

# What Hinders Spiritual Growth

By Dr. Bingham Hunter

Announcer:

The title of this message by Dr. Bing Hunter is "What hinders Spiritual Growth?" And it's the fourth message in a special five part series presented by the Dean of Biola's Talbot School of Theology. Here's our teacher, Dr. Bing Hunter.

Dr. Bing Hunter:

What hinders our spiritual growth? Now last time we talked about what the Bible said should motivate it. Here we talk about what hinders it and what causes it difficulty in growing in Christ. I am convinced, based on my own experience and that of a lot of folk that I talk with, have opportunity to counsel with, even pastors and other leaders in the Christian movement, that fear is a major factor which hinders progress in the Christian life. Most people would say "Well, I think what it amounts to is fear of failure." But I've become convinced that's not the whole story.

I say that based on my own experience and some dialogues with a number of prominent evangelical leaders over the last five to six years. But there are large numbers of us who are just afraid to try it again. We have been disappointed; we have been grieved. One of the men here at the conference was sharing with me this morning some bits of personal testimony, which he's written on these cards. And I see in this experience here, which he shared with me, a- a pattern of

feeling that I have failed the Lord over and over and over again, and I just can't take the feeling that I have been defeated again. I am afraid I just can't do it.

This fear comes to many of you; when a pastor or leader in your church or maybe even your spouse or your child challenges you with the idea of having a home Bible study in your home, and you feel "well, I just couldn't do it. And what happens if I'm the one who's doing the speaking, and we have 25 the first night; now we have 16 the second night; third night we have 12; fourth night we have nine, and finally it dwindles down to me and my spouse looking at each other with four pounds of nuts on the table and no one else comes. And that feeling that I'm going to fail is something which suppresses large numbers of possibilities for growth in our personal spiritual life.

I see that as something the Old Testament prophets worried about. I hear Moses saying to God right at the day when he was called "Hey look, I have not got what I need to have in terms of the zip to do this job. I- My tongue is thick and I can't communicate effectively." God, of course, looks beyond this fellow who thinks he has a thick tongue to see someone who understands more about the internal workings of political power in Egypt than anyone else who has ever been born in the nation of Israel because he's been raised in the House of Pharaoh's daughter, someone who's had administrative responsibility. But what he thinks of is his inadequacy and being a speaker. And he said "Lord, I can't do it. I have never been eloquent."

God's response to him is very, very important; at that point He says "who made your mouth? And if I have made your mouth, I can glorify myself with your mouth." And he struggles back and forth and back and forth, and finally Moses says "Lord, send anybody else!" That's the way it's translated in a Berkeley version and that's the spirit of what the man is saying. And the Lord gets a little angry at that point, and tells him "Well then your brother Aaron; he will be the

one who speaks. But the three of us are gonna go do this job and you will not fail because I will be with you."

And I think that's what this fear of failure tends to create for us is this- this denial of the power of God; the affirmation that I will glorify yours- Myself in your weakness. It's difficult for many of us to get a handle on because our society projects to us, even in the Christian experience, the superstar phenomenon you have got to be able not only to play the game and to win all the sets, you have got to leap over the net afterwards and congratulate the people. Don't you-, I mean that's the way that it has to be done in the Christian life but that's not the way that it is. Over and over, we all fail; we all disappoint the Lord; we disappoint one another; we grieve people that look up to us; and yet God is pleased through what He describes as the foolishness of preaching from the lips of people who feel they have very thick tongues to bring the message of salvation to other people.

What we're really saying here is that, I think too much of myself to have the willingness to trust God. And you'll see ultimately that fear of failure, although it may be based on a certain pattern of experience in your life, is ultimately a valuing of yourself above the power of God. And to break that pattern, you must be willing to look at it more objectively. The issue of success related to ministry, or opportunities to grow in Christian life, or to gain victory over some area that seems to be a defeat in your life, is largely a matter of concentrating on the power of God and focusing on the resources that he's given you in Christ. It's when we look at ourselves, when we compare ourselves to other people, when we accept this unrealistic picture of 100% success that we often fall prey to this fear of failure.

On the other side there is the fear of success and that I think is much more subtle, because we are by and large fairly comfortable in the patterns that we've established for ourselves, and

we may define ourselves as someone who simply sits in the third row from the back, and who is not involved--and that's a comfortable place to be. Or it may be the third row from the front; sometimes being upfront is easier to hide in than being in the back. But at any rate what we have is a pattern which says, well I know how to function as a defeated Christian and I'm not so sure that I know how to handle it if I were to be a growing Christian, or who was involved in a ministry which I saw the Lord prospering me in. I think what we have is an unwillingness to accept our potential as one of God's children, may be much, much, much, [inaudible] than our parents' educational background, or economic status in life, or educational opportunities may cause us to think that it is, over and over again, we focus on the things which are part of us part of our experience, rather than on the way Jesus transforms a relatively adult impressive Palestinians into men, whom according to the testimony of the book of Acts, were responsible for turning the ancient near eastern world upside down.

No one who saw Martin Luther's experience in the early days of his life even after he got into religious business as a Roman Catholic monk, would have said this man would have transformed the face of Christianity. No one would make those kinds of statements about many people who have been used to the glory of God. Again, it is the realization that we must be willing to give up what has been called our commitment to mediocrity and to reach for something which is larger than where we are right now. You ask yourself--and many of you will say well maybe there is some problem in my life related to fear of failure--but I know that in my own life this business about success was very, very subtle and it was very, very powerful.

You see, if you begin to become what I guess I would describe as a growing Christian, you're gonna have to abandon behavior patterns which you're comfortable with right now. This relates directly to the next observation, that frequently bondage to the past is what intimidates

people. I've never done anything like that before. These two are very, very closely related, but they're not exactly the same thing. I think it doesn't much matter what we're talking about in terms of commitment to obey God or respond to his word, when an opportunity to take advantage of ministry or to get involved presents itself to us, we very often retract from it saying, I don't have the preparation, I don't have the experience, I don't have the gifts. And I'm convinced that that's simply a way of escape from the risk involved in reaching out and doing something special. [Inaudible]. Bondage to the past is a terribly destructive phenomenon in the evangelical church. Somehow we have gotten adherence to orthodox doctrine, which comes to us from the Old and the New Testament era is tied up with methods which simply are tied to a time and culture. Be careful that we don't let that happen in our own personal lives.

And related to all three of the ideas is this last one here: lack of godly self-respect. What I hear over and over again from people is, that I'm just a worthless worm, a wretched worm; and they encouraged in that way of thinking by Sir Isaac Watts, and by John Newton, and others who have written hymns which have emphasized the wretchedness of humanity. David and I had an interesting interchange last year at the conference as I spoke about this, because he and I both have some great concern over the way modern [inaudible] particularly secular psychology is selling love yourself today. Michael talked about narcissism and one of his presentations self-love. I'm not talking about that here. I'm talking about an objective, honest, biblical understanding of who you are in Christ. And you simply cannot let yourself be bent by the pressure of the world around you into thinking that as one for whom the son of God personally died, and that's what I understand Scripture to teach--that he died personally or individually. That I was foreknown by God and that Christ died, according to Romans 8, in order to justify

individually, will glorify me, and that was intended personally on my part. And knowing that helps me to understand it from God's point of view.

[Inaudible] I was bought with a price, and that price according to Peter has infinite value; it was a precious blood of the Son of God. So I have come to understand the world in which God made as being marvelously efficient. I see nothing wasted in nature. I was raised in Michigan and my parents had a summer home in the northern part of the country, and I spent a lot of time in the woods as a youth. I always thought that decay, and I saw the destruction in the [inaudible] forest. I never saw anything wasted. The bark on trees became homes for beetles, and for lichen, and for moss; and there were other animals that preyed upon them, and over, and over again, I saw nothing wasted. And I am convinced that the blood of Jesus was not wasted. The son of God did not die to redeem a can of worthless worms. [Inaudible] Son of God did not [audio cuts] God who had inherent value, and dignity, and worth. Else God would not have bothered to redeem us and we must understand this. We must understand that the most wretched, vile, ugly sinner is worth the cost of the death of Christ, and therefore we should reach out and take the message of redemption through the power of the blood of Christ to those persons. There are no people that we can afford to write off as beings beyond the power of the Gospel. But the implication of that, of course, is that if even those we regard as the scum of society are worth it having been died for by the blood of Christ then we're going to have to accept that we can have some significant value in and of ourselves. How can you call an individual in whom the Spirit of God has chosen to live as raptured? [Inaudible].

Brothers and sisters, if we were worms would God be bothered that we lived in the dirt? Is that not where worms are supposed to live? Are they not supposed to live in filth and ugliness? Isn't that our destiny, in a sense, from the Creator? You see the problem with humans' sin that

we act like worms when in fact we are not. We are creatures made in the image of God. Don't let someone tell you that because Adam and Eve sinned the image of God was lost. You read Genesis and see why it's wrong to kill a man and it's wrong to kill a man because he bears the image of God. That's a statement which was made after the flood. Well after they fell. Find out why it's wrong to swear at people. It bears the [inaudible]. They bear the image of God but it's not right to blessing and to curse things because they don't belong to you to do that with.

The image of God is part, in part, what it means to be, to have a personality. The capacity to love and to communicate to other people, and that's valuable. And it is to be something for which we ought to be profoundly and overwhelmed, in terms of thankfulness. Not to deny that in my heart, in your heart, lives the phenomenal power of evil. There are things in my person which I tried to put down, which I asked the Lord Jesus to give me victory over, but I am clear now in my head. God is not glorified if I go around acting like a worthless wretched person. You see people who set their sights about a sixteenth of an inch above dirt know no uncomfortableness living that way. They have no uncomfortableness and accepting mediocrity and accepting defeated Christian lives doing nothing in which God is glorified in their life. Persons who recognize that by the power of God they are going to gain victory over the ugliness of their life, eventually be glorified and be like Jesus, are people going to set their sights on something above the presence of evil in their life and say I know by the fact that I was redeemed by Christ that I matter to God, and I'm valuable to him; I'm worth the cost of the blood of his son.

There's something wretched inside of me. But God saw enough in there to want to die for me. You see what has happened to Christians today, is they have misunderstood the message of salvation, and the attitude that they should have regarding pursuit of sanctification. And it is the message of God's Word that unless you repent, evil in your heart will condemn you'd ever lasting

torment in hell. And therefore, in a sense we call wretched sinners. But we often do it in a way which denies the fact that they bear the image God at all, and that tendency to do that causes Christians to feel so bad about themselves that they don't know how to relate to their father, and you always come to God expecting him to slap them in the face. But the power of the blood of Christ is so [inaudible]. But as I have said on other occasions God is willing to hug us, even when we have jam all over our face. Even when there is sin which is all over the person, because we are His children. You see friends, when my children are bad and they do that because they like me sometimes, they don't stop being my children, they don't stop being people that I love. They may cause me grief in the heart as the [inaudible] sin, but they stop being my children.

And you need to recognize that that's true in your own life. How do you feel towards yourself, then? Well there are parts of your personality you need to rejoice and thank God for, and there are other parts of your personality you feel to [inaudible] help you gain victory over. It's got to be balanced. What has happened in many Christian lives is that it is twisted in the direction to complacency. [Inaudible].

I remember listening to David give a message some time ago in which he said to our seminary students, in this room drag your worthless wretched selves up here to the altar. And I found myself thinking in the back of my mind I just wish that they could project that kind of worthless wretchedness that David Hawking does every time he preaches. [Inaudible]. I wanted to feel the presence of David, you're talking to a defeated, wretched, worthless, beaten down, crushed into a [inaudible].

[Audience Laughter]

Yes or no? I realize I'm walking around the edge of something that is very [inaudible]. That has created phenomenal division in the body of Christ. I'm not talking about the power of positive thinking. I'm not talking about possibility thinking. I'm not talking about it I'm convinced appeal. I'm talking about the Apostle Paul thinking I was appealing [inaudible]

[Audience Laughter]

What we are talking about. What we're talking about here is accepting us for what we are as the redeemed children of God. You have been entrusted with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and you have the power now to preach something that will transform the lives of men and women. You have the opportunity as a Christian parent of producing or lending a hand to the process that will produce another Martin Luther, or David Hawking if you will, or Michael Wilkins. Producing or lending a hand in the process that [inaudible]. You have spiritual gifts according to God's Word which others in this room and in your local body of Christ need, and which are important to the functioning of that local church.

Listen, there is something ugly ingrained which sat on my shoulder for years. I shared some of this, I shared this with some of you informally. And he whispered in my ear over, and over again, and he said you know you have done so many things that are so wrong that I know about and you know about--I don't know how you have the courage to get up and say anything. I suppose in a sense this was my worthless, wretched worm alter-ego, sitting on my shoulder and telling me this. Telling me in a sense that the blood of Christ was not enough to take away Bing Hunters guilt, it was not enough to take away the evil that lurked in my ministry, it was simply that I had an add to it. You know we had the blood of Christ and what do I have to do to atone

for what I've done wrong? I have to feel wretched. I knew I had to say to that green thing and sat on my shoulder: you what I think you're right. There is an awful lot of wretchedness to my own heart. But I have someone who thought I was worth dying for, and who has said to me that I'm your child, and I don't know why he wanted to die for me. But I know this: that I am as best I can going to focus on him rather than the evil that's in my own heart. As I watch the one that I want to live like I'm going to forget the past.

I was helped in this by my wife. Inside my wedding ring, you will find a biblical reference--I don't know what you've got in your wedding ring and watch those pawn shops or something like that. But inside this ring, there are two verses of scripture inscribed in they're Philippians 3 verses 13 and 14. Verses which say that I forget what is past, and press on toward the prize of a high calling which is a mind who loves Jesus. And you must get that attitude into your head. You are a new creature, according to God's word you put off the old man and put on the new what? The Lord Jesus Himself. And until you get a grip on that, you are gonna find yourself vulnerable to the fear of failure, and even worried about success; you are not going to have the courage to break out of patterns that have been your past, and you are gonna have no sense of godly self-respect. This is not a hedonistic love yourself that we're talking about, this is a sense of objective understanding of who you are in Jesus; that you do have the potential to encourage others, to build them up. That you do have the potential to teach others exciting things about God's word, that your life can be a testimony to the power of God to transform. That you don't have to be defeated every day. No you're probably not gonna become Superman or wonder woman, but you don't have to be defeated every day. You see what's underneath all this wretchedness is this.

That's modern American religion. And if all you focus on is what I am, and what has always been me, and what's been my lot in life, and what I'm like inside myself, rather than the Lord Jesus Christ and the promises you have in God's word about what he can do through in your life, you are going to remain fixated on the kinds of standards and values that come to you from the world rather than the guidance and direction of God's word. The Holy Spirit is not going to have enough space in your life to do much for you. So I want to challenge you. Go ahead, get your eyes off yourselves. Read what God's word tells you your potential is. Ask if the apostle Paul is a liar when he tells you that you can influence others for Jesus; that you can raise children who have a sense of godliness, that you can encourage your spouse, that you can give of yourself, Christian husband, as a sacrifice just like Jesus did for your wife, and actually nourish and cherish her, instead of beating on her, and telling her in authority she's got to (sarcastically) obey me.

I'll get you as a Christian woman have the power. And sometimes it takes faith in the power of God to submit to this guy who's your husband. I was talking with a young man last night while David was preaching. We talked for 2 hours and 15 minutes outside there into the light. He works with young people in San Diego and he said I think the biggest problem in our whole ministry is un-submissive women in the home.

And I said you don't think it's the wretchedness of their husbands that they can't submit to these turkeys. He said no it's the attitude of the women. I said tell me what you mean. He said well an un-submissive woman sets their daughter up for sexual exploitation. I won't take you all through it. Josh McDowell has been over there doing the why wait series for these kids but the attitude on his part...Kind of scared me and it took my wife back. But you've got to get your eyes off yourself and focus on the Lord Jesus; accept what Scripture says about you.

I believe we also have a problem with sinful habits, bad examples. There is a need for radical surgery in some of our lives. There is a need to make changes. I have listened to person after person after person tell me I understand there is a negative influence in our home due to television. We waste time. My children are no longer as creative as they used to be. I'm not able to talk to my family anymore; when my wife and I get zonked out, we just sit there and get numb rather than talking to one another about it. And then we can talk about the kind of things that come on after ten o'clock or what they have paid on the cable to watch. Over, and over, and over, I listen to people say I know this is wrong in my house, and I found myself wanting to say "Why did you pull the plug?" Why don't you get it out of your house? Why don't you make some logical move which will eliminate that threat to your personal life and the life of your family? Practice some radical surgery. That's easy for me to say because we don't have a TV in our home, but it's something that is bothering me in relationships with other people over and over again I will hear this statement.

Well I have this problem in my life and I would say to them OK how do we need to address that? The guy who tells me he has problems with going to violent movies or something like that. I say well what are you doing to work the pattern of violence out of your life? Or someone who tells me have difficulty with jealousy in relationship to a certain thing in life, and I say, "Well how often do you look at that?" How often do you dwell that way? How often do you drive home in a way which causes you to go buy that thing that causes you problems? When are you going to do something to stop it? And the need for radical surgery, I think in our lives, is something we play around with too much. We need to make some changes in lifestyle that will take away the opportunity to sin. Now, I'm going to give a handout to just before I conclude here today which has a reference to a book by Erwin Lutzer, who is pastor of Moody Memorial

Church, entitled *How to Say No to a Stubborn Habit*. That's one of the most pragmatically helpful things written by a Christian on this kind of thing that I know.

Who do you hang out with? If you spend half your time with people that are negative influences on your spiritual life, and I realize we work in the world and not everyone there knows Christ. But if in seeking friendships and spending time that we do have control over, we are with those who are negative examples for us, and we're not helping ourselves. And then how about accountability? We talked about this earlier but you need to have someone that can hold you accountable for areas where there are difficulties in your life and so often we don't do this. I need the help of others. I have to write down a list of my goals that I want to make progress on for the person I report to at the university. I keep them on my desk, he keeps them on his desk, and we talk about them back and forth. And that accountability helps motivate me. And the same thing holds true in the spiritual life. I've down here busyness and over commitment. The phrase I wish I have more time--I say that so much myself I feel a little funny talking to you about it, and yet I think I have to be honest busyness and over commitment are real problems for many of us in the Christian experience. It is time many of us said no. Some of you remember the little dialogue which I guess was actually broadcast on the Biola Hour in which David said Bing, God's revealed to me that you got to come and be the speaker at the second annual Bible hour family conference and I said to him I need to hear it from God, David, as well. I was one of those off the wall comments that I made that I guess Al Sanders thought was good stuff and he broadcast. I understand that.

[Audience laughter]

I am fighting this thing over and over in my life. I think I have three requests every Sunday to go somewhere to do something, and God just told them all I'm supposed to be there and I have to say to them, no. And you know it's hard to give up the feeling that I'm essential, right?

[Audience Laughter]

But I took a week off about a month ago and the place went on just fine. Nobody knew I was even gone. Sort of like Oh you're back, I didn't know you'd left. But we have got into this thing that I have got to be so busy; I have no time to think in order to feel like I have a fulfilled life, and that my life is significant, and it matters. It was this phenomenal thing that I heard on the radio was a commercial. What are you doing tonight? Well I'm going to run two miles. What you gonna do after that? I'm going to do aerobics. What you gonna do after that? I'm going to have some health food. Finally this one woman says to the other one, oh come on let's be honest. Come on over, we'll have a pizza, and pig out, and watch videos. But this, I've got to do this, I gotta do this, I gotta do this, I gotta do this...you know you gotta get off the treadmill. You got to say no and take a walk with someone that you want to get to know better, maybe the Lord Jesus Himself, as you spend some time in prayer time with the person sitting next to you. Over-commitment, a lot of it is directly related to the feeling that I'm essential and we need to have a little more objective understanding of just who's essential.

Announcer:

Please turn the cassette over at this point the message continues on side two.

Dr. Bing Hunter:

Anyone who talks to you about why people do what they do will give you the following scheme. I don't have it written down, but you need to have some awareness of this. Based on what we think reality is, we will make a conclusion about what we think is true. Based on what we think is true. We will make a decision about what we think is best, and based on what is best we generally have behavior. Reality is what is true, what is best, and then the behavior which comes as a result of that, that's a pattern that takes place in cultures all around the world. The thought to give you here at this point, would be that most modern advertising--which so saturates everything that happens to us--subtly projects things which are not true. As a consequence they create needs which twist our values, which results in behavior which does not satisfy. I wish there was somewhere I could push this into your heads.

The images which are projected in front of us and modern advertising are usually images which don't exist in reality. Dotson 386ZX Turbos don't come with beautiful blondes in the front seat. Spuds Mackenzie is a female. Yes. Yes.

[Audience Laughter]

Weekends were not made for Michelob. They were made by God. Did you ever watch a Michelob commercial on TV? Always shows, usually four people together in an intimate setting. Sometimes on the beach around the fire, sometimes in the back of a yacht, sometimes very extensively appointed room; having a great time laughing to one another, right? There are always beautiful people--never older than 35. They always have big muscles and phenomenal curves.

There are people who always smile. No one ever has a beer belly. Do you know what sociologists say a Michelob Commercial is all about? It has nothing to do with beer. It is a commercial which is designed to exploit the sense of alienation and loneliness which characterizes the modern competitive professional. The feeling is, that if you drink this product you will be an attractive person who will have the opportunity of getting to know others, and you will find some intimacy in your life. It has nothing to do with beer. Same kind of thing is projected in commercials for Bud products--whether it's Bud Light or Bud heavy.

[Audience Laughter]

This Bud's for you, for all you do. You know that--and the guys in the bar or wherever they are, playing rugby and all that, they look like macho men and they hoist those chain saws. You know, if you pop the cap every time they tell you two on one TV game, you couldn't lift the chainsaw because you got would get in the way. If you buy a Toro lawnmower, and will not transform your house to look like that 16 column mansion that they use in the adverts. Over and over again, you will find that application of 15 pounds of mascara to your eyelashes will not take away the wrinkles along the side of them.

[Audience Laughter]

Huh? Listen I was on a TV program. It's been about two years ago now and they worked on me for 45 minutes and then gave up.

[Audience Laughter]

I know something about what is projected through the media. That wasn't me. They even had the touch up my mustache--sacrilege! I just couldn't believe it. It didn't show right on TV.

(Grunts) Over, and over, and over again, friends, what is used to set our understanding of what reality is, what really matters in life, is twisted and distorted and not based on what's going to last, what is gonna provide satisfaction in your life. And if values are based on these kinds of things, we are gonna make decisions, allocate our time, allocate our energy, in ways which are gonna be defeating to us. Do you know that the only reason modern advertising works is because it knows it is based on deception, and that after you buy this stuff you will still be dissatisfied? There is a calculated sense of dissatisfaction. There has to be. If you got satisfied you wouldn't buy it next week. And a whole pressure in this consumption orientated society works on this sense of calculated dissatisfaction. What the psychologists call the pecking order; the fact that we compete we all want to be higher, and higher, and higher [silence].

Which is why the other point is on here. What, what beats so many people in their Christian life today here in Southern California? I suspect in Oregon, and Arizona, and maybe even in British Columbia. It is a commitment to achievement, to a career-ism, to competition, to materialism, and success; over, and over, and over, people are pursuing something so that they can eventually get done, and stick in their thumb, and pull out a plum, and say, what a good boy am I. Doug has a bumper sticker, which he doesn't have on his car but he keeps it there in his bedroom close to his bed. And it says: it doesn't matter whether you win or lose. What matters is how you look while you play the game.

[Audience Laughter]

I want you to be very clear that I am not saying that a growing Christian is committed to mediocrity in whatever God has called you to for your career. You ought to pursue excellence out of a desire to do the best you can with whatever God has given you. You ought to take some courses to improve your skills in order to be more effective in whatever God wants you to do with your life. But I think you must be very careful that you avoid the phenomena, which is climbing the ladder to get to the top. Over and over I meet people whose incomes are in six and seven figures, that tell me when I got to the top I found the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. I have a friend who loved the Lord Jesus, he even talked to me about coming into the seminary in order to change his career and go into full time Christian work. Now that's not the apex of spirituality, those of you who work in that slug it out world with pagans day in and day out may do much more for the glory of God than those who are in some kind of full time Christian work. But this was a phenomenal transition for this guy. But he and his wife decided that they committed too much to his career--and he was in high tech careerism like no one I've ever known. His income went first the five figures. Then it went to six figures. Then he traveled internationally. Then he was in the executive clubs in the various airports. He was staying at hotels where he was dropping 250 to 400 dollars a night on one room. You've got to have towels 14 inches thick to justify that kind of price. You can't even get your suitcase clothes when you go to leave when you have those in there.

[Audience Laughter]

As a result of what's happened in his friend's life, he is now separated from his wife and they are in divorce proceedings. And I've seen it with three other couples in the last six months, where their pursuit of success and achievement not one house, not two houses, in one case (emphatically) five houses. You've got to have a condo in Vail, and you've got to have another one up here close so you can go skiing when you get the urge. You got to have a beach house and you have to have somewhere in the mountains, and then you have to have some really big impressive monster somewhere down in Orange County. After a while you get tired of making the payments on all that real estate. After a while you are driven by nothing other than economic pressure to maintain the success that you work in. It is totally self-defeating, and these people have been fractured. And it comes from this: it comes first of all from twisted thinking about what is valuable in life and it works its way out in the commitment that we have to achievement, careerism, competition, and success. You can't love people if you compete with them day and night. The people you encourage become your competitors and you have to put them down. And if they succeed you can't rejoice with them, you feel jealous. And it's endless, absolutely endless. More, more, more; flaunt, flaunt, flaunt. I will be quoted in a newspaper article not too many weeks, forward having been asked by someone what I thought was the greatest threat to American evangelical Christianity. The answer to that question is success and achievement. I am convinced it is destroying thousands and thousands of Christian homes and is absolutely eating up my brothers and sisters in Christ.

There is another area where I think there's tremendous pressure which comes into spiritual lives, and that's related to learning. Ignorance is dangerous in some cases. This is one of the priorities that I would attach a great deal of force to: getting into a place where you're gonna get accurate Bible teaching. It's why David's ministry on the Biola Hour, why having the

opportunity to listen to persons like himself, is so critically important because there are all kinds of twisted ideas about what is needed in order to grow spiritually. There are people who tell you you're saved by grace and you maintain your salvation by works--a ridiculous idea, in total tension with what Scripture says. There are people who will tell you that this--well, we don't need to go through the heresies. You've heard them all, and you hear them frequently on the radio. But be sure that you're attending a Bible believing church, where the scripture is studied by someone who tries to give you accurate interpretation of it. And if you're in a situation where, because you're in a community where that isn't true, then you listen on that radio regularly and daily, and get some tapes, and read good books.

The problem however is that education can become thing very dangerous--it leads to arrogance. I have grieved at the way higher education, even here in a Christian context, leads to arrogance. It leads to the flaunting of what you know and it's easy to manipulate people if you know just about a sixteenth of an inch more than they do. Watch out if you've had the opportunity and privilege of having some higher learning, especially if you went to bible school, or seminary, or had an opportunity to take an institute, or you came to the Biola Hour family conference. Learning, as I read about it in James, is something that creates awfully high responsibility. Those of us who teach were told there we have greater responsibility. You ought to pursue everything you can about how to grow as a Christian and how to better understand God's word. But don't you let that go to your head because, when that happens you become awfully dangerous.

I know a lot of Christians who have difficulty in their spiritual life because they react against God due to adverse circumstances in their life. There is a political reverse and their business does not do as well as they wanted it to. Or perhaps there's some kind of change

economically, tax law, change in our relationships with some suppliers, whatever. At any rate, their business fails and they become very angry at God. I gave my--and I am still waiting for a realistic presentation of what it is like to try to survive in the business world. Over, and over, and over, media figures say I gave my life to God and my profits went up 85 percent. I keep waiting for the guy who says I gave my business to God, and I went bust because ethical integrity required me to stop double bidding, and I wasn't able to cheat on subcontractors anymore, and I found I had to give accurate prices, and in that business you can't make a success of it if you'll hold true to the principles of God's word. There's a kind of a twist in some of the way that we think about all of this. I know brothers and sisters who, because of illness in their life, we live with this in our own extended family, have become very, very bitter towards God. I will not submit to a God who did that to me.

It may simply be the presence of evil in the world which causes you to react to this way. You need to get back into the book and see whether or not God has enjoyed the evil which we have to live with. And think objectively about what he's done in intervening in the world through Christ to do something, personally, about evil in the world. But over and over I meet reactions to adverse circumstances which create bitterness and create entrenched resistance to any movement by the power of the Spirit of God. There is not too much tenderness there anymore.

Religious legalism. This is different than what I had before related, to careerism and success. And it's something awfully subtle. I want to read you a little snippet that I have written about how legalism works. It's the pecking order applied to the activities of the Christian life. That implies that you can make judgments about a person's spirituality based on how they dress: neckties or more spiritual than golf shirts. There are those who think commitment to Christ can be measured by the version of Scripture that you carry around: the most spiritual version is the

King James Version. Next to that is David's version, The New King James version. Then comes the New American Standard Bible. Then the NIV than about in the middle the RSV. Then there's today's English version, and then way over on the left in the un-spiritual category is the New English Bible. Now, if you have a gilt edged one you add one point five. If you have a paperback. Subtract about a half.

There are similar spirituality scales that relate to all kinds of things: married believers are more spiritual than people who've been divorced. You ask anyone here who's been through the agony and trauma of divorce if that's not the way the church works. J.S. Bach's music is more godly than Bill Gaither's. Single Believers, especially working women over 30--unless they're missionaries--have tendencies towards being un-spiritual. Extemporaneous prayer is inherently more spiritual than anything you could read in a prayer book. Solid oak pews are probably more worshipful than folding chairs being baptized in water if it's running, especially if it's cold, is more spiritual than being in a warm tank, especially a swimming pool.

[Audience Laughter]

Prayers in Elizabethan language at 6 a.m. in the morning are inherently more godly than 25 sentences in vernacular before you fall asleep at night. Water beds are decadent. Four track stereo isn't Republicans tend toward godliness. Democrats have to evaluate on a case by case basis.

[Audience Laughter]

Choir members are more committed than ushers. Am I right? Am I right? Isn't that the way we feel? Orthodontic braces are neutral, but marital and family counseling is always a negative. Huh? Is that right? Because we can't afford to admit that we have problems in our relationships. Unleavened matzo crackers are better communion pieces than a slice of white bread. The most divine diet is prophetic, that is it's vegetarian. There are no doubts, I think, that social and cultural factors that we get into our religious experiences are very real, and you've got to be aware of them. If you're in ministry you got to know those things. And by accident on occasion, they may have some relationship to spirituality. You may measure commitment in some sort of culture, but we never ought to think that the God who searches our hearts cares one whit about what we wear, what we eat. Or that our spiritual growth can be measured by making some progress in this sort of stuff.

When the apostle Paul commented on this referring to food which was an issue in the culture in the first century, he said this, "Don't argue about all of this. Not everybody knows it but food doesn't bring you any nearer to God. We're not the worst if we eat, or the better if we don't," he says that in 1 Corinthians 8:8. He says in Romans 14:17, "the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking but of righteousness; peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." He says to believers who are being oppressed in legalism and Colossians 2, "Don't let anybody judge you regarding what you eat or drink, or in regard to some festival, or celebration, or the Sabbath day." He goes on to tell them in Colossians 2:20, "You died to the basic principles of the world, why is though you still belong to it, that you submit to rules; don't handle, don't taste, don't touch. These are all destined to perish because they're based on human commands and teaching." These regulations have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their humility, and harsh treatment but they lack any value at all in restraining indulgence. Don't get

into making spirituality scales based on external behavior of this type. It may in some contexts measure something of your commitment, but they very often are a sign of being in bondage to legalism or they represent insecurity or something of that type.

Finally, I conclude with a reference to the reality that many of us are tired I chatted over lunch yesterday with the young woman who has four children, who's gonna have a fifth. She and Joanne and I were reflecting on how difficult it is for a young mother with many children in the home to feel very spiritual. Mostly she just feels tired. And I think it's high time that we recognize the reality of that. Those of us who have the opportunity of having a different role in life I think ought to do something to help encourage people of that sort. I find that when I say to a Christian husband you're responsible for helping your wife grow spiritually, what he thinks that means is I should take her to church with me. But what it may mean in that sort of circumstances, is that you take care of the kids, and you put them to bed one night, and you let her get out of the house for a few minutes. We must, I think, recognize that our desire to pursue, and accumulate, and be successful, and to have more, and have a bigger, and whatever; affects this whole area in our persons. Working night and day is simply not good for your body, and it has very negative effects on your spiritual life. Perhaps you have to scale back your lifestyle. Perhaps you have to give up some ambitions about where you want to be in your career in order to do that. But it seems to me it's necessary to make some decisions of that type.

I remember counseling with a young man who talked to me about the difficulty he had in his home with his wife, and I said "Well how much sleep you get a night?" And he said about four and a half hours, and I said, "What do you eat?" And we listened to a litany of McDonald's, and Burger King, and Colonel Sanders. I ask if he was getting any exercise, and he said, "Well I run about once a month." Well, you will find it because your body, and your soul, and your

spirit, and your head, are all related to one another that unless there is balance in your life, related to rest, related to what you eat, and related to exercise as well as involvement, and reading, and studying God's word, you may very well run into some walls in your spiritual experience. You were redeemed as whole people. Do you know that if God simply wanted to deal with your head, or your soul, or your spirit, he could have done that very effectively without the resurrection. But what he's committed himself to in the resurrection, is the transformation of your body. He cares about what you do it. He says that that's the place where the Holy Spirit lives, a temple.

So let me encourage you, if you are concerned about progress in your personal spiritual life, to take the reality of the way God made you a little more seriously. It may be that what you need to do is to cut back and to think more seriously about how much time you're getting and rest; how much opportunity you have to do some relaxation which you need. How much opportunity you have to eat what is right and what is good for, you rather than what is destructive. They sound like very un-spiritual things to say, but they are directly related to your spiritual life and you simply can't ignore them. Many of us would find that, it's the pursuit of these things here (two tapping sounds) which has caused the problems that we feel down here.

Announcer:

You've been listening to a recent message presented by the dean of Biola's Talbot School of Theology, Dr. Bing Hunter. And let me remind you that additional messages and broadcast series presented on the Biola Hour are also available on tape cassette. For more information just write to the Biola Hour Cassette Catalogue, La Mirada California, 90639. Thank you so much for

Bing Hunter: What Hinders Spiritual Growth

your involvement with us, and we encourage you to join Dr. David Hawking each day on the Biola Hour.