of inner vows. In Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus makes it clear that it would be best if we did not make vows because vows are sacred and we are bound by them. (See also Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). Children who are hurt often make, sometimes unconsciously, inner vows that they are bound by. Such vows can be either negative (I’ll never) or positive (I must always) in nature, but both are forms of bondage. An example of a negative vow might be “I’ll never trust anyone again.” A positive vow might be “I must always be nice” (to avoid conflict). Because these inner vows are binding they will be manifested in the life until they are broken by the authority of the word of God.

If a violation of these laws is seen properly as sin, then the solution is found in 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (KJV). In practice, we ask the client to list on a sheet of paper the specific ways that they have not honored their parents, the judgments that they made toward their parents or others in authority, and the inner vows that they have made. When the person is ready to repent of these fallen responses, we kneel together in prayer, specifically confessing each sin, and claiming the power of the promise of God to forgive and to cleanse from all the unrighteousness including the negative consequences required by the violations of law. This has been highly effective in bringing about positive changes in a person’s life. Rather than continuing to blame parents, this puts the focus squarely on a person’s own responses to one’s parents or other authority figures. Clients come to accept and rejoice in the reality that they cannot change their parents but they can change their own responses to them.

### **False Beliefs**

The events of life that a person experiences often leads to negative beliefs about oneself, others, the world and even God Himself. When children in hear messages from their parents such as “You are stupid, no good and will never amount to anything,” they have a difficult time not believing that they are true. Even when hearing these messages wounds deeply, children have a difficult time sorting out the difference between what is true and what is false. They are most often like sponges that soak in whatever messages their primary caregivers send. Cognitive-behavioral therapy views these false beliefs as thought distortions that need to be reframed so that they will no longer be self-defeating. Biblically, false beliefs are called lies. Satan is called the father of lies (John 8:44). Probably his main weapon is deceit. Satan is delighted when we believe lies about ourselves, others and God, because he knows that it robs us of the freedom of the truth (John 8:32). Please see excellent books on this subject such as *The Lies We Believe* by Christian psychologist Chris Thurman.

In using the concept of false beliefs in connection with the Heart Examination, we ask that the client attempt to connect specific false beliefs with hurtful life events. We then ask them to write out all of their false beliefs on a sheet of paper. Finally, we ask them to counter each lie with a truth found in the Word of God. We ask them to renounce each lie and to verbally, boldly proclaim each truth about themselves, others and God. Sometimes, the lies are deeply imbedded into what is called a shame core. It may take many times of repetition of a biblical truth for it to become the person’s new reality, but persistently claiming the truth of the Word of God produces positive results because “the word of God is full of living power” (Hebrews 4:12, NLT) in those who believe. The challenge is helping a client come to believe the truth about herself. The following is a list of affirmations that can be helpful in counteracting false beliefs with the truth.

There are cases where the abuse has been so damaging that the client has a core of negative beliefs that leads to a greater or lesser degree of self contempt. This shame core may require a deeper level of ministry to address issues such as an attachment disorder, personality disorder or symptoms of trauma. Please see works such as *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender or *The Trauma Model* by Colin A. Ross for a more in depth discussion of the healing process.

## **Affirmations List**

### **Ways to Practice Affirmation**

1. Spoken silently to one’s self
2. Said aloud to one’s self
3. Spoken aloud to another person
4. Spoken into a recorder and played back
5. Written down on paper

### **Some Suggested Affirmation and Corresponding Bible Verses:**

<b>Affirmation</b>	<b>Bible Text</b>
I am a child of God	Beloved, now are we the children of God. 1 John 3:2
I am precious to God	Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you... Isaiah 43:4
God holds me in His hand.	Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands... Isaiah 49:16

I am the beloved of God.	For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son... John 3:16
I am not alone.	The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him... Psalms 34:7
God wants good for me.	For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare, and not for evil... Jeremiah 29:11
God will not abandon me.	Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Isaiah 49:15 ... I will never leave you nor forsake you. Hebrews 13:5
God's strength is available to me.	Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you... Isaiah 41:10
In Christ, I am made free.	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36
In Christ, I set my sights on high.	I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13
I belong to God.	... I have called you by name, you are mine. Isaiah 43:1
I am special to God.	... For he who touches you touches the apple of his eye. Zechariah 2:8
God will give me good things.	... The Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Psalms 84:11
I am happy and at peace with God and with myself.	But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace... Galatians 5:22
I will care for and accept my body.	Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1Corinthians 6:19-20
I have clear, sound mind.	Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. 2 Timothy 1:17
I will always triumph over evil.	But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession... 2Corinthians 2:14
I will live victoriously.	But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1Corinthians 15:57
The strength of God is mine.	... For the Lord God is my strength and my song... Isaiah 12:2 Blessed are those whose strength is in you...

	They go from strength to strength... Psalms 84:6-7
I will not be overwhelmed by fear.	When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you... Isaiah 43:2
I will not fear life.	Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God... Isaiah 41:10 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear... 1John 4:18
I am free from the weight of sin.	If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1John 1:9
I am safe and protected.	I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." For he will command his angel concerning you to guard you in all your ways. Psalms 91:2,11
I love doing my work and am richly blessed by it.	Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might... Ecclesiastes 9:10
I am released from my past mistakes.	There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1
I have everything I need today.	Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself... Matthew 6:34
The wisdom of God is available to me.	If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5

### **Structures of Self**

Again, drawing upon cognitive-behavioral theory, based upon our thought processes, people build patterns of behavior into their lives to help them survive. I like to call these behaviors “structures of self” because people ourselves build them in response to pain. The good news is that if clients take responsibility for building them, then they can also claim to power to tear them down. The trap of structures of self is that when people use them, they appear to help them. For example, building a structure of not trusting others, and relying only on one’s self makes a person feel safe, but it also keeps them from real intimacy. Self-dependence also gives God the message that He is not strong enough to be trusted to take care of my needs. Similarly, a victim structure (See Table 2) draws the attention of sympathy to us and it projects responsibility for my plight onto another person. However, it does not help a person grow emotionally nor take responsibility for their actions. God is often seen as the great victimizer who is responsible for the pain that has come into that person’s life. A performance oriented person (see Table 3) does not know that he is loved, but continually tries to prove his lovability through performing to please others. Unfortunately, such a person cannot rest in the love of God for him, but tends to be anxious about salvation viewing God as a hard-to-please taskmaster. See the Heart Examination for a more complete but certainly not exhaustive list of structures of self.

Table 2

### **Characteristics of the Victim**

Check any of the following which apply to you:

- 1. Do you have a sense of impending doom?
- 2. Does it seem that bad things always happen to you?
- 3. Do you tend to feel sorry for yourself?
- 4. Do you tend to look on the negative side of life?
- 5. Do you view the world as the “enemy”?
- 6. Do you feel good when people compliment you about putting up with a difficult person or situation?
- 7. Do you attract people who take advantage of you?
- 8. Are you afraid of being take advantage of?
- 9. Have you been in a relationship more than once with someone who was physically or emotionally abusive?
- 10. When others raise their voices at you, do you wilt?
- 11. Have you been “blind” to how others have used you? Do you make excuses for their behavior?
- 12. Do you sometimes feel like a “doormat” for others?
- 13. Do you have a false sense of loyalty to others, no matter what they’ve done?
- 14. Do you feel inferior to others?
- 15. Do you attempt to control others’ lives out of a sense of fear?
- 16. Do you let others dominate you in conversation?
- 17. Do you have difficulty looking directly into someone’s eyes during conversation?
- 18. Have you been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused?

Table 3

### **Performance Orientation Checklist**

Please check those items that match your experience.

- 1. Do you feel as if you need to be in control?
- 2. Do you find it hard to admit it when you do wrong?
- 3. Do you seek approval from others?
- 4. Do you believe that you don’t deserve the best?
- 5. Do you have a hard time accepting it when someone calls you “precious”?
- 6. Do you have difficulty accepting criticism?
- 7. Are your expressions of love for others dependent upon their doing what you want them to do?
- 8. Are you torn up inside when others think badly of you?
- 9. Are your decisions made based upon what others will think?
- 10. Are you like a chameleon, changing to suit whoever you are with at the time?
- 11. Do you feel like you’ve emotionally “prostituted” yourself to others?
- 12. Do you believe that if you are not perfect, you are no good at all?
- 13. Are you afraid of being out of control of your life?
- 14. Do you have a hard time being spontaneous?
- 15. Are you afraid of letting others get too close?
- 16. Did you experience one or more of your parents as being rigid and controlling?
- 17. Did you lack enough warm, loving attention as a child?
- 18. Do you find it hard to trust others and yet find yourself trusting sometimes too easily and being hurt?
- 19. Are you afraid to try new things?
- 20. Do you sometimes do something “wild” or “crazy” just to see how others will react?

- \_\_\_ 21. Do you see being in control, especially in public, as being a virtue?
- \_\_\_ 22. Do you sometimes feel like you have no values or principles of your own?
- \_\_\_ 23. Do you sometimes feel as if you don't know who you really are?
- \_\_\_ 24. Do you always need to know the rules before you'll try a new thing?
- \_\_\_ 25. Do you sometimes explode in a rage at someone "safe" and afterward feel intense shame?
- \_\_\_ 26. Do you strive for success and then sabotage yourself just before achieving it?
- \_\_\_ 27. Do you work for material goals, but still feel empty after you've achieved them?
- \_\_\_ 28. Do you sometimes feel that life is too hard and want to just give up?
- \_\_\_ 29. Do you feel like a "noble martyr" when people compliment you for putting up with a difficult person or situation?
- \_\_\_ 30. Do you find it difficult to just relax or rest?
- \_\_\_ 31. Do you sometimes feel as if you are all alone in the world?
- \_\_\_ 32. Are you a person with "black" or "white" thinking (all or nothing, either extreme)?

While these structures serve the important and understandable purpose of helping us to survive painful and traumatic experiences, the Lord wants us to grow out of dependence on them because they keep us from intimacy with other people and with Him. He knows that the root of these structures is fear and He wants to deliver us. "And deliver them who through fear of death (to self) were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:15). As part of the deliverance process, God brings his children to decision points just as He challenged the rich young man in Mark 10:17-22. The "treasure" that many of us want to hang onto is control of a life that has seemed out of control. Christian social workers, guided by the Holy Spirit, can, as clients are ready, challenge them to let go of the structures that they have built. For many who have been deeply hurt this is a process because surrender of a structure that has kept them safe feels to a broken person like an invitation to open them up to being abused all over again. Therefore, the timing of the clinical challenge is critical, and must always be done with an awareness of where the client is in the clinical process. Certainly, if a trusting relationship has not been established with the therapist and with God, the person will not let go of their "safety net", even if it is full of holes.

Another major question that often arises is "If I let go of the structures I've built, what will life be like? This is what I've known. I don't know what is on the other side." Romans 6:3-11 reassures us that after death comes the experience of resurrection life. This life is a life of true intimacy with God, continual connection with Him, and the promise of God living His very life out in us. It is a life of freedom from fear, exploring the depths of love, and simply following Jesus wherever He takes us (Revelation 14:4). It is a life of allowing Him to lead (be God) rather than dictating to Him what our life should be like. In this sense, death to self and absolute surrender become more than spiritual concepts taught by religious giants of the past such as Oswald Chambers, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Andrew Murray. For the social worker, they become a therapeutic invitation to release toxic, self-destructive behaviors and to embrace in their place a healthy, growth-filled life.

In the therapeutic process, clients are asked to list the structures of self that they can identify and own. They are then invited in prayer to verbalize them to God and to ask Him to take each of them away. Often, it has been helpful to ask clients to picture themselves at the foot of the cross, asking Jesus to crucify them and the specific aspects of their lives that they have seen as destructive. Self does not die easily. We hang on to old patterns for dear life. Therefore, God will often test us to help us to see whether or not we've really surrendered a behavior. In His

grace, He does not give up on us until He know that either the transaction has been made or that we refuse to let go of the behavior. He never forces a person to do anything even if it is for that person's well-being.

For a fuller exposition of these concepts, please see "Cleansing the Sanctuary of the Heart: Tools for Emotional Healing" by the author.

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