

May 2004

“Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” ~ Genesis 4:7b



Our Secret Weapon: The Will

By Alan Medinger

Some years ago at a conference, my wife, Willa, was addressing a group of wives whose husbands were dealing with homosexuality. She was discussing all of the wrong things that wives in their situation are prone to do: enabling, denial, co-dependency, protecting their husbands from the consequences of their sin, and so forth. She could see the heads nod as the women recognized their various dysfunctions. And then Willa stopped, paused and said to the women, “If you are doing any of these things, stop it! Stop it! Stop it!”

For years afterwards in Exodus circles, this became known as “Willa’s Stop It Therapy.” This was said in humor, but in truth (as with much that my dear wife has said), there was a lot of wisdom in her advice.

A number of times in counseling strugglers, when they have told me of their ongoing struggle with masturbation, pornography, or some other type of acting out, I have said to them, “Well, why don’t you stop it?” Invariably, their jaws drop, their eyes open wide and they look at me with amazement.

There are a couple of reasons why Willa’s counsel and my question have been met with humor or astonishment. One is that people in our day—including Christians—know little of the power of the will. The will is indeed a powerful force, and we all have one, but many people are like a man sitting in a car with a 400 horsepower turbocharged engine running, who leaves the car in neutral or in park. He isn’t going to go anywhere until he puts the car in gear and engages the engine. It is the same with the will; we can’t go anywhere until we engage it.

A second reason why people may discount exercising their will as a means of growing in obedience, is that they don’t know that we exercise our wills in two ways—in *deciding* and in *doing*. They are all too familiar with the weakness of their will in *doing*, and they have let their past failures in this area lead them to write off the power that is in their will to *decide*.

The Power of the Will

A number of factors lead us to overlook or dismiss the power of the will. Some are based on fundamental truths—but ones we easily distort. Others are fundamentally wrong beliefs that reflect the faulty views of our age.

We rightfully recognize the truth that we cannot solve all of our problems through our own efforts. If we could, we would not need Jesus. But at the same time, Scripture addresses us as a people with a will. Every time our Lord said something like, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14:1), he was acknowledging that we have the strength to “Let not.” Every time Scripture calls for us to change our ways, there is the clear implication that we have some power to do so. Adherence to such calls always involves the will.

A second valid principle that can lead us to overlook the power of the will is the 12-Step doctrine of powerlessness. “We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol (or whatever the problem)—that our lives had become unmanageable.” This is the first step in the surrender process, and it is essential if we are to gain victory over a prevailing sin. But here the distinction between deciding and doing becomes extremely important. By the very act of surrendering, the alcoholic is admitting that he cannot resist drinking by the power of his own will—he needs a higher power. But *by the power of his will* he is deciding to make the surrender. And if you and I have ever struggled with any kind of life dominating sin, we know that the exercise of the will in making such a decision is no passive act. Every person who has experienced any major life change gives testimony to that power to decide.

However, the biggest problems causing us to downplay the power of the will may come from our having bought into two of the prevailing beliefs of our age. Even as Christians we may have unconsciously accepted the beliefs that: 1) emotions are the governing factor in our lives, and 2) real truth is found in a materialistic or naturalistic way of thinking.

Regeneration News Moves to Bi-Monthly Schedule
(See p. 4 for further details!)

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Our Secret Weapon

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The Primacy of Emotions

The prosperity of our age and the exalted position given to psychology combine to convince people that behavior is—and often should be—determined by feelings. Prosperity has made us self-indulgent, even to the point of believing that suffering any kind of discomfort is unreasonable. Also, we tend to act more according to feelings or immediate human need than according to principle. And psychology, pointing to our past trauma, our unmet needs, and our unhealed wounds, can lead us into a victim mentality in which we believe we have no power to change our behavior until we are healed.

I am sure that many women who heard Willa burst forth “Stop it!” felt that their behaviors were products of their unhealed selves, and they could not act differently until they were healed. While there is probably some truth in this, denying one’s ability to bring about any change of behavior is to deny the power of God. That we *can* do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13) is a promise from God’s word. The idea that behavior cannot change until we’re healed has no basis in Scripture.

The Influence of Materialism

Many Christians recognize the war that is going on in our culture between two philosophies: the Judeo-Christian belief in a created order established and ruled over by God, and the philosophy of materialism or naturalism, encapsulated in astronomer Carl Sagan’s famous declaration, “The cosmos is all there is, ever was, or ever will be.”

Please Pray With Us . . .

Thanksgiving – We thank God this month for the successful completion of our 2003 – 2004 Baltimore Living Waters program, which ended in April. This was Baltimore’s 6th year running the program, and the participants seemed particularly open to what the Lord wanted to do in their lives. Nearly 80% of this year’s participants completed the program and we thank God for what He did in their lives this year!

Petitions – Please pray for our summer group, “Growing Healthy Friendships”, which begins Thursday, June 4th. As this is a pilot program, please pray for the coming together of the program content and for those who will attend the program (see p. 4 for more details).

Also, please pray for the upcoming Exodus North America conference, July 20th – 24th at Azusa Pacific University in California (see p. 4 for more details).

A materialist view of existence always sees a cause and an effect. We are what we are totally because of our genes and our past experiences. Even the Christian may have a hard time thinking otherwise. But such thinking leads first to the belief that no one is responsible for anything he or she does, and then ultimately to the belief that there is no right or wrong, only what is, what evolves.

But the God who made us in His image gave us minds and made us free. The mind, of course, encompasses more than the brain; it includes the will, and the will belongs to the spiritual side of man. And when we abused our God-given freedom and fell into slavery to sin, God sent us His Son to restore our freedom. “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Because of the Divine nature in us, we are more than just the product of our genes and our experiences. The man who says, “Even though my father never affirmed me, even though my peers rejected me, even though I was sexually molested as a teenager, even though I often feel like I don’t fit in today, I do not have to have sex with a man,” is speaking the truth, and he is reflecting the nobility of man as something so much more than an accidental product of genes and experiences.

Ambivalence

The first step, then, in utilizing the secret weapon of our will in our battle with sin is to recognize its power. The second step is to actually use it. And herein most people who come to our ministry have a real problem.

Here is a multiple choice question for you: When a man says “I need to stop masturbating,” he is almost certainly saying:

- a) I have stopped masturbating.
- b) I will stop masturbating.
- c) I will keep on masturbating for now.
- d) One day I’ll try to stop masturbating.
- e) I will never stop masturbating.

Answers a, b, d and e could all eventually be found to be true or not true, but only answer c is almost always true. One can be almost certain that by putting off a decision not to masturbate until tomorrow, a man has decided that he is going to allow himself to masturbate today. Of course he has made a decision of a sort, but he clearly has not made a decision for righteousness.

“Choose this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15). One reason we don’t choose or decide is because we fear we will not be able to live up to the choice we have made. We see ourselves promising something to God and then failing to keep our promise. But we are

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Baltimore Update
by Jeff Johnston, Executive Director

Here's some of what we've been up to in the Baltimore area during the past few months:

Baltimore Director: We are delighted to announce that in a decision made by our Board of Directors in January, Josh Glaser has been promoted to the position of Baltimore Director. Josh will take over some of the local ministry functions that I used to manage: overseeing Baltimore support groups, working with local clients, and developing local ministry connections. Josh is a gifted and creative teacher, counselor and writer. He is skilled at listening prayer and has a heart to see the ministry grow. Please pray for him and his family as he shoulders this new responsibility.

Church connections: Josh, Karen and I have been working to connect with churches in the Baltimore area. In February, Karen and I went to meet with a group of pastors representing, "Churches United for the Renewal of East Baltimore." We spoke with this group about our testimonies, about the roots of homosexuality and sexual brokenness, and about the resources and equipping we offer. One of the pastors, Pastor Toni Draper, invited us to speak at her church in downtown Baltimore in March. Karen and I felt warmly welcomed by this wonderful church family. Two of the women in the church have started a ministry to women coming out of substance abuse, and they've discovered that many of these women have been sexually abused. We were able to provide them with some books and articles to help these women on their journey toward wholeness.

Also in March, I attended a Sunday service and missions fair for three Alpha and Omega Pentecostal churches in downtown Baltimore that had joined together to discuss their purpose in missions; I attended an event near Annapolis for parents, educators, and youth workers learning about

youth culture and promoting sexual purity; and Josh Glaser represented Regeneration at a missions fair at Timonium Presbyterian Church. In April I spoke to a Campus Crusade group at Towson University about God's power to heal and led a workshop at our Regional for men looking toward dating and marriage.

Regeneration Books: In the first three months of the year we shipped over 500 orders. This aspect of our ministry continues to be a growing and vital part of our work. Each order represents a person struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions, a parent who just discovered his or her child is gay, a pastor fighting a battle in his denomination, or a new ministry leader equipping himself for ministry. We provide many valuable resources that are unavailable anywhere else. Lani Bersch also sold books at a Day Seven conference in Pennsylvania, and she and Karen headed up the bookstore at our Exodus Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference.

Support Groups: Our 2003 – 2004 Living Waters program ended in mid-April. Josh, Karen, and a team of 7 volunteer leaders helped make this one of the most exciting Living Waters programs we've run. On Monday afternoons we've had a group of men meeting at the office to work through Joe Dallas' book, *Desires in Conflict*. And I just completed a group for men called "Battles Men Face", for men seeking greater victory in their struggles for sexual and relational wholeness. Our Wives Group has been studying Beth Hunter's book, *Forgive and Live*, and New Beginnings, our group for men struggling with sexual addiction, continues to meet weekly. It's wonderful to be part of the growth and healing process for these men and women.

Bless you!

- Jeff Johnston

Our Secret Weapon

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letting the weakness of our will in *doing* keep us from using our will in *deciding*. But if we never *decide*, we will never *do*. On the other hand, once we *decide* for righteousness, we put ourselves on the side of God, and He is there to help us *do*. Maybe we will fail sometimes, but we have a remedy for our failures—confession and forgiveness. We have no remedy for a passive unwillingness to decide.

In my own life, and in the lives of men and women I have known through ministry, I have seen how a simple decision has led to profound changes in a person. One day they woke up and said, "I'm not going to do that anymore," and in fact, they didn't. There is a mystery in how such a

decision can turn out to be so life changing. I suspect that quite often the decision has come about as the outcome of an intense but unrecognized battle that has been going on deep inside the individual's soul, a battle in which he or she allowed some cherished thing to die. Even if this is the case, however, the fruit of that battle and death will not be experienced if that person does not exercise his or her conscious, God-given will and decide for righteousness.

Are you struggling with destructive behavior or sin? Why don't you stop? ■

Ministry News

Regeneration News Goes to Bi-Monthly Schedule

This newsletter has moved from a monthly to a bi-monthly format. We have archived many of our past newsletters at www.regenerationministries.org, so the teaching articles provided in *Regeneration News* will continue to be available throughout the year! Your next newsletter will arrive in July 2004.

Saturday Prayer Meetings for Regeneration

Judy Johnston will be leading a prayer meeting for Regeneration this month at the Regeneration office on Saturday, May 8th. For more information, call 410-661-0284 during office hours.

s.a.l.t. Begins June 10th in NoVA

If you or someone you know struggles with habitual sexual sin, you may be interested in this summer's s.a.l.t. program beginning June 10th. Contact our NoVA office at 703-591-4673 for more information or to apply.

Monday's Noon Drop-In Group Continues

For more information about this one-hour weekly Baltimore group for men struggling with homosexuality, call 410-661-0284.

Exodus North America Conference July 20 – 24th

Imagine what it would be like if the entire Body of Christ caught a glimpse of what the Lord intended for His creation with regard to sexuality. Just think how much better equipped the Church would be if everyone in it completely surrendered their sexuality to the Lordship of Christ. That is the vision behind the 29th Annual Exodus Conference: *A Biblical Foundation* in Greater Los Angeles, California. For more information or to register, visit Exodus on-line at www.exodus-international.org.

NoVA Mailing Address Change

Please note that the post office is changing the zip code of our Northern Virginia office from 22030-1034 to **22038-1034**.

Regeneration Changing E-mail Addresses!

Any Regeneration E-mail address ending in "@juno.com" will now be changed to end in "@regenerationministries.org". For example, the main Baltimore E-mail is changing from regenbalto@juno.com to regenbalto@regenerationministries.org. Please make these changes in your E-mail address books today!

Financial News

Thanks to your financial and prayerful partnership, 2004 has been the steadiest financial year Regeneration has had for over two years. As of mid-April, the ministry has been up-to-date on meeting all its financial obligations—including staff salaries, which are paid last—each month.

*Please Note: If you are one of the many contributors who have relied on this newsletter to supply giving envelopes on a monthly basis, please remember that *Regeneration News* now only comes every other month (see notice in opposite column). However, we have begun to send out monthly donor acknowledgement letters, which include donor envelopes for your convenience. Thank you!

Regeneration Is...

Baltimore Office

Jeff Johnston
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Director of
Regeneration Books

Karen Woollen
Baltimore Women's
Ministry Director &
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Northern Virginia Office

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Director

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Group Meetings

Baltimore, MD

- Living Waters
- New Beginnings
- Women's Group
- Wives' Group
- Monday Noon Group

Northern, VA

- Living Waters
- Women's Group
- Wives' Group
- Men's Group
- Parents' Group
- s.a.l.t. (Sexual Addiction Group)

Washington, D.C.

- Men's Drop-In Group

Regeneration Books

Regeneration Books is the major distributor of books addressing homosexuality and related subjects from a Christian perspective. To receive a free catalog call us at (410) 661-0284.