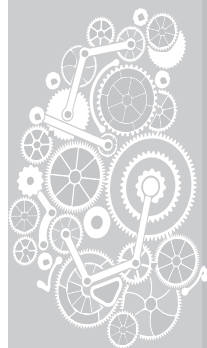


I had the privilege of meeting George Verwer at Maryville College in Tennessee. He recruited me for his first international missions trip to Mexico in 1957. What has impressed me over these 63 plus years has been his transparency, his passion to hear the other side whenever a disagreement may arise. He saw many of the Lord's faithful followers were discouraged because they were not living up to all the challenges they had heard. It was as though the conference speakers gave a vaccination to the troopers. They wondered if the Lord could use them. For these George's messages on forgiveness and love were just what the doctor ordered.

—**Dale Rhoton** (Co-founder, OM)

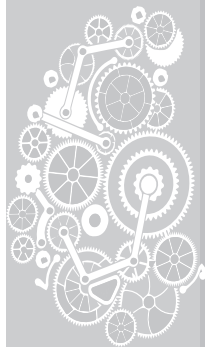
I have followed George Verwer and his writings for more than forty years. *Confessions of a Toxic Perfectionist and God's Antidote* is one of his best books yet. Pertinent, poignant, passionate and without mincing any words, the book addresses the eroding traits that are inhibiting the body of Christ. He uses his personal life and journey as an example of God's ongoing grace and antidote to shape and transform an imperfect person to the image of Christ.

—**Lawrence Tong** (International Director, OM)





CONFESSIONS OF
A TOXIC
PERFECTIONIST
AND
GOD'S ANTIDOTE





CONFESSIONS OF
A TOXIC
PERFECTIONIST
AND
GOD'S ANTIDOTE

GEORGE VERWER, D. D.

Confessions of a Toxic Perfectionist and God's Antidote

by George Verwer, D. D.

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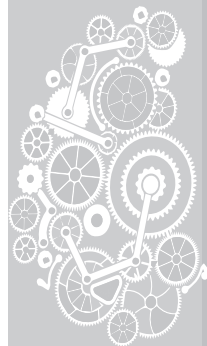
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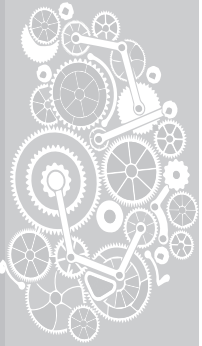
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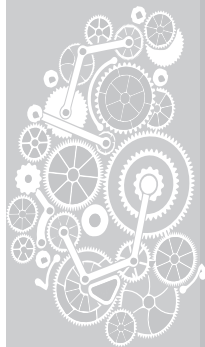
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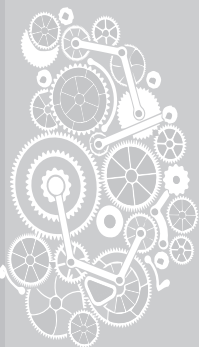


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Dedicated to Peter Maiden with whom I had the privilege of working for more than 46 years and who became my successor for 10 years from 2003 till Lawrence Tong became the leader of OM. Peter Maiden was among the least toxic persons I have ever known having found the Antidote at a very young age.



Foreword



Among George Verwer's great contributions to Christian thought would be the books 'Revolution of Love and Balance' and 'Messiology'. Now add this book, 'Confessions of A Toxic Perfectionist'. It has a message and perspective whose time has come.

The highly socially vitiated and divisive culture developing in societies everywhere is largely due to what George calls in this book—a lack of forgiveness and a lack of awareness of our own sinful nature.

As globally we try to negotiate with the phenomenon of a social media that has become already very destructive (not denying the positive value of social media) Verwer's perspective on 'toxic perfectionism' offers help broken relationships, families, churches and communities to come together and reconcile even in the midst of disagreeing with one another. The world cries out for social reconciliation and the Church needs to show the way to do this.

Verwer's humility in accepting his own imperfections and the major imperfections in the Church through the

book is a grace that is developed through years of the practise of Christian discipleship.

We may not agree with everything written in this book and the author does not expect us to do so. But the message of this book needs a patient hearing. I am sure it will bless and help many people around the world.

+Joseph D'Souza

(Moderator/Archbishop,

Good Shepherd Church of India and Associated Ministries)



Acknowledgements



There are many people I would like to thank in connection with this book, but I especially want to thank my wife Drena for all she has done each day living together during the lockdown and semi-lock down of eight months in 2020 when I typed this manuscript.

I want to thank my Personal Assistant Vera Zabramski who had to correct and re-correct what I was coming up with. Then, Mike Wakely who has served with OM for over half a century, and also in recent years founded *Starfish Asia* which has such a great ministry in Pakistan. He did some editorial work and put the finishing touch on every chapter.

Above all, I want to thank the Living God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit whose help I had every step of the way.

—George Verwer, D. D.



Introduction



The ideas and thoughts and scripture I present in this book have been on my mind and in discussion with friends over many years. Some of them have come out in my preaching, but I could not believe I would ever be able to put them together to make a book. So looking at the manuscript, I can hardly believe my eyes. I thank Him for the courage and grace, more especially as I know some people will not agree with some of it and might even get upset with me. Joseph D'Souza answers that in his Foreword.

You don't have to agree. The basic message is solid Truth based on the Word of God.

I pray that people will read it slowly and carefully allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to their mind and heart.

In some way this book is the 3rd of a trilogy starting with *Drops from a Leaking Tap* published in 2008 followed by *More Drops* in 2015 which was later called *Messiology*.

What I call 'messiology theology' is important as you read this book as it emphasises how God uses all kinds of

people—even those whose toxic factor might be high or have had major failures along the way.

At 82 I am in one of the final laps of God's great race and I am blessed and encouraged when I hear of anyone who is blessed or helped by any of my books. When they take time to write or email (at present george.verwer@om.org) I try to pray for each person who writes as I read their letter or email.

Please understand that what you read in a few minutes is often something that has concerned me for almost a lifetime. I hope you might feel my heart and emotion and try to really understand what I am trying to say. God Bless you.

—George Verwer



CHAPTER 1

Toxic Perfectionism



For about three years I have been thinking about this subject and wondering if I should write a book about it. I have touched on the subject in the newsletters and messages. Many people who have read and heard have urged me to write it as a book. Others have said, “Make sure we get a copy when published.” There has been no book due to a lot of struggles in my own mind about some of the concepts that I would want to share.

My previous book *Messiology* actually started with an article like this and was widely distributed before the book went into print. What I share here is very much tied together with some of what I shared in *Messiology*.

Procrastination has always been a struggle for me, especially when something seems difficult and complex, and I also know that some will not like it. After 65 years of often critical and hurtful letters—and then emails—I am not really looking forward to more at my age. One of the

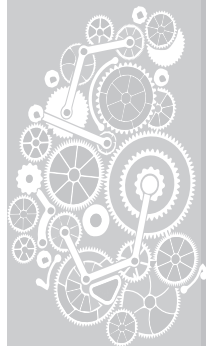
most hurtful was when someone accused me of writing *Messiology* as a cover-up for the sins of a Christian leader they were trying to expose and bring down.

There is a strong biblical basis for what I am trying to share, including verses like: *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) and *the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.*" (Jeremiah 17:9) *He who commits sin becomes a slave to sin.* (John 8:34) *If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.* (I John 1:8, TLB)

Perhaps one of the most important passages is James 3:13-19:

If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favouritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. (NLT)

These verses beautifully compare the difference between the wisdom of man, which of course is linked with perfection and excellence but with the toxic factor mixed in, and the wisdom that comes from heaven. I want to urge you to study these verses and while you are at it, the whole book of James.



I am sure many of you reading this know many more passages of Scripture dealing with human selfishness and sinfulness. In this book, it is often referred to as the ‘toxic factor’. My paraphrase of Romans 3:23 is: *All are toxic and fall short of the glory of God.*

Driven to Write

What finally pushed me to getting to my keyboard? Well, it was an email from an American friend, who happens to be a woman who came to England to study at one of the best Theological Colleges. One of her obviously ‘perfectionist teachers’ said so many hurtful things to her that it affected her the rest of her life.

It reminded me of my own wife Drena’s experience in primary school when she had to sing a song in a musical, and when she struggled with the words the teacher publicly tried to correct her which only made it worse. Afterwards one of her male school friends told her how terrible she was, which a huge emotional hurt especially for a little girl living in a home with a totally unconverted, toxic perfectionist step-father. He was bitter and racist, but hard-working and a proud accountant with the IRS. He was not a believer and at times was upset with the newly found faith of his wife, Evelyn (Drena’s mom). What she and the rest of this family suffered with this legalistic perfectionism is hard to describe, but it has impacted my dear wife all her life.

One of the greatest answers to prayer in our marriage was to see Henry, her stepdad, come to repentance and faith in Christ in his senior years. I spent considerable



time with him after that and saw the radical changes that God made in this still very imperfect man—and what a joy to be asked to share at his funeral.

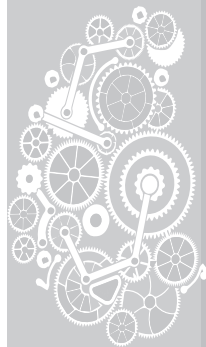
My observation over these 65 years in Jesus is that accountants, so committed to excellence, easily develop a hurtful toxic factor.

What I write on these pages is not meant to attack the commitment to excellence, perfection and doing things right, whether in the spiritual or the human realm. Do I want to fly in an airplane where the pilot is not committed to perfection? What we don't want is the stressed-out pilot to beat up his wife when he gets home because in his view she had done something wrong.

History shows that often great and effective people in the workplace are toxic and unpleasant in their homes and, sorry to say, this includes Christian leaders. The level of domestic violence and abuse of women is the theme of a number of books, so I will not pursue it here.

The greatest emphasis of Jesus and the New Testament is doing things right and that by godly living. It is presented in many different ways and with a wide range of vocabulary. Reading and even memorising some passages like I Corinthians 13 has been used by God to transform the lives of toxic perfectionists.

Let me make it clear that in the life of the believer who is really trying to follow the Lord, we are speaking about a weakness or factor in the person's life—it will greatly vary from one person to another. It might be better to say that he or she is a perfectionist with a toxic streak.



The Bigger Factor

I was also pushed into moving forward by the riots and protests all over the world and the elevation of ‘total justice’ and ‘fairness’. The increase of all kinds of extremism and fake news has been another factor.

The bigger factor is my own life—and especially my failures in this area. So in fact this is a confession.

I was reared in a home with good parents who were not committed believers but believed things should be done right and down to the smallest detail. This was especially good for my dad who became a gifted electrician where one mistake can cost you your life. This actually happened to an electrician who lived in the next street to where I am typing this from.

My dad was Dutch but came to the United States at around seven years of age and lived in his Dutch home with four brothers and a very strong Dutch ethic and standard, which of course they could not keep. Many in the family had a sad history, including one brother who became an alcoholic, which was also true of my maternal grandfather whom my grandmother divorced. Hardly any of them became followers of Jesus. They had many positive qualities linked with perfectionism and hard-working and caring for their families. My own parents and sister all came to faith in Christ sometime after my conversion. The transformation in their lives was very real but included those imperfections so often linked with their own backgrounds and childhood. The positives and negatives were passed on to me, but in my mind looking back, the positives outweighed the negatives, for which I am thankful.



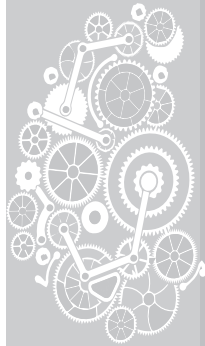
In my counselling and fellowship with thousands of people over the years, I have been stunned again and again by what people have suffered in their childhood.

Living in an America that was just coming out of World War II and about to get into the Korean conflict meant, there was a very strong emphasis to be a good patriotic American. Soon in my teenage years that meant being mega anti-Communist, which I became. We assumed our nation was Christian and many Christian values, if broken, were punishable by law. One of the things hindering me from ever writing this is that so often good and evil are mixed together. Many of the laws were good and, many people seemed highly gifted at breaking them, always putting huge numbers behind bars. Getting into jail and prison ministry when I was only 18 had a huge impact on me.

Some of the laws were not good, actually leading to injustice and the mistreatment of people. It is hard to grasp how much human sinfulness (the toxic factor) affects every aspect of society. Again, we have whole books on that subject, often rejected today by so-called modern man.

I moved to the South in 1956 when segregation was the Law. My understanding of the teaching of Jesus immediately put me at odds with this system.

After our first summer in Mexico, I went to Moody Bible Institute when interracial dating was against the rules and we all had to sign a very perfectionistic rule book. This included no dancing, no movies, maybe no lipstick. Without knowing it, a perfectionist mentality developed in most of us, both the positive and negative. Keep in mind part of the theme of *Messiology*, that despite



our sins, weaknesses and imperfections, God was using us and a mission movement was being born without us knowing it.

No Ulterior Motive

Another reason it is hard to write this book is that some of my friends—and some so-called enemies—may think that I am having a go at them. It would be easy to think that, since I have seen some level of toxic perfectionism in about 90% of all the people I know and many more whose books I have read or whose sermons I have listened to. Since I am confessing my own sin in all of this, I do hope many readers, including friends, will confess theirs as the Holy Spirit directs them.

I was so strong on doing everything right, and according to what I felt the Bible taught, that in some ways I became a fanatic. I am not sure how many examples I should give. The one who suffered the most was my own wife, especially in those first weeks of marriage living on the floor in the back of a bookshop. Please don't misunderstand because they were not major incidents—at least not the way most people think, but I believe they were major with God. I may have hurt others back at Moody who often did not have the courage or whatever to confront me. I thank the Lord for the few that did.

All during this time, I had daily prayer and communion with the Lord, having learned to take God's antidote on a daily basis. The imperfections and weaknesses always seemed to be there ready to move into action when someone said something or did something I thought was



not right. Amazing that I would especially react strongly if I felt someone was being treated wrongly or unkindly.

Years later, I can still remember at a leaders meeting in a large conference, seeing a close friend spoken of with very hurtful and unkind words. Bang, it happened. I lost

The greatest obstacle to our sanctification or godly life is our inability to see ourselves as we really are.

my cool, nailing him verbally with all the inconsistencies I saw in his life. The others in the room were in shock over the outburst of the visiting, semi-famous missionary speaker. I quickly

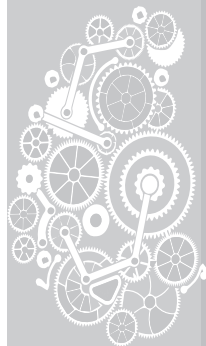
apologised with a high level of emotion. This story did not have a happy ending.

I don't think we realise how much the positives and negatives of our families and our culture impact us and how both factors remain with us the rest of our lives.

Blessed are those who realise it, repent and come to Jesus. Blessed are those who know Jesus but struggle and fail in this area like me. There is a great difference between the person who knows he has this sin and fault in his life and deals with it, and the person who never faces up to it and fails to get the help needed. This toxic factor can be very subtle and we can be blind to it.

Billy Graham said, 'The greatest obstacle to our sanctification or godly life is our inability to see ourselves as we really are.'

As a young Christian, I began to read books like *Calvary Road* that really exposed the toxic factors in my life. I also was fortunate to read great books about love and some great ministry which was the greatest deterrent to toxic perfectionism in my life.

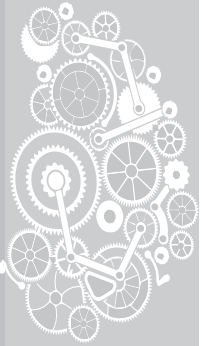


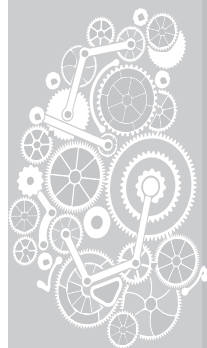
Later on I would share my experience, including my struggles, especially in our prayer nights, and often there was a great work of the Holy Spirit bringing many to brokenness and repentance. Little did we know what our God was planning!

We learned how to apologise for any unkind word or action. We discovered the miracle of God's amazing *GRACE* and what I like to call *radical forgiveness*. We learned from Philippians about esteeming others better than ourselves. It truly was a Revolution of Love and it is still going on!

I feel strongly that many people reared in church-going families, who often are obliged to go to church, don't realise the huge impact that will have on them all their lives, both positive and negative. I speak of this more in the chapter, *The Devil's Vaccination Programme*.

The shock for me again and again was how quickly that toxic factor could manifest itself as I still struggle with it to this day. It continues to hurt others, especially my wife. It still leads to discouragement and a wrong attitude towards myself and others. Without His mercy and forgiveness, be sure I would not be writing this. Yes, my commitment to discipleship, godly living and obedience to the LORD and His Holy Spirit is still there. Yes, but with more patience and less of the toxic factor. I believe everyone should be on this narrow path that Jesus has called us to.





CHAPTER 2

The Toxic Environment

I am sure I have experienced or observed more than a thousand situations where toxic perfectionism manifested itself—and sometimes in people that I highly esteemed and whom I knew God was using.

I cannot over-emphasise the shock when suddenly out of the mouth of someone I respect comes some hurtful toxic or semi-toxic statement. I have been guilty too, but had a great advance start in ruthlessly dealing with it as a very young Christian. I also discovered that this weakness easily gets married to one's negative streak, which increases the damage.

My own lifelong struggle with impatience, moodiness and irritability made me more vulnerable. As a young Christian, the Holy Spirit dealt a heavy blow to the anger factor in my life. Again, the teaching of Billy Graham, and especially his book *Seven Deadly Sins*, played a key role. Other more subtle sins and weaknesses were to be a



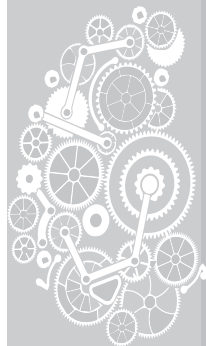
lifelong battle. Reading about it, and observing how deadly toxic anger can be, even sometimes leading to murder and even war, caused me as a young disciple of Jesus to hate this sin with holy hatred.

It made it easier to quickly repent and apologise if I failed in that area. Without question, this aspect of human fallenness and toxicity is one of the greatest problems in the world today. It is manifested in every nation and every culture. Look at these powerful words from the book of James:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1-3, ESV)

Critical Christians

I have observed that some Christians often struggle with impatience and anger and can be the most opinionated and critical people. From the very beginning of my walk with Jesus, I was criticised both to my face and behind my back, often on very small issues. Some of this I only found when someone felt that they must pass on some negative things that someone else had said about me. I am reminded of that verse in Proverbs 17:9, *Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.* (NLT). Some of it was valid and I often learned from it, especially if what I had done was toxic or sinful. So often it was linked with language and misunderstanding. Very seldom, however,



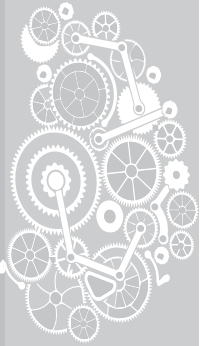
did people, who had been hurt or offended by me, have the courage to speak face to face. I have also been guilty.

A great Christian leader with years of experience said that gossip was the biggest hindrance to the work of God around the world. Yes, it often seems to be out of control among God's people and of course it is a way of life for many non-believers, who even produce whole newspapers given over to gossip. Wow, don't even think about Social Media and the Internet! The Smart Phone is changing the course of history.

What is even more shocking among the Lord's people is that this criticism is often just about some small thing. However, I discovered the hard way that what I think as small is huge for someone else. I use many different translations of the Bible but have been criticised in certain situations for not using the translation the people believed was 'right'. I discovered that for some this is a huge issue. Whole books have been written defending their favourite translation, which is usually the King James or Authorised Version. We fail to realise what a huge stumbling block this can be to non-Christians.

On the other hand, we know there are hugely important doctrinal issues that divide Christians and cause them to speak against each other. The question is, can we strongly disagree with what someone is writing or teaching and still love that person? I believe the answer must be 'yes'.

In the mid-60's here in England, John Stott and Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones had a strong public disagreement in front of hundreds. I knew both these men and they still showed love for one another. Later there was some kind of



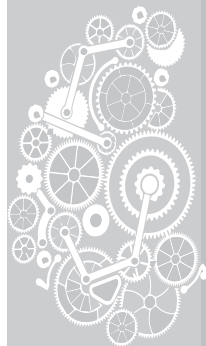
reconciliation. Now that both are in heaven, no doubt it is all sorted out.


My spiritual father Billy Graham became the most criticised Christian leader I have ever heard about, especially starting in 1957 when most conservative fundamentalists turned against him. There is a whole book about it that you don't want to read. I found it one of the most discouraging realities; the toxic language that spilled out was off the charts, but never from big-hearted Billy. He did struggle with the hate mail. One particular Christian University led the attack and other individuals who often were totally sincere. I speak in my book *Messiology* of how God kept working in the midst of the mess, and on both sides of the controversy that still continues even after his death. Some spilled negative things on Social Media. Mainstream media was somewhat fair and I felt the Gospel was often communicated. Of course, their toxic streak often insisted on pointing out Billy's mistakes, especially with Presidents Truman and Nixon.

In the minds of some, Billy Graham's meeting with the Pope was a terrible sin. Books, leaflets and even videos were sent to me to show how evil Billy was, even being referred to as part of the anti-Christ.

Some of the great criticism both OM and I have received has attacked us for distributing Billy Graham's books or standing with him in any way. Most of these people were sincere, believing they were defending the true faith.

I believe, due to the Devil's cleverness and our fallen nature that even the church has sometimes created a





toxic environment in which a leader cannot sin. If he or she does, it must be hidden or kept quiet. I could give many true stories of pastors and leaders being mistreated or even driven out of leadership. It seems that anything in the area of sex is disunity dynamite. One friend and dear pastor with great courage shared from the pulpit his struggle with pornography on TV, asking for prayer as he was now staying away from it. His marriage was holding together, but the church came unglued, with what I call toxic perfectionists leading the way. The church split. He not only left that church where he had been for a long time, but never returned to the ministry. Praise the Lord his marriage held together and he is pressing on in his faith.

Sometimes the toxic situation actually is the fault of the pastor or someone else in leadership. In the hundreds of situations I have observed, it all gets very complicated and so many people get hurt or disillusioned. Without radical grace and forgiveness and a willingness to compromise, you can end up with what some people call a ‘train wreck’ and you will never come out of it without a lot of hurt and damage on all sides. I could share hundreds of stories like this from all over the world and throughout history. You might start with the Book of Acts and the Epistles.

I don’t think you want more stories like this, but be sure there are plenty of positive ones in what I call the ‘Grace Awakening’ that is changing some churches and situations. Be sure to read the book of that title by Charles Swindoll. It is hard because just one toxic *Grace-killer* in a church can bring the whole church into chaos. I have seen it again and again. There is now, sad to say, more negative news about the church, and especially evangelicals, than

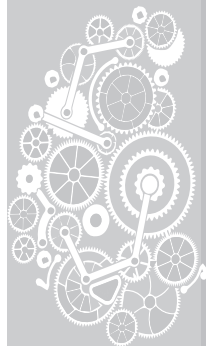
ever before. The word 'evangelical' in some places has been tied to a political movement and it is become a mess 10 times over.

Destructive Idealism

There is another side to the coin that I especially hope young people will look at (I am still very involved with young people). It is what I call 'destructive idealism and unrealistic expectations.' It has produced a new style of toxic perfectionism and it is promoted big time via Social Media. Years ago, people with extremist convictions had trouble getting a following. They still did and the damage done is in our history books. Today almost any extremist can get a following via social media. It is portrayed in the news every day and many have written about it.

Society, more than ever, is fractured. More and more people are making statements about nations and society becoming ungovernable. It is very scary, especially for those whose only hope is what happens here and now. Often elements of truth are mixed with untruth to take down a leader or government. How many of us have studied the unbelievable death and chaos that came from the so-called the Arab Spring?

Have we forgotten that the Syrian Civil War and the birth of ISIS came about through some sincere people marching down the street protesting? I could list many historic situations where horrendous bloodshed and worse was triggered off by unrealistic extremists with their mixed motives (some good), attempting to have radical change and total justice (their own definition). If we only could go



back to the Bible we would realise that total justice is not possible for human beings, nor for their organisations and governments. This quote from A. W. Tozer has helped me along the way:

The fall of many has created a perpetual crisis. It will last until sin has been put down and Christ reigns over a redeemed and restored world. Until that time the earth remains a disaster area and its inhabitants live in a state of extraordinary emergency.

To me it has always been difficult to understand those evangelical Christians who insist upon living in the crisis as if no crisis existed. They say they serve the Lord, but they divide their days so as to leave plenty of time to play and loaf and enjoy the pleasures of the world as well. They are at ease while the world burns.

—Gems from Tozer

About 100 years ago or before, many who turned away from the Bible embraced the dream that the world was getting better and better. Later some believed the United Nations would help make that happen. We started making idealistic statements about ‘ending all poverty, all injustice, all war’. It sounded great to many. Some actually believed Communism would bring this in. Hitler had his own ideas.

Two horrific ugly wars changed that view for many, leading to all kinds of extremes, often anti-Christian philosophy, so wonderfully exposed by Dr. Francis Schaeffer and his films and writings. He, by the way, in my view was also a toxic perfectionist, which for me does not reduce him in my eyes but helps drive home the reality that we all have it. If you read his books about love, you catch something of the reality and struggle.



The Messy Church

Young person, it is a huge mistake to abandon the local church because of their sins or inconsistencies. Very godly people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eugene Peterson, Brennan Manning and others have taught us the reality that the church and her people can be messy. This is not an excuse but a basic reality that we must embrace.

Every organisation or institution in all of history, from sports to politics and to the arts, has proven that *where two or three people are gathered together, there will be a mess* (my own paraphrase).

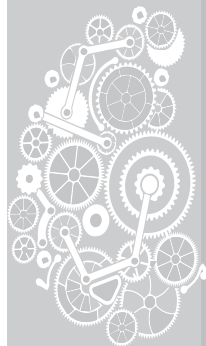
To think we will not have a mess in the church is to reject history and reality. That does not mean we should not work night and day to improve in every area of life. We see it in the news every day. Our newspapers and media

Every organisation or institution in all of history, from sports to politics and to the arts, has proven that *where two or three people are gathered together, there will be a mess.*

daily report the evil deeds of humankind. Yet in our so-called new culture, we are not allowed to say someone is a sinner or that anything is deeply wrong with all people. If we present our solution that repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the answer,

we get into more trouble—praise the Lord not always, as so many people are still turning to Christ in our day.

In fact, for the last 100 years we have been in the midst of the largest numbers of people turning to Christ in all of history. Yes, and with it the global church mess factor has increased which, as in the New Testament, includes false teaching and false teachers.



There is a huge emphasis on planting more churches today, but we must ask ourselves what kind of churches will they be? Healthy, Christ-focused, grace awakened and alive or toxic, where more people will get confused and hurt?

We have created a toxic culture of unrealistic expectations where we are unwilling for sensible compromise that enables us to survive in such a toxic broken world. This has, sad to say, invaded many churches, so that many people get hurt or disillusioned trying to live up to some lofty unrealistic dream or standard of living that is taught. I paraphrase the Danish, semi-Christian philosopher Kierkegaard, who said that “we as Christians create the highest ethic ever and kill ourselves with it”. I pray that my words will be a wake-up call to reality and that will lead people to a deeper experience with God.

When we see our own sin in the light of God’s word, we will become much more patient and forgiving toward the sins of others. It is so easy to be self-centred, which is linked with one of our greatest enemies, the pride of our own sinful toxic hearts. I urge you to read Andrew Murray’s small book called *Humility*, that hit me so hard that I remember when and where it was when I read it—Bombay, India 1964. It is sad that books like this and other similar books are not read much anymore. The non-Christian book-reading generation will feel the impact of this and we will all suffer because of it.



In this world of corruption there is real danger that the earnest Christian may overreact in his resistance to evil and become a victim of religious occupational disease, cynicism. The constant need to go counter to popular trends may easily develop in him a sour habit of faultfinding and turn him into a sulky critic of other men's matters, without charity and without love.

What makes this cynical spirit particularly dangerous is that the cynic is usually right. His analysis are accurate, his judgement sound; yet for all that he is wrong, frightfully, pathetically wrong.

As a cure for the sour, faultfinding attitude I recommend the cultivation of the habit of thankfulness. Thanks giving has great curative powers. A thankful heart cannot be cynical.

—A. W. Tozer



CHAPTER 3

The Devil's Vaccination Programme



People who have heard me speak may have heard me use the expression, “the devil’s vaccination programme”. What in the world am I trying to say? Let me try to explain, because it is important for you to know that you don’t need to use my vocabulary to embrace the basic truth of what I am trying to say. There is clear teaching in the Bible about the devil’s subtle way of trying to hinder or even destroy believers. Ephesians 6:10-20 is one of the most important passages.

It is my way of trying to measure the level of perfectionist practices we have experienced, especially in childhood that may be still affecting us today, though we may sometimes hardly realise it. It is key to understand that in most situations the positives are mixed with the negatives. Just touching on it in my spoken messages and

emails has brought amazing feedback, including people urging me to write this book.

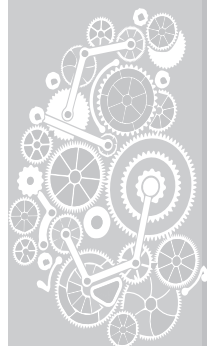
For example, I mentioned that my father was Dutch, and if we study the Dutch culture, and today there is a wide range of Dutch people, we will discover their commitment to doing things right. Without the transforming grace of Jesus, it leads people to toxic perfectionism. So before I was ten I had this vaccination.

I feel the fact that I was reared in America, including all my schooling, brought the second vaccination. Being trained as a leader in the Boy Scout Movement was my third.

After my conversion, I immediately became involved with very conservative, fundamentalist Christians with all their rules and values, many of which were good. In my situation, the positives outweighed the negatives, partly because I never joined their church. But I still got my fourth vaccination.

One local church that I was linked with was already on the way to a toxic, hurtful split. One of my first examples was when I saw a pastor, whom God was using, brought down by what I would later call 'toxic perfectionism'. I knew somewhat well a couple of the people who led the way. Anyway that was my fifth vaccination.

I soon ran into it again in the churches in Maryville, Tennessee, where I was studying at Maryville College—where, by the way I met Dale Rhoton and Walter Borchard, who the next summer went with me to Mexico. The level of legalism and toxic perfection were lower at the college, but that was not so in the strong fundamentalist, anti-integration segregated white churches.



The truth is that I was so set on winning men and women to Christ, and believing the church needed revival, that statements that might have hurt other people only pushed me into more Bible study, prayer and evangelism. I probably had another vaccination there but maybe the toxic dosage was low.

That was to greatly change in Chicago when I enrolled at Moody Bible Institute and was handed a good-sized handbook with all the rules. With it, I had to sign a statement that I would keep them. I must have had at least three more jabs (shots or vaccinations) during my time there.

The Most Positive Factor

The most positive factor that kept me on the road of the Jesus' Revolution of Love was that I had the antidote.

Yes, I had been born from above in that Billy Graham meeting in Madison Square Garden on March 3, 1955, and indwelt by His Holy Spirit, and was experiencing the reality of the fruit of the Spirit in my life. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* (Galatians 5:22-23)

Because of great books, great preaching and the example of some people, I had learned how to quickly repent and apologise. I really believe that my commitment to being a loving disciple of Jesus outweighed the toxic factor. I was often unaware of the struggles and hurts of my fellow students because of toxic situations they were facing, often back home or in their home church. We did

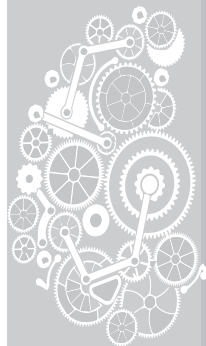


not realise that we were now functioning in a shame-based culture where we would never talk about certain kinds of failure, especially in the sexual area. In the early prayer nights, especially when only men were there, these failures were often confessed and there was love and forgiveness. I learned that the toxic side of commitment to excellence could be dealt with by confession, repentance and brokenness.

No wonder Roy Hession's *Calvary Road* became a required reading in OM for many years! I guess one of my biggest complexities was that I wanted to semi-enforce what I believed were biblical principles of discipleship on anyone who was joining me to go to Mexico, and later Europe and beyond. It actually led us to new forms of legalism, but as I point out in my book *Messiology*, God does not seem to have a problem using legalists—or even semi-legalists. But there was a better way.

I would give very strong messages that seemed to bless and help many, but hurt others, sometimes linked with just one sentence or comment. It took many years before what I call, 'Grace Awakening' would move into great force in my life and our OM fellowship. The process continues.

In listening to some old tapes, I have been quite shocked by some of my hyper-dogmatic statements. Without realising it, we were creating our own sub-culture that in the years to come would attract some and scare others (often people with great potential) away. I really believe that is less true today and we have to be careful that the pendulum does not swing too far the other way to a



point where we have no distinctives or strong convictions that will always upset some people.

I had a fear to offend and a people-pleasing streak that also had to be dealt with, even to this day. That might be a result of reading Dale Carnegie's best-selling *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

I don't want to admit it, but from then on all who joined me (later we were called OM, but in those days 'Send the Light') got at least one Verwer Vaccination which was definitely a positive and negative mixture. How it affected them would be deeply linked with how many shots they already had from their childhood environment, especially parents, peers and the church. Today I can talk to a person for half an hour and have some idea of how many vaccinations they have had. Wow, some friends have been surprised when I say, "I can tell you have been vaccinated", and it leads to vibrant conversation.

Only by Grace

I only wish that in those early days that we had books like *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll or *Healing for Damaged Emotions* by David Seamands, with those key chapters. Chapter 7: Symptoms of Perfectionism, and Chapter 8: The process of healing for perfectionism. In his book, David comes at this subject in a very different way than what I am writing about and I would urge you to read it and share it with others. I met him personally and discovered he was a clay pot just like the rest of us.

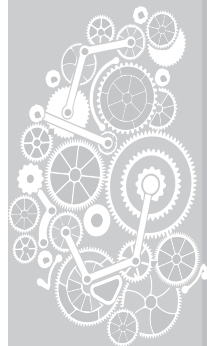
We were reading other books like *Taste of New Wine* by Keith Miller and the amazing writings of Eugenia Price,



especially *Make Love Your Aim* and *God's Call to Freedom*. The books of AW Tozer became very important in our fellowship and I was always quoting him. My study of his life and listening to his tapes showed a very deep toxic perfectionism. In one tape he pretty well wrote off the entire mission movement he was part of. When I quoted him out of context at Urbana in 1967 it upset quite a few people. I was greatly helped when I read it in one of his books (OM produced *Gems from Tozer*). He confessed his lack of moderation and went on to talk about how hard it is to pin a preacher down. There were other great streaks of grace and forgiveness on his tapes and in his writings. His widow remarried, and referring to her two marriages she said, "Aiden loved Jesus Christ, but Leonard Odam (her new husband) loves me". Another marriage story that will be told only in heaven.

I could list some very well-known writers in this camp. I discovered that the high standard form of radical discipleship that I was teaching, and trying to live, did not actually exist and certainly not in the New Testament era. We never had anyone in the work who lived up to them, though a few got close. I was constantly disappointed with people and often myself. To survive and keep the link with people, I had to compromise, but looking back that was positive and good.

If I did not have the message of forgiveness, as I John 2:1 says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* (NIV) Without that I never would have made it and I doubt that OM would exist, at least in the healthy form it is today.



Most of us in OM were reading all kinds of books with much blessing, but again the negative factor was there, as so often different leaders were reading different books. Looking back, I feel sad over so many books that have such strong, hyper-dogmatic, legalistic, hurtful, and judgemental statements. Quite a few presented an idealistic, perfectionistic brand of discipleship and the Christian life that does not exist.

Soon in OM we had the Bill Gothard group, the Dr. Shaeffer group, the Watchman Nee group, the Bakht Singh group, the Ralph Shallis group and so on. We had the Charismatic and the anti-Charismatic groups. Leaders were always coming to me with different suggestions and agendas. We had a crisis when some wanted the whole movement to get involved in dealing with demons. We were under great pressure to read a book on this subject about two inches thick. I still stand amazed how we got through all this without major disunity. The 'Revolution of Love' was working. The Antidote was effective.

How many vaccinations have you had? How much is this still impacting your ministry, relationships, marriage and family? Maybe you would like to join my 'Crying-Out-For-Mercy' Club.





CHAPTER 4

The Toxic Factor in Family Life

I hope you agree that we not only learn from the Word of God, but we also learn from those who preach the Word and from their lives. We learn from their books—I see a book as a sermon in print. We see, especially in the New Testament, a strong emphasis on sermons and preaching. Think of the life-changing *Sermon on the Mount* of our Lord Jesus.

I am doing a whole series on the Book of Acts by Zoom for a local church and they are putting it on YouTube. I have been amazed at how much space in the book of Acts is taken up with preaching, especially with the messages of Stephen, Peter and Paul.

Read Acts 20:7-12. Paul preached so long that one young man fell asleep and fell backwards out of a window. After Paul raised him up, and “they went back to breaking bread and continued till dawn.” Doesn’t quite seem like the Anglican Church down the road. No wonder my messages were more acceptable in India than here in England.



In over 65 years of ministry and walking with Jesus, I have learned so much by listening to hundreds of speakers and preachers. I have also learned so much from following people in their lives and having friends.

Learning from Life

I could write a book about the many amazing transformed people, both singles and married, who I have had the privilege of knowing, meeting or reading about. If you read the family letter that Peter Maiden's family had sent out at the time of his homegoing you will have a great example of this. Peter and I worked together for 46 years and in 2003 he became my successor doing an outstanding job for the next 10 years until Lawrence Tong stepped into his shoes.

I have learned so much from people and families that have gone through difficult times, some of them going through divorce. With over 200,000 former OMers, we have a lot of opportunities to learn from the trials and experiences of dear friends. I have continued to be in touch with a few thousand, and more and more of them are in heaven.

Something in me, I believe put there by Jesus, reaches out to those who have suffered, including the loss of loved ones, especially children, financial failure, divorce or worse. It has led me to a more realistic understanding of life on our fallen, rebellious planet.

I have had an extra special interest in couples who met on OM, but whose marriages broke. Well over a thousand couples have met on OM, especially on our four different ships. OM actually pioneered in accepting divorced people



coming into global missions. We now have a long history of outstanding divorced people being used of God. I believe it is wrong teaching and toxic perfectionism that led to the persecution and mistreatment of divorced people for a couple of thousand years. That's another book I would like to write, but don't worry that will not happen.

We also helped pioneer international and inter-racial marriage in missions. It is interesting to see how they are among our most faithful former OMers, and it is exciting to see so many of their children going on for God.

However, we do not live in some 'OM bubble' but are involved in a wide range of relationships in local churches and communities. We read newspapers or follow daily news and so know to some degree what is going on. Most of us have studied history.

The Poison that Destroys

One of the results of my observations, study and counselling is that toxic perfectionism is a major factor among believers and non-believers in destroying the marriage relationship. Anger problems are sometimes even more of a factor, as anger easily gets united to toxic perfectionism.

I remember reading different sides of the story of one of my heroes, Dr. Bob Pierce. The story of his broken marriage and his daughter's suicide, combined with his departure from World Vision, the movement he founded, is not easily forgotten. He himself then had a breakdown and the story of his comeback and restoration is another testimony to radical grace.

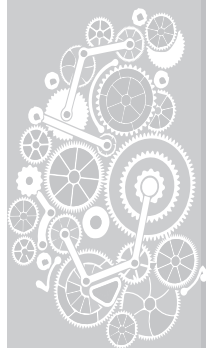


I especially learned from a young man, ex-military, who studied at a Bible College even more conservative than Moody. The College was part of a global network of churches that God used in mighty ways over 100 years, despite it having about 40 different splits. One of the splits ended up becoming totally cultic and is still functioning today. The founders were still living when the first really big split took place. I dare not give their names.

The early prayer meetings had a huge impact at this college and even the president was deeply impacted. He left the college and travelled a year or more with OM. He became a lifelong friend because we both learned how to graciously disagree and press on.

This particular student quickly joined OM and met his wife. He soon was with us in India and they served for a number of years. I only found out later that he had a huge anger problem that his wife took the brunt of. I fear they both had the negative side of the Verwer vaccination.

He actually wrote a hard-line toxic perfectionist book on discipleship that made other books on that subject that we were selling look weak. I refused to distribute it, and to this day feel bad that even though he was a dear friend I never realised what was going on. I did see a few signs but failed to follow up. Some years later, he walked away from the Christian faith and from his wife, and his daughter took her own life. He rejected me and wanted no contact until recently, praise the Lord, when we spoke on the phone.



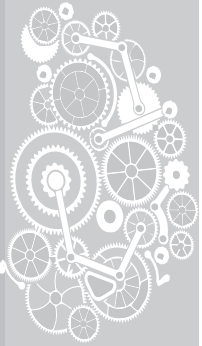
How many horror stories do you want? I know hundreds, and I am too aware that often I don't have the whole picture and the whole story.

I was talking to a leader I greatly respect and he shared how a distraught woman, married to a well-known Christian leader, had poured out her heart to him and his wife about the long-lasting domestic abuse she had experienced. This has been on the increase during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic might stop or slow down, but domestic violence will increase and it is often tied into toxic perfectionism.

The Size of the Problem

My view is that all of us have too many strong convictions and opinions, some of which might be right, but without LOVE it is just a 'clanging gong' or worse. Sorry to say that some of the most judgemental, toxic perfectionistic people I have ever known are strong students of the Bible. They especially know how to hit people on the head with it. Alex Strauch in his books, *Leading with Love* and *If You Bite and Devour One Another* would be so helpful in setting people free and bring them into repentance and reality.

Calvary Road by Roy Hession was the first book in which I read about the sin of irritability. It exposed my irritability factor big time and brought me to repentance. That especially came out in our first weeks of marriage, living in the bookshop in Mexico City. I was often irritated with the staff, and on one occasion spoke harsh words to dear Benjamin whom I put in charge of the shop for a short time. The Lord quickly convicted me and I started

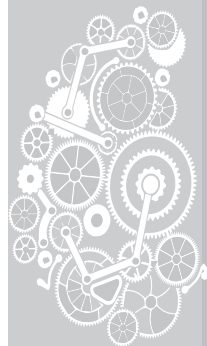


crying as I apologised and asked for forgiveness. Our first son Ben, born a year or so later in Spain, was named Ben after this dear Mexican brother.

I often became irritated and upset with myself. I remember driving once and making a mistake, swearing at myself. I am reminded of the expression, I'm not sure who said it "our greatest enemy is often ourselves." This is the side of perfectionism that David Seamands speaks about clearly in his book that has been a huge help to me. Toxic perfectionists easily get down on themselves. A number of the suicides I have known about have taken place in very shame-based, cultural situations. Many of these suicides, and it is way more than people realise, would never have happened if we were teaching and practicing the message of *radical grace and forgiveness*. The story of Christians struggling with sexual issues and feeling ashamed and taking their lives, right through all of history, has never been told. I could give you dozens of examples. When it happens within the church, even maybe with the leader, you cannot imagine the complexity and hurt.

I used to think that sexual failure in a marriage was the biggest problem, but I now believe anger is bigger.

One of the saddest realities in some churches and other situations, even missions, is that we create an environment in which it is almost impossible to confess sin. Without saying it, we expect our leaders to be more or less perfect. So often in such situations we wear a mask and nobody really knows us. This is sometimes true in marriage as men and women in the grip of sin and shame live a double life.



A strong commitment in marriage to doing things right, and to make sure our children do the right things, will never work without lots of love, patience, flexibility, radical forgiveness and grace.

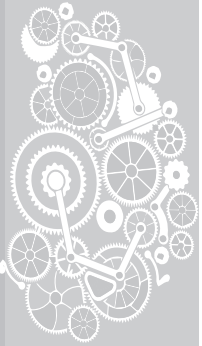
It is quite normal in our fractured and diversified society, with people from such a wide range of backgrounds, that husbands, wives and even children have very different views on what is right. We often cannot even agree what the actual situation is, much less resolve the problem. Toxic perfectionists often insist that their way is the only way. How does that work out if other members of the family, team or partnership have a similar infection? Broken marriages and relationships and long-term hurt and bitterness can come out of such situations. Pride, selfishness and ego are other toxic factors that push their way onto centre stage.

Human efforts to do everything right lead to hurt and marital breakup. Sad to say this happens among Christians and even Christian leaders.

Our Personal Battle

In my other books and on my audio and video messages I share about our own struggles within our marriage. This also comes out in the film of the story of my life, *George for Real*, where Drena also shares her heart.

My subtle toxic factor, often riding on impatience, was hurting my wife, but with her commitment to try to be the 'perfect wife' by what we thought was the Biblical definition, she never said much. We slowly discovered how very different we were. Later, I read such a helpful



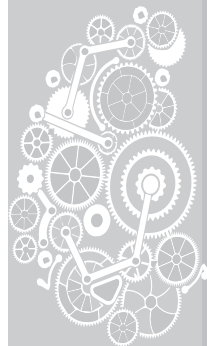
book, *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, but it came a bit late for us!

For us it was the chapter 'Revival in the Home' in Roy Hession's book *Calvary Road* that God especially used. We both had the antidote and learned to apply it more and more each day. Being daily in God's Word, especially passages like Galatians 2:20 about the crucified life, was one of the most important factors in keeping us together in love and grace, serving Him for over 60 years.

Many marriages are on a faulty foundation from the beginning due to the human sinfulness of both husband and wife. This often includes toxic factors including unrealistic expectations, insecurity and other weaknesses—all strongly spoken about in the Word of God. Failure to deal openly with the lust factor also often weakens the foundation.

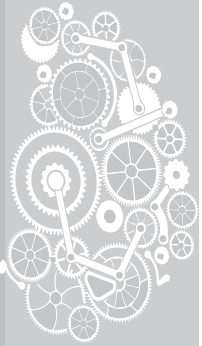
For a time I felt the sinfulness of men was greater than women. That was affirmed in my thinking as I ministered in prisons here in the UK, finding out that over 90% in prison were men. More biblical thinking helped me understand that men and women are equally toxic and sinful but often different. Men move quickly down the road of anger and violence which can land them in prison, whereas women often struggle with jealousy and more subtle sins which grieve God but don't lead to arrest and imprisonment. Forgive my generalisation as everything is more complex than you can express in a few sentences.

I close this chapter with this true story of the sister of one of the first persons from Moody who went on my second trip to Mexico. Her husband was strongly opposed



to divorce but was madly infatuated with another woman and so he murdered his wife. He was clever and thought he had committed the perfect murder, but was found guilty and now is in prison. I am in touch with him, and his deceased wife's sister has forgiven him and visited him in prison.

I would urge you to read my older book, written with the help of Tony Collins, called, *No Turning Back*. Read Chapter 11 on family living and especially my list that has offended a few people, *The Too Much and the Not Enoughs*. Most of us have been helped by other great books on sex, marriage and family life. There are a number of books that have also been especially helpful for single people who often are involved in global mission.





CHAPTER 5

Toxic Perfectionism – Global Epidemic

This chapter is especially written for non-Christians and is about some issues that we might agree on. No matter what our faith and belief, we have to share this planet together and, issues like starvation, global warming, pandemics, refugees, racism, conflict and governance should be a concern to all of us.

We should all be able to agree about what the Good Samaritan did for the man he found beaten up and lying by the side of the road. He said nothing about God or religion. This is interesting, as Jesus told the story in answer to a lawyer's question about loving his neighbours.

Many of us believe that having the Christian religion is very different from having a life-changing transformation through Jesus Christ. We have to try to love and relate to people of all faiths, including Christians.



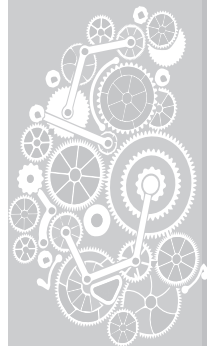
A Global Epidemic

I am convinced that toxic perfectionism is a global epidemic and that it is part of the cause of many global problems and suffering. It is often linked with misunderstandings, anger, pride and selfishness. It makes it almost impossible to lead and is often tied into the ugly side of politics. To make it more complex, there are some leaders, actually all through history, who seem to be 99% totally evil. I so often have struggled with the question of why God does not quickly snuff out such people. Of course, it is so complex and I should not be trying to write about it.

You have to forgive me, but I don't like to see people hurt. I don't like to see people raped, abused and mistreated. I have been speaking about this for years all over the world and distributing important books like Debbie Meroff's *SOS (Save Our Sisters)*, which gives the most mind-bending facts about what women and children are suffering all over the world. Just yesterday I came across an old December 1991 *Renewal Magazine* and one of the main articles was the text of a message I gave entitled *My Heart for the Poor*. Surely all of us who share this planet can do more to help the poor.

As followers of Christ we should go the extra mile, just as our Saviour did. We must not do this just with the goal of seeing them come to know Christ, but we must do this because it is our DNA.

It is a very basic aspect of being the people the Living God wants us to be. It should impact the way we live and the way we use our resources. One of the great proofs of human fallenness and toxicity is how human beings can

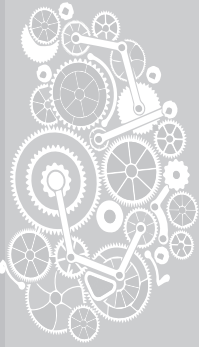


spend so much on themselves and so little for those who are suffering so much. Clearly in the whole world, the bottom line is selfishness. It is the world of ‘I’, ‘my’ and ‘me’. Only the Revolution of Love can change that. You can have that revolution in your own religion and culture. In my view this will not get you to heaven, but it will accomplish so much more along the road. Please do read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10.

You probably don’t like the word *sin*, but what about the word *toxic*? Last year, in the midst of the Brexit crisis, the leader of the House of Commons publicly said the place was toxic. Can we paraphrase that verse in the Bible in Romans 3:23 and read: *All are toxic and fall short of the Glory of God*? If you don’t believe in God, I hope we can at least agree that the toxic factor is real and many people are hurt and even die. We believers in the Lord Jesus need to study more of His word and make sure we are loving all people. What about Romans 12:17-21?

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘it is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the LORD. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV)

One of the great proofs of human fallenness and toxicity is how human beings can spend so much on themselves and so little for those who are suffering so much.



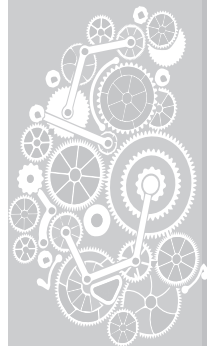
The media and the press pour out endless examples of the toxic side of human behaviour. At the same time I have known many people, and have read about many more, who show very little of the toxic factor. We must avoid putting people in boxes and we must stand against all forms of prejudice, knowing fully well that it will never be totally eliminated on this side of heaven. Let us try to thank people more, including the police, politicians, health care workers and so many others who serve society in different ways.

Being Positive in a Negative World

We must try to be more positive in a seemingly negative world. Toxic perfectionism comes out especially in generalisations about certain people we don't like. For men sometimes it is women and for women it is men. I have been shocked in gatherings of friends when a husband makes a negative toxic statement about his wife when she is sitting right next to him, or vice versa. We see this in the movies, but it should not happen among God's people. When we see it, I always hope that when they get home they repent, forgive and renew their love for Jesus and one another.

I have seldom said anything negative about my wife, even to my own children. In my life however, I tend to be more aware of my failures than my successes. In my so-called humour that often gets laughs, I have given misunderstandings about her. I remember, at a conference in a Bible School in Germany, a woman rebuked me for something I said about Drena that she felt was wrong.

I once commented that she was a perfectionist, which for Drena's main ministry of data entry is a real winner.



Some perfectionists may have very little of the toxic factor. You can imagine the challenges she has had living with Mr Imperfection who is writing this. Being at home together during this period of lockdown due to COVID-19 has really tested us, but thanks to Jesus and His Word, we have, I believe, passed the test. It has been a wonderful and super-productive period of our lives.

Some of you have seen the film of my life story *George for Real* and the follow up film *George Uncut* in which Drena shares something of her side. Our 60th wedding anniversary year is proving to be another great year even in the midst of much grief, with our hearts being broken many times.

Lessons from History

Something happened in the year 313 that still affects the entire world today. The Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion throughout the Roman Empire. Soon this new faith was being spread all over Europe. As was the culture of the day, it had a major toxic factor attached to it which eventually led to wars and the loss of many lives. The values that are still highly esteemed in most of the nations in Europe and many other nations can be traced back to this event and all that took place after it. Some of the values came from the Old Testament and the Jewish heritage and others came from the very mouth of Jesus, like the Sermon on the Mount and The Beatitudes.

Because of human weakness and the power of culture, both the good and bad, from the beginning there was toxic perfectionism causing great hurt and harm and,

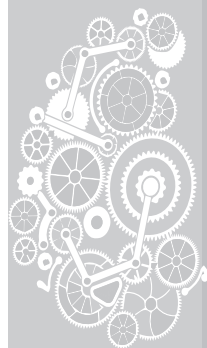


much worse, war. We don't even want to think about the Crusades. The church was aiming at perfection, of course according to their definition, which sometimes varied from one leader to another, leading to the massive split with the Eastern Church.

One example is how the church treated divorced people and homosexual people. Radical forgiveness and giving people a second chance after their marriage ended did not seem to exist. Many other kinds of people, especially the mentally or physically challenged, were mistreated by society and the church. Why not do some research on how unwed mothers and their babies were treated by the church? This was one of the major factors leading to the abortion legislation, which is such a huge complex issue to this very day.

I am against abortion, but so often it gets tied in with extreme views against birth control and leads to very difficult toxic situations. The Pro-Life Movement is supported by many toxic perfectionists and is deeply divided. You don't have to agree, but what is the basis for expecting non-Christians to live as Christians? In fact, it is a denial of our basic doctrine about the condition of humankind outside Christ's transforming grace. To say our goal is to end all abortion is to say that our goal is to stop all toxic behaviour. We, of course, would like to stop murder and all injustice, but it will not happen on this rebellious fallen planet until Jesus returns.

The complexity in all of history when Church and State are married, especially in connection with war, which has never ceased in all of history, is way too huge to take up in



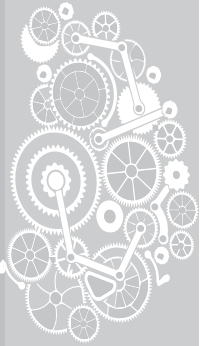
this small book. The huge amount of injustice all through history is a giant shout that something is seriously wrong with all human beings. To think you are exempt from that is a great deception.

Of course, such toxic perfectionism led to the birth of the Anglican Church that has had its positives and negatives for hundreds of years. You might want to study the life of Henry the Eighth and his wives and the break with the Roman Catholic Church.

All kinds of legalism became dominant and to this day affect a huge percentage of churches and other organisations. In Britain it got married to the class society which was the ugly order of the day. The suffering of the underclass and poor in many nations of Europe was beyond description.

The positives and negatives of Colonialism are way beyond what I am writing about here, and even to this day are part of the global blame game and lots of radical statements that do not give the full picture. In my book, *Messiology*, I try to show how God kept working in the midst of the global mess. You might also ask yourself, if you were living during that period of time with considerable power and wealth, what would you have done and how would you have lived?

Only recently has the church more fully apologised for being so involved in the slave trade. It is ironic that those who are making the slave issue very large these days (not saying it is wrong), are often doing nothing about sex trafficking and other forms of slavery going on all over the world. I have spoken about this for a couple of decades and

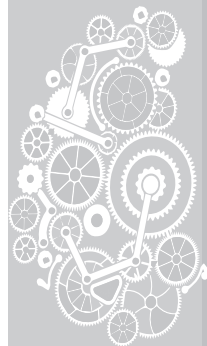


have tried to raise funds to help in that battle, with in fact very little response. Despite some noble efforts, there has been very little change. For sure it is easier to see the faults and failure of others than to be honest about one's own.

Some of it was revealed in Charles Dickens' writing—and then we had Karl Marx leading the way into global communism. It started as a very idealistic movement, never dreaming that its followers would soon engage in forms of evil beyond anything the wealthy of the upper classes were involved in.

Then so many of our horrific problems in the world, even genocide, are linked with this almost fanatical pursuit, which refused to take in the human toxic factor which means there will never be total justice until the Lord's return. Why can we not face the fact that something is seriously wrong in all human beings? As believers in the Lord Jesus and His great salvation we believe we have the answer.

Many of the wars and horrible situations in history are linked with various definitions of justice. In our day the desire for total justice in all kinds of areas is major. Of course, most of us want as much justice as possible, but we realise that something is wrong with us human beings and we will never see it. So many of our horrific problems in the world today are linked with this. As followers of Christ believing in the Bible, we feel we know the answer, but let's leave that out for now.



The Ugly Lessons of the Past

Is it now clear that people are greedy, selfish, imperfect, proud (the wrong kind), angry and often hostile and hurt? Revenge is still the order of the day in many cultures. The history of war and genocide surely proves what we human beings really are. We are thankful for every exception, no matter what their faith or religion are. We are often fooled by who is good and who is bad. The woman who led the protest movement for human rights in Myanmar, who was then honoured with a great Peace Award, a few years later turned out to be the bad woman of the year for not doing anything in connection with the genocide of the Rohingya peoples. People who only think in ‘black and white’ need to realise it might not have happened if those idealistic Rohingya men had not taken up arms and attacked government forces.

In my view it was actually a fanatical Buddhist Monk Movement that laid the foundation for the genocide. They became fanatically committed to their definition of justice and influenced the government and military to engage in those atrocious acts bringing death and suffering to hundreds of thousands. I wonder how the present President of the USA would handle American soldiers in Texas being attacked by Texans who wanted to leave the USA and have their own nation.

If we study the Nuba mountain crisis and the Uighur crisis of China, and other events in all of history including the modern-day crisis in Syria, we see the awesome power of destructive idealism. This is not to justify any wrongdoing by the government but just to express a forgotten reality. There is an amazing passage in the Bible in Luke 14 about



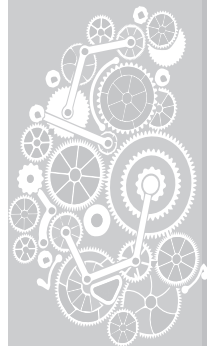
really counting the cost before going to war. I don't think all the people marching through the streets of Syria, calling for Assad to step down in the middle of the so-called Arab Spring, had done that for sure and look what the next few years came as a result.

Have we forgotten that some believe that the worst war in history was the First World War, which was triggered by the assassination of one person? The bungling and mishandling after that horrific war laid the foundation for the next war which was more global and even worse. How can anyone study history and not believe there is something deeply toxic in varying degrees in every human being?

Facing Reality

I want to be the first to acknowledge that history shows that in the midst of this there have always been a minority of people who really seem to be good people and mainly did what is good and right to the level they understood. Today there is an army of hidden heroes who are concerned for the poor and suffering and who hate and opposed war, violence and injustice. I hope you are in the minority group, whatever your faith or religion or nationality. Here is some common ground for all of us.

It is clear that in the world today more and more people are unhappy and want change. Some of it might be good, but the toxic factor soon comes in with all its complexity. A lot of top experts are saying the world is getting worse and especially more violent. Global starvation is being predicted and, with more and more dysfunctional nations



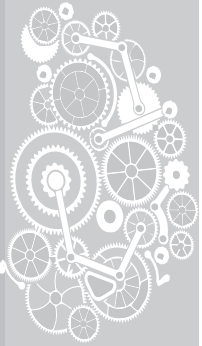
with massive poverty, there will be a much greater flow of refugees trying to escape.

It is now much easier in some places to remove a bad leader than to find a so-called good leader to take their place. Are you following events in Sudan? More and more nations seem ungovernable. There is a refusal to acknowledge the complexity of it all in the light of human weakness and what I call ‘the toxic factor’.

The complexity of climate change is very important but without some internal climate change, we will never resolve this issue, especially considering all the other threats like viruses and nuclear war, and the list goes on.

The ‘Christian Nation’ goal is in question. I have followed many nations in Africa and Latin America where the elected leader was an outspoken Christian, who was elected and claimed it was a Christian Nation. For many, Britain and the USA were their models. One African friend wrote a whole book showing that the UK was no longer the great Christian nation it once was. In every case in these different nations, it ended in a mess, which is an understatement. Quite a few of these leaders were convicted of crime and corruption. My view, which may upset some readers, is that some have made the so-called Democracy their Golden Cow. They might not really be happy in heaven.

Young people, keep dreaming and have ideals, but embrace history and reality and find a more peaceful, less arrogant and more loving way forward. We live in an imperfect world, full of imperfect people, and remember YOU are one of them!



In summary, I say that unless there is a lot more love, patience, forgiveness, dialogue, compromise and flexibility, with greater control of what comes out of our mouths and keyboards, then the world is truly headed for more difficult times. Young people, keep dreaming and have ideals, but embrace history and reality and find a more peaceful, less arrogant and more loving way forward. We live in an imperfect world, full of imperfect people, and remember YOU are one of them!

For those of us who know Christ, may we be set free and stay free from the toxic factors in our lives. May we really start to live that Spirit-filled, I Corinthians 13, 'Revolution of Love' life. May we, as James says, "be quick to listen and slow to speak."



CHAPTER 6

The Marks of Infection

As we think about the marks of perfectionism, we don't want to put people in a box and then put a label on the box—Toxic Perfectionist. Forgive me if the very title I have chosen puts me in a box. We are all more complicated than that.

I am also hoping that people of other faiths or no faith will read this book, as I want to be a help to them. I always have two 'hats' if you know that expression. I am a strong follower of the Lord Jesus and His Word which is my main 'hat', but I am also a fellow human being, committed to living in peace and love with all others as much as possible. On this road I have had to learn to embrace, with my limitations, what seem like impossible people and impossible situations. I have learned how to embrace the unsolvable which is not easy when we take verses like Philippians 4:13—*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (NKJV)—out of context. So often our pride and arrogance play a negative role in all of this.



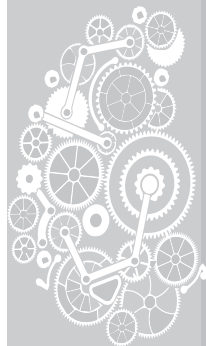
This is one of the reasons why I believe dialogue and discussion among people of different faiths is so important in every aspect of life, and what I call *the toxic factor* is a great hindrance to that. In this age where all kinds of social media are out of control, we just seem to shoot media arrows at each other rather than sitting down and discussing the issue or problem. The world is suffering much from this. It will increase, and the church is included.

I just watched a documentary of a horrific murder in a nearby, very conservative and quiet Kent village. In the end a young man was found guilty of brutally murdering his girlfriend, largely inspired by what he was feeding on through Social Media. More and more, he just got a desire to murder someone.

The Pursuit of Excellence

This reminds us of the reality that for many the pursuit of excellence or perfection is not an issue. Some have their lives more or less wiped out before they are twelve—many more by 20. I honour all those who are in any way trying to help such people. Many others are in survival mode due to a huge range of health issues. I have had such people tell me that on any one day they were just happy to be alive, much less having some great goal for the day.

I believe history will show that it is people committed to excellence that do more to help and improve society; I share more about that in a later chapter. However, we don't always have the humility to admit the toxic factor both among those helping and those being helped.



Why not make a comparative study of those in prison and those who work in the prison system? As I have visited quite a few in prison, I have learned so much and long to see improvement in that whole area of society.

History is full of stories of what has been accomplished by those committed to perfection and excellence. They are often people who in every part of society bring improvement. This is also true within the church. We should all pray, “Lord give us more such people”.

However, the Bible and Jesus make it clear that great works and accomplishments will not get them to heaven. History has also shown, and it is in the newspapers and media all the time, that many great people in the world’s eyes, who have accomplished great things, have proven to be very toxic. Lately, many have been exposed as sex offenders and quite a few of them are now in prison. History shows that many great people, even heroes and leaders of nations, have been immoral. We are now tearing down the statues of the ‘bad’ people, not realising that our own pride and sin before God is as great as those who behaved badly in the past. We might be more understanding if we asked the question, “What would I have been like if I lived back in that period of time?”

In India there is a huge movement to get revenge against Muslims for terrible events that took place hundreds of years ago when they conquered parts of India. They fail to see their own sin and toxicity which has led in present times to so many Muslims being murdered. The message of Jesus and radical GRACE seems beyond



comprehension to those locked into such toxic thinking and behaviour.

We are given hope when we read about the Apostle Paul, who persecuted Christians and stood by when Stephen was murdered, but later experienced the transforming grace of the Lord Jesus. This should inspire us in our passion to tell the whole world about the glorious message of the Gospel. We should pray: “Lord give us some modern-day Pauls”.

How to Recognise Our Toxic Factor

What are some of the signs or marks of toxic factors in our lives? How can we recognise this toxic factor and therefore be better able to deal with it?

1. Being quick to react in impatience and make negative remarks about what we see as the wrong behaviour in others—often very slow to commend and encourage people and even slower to forgive them. Good books like RT Kendal's *Total Forgiveness* and many other books have been transformational in the lives of many.
2. Being quick to get upset with one's self when we make a mistake, or when something we are trying to do goes wrong. At times I have caught myself swearing under my breath in such situations. Oh dear, sometimes not under my breath. Generally, it is the word that rhymes with ship. I remember Tony Campolo using the word in a sermon and it almost brought the house down, but he was driving home a powerful point. In my view, he

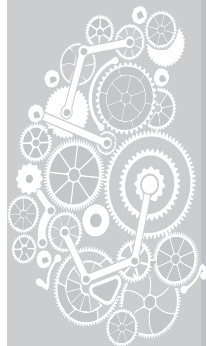


was one of the best speakers we ever had. I hope you read some of his radical books.

3. Being quick to notice anything we feel is not right (often it is true) and quick to show our displeasure, often followed by an unloving reaction. Remember that old expression, “Do two wrongs make a right?” If we are really biblical and committed believers, our reactions should always be with all the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
4. Being quick to get upset with the church and church life over anything we don’t agree with, especially if it comes from the preacher or leader. There seem to be more hot issues than ever, making it more difficult for preachers to not quickly get in trouble for touching on some hotspot. When I visit churches to speak, they often give me orientation about areas that I had better not comment on in my message. In some countries they warn me not to mention the name of the President.
5. Being quick to disagree and give our opinion. My wife and I had one of our worst disagreements—yes, on the way to the prayer meeting—about which route was the best, and we were both very strong about it. Those of us who struggle in this area are better off going by bus. I have generally found traveling with someone else in the car often leads to a toxic hurtful situation. I know someone who was recently sitting in the back of a car travelling with a friend, and his wife was constantly correcting and criticising him, something I prefer to avoid.



6. Having an opinion on almost everything. It was a great day many years ago when the lights went on that I was opinionated. Emotional characters like me, who have very strong convictions (many of them good), have this tendency. I repented before the Lord and learned to have more self-control and wisdom in sharing my opinion. It is sometimes best just to keep my mouth shut. I cannot tell you how much encouragement I have had in many situations, including within my own family, by just keeping my mouth closed and committing it to the Lord.
7. Often seeing our own failures—never being fully satisfied with what we have done. Much of the reading I have done on this subject, like what David Seamands writes, is very much aimed at showing the many personal relational problems such people have. Some non-Christians have some good thoughts on the subject that are worth reading. Some are very heavy stuff, like how this emotional, mental and, in my view, spiritual problem can even lead to suicide. Others try to find relief through alcohol, drugs or sexual promiscuity, often including addiction to pornography.
8. Not being a good listener. Once again it is confession time as this has been another weakness in my life. My wife was going on about something in which I had little interest and so was not listening well. She suddenly stopped and asked if I was listening. “Of course I am,” I answered with



my pride popping out. Then she caught me off guard and asked me what she was talking about. I don't remember my weak answer, but maybe it was that I was listening in general, but not to details. Actually, it is much better to just apologise and make a commitment to do better.

I wish I could apologise to all those I have interrupted, especially when they said something I did not agree with or like. All my children have suffered from this toxic factor which is really the failure to be polite. I hope I have done better with the grandkids of whom there are now five. Maybe I will even do better with our six great grandchildren. I will be encouraged if I hear of anyone learning from sin and mistakes. If you think I run around feeling guilty about all this, then you don't understand God's amazing grace and forgiveness, all because of Jesus and what He did on the Cross for us.

In closing this Chapter I would urge people to spend more time in the Bible and reading some really good books. Let's remember that as Christians we can sometimes be more vulnerable and self-condemning than non-believers.

Some of what I have touched on here is written about in the Book of Proverbs which I focused on in the early chapters of *Messiology*. This entire book is not really a new message. I have written about most of it in my other books and you will find it in the writings and messages of others.

I was reading an old memo I circulated, *The Marks of a Difficult Person*, and remember getting amazing feedback. In the mid-60s at a main annual OM conference, I gave a message that went into print, *Pseudo Discipleship*, which



today seems a bit dogmatic to me and lacking in grace. The *Messiology* theology helps me understand how God used it and it is still in print.

Just last week I found a small out-of-print booklet from a message I gave on the MV Logos in 1979 in Bombay, India, called *Dangers of Spiritual Deception*. It must have been a long sermon, but most of it is relevant today.

It could be that, if you don't think you have any difficulty in this area of toxic perfectionism, in fact you are blind to it and deceived. I pray this book will open your eyes and that you will take the necessary steps to change. For me it has to be every day.

I trust the Holy Spirit will use these insights and experiences to set people free and bring them into a more balanced Grace-Awakened walk with the Lord.



CHAPTER 7

Oh Lord, Give Us Spirit-filled Perfection

I really want it to be clear that aiming at perfection and being a perfectionist are totally different. I know I risk it being a game of words, so for now try to accept my definition. People committed to perfection easily cross the line into perfectionism and even toxic perfectionism. According to the Bible, the toxic factor is in all human beings. When I Google on my smartphone for the definition of toxic, I only get one word: Poison. One dictionary gave this definition:

Toxic ['tɒksɪk]

ADJECTIVE:

very harmful or unpleasant in a pervasive or insidious way. “A toxic relationship”

NOUN:

(*toxics*) poisonous substances



Extreme forms of perfectionism are classified by some as a mental illness known as OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and there is much written about that.

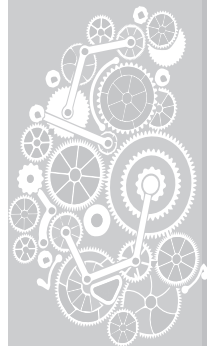
Some perfectionists mainly hurt themselves but others hurt others; most do both. Much of the writing on this subject is more about how we hurt and hinder ourselves, whereas I am trying to show both sides of the story. My main emphasis is on how we hurt others and also the work of God.

Perfection or Perfectionism?

I am reading a 300-page book that is about toxic faith. It was written over 20 years ago, so I don't think using the word toxic in connection with our faith is a totally new concept.

I don't think the writers of this book believed much in what I call *messiology*. They fail to bring out the fact that people, even with toxic faith, might still be used of God. We might be amazed at how God may still be working in toxic churches, especially among some individuals. By the way, one of the key chapters in my book, *Messiology*, is 'Mistakes Cost', which urges the reader to avoid mistakes and do it right the first time.

I would love to say more about how, in my involvement with thousands of churches and teams, so often the problem is not some huge sin, but just an old-fashioned mistake. Surely you can agree that the fewer the mistakes, the better. I have often struggled with this, that there is often a thin line between mistakes and sin, or what I think of as toxic behaviour. Many mistakes are made due



to anger or anxiety and so often we are dealing with that combination.

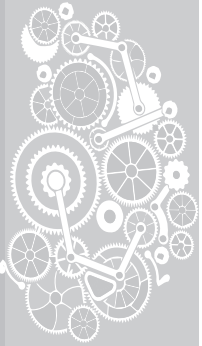
How are you doing in the many practical aspects of life, like taking care of your possessions, shopping and driving? You can make your own list.

The world in general and the church too urgently need people who want to aim at perfection, even if they are biblically realistic that in this fallen, rebellious world it is not possible in many areas.

I admire the Automotive Industry and its commitment to perfection. In OM, in the light of many factors, including not having the money, for 60 years we used imperfect cars (I could write a book about it). Our mechanics however, who were very key in the work of OM, wanted the vehicles that left their garage to be as perfect as possible. One of my heartbreaks was the toxic behaviour of some of them in handling people and their own families. The toxic factor would often come out in church life and it was hard for the pastor and others to meet such high standards that, of course, they were not living up to themselves.

Actually, there are hundreds of Bible verses that push us towards being perfect. The word holiness, and what the Bible says about it, is at the heart of our theology. We all fail and that is why our HOLY but loving God sent his Son to die on the cross for our sins.

When I started to recruit for our ship ministry four years before we even had a ship, I really wanted a crew that was committed to excellence. With an old ship that was even more important. One of the first to join was Graham Scott, a First Mate with a top shipping company



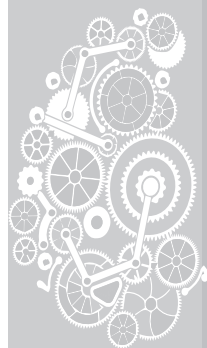
where the demand for discipline and excellence was very high. He would be our Captain. For me, he was a Spirit-filled person committed to perfection, and after helping pioneer the ship ministry, he became Director of OM, UK. His adjustment to OM's different lifestyle, such as at times sleeping on the floor and not having world's greatest food, was a huge adjustment. The way he handled it was a testimony to God's transforming grace.

Over these 65 years I have had the joy of working with and having friendship with many hundreds of such people. At the same time, OM attracted a wide range of people (over 200,000), many of whom had a long way to go just to get the basics in their lives sorted out, much less aim too high for perfection. When a life is filled with imperfections like laziness, lust, anger, lack of self-esteem, resentment, hurt and unforgiveness (the Bible gives a long list), how can they possibly do anything perfect?

For me one of the greatest encouragements in life has been seeing so many people of all different nations, religions and backgrounds being transformed by their faith in the Lord Jesus and the daily work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, these people found the antidote—and there will be more about that in the last chapter.

Seeking Perfection, Aiming High

I am so thankful that I went to a Liberal Arts College and then attended the University of Mexico in the summer when I was at Moody. I am also very thankful for a good primary and secondary education. I learned so much and developed a great interest in almost every aspect of life.



Becoming an avid reader of Christian and non-Christian books and magazines helped me in trying to understand humanity and history.

I have been in about 100 nations and everywhere I see the influence of Jesus and his teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount, among people of all religions and even atheists and humanists. There are many books about this. We can even measure the impact of the Ten Commandments, even among people who have no idea about the Old Testament and the Bible. It lays the foundation for that basic principle that there is a right and wrong and we need to always try to do the right thing.

I honour people, no matter what they believe, who have accomplished great things in every area of life and society. We read of their accomplishments, including their mistakes, over thousands of years of history. We see it in all its complexity all around us. This will not get people to heaven, but it will help us all survive while here in this world. Bad news travels faster than good news. It seems that in our newspapers and media (I follow a very wide range of them) about 90% is negative and bad news. I believe we need more people who see the 10% and go out of their way to affirm and thank people who have accomplished something to help people and society in so many ways.

Sometimes I am overwhelmed by all the negative news—often among people claiming to be followers of the Lord. I purposely try to focus more on the positive. There is so much ugliness being portrayed on the screen and in print that I believe people can become ill and depressed focusing on it. There is so much beauty in so



many aspects of life, and for me especially in music. One of the most helpful verses for me and my negative streak is Philippians 4:8.

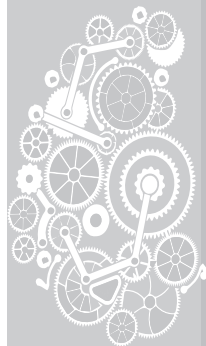
Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (ESV)

Our God is doing great things in the world today and there are millions of transformed Christ followers loving and serving society—more than has ever been recorded.

What would have happened if great scientists had not discovered vaccines, antibiotics or electricity, and made thousands of other inventions and discoveries? You can make your own long list. Yes, often there are negative factors tied in, and so the road to change and improvement never ends. The journey even to find the truth in the first place can be a long one.

Hundreds of times I have said from the pulpit that God is not just calling us to evangelise the world, but to be involved as salt and light in every area of society. I have had the joy of meeting godly people working in almost every area of society. There are more such people all over the world than ever before. They are all committed to perfection and doing things right—and especially my aircraft pilot friends.

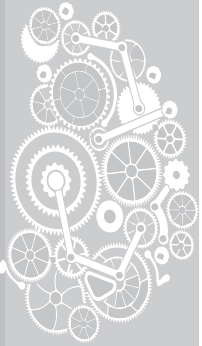
Sad to say, so many great people also have active toxic factors, sometimes even leading them to serious crime. The press and media often highlight this and all the prisons of the world are full of them. The majority don't



know the transforming life-changing GRACE of the Lord Jesus which gives us plenty to do. At the same time some in prison come to know Christ and His redeeming grace.

Many of us know the powerful history of people like Chuck Colson who was involved in Watergate and the great Nixon scandal and then found the Lord in prison. He ended up founding and leading a great prison ministry. We actually have hundreds of Christian books about such people, both men and women. Many of them have been a huge help in my leadership and walk with Jesus.

May our goal on a daily basis be to live a Christ-focused, Spirit-filled Revolution of Love life.





CHAPTER 8

Committed to Excellence but Embracing Imperfection

From my childhood in our home, it was clear that there was a right and a wrong. My dad was a highly skilled electrician who sometimes worked in the mines and he knew that one mistake could take his life and the lives of others. I had chores and work around the house and they wanted it done right. I aimed high but was learning fast about my imperfections.

From a very young age, I was strongly into baseball and basketball and wanted to do my best and win. Our whole culture was wired to win, and to do that you had to aim for excellence and perfection, which was also true in our school work. This kind of mentality and practice became even stronger after being born from above in that Billy Graham meeting in New York City.



I have already shared how as a young Christian I learned how to deal with my toxic perfectionism and the need to be set free on a daily basis.

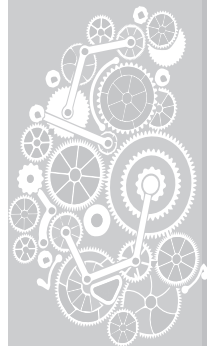
The goal of this chapter is in fact a plea to stay committed to excellence, especially in leadership. George Sweeting, who is now in his 90's and was President of Moody Bible Institute for many years, has been one of the most non-toxic, godly leaders I have ever known. He wrote many great books; I am in the middle of a more recent one on excellence in leadership, *The Pursuit of Excellence*.

All my life I have been influenced by similar books which are in line with the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament. None of these books is perfect and some seem to have a lack of what I call *messiology theology* and the *radical grace* that goes with it. Many of the older books have helped promote legalism and even toxic forms of faith.

Lessons from Life

In my notes for this chapter, I ended up with a list of 25 aspects of life (there are more) where we need to aim for excellence, yet where history shows there is so often failure, injustice, toxicity and worse. Let's take a look at a few (six).

1. **Marriage:** For many reasons, including the influence of teachers and books, I have always felt people must aim high in their marriage. I studied books on the subject before taking the leap and I believe it paid off. Yet the perfect marriage does not exist, and most married couples soon discover their own weaknesses and unhelpful habits and how they impact their marriage. The only way



forward is the right combination of commitment to excellence, radical grace and forgiveness.

2. **War:** This has always been a huge factor in my life as I was born in 1938, the year Hitler moved into that great horrific action. In my mind war was always the worst thing that human beings ever got into. It is huge to this very day and is one of the greatest proofs of the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart. The history of how people are recruited, and all that happens after that, is heart breaking. In most cultures we have tended to glorify war and many of our heroes are former soldiers whose monuments are all over the world. It is deeply embedded in the culture of most nations and can go back to Cain and Abel in Genesis.

I believe this is still the greatest problem of the world today, even greater than the climate change crisis. Considering the nuclear build up, combined with massive global unrest, we should be making much greater efforts to stop all wars and prevent new ones. Forgive me for being what some would call naïve or idealistic, but I am committed to excellence and doing what is right. We will never totally stop war until HE comes, but we must all try harder and we must honour the peacemakers mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 5:9. We should all have that ministry. It will never happen without forgiveness and compromise. Do we really think we will ever have peace in hyper-



complex situations such as we have in the Middle East and especially in the Israel situation?

In some nations it seems like there is war between political parties and people also die because of that.

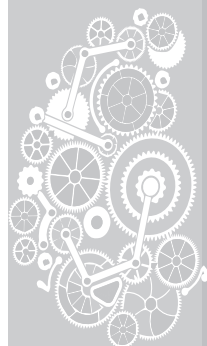
3. **Business and Industry:** What a huge part of our lives it is! We should affirm the many who have worked so hard to move forward in these two areas that affect all of our lives. I feel much of the criticism of the leaders in these two fields is often unfair. When things go wrong and there is injustice, the media constantly fails to mention the big picture and its complexity.


In many nations the battle between left and right goes on. It is easy to see the imperfections in both systems, but once it is in the political area each side, desperate to win, will usually make some false or exaggerated claims about the opposition. It is very hard for those of us trying to do what we feel our Lord Jesus would do.

4. **Government:** The verse that comes to mind is from Jesus: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:25)

You might also want to read Romans 13:1-6.

The argument goes on about where totally unjust governments fit into this challenge. This verse leaves out any discussion about overthrowing a government which people judge to be unjust and bad. This is one of the reasons I believe it is wrong to think that the Bible has the answer in





detail to every problem. I embrace the mystery of what God has chosen to tell us and what he has left for us to figure out. For me there is a place for peaceful protests and demonstrations, but not for violence. It is unrealistic to think that angry toxic people will not bring violence into such times. It is also unrealistic to think that the police, under the orders of their commanders, are not going to make some terrible mistakes, leading even to death. Often soldiers and police are faced with totally impossible situations because of their own toxic factor and of everyone else's.

For me the bottom line is to love all those in authority and to pray for them. This must include the police. I wonder if you have read any of Brother Andrew's very radical books. Wow! They will give you something different to think about. Start with, *And God Changed His Mind*, *Light Force* and *Operation Desert Light*.

We, in this huge area that affects all of us, must continue to aim towards excellence, which includes justice, but we must embrace imperfection and be quick to forgive. I am reminded of my friend, Gary Witherall, whose wife Bonnie was shot dead at a clinic in Lebanon where she was serving. He stood at her bleeding body and started the process of forgiving. His book, *Total Abandon*, tells the story.

5. **Sports, Recreation and Entertainment:** I have followed all of these areas most of my life. Commitment to excellence is the bottom line,

with of course the greed and money factor playing more of a part than people will admit.

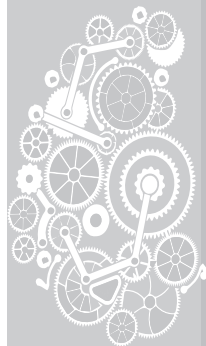
The training and discipline of many of the people in these fields is a rebuke to many of us. Those in leadership in the different fields of sport and entertainment are the ones who get the greatest publicity and press coverage, and yet research shows serious toxic factors in most of them.


My heart goes out to those who are famous, as often in the end they suffer so much, which often pushes them to alcohol, drugs, sexual addiction, mental problems and sometimes suicide. I will never forget the summer of 1962 in the midst of our outreach in Italy getting the news of the suicide of Marilyn Monroe, whose photo was in my bedroom as a young teenager.

It is always exciting when we hear of someone of fame coming to Jesus but the road is often hard for them, partly due to the words and agenda of toxic perfectionistic Christians who are always so full of advice. Follow the story of Bob Dylan.

In sports the goal and commitment is super strong toward excellence. It starts in a child when he picks up his first bat. Here in the UK it would be the same for cricket. Yes, we often see very toxic behaviour among players and yes, the fans too.

My dad loved sport and had a big heart. He served as an umpire and I remember him coming home after a baseball game with a huge bandage on his leg. A player did not like my dad's call and in anger dug his spike into my dad's leg.



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6. **Health Care** and everything connected with it, like health insurance. Jesus had a great emphasis on healing, and in all of history, the followers of Jesus have been pioneers and leaders in this field. The full story of medical missionaries and the hospitals they opened all over the world has never been told. Commitment to excellence, and in some cases love for Jesus and His Word, was at the heart of it all.

These people often faced impossible situations. For example, in Africa there were head-on collisions with witch doctors and every kind of superstition that continues to this day—and not just in Africa. In fact superstition, combined with fake news and conspiracy theories, seems to be the order of the day and many die because of it. Imperfection will always be there, including in this world which is also linked with pharmaceuticals.

People in this complex world have done more to help society and bring healing than anyone else but, in a world that is pushing toward 8 billion people in thousands of different cultures and languages, things will go wrong. Bad news about mistakes travels faster than good news, especially in these days of Twitter and all the rest. Very few take time to really research and study different sides of the story.

I especially thank God for people in the scientific community who are strong followers of Jesus. I celebrate that most believers have a trust in science, though of course disagreeing with some

of its conclusions. I weep over the division and lack of love often shown in controversial issues like evolution. A little more Biblical humility and less arrogance and pride would take us a long way down the Jesus Road.

As you might guess, at this point I could write an entire book on this theme as I have more than 20 more areas on my list of the challenges of being committed to excellence while embracing imperfection. I guess I will have to let you write your own—and good luck!



CHAPTER 9

God's Antidote

For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NLT)

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12 NLT)

These verses and others from the Gospel of John changed the course of my life and set me free to begin my long pilgrimage to become free from the toxic factor. I was born again as Jesus spoke about in John 3. “Except a person be born again they will never enter the Kingdom of God.” Being born again is not the end, but the beginning of a whole new way of life.

God used an ordinary housewife, Dorothy Clapp, and her son Daniel to make it happen in my life, by specific prayer and sending me a Gospel of John.

The big moment that took me from darkness to light was on March 3rd 1955 at the Madison Square Garden, New



York City. And I have never been the same, nor missed a day of communion with the Living God ever since. I had taken God's antidote that night by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then Peter said unto them, 'Repent, (turn from your sins) and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38 KJV)

This very verse leads in to one of the many aspects of this new life in Christ, often called the 'Spirit Filled Life'.

After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness. (Act 4:31 NLT)

I was with my close friend Nancy that night, and as we walked out of Madison Square Garden into the heart of New York City, we walked straight into some kind of gang and one of them made a rude remark to Nancy. My quick tongue shot back what we might call a rebuke and the next thing I knew he had knocked me over into the street. Fortunately, the leader of the group told him to leave me alone. Many times I have thought of this event as my first experience in my walk with Jesus. It has been a reminder that the way ahead in following the Lord is not an easy road.

Milestones on the Road

Now as a new follower of Jesus I realised I had so much to learn and to change in my life. Listening to Billy Graham on the radio and getting those same sermons in print was a huge help, especially his message, *What the Bible Says about*



Sex. He spoke powerfully against sin (the toxic factor) in the life of the believer, all of which helped me in my pilgrimage.

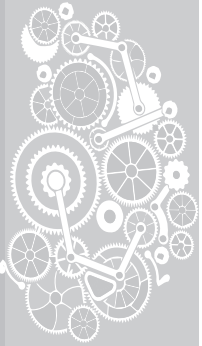
One of the first Christian books in my life was *Peace with God* that he wrote. I realised there was a real devil and that he would, with his forces, be on the attack.

If you joined a football team, would you learn to play football and then play? Of course you would. So, now if Jesus is your Lord and Saviour, you must follow him in the action as a disciple. That happened very quickly for me, as the door opened for me to share my story in my High School.

Due to Billy Graham's emphasis on prayer, we started prayer meetings and soon even a night of prayer. I soon met more godly people who were examples of love and grace and I thank God for each one of them. Some of them supported us when, in the summer of 1957, we headed off thousands of miles to Mexico. Little did we know what God was planning!

I soon learned that many who loved the Lord had no experience like I had in New York City. Many professed faith when they were very young and in the quiet of their own home. I was able to get to know some of them, and soon spoke at their youth meetings. My first message was about repentance and revival, and to this day I believe that is the antidote that we must take each day to keep us from toxic perfectionism or any other aspect of our human fallenness.

As a teenager I was preaching from verses like 2 Chronicles 7:14—*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn*



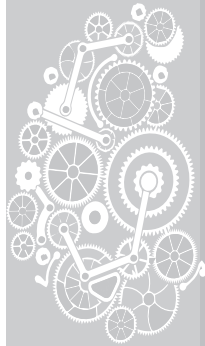
from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land (NIV)—linked with a Gospel leaflet with the message based on that verse. I had so much to learn as I walked that road for a year and a half at Maryville College in Tennessee, including that summer in Mexico and on to Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

This weekend I was involved by Zoom technology in my 1960 Maryville Class Reunion, even though I was only in that class for a year and a half. I remember that at times my studies got neglected as I was so involved in trying to become stronger in the Lord and reaching out in all kinds of evangelism and outreach, especially in the local jail.

I would sometimes hitch-hike to Knoxville and get involved in the Youth for Christ meetings. The local bus station became part of my training in learning how to tell my story and see people come to Jesus.

I especially remember a special meeting in a church. There was a well-known speaker, Lee Roberson, who founded Tennessee Temple Bible College where later I went to my first missions conference which had a huge impact on me. His message convicted me and I made a recommitment of my life, something I have done many times, especially at Moody under the ministry of Oswald J. Smith, who gave us that book, *Passion for Souls*, and became one of the most influential persons in my life.

I wish I could remember when the book *Calvary Road* came into my life but it was to become one of the most important books for me, as it showed clearly what personal revival is. We can keep praying for larger scale revivals,



embracing the mystery of that, but it is our inheritance in Christ to daily have personal revival. It is one of the very best books that show God's antidote. It is good to follow it up with Roy Hession's other books, *We Would See Jesus* and, *Continuous Revival* by Norman Grubb.

Beware of Your Toxic Factor

In many ways the key verse is Galatians 2:20. *My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (NLT). But in some ways there is nothing stronger than the very words of the Lord Jesus:

If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26,27, NLT)

Then he said to the crowd, 'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.' (Luke 9:23-24, NLT)

If you have a serious weakness and toxic factor, as I did, and to some degree still do have, then you have to work very hard to stay free from it. Beware of thinking there is a quick fix or magic formula. There can be special times of deliverance or encounters with God and the Holy Spirit, but it cannot be a substitute for what our Lord has said—see the verses above.



Look at this powerful and important quote from the famous preacher Dr Martin Lloyd Jones, whose messages, by the way, have been downloaded over 10 million times.

Nothing is more obvious about the teaching of the New Testament than this. That the Christian Life is a life of activity. A life of vigour. A life of exertion. The strength is given to us by the Lord, but we have to act.

In this book I have tried to make it clear that you cannot move down this road of radical discipleship if you do not also embrace radical grace. I have already mentioned the impact of books like *The Grace Awakening* that has so helped me personally.

In the past days I have read more links and writings about perfectionism from some secular writers who can see the enormous hazards and problems of those addicted.

Nothing is more obvious about the teaching of the New Testament than this. That the Christian Life is a life of activity. A life of vigour. A life of exertion. The strength is given to us by the Lord, but we have to act.

They don't seem to have a clear antidote, *but we do* and really have no excuse for not walking daily in *HIS GRACE and GRIP*.

As I come to the end of this book, I wonder how many will get this far. I think that some of my very global mission-focused, unreached people-

focused friends might wonder what all this has to do with world missions.

For me, *EVERYTHING*

In our own OM ministry, our first focus in those early prayer meetings, and in the many years of conferences



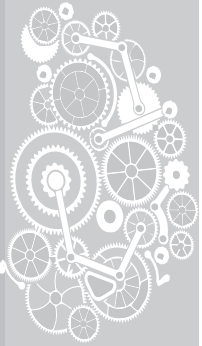
preparing people to serve, was repentance, embracing the Cross and personal revival. That is clear in the books people were required to read like *Calvary Road* and the messages, many of which can now be found on *sermonindex.net*.

If you want an one-liner to describe God's antidote, it is this: "God's antidote for toxic perfectionism is A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST MOMENT BY MOMENT." If somehow you don't yet have a relationship with the Living God, it can start right now as you put your faith in the Lord Jesus and what He has done for you on the Cross.

Mission must come out of a personal powerful experience with God. We have often called it *Spiritual Revolution*. In reading the Bible, we see many different words and expressions being used to describe this amazing abundant life. I pray you will be part of it and be sure the ends of the earth and the most unreached (some don't like that term) people will feel the impact, with the hope it will start in your own neighbourhood.

The media seems to love to write about fallen priests or pastors or Christian leaders. I am not saying there is no place for this, or that it is not very sad, but they often don't follow up and tell the stories of restoration and forgiveness and maybe a whole new life of serving others. I personally have seen this and have friends who have walked that road. I strongly recommend Gordon MacDonald's relevant and important book, *Rebuilding Your Broken World*.

If you want an one-liner to describe God's antidote, it is this: "God's antidote for toxic perfectionism is A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST MOMENT BY MOMENT."

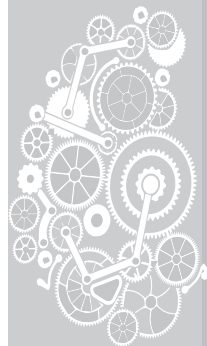



In my personal experience, these 65 years among thousands of Christian leaders, I believe it is fair to say that, for everyone who had a serious moral failure, there are 25 or so that have never had such a fall. All of them would have their weakness or faults and imperfections—and our God of forgiveness, grace and mercy is using such people in great ways to change the whole world.

As I look at my over 65 years of walking the walk, one of the most important aspects has been getting to know so many people. I believe I could make a list of over 1,000 people, with whom in some cases I have kept in touch for over 50 years, who are a living testimony to the transforming grace of Jesus, as they found God's antidote for their own toxic factors.

About 60 men have worked very closely with me, usually for an entire year, and I am still in touch with most of them. Some years we took about 300 meetings with all the stress and challenge that brings. They saw my weaknesses and toxic factors, and I saw theirs, but it did not break our relationship, thanks to brokenness and repentance combined with radical grace and forgiveness. In a different way I have worked closely with women, like my PA, Vera Zabramski, who has helped correct all I have written in this book. It will soon be 40 years that we have worked together. The story of her life is one more among many thousands that I have witnessed personally or read about.

I trust you too are one of them running in that great race, described in Hebrews 12:1-2.





The love of Christ both wounds and heals, it fascinates and frightens, it kills and makes alive, it draws and repulses, it sobers and enraptures. There can be nothing more terrible or more wonderful than to be stricken with love for Christ so deeply that the whole being goes out in a pained adoration of His person, an adoration that disturbs and disconcerts while it purges and satisfies and relaxes the deep inner heart. This love as a kind of moral fragrance is ever detected upon the garments of the saints. In the writings of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, for instance, this fragrance is so strong as to be very nearly intoxicating. There are passages in his Confessions so passionately sweet as to be unbearable, yet so respectful and self-effacing as to excite pity for the man who thus kneels in adoring wonder, caught between holy love and an equally holy fear. The list of fragrant saints is long. It includes men and women of every shade of theological thought within the bounds of the orthodox Christian faith. It embraces persons of every social level, every degree of education, every race and color. This radiant love for Christ is to my mind the true test of catholicity, the one sure proof of membership in the Church universal.

—A. W. Tozer Sermon: *Loving Worship*



APPENDIX

The How's and Why's of Disunity



For 65 years I have seen Christians turn against their pastors and leaders. When I was a new Christian two of the men who supported me the most turned against their pastor and wanted him out. My mind was semi-soured against that pastor but I kept loving him and he became, without me knowing it, a lifetime picture of *messiology*. We were friends when he was moving towards 90 years of age and God was still using him. He had many weaknesses and failed in different ways but helped start a number of churches. One of them has supported Drena and me in our home town area for over 40 years. So, what have I learned all this time—over 65 years of this—both first-hand and as a Christian news and magazine reader? Yes, I have read a lots of books as well. Here are my reasons:

1. Our human sinfulness

Our human sinfulness, combined with enemy attacks as outlined in Ephesians 6:10–20, and many other passages is the bottom line.

2. Strong-minded leaders

Strong-minded leaders, just naturally do not stick together or work well together. Doctrine is more 'important' than we realise. I lost one of my best friends in the early days who felt I was not charismatic enough. Do we have any idea of how many tens of thousands of splits and relationship bust ups there have been on that one issue? Strong-minded, focused leaders who accomplish great things are often impatient and the devil knows how to use that.

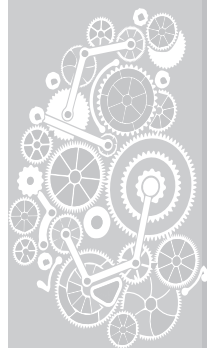
3. The grip of money

In full time ministry, *money* is a bigger factor than we admit. People are quick to criticise if one leader, maybe the head guy, is getting more money than them—totally normal in secular situations yet they still have tons of money-related issues. People get to extremes on the 'not fair tangent' and it

Strong-minded, focused leaders who accomplish great things are often impatient and the devil knows how to use that.

leads to hurt, confusion and a mess. The story of people in the whole history of OM, who got upset over money issues has been untold. At the same time the story of often mega generosity and people going the extra

mile also has not been widely told. Women are often not happy with the money their husband is getting even when he might be. The complexity and potential for disunity in all



this is off the charts. It seems impossible for people not to get hurt. People even threaten to go to court to get what they want. The gossip during these tough situations gets released which increases the disunity.

4. The grip of poverty

We cannot comprehend, if we have not been there, the fear and complexity that poverty brings. Many people are given low paying jobs in Christian movements. The backbone of much of global missions in terms of the big humanitarian agencies is built on that. Some pay more than others and their senior people get much more. The complexity of this is beyond grasp. Yet God has used these movements. When people are fired, unless they are given a “golden handshake” (sometimes to get that, people have to sign that they will not say negative things about the agency) they complain and gossip, and even make threats of going to court. Sometimes they say they have been mistreated even if they have not been mistreated. I have hardly known any agency that did not have negative things being said about them—and I am speaking of hundreds that I have had exposure or contact with. Actually, similar things happen in local churches. I have heard about many of them as I've been in many of these churches. There are examples of people going on strike for more money and, sometimes bringing the entire company into bankruptcy and, then everyone loses their job. Often lawyers have to be involved and sometime unscrupulous outsiders, even non-believers, get involved trying to make some money from it all. People and books have some nice, idealistic answers, often with Bible verses, but that does not put food on the table and pay the rent. People get fearful and

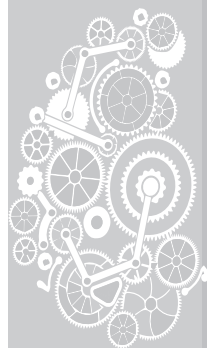


desperate and that makes them very vulnerable to do sinful and foolish things, often ending up in a worse situation or even prison. Marriages sometimes break in the middle of it. On the other hand, there must be thousands of stories of those who have been helped down life's road because some Christian agency gave them their first job even if the pay was low.


5. The grip of culture

We are all impacted by our culture and, especially all that happens to us before we are even 10 years of age. Getting people to submit to a leader of a different culture who will probably make cultural mistakes is very difficult. It may go for a while depending on circumstance, but then bang, something goes wrong. Misunderstanding and hurt comes in. In some cultures, telling a lie is not considered that wrong. I just read a key article in a well-known, acceptable newspaper on the importance of being able to effectively lie, so it is in some western culture as well. It plays havoc in Christian ministry. Soon people don't know who to trust. People take different viewpoints. The truth is very, very hard to find and that really upsets the "total truth/total answer" guys especially when mixed with hardball legalism and super spirituality.

Mix that with "God always answers prayer and God always heals and delivers" and, you have a mess that no one is going to resolve without a lot of pain, and who wants pain?



6. The blame game



It is hard for us humans to see our own faults. We cannot see our blind spots or they would not be blind spots anymore. I still stand amazed on how hard it is, even as a leader, to correct most people. They often immediately turn on you blaming you or pointing out some fault in your own life. In a team or office, they look for someone else to blame and in some agencies they end up blaming the CEO. If they build up their case enough and know key people to talk to, the CEO (or Senior Pastor) may soon lose his job. In some cases it will be the team leader or department head. If the person in the first place had the humility to admit his mistake or take correction, even if it is not 100% accurate, then this heavy stuff would have never taken place. I personally feel our own movement was better off when everyone had to read the book *Calvary Road*; confessing faults, humbling ourselves, learning to be broken became part of our DNA. How much is still there remains to be seen. The book is hardly read any more even though thousands of copies are going out in many languages. There are new similar books like, *If You Bite and Devour One Another* and *Leading with Love*, but not many have ever read them. My own books carry this message especially, *Revolution of Love*, even my first book about literature evangelism—*There's Dynamite in Literature* had a key chapter about loving one another.

7. Handling change

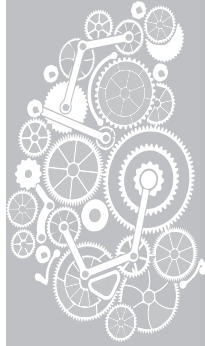
Hundreds of thousands of churches around the world have split when the pastor or leaders wanted to make serious changes. Years ago, I was at a key church in Copenhagen

and, 75% of the people left when changes were made. After the changes were made, the church did much better and many non-Christians came and found the Lord. Can you even imagine that churches split over John MacArthur's teaching and Willow Creeks' teachings, to list only a few? I guess speaking in tongues must be the global leader for splitting churches. There are also whole books written about abusive leadership, and books and articles on the abuse of leaders. What blows my mind is how whole new church denominations are born through such things happening. Hope you have read what I have written about *messiology*.

8. The tendency to be negative

The tendency to be negative and problem oriented. Some people, for different reasons, always seem negative. Leaders should try to find out if people are like that and not hire them in the first place. It is much more complex in movements like OM. By the way, a number of our key people in those early days completely threw away their Christian faith, and I am talking about Bible College graduates. Some people seem to be unhappy no matter what. Your co-worker might be a more positive and forgiving person, but what about his/her spouse? Many a spouse has brought division between their husband/wife and their direct leader. Endless stories, even movies, have shown this harsh reality. So often, human pride is in the middle of it. We need to ask ourselves, 'how easy is it for people to correct me or exhort me?' I dare people to read Ken Penman's, almost unknown, book about pride, *Pride or Praise*.

—George Verwer
 Email: george.verwer@om.org



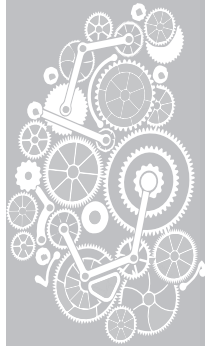
Recommended Reading

(Resources Referred)

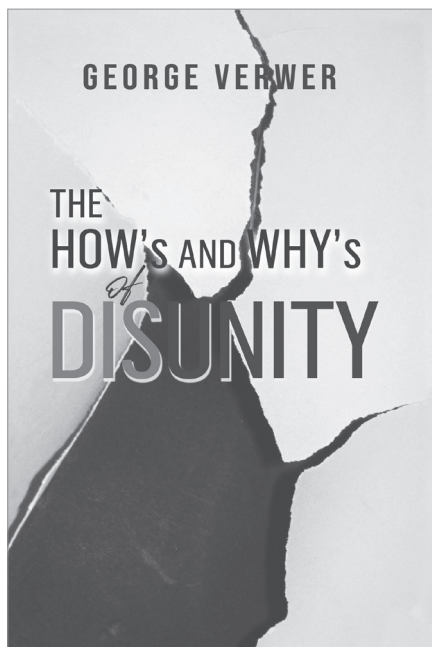
- 1 George Verwer, *Revolution of Love and Balance*.
- 2 George Verwer, *Drops from a Leaking Tap*.
- 3 Billy Graham was the greatest evangelist of 20th century.
- 4 Roy Hession, *Calvary Road*.
- 5 Billy Graham, *Seven Deadly Sins*.
- 6 George Verwer, *Messiology*.
- 7 Charles Swindoll, *Grace Awakening*.
- 8 A. W. Tozer, *Gems from Tozer*.
- 9 Andrew Murray, *Humility*.
- 10 Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.
- 11 David Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*.
- 12 Keith Miller, *Taste of New Wine*.
- 13 Alex Strauch, *Leading with Love*.
- 14 Alex Strauch, *If You Bite and Devour One Another*.
- 15 John Gray, *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*.
- 16 George Verwer, *No Turning Back*.
- 17 Debbie Meroff, *SOS (Save Our Sisters)*.
- 18 Stephen Arterburn, *Toxic Faith*.
- 19 *George for Real*, a documentary film on George Verwer's life.
- 20 *George Uncut*, a follow up film of *George for Real*, on George Verwer's life.
- 21 R. T. Kendal, *Total Forgiveness*.
- 22 George Verwer, *The Marks of a Difficult Person*.
- 23 George Verwer, *Pseudo Discipleship*.



- 24 George Verwer, *Dangers of Spiritual Deception*.
- 25 George Sweeting, *The Pursuit of Excellence*.
- 26 Brother Andrew, *And God Changed His Mind*.
- 27 Brother Andrew, *Light Force*.
- 28 Brother Andrew, *Operation Desert Light*.
- 29 Gary Witherall, *Total Abandon*.
- 30 Billy Graham, *What the Bible Says about Sex*.
- 31 Billy Graham, *Peace with God*.
- 32 Oswald J. Smith, *Passion for Souls*.
- 33 Roy Hession, *We Would See Jesus*.
- 34 Norman Grubb, *Continuous Revival*.
- 35 Gordon MacDonald, *Rebuilding Your Broken World*.
- 36 George Verwer, *Revolution of Love*.
- 37 George Verwer, *There's Dynamite in Literature*.
- 38 Ken Penman, *Pride or Praise*.
- 39 A. W. Tozer, quotation from the notes on 2 Thessalonians 3,
Tozer Study Bible (?)
- 40 A. W. Tozer *Sermon: Loving Worship*.

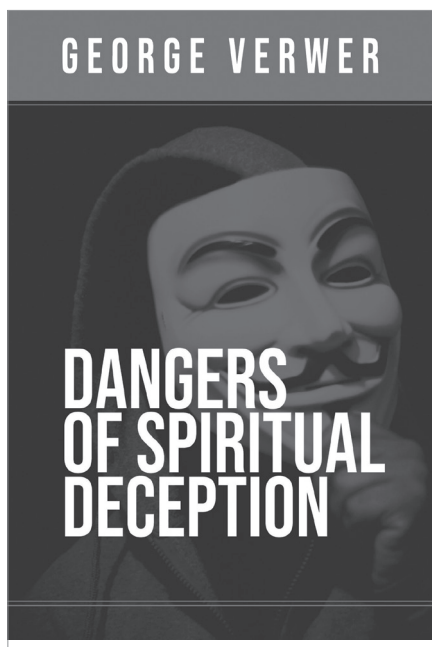


Other Helpful Books on the Subject



**THE HOW'S AND
WHY'S OF DISUNITY**
by George Verwer

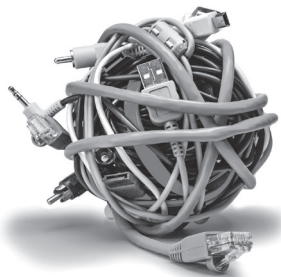
**DANGERS OF
SPIRITUAL
DECEPTION**
by George Verwer



Other Helpful Books on the Subject

MESSIOLOGY

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED AS
MORE DROPS



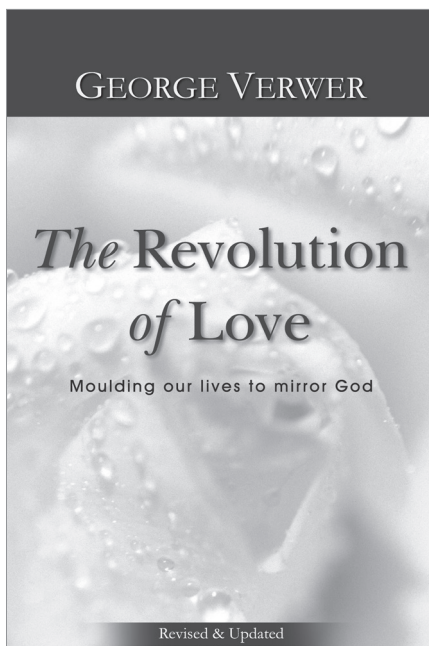
THE MYSTERY OF HOW GOD WORKS
EVEN WHEN IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE TO US

GEORGE VERWER
FOUNDER, OPERATION MOBILISATION

MESSIOLOGY
by George Verwer

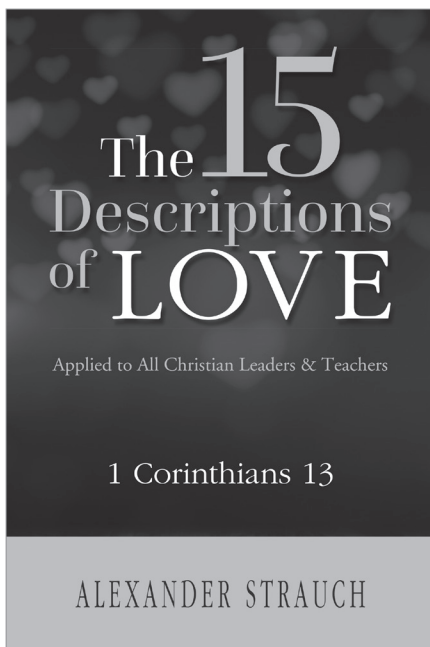


REVOLUTION OF LOVE
by George Verwer



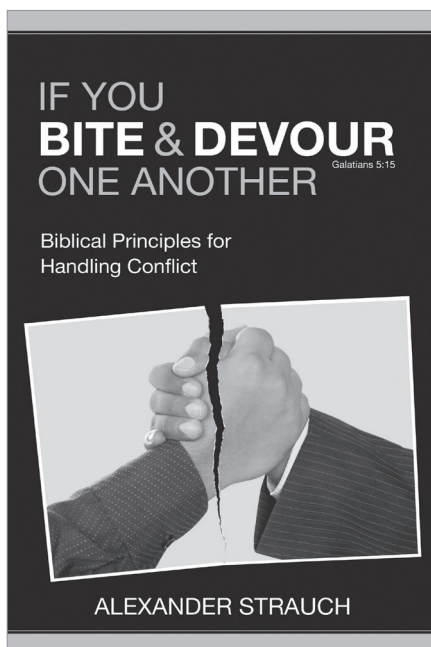
Available at www.christianstore.in

Other Helpful Books on the Subject



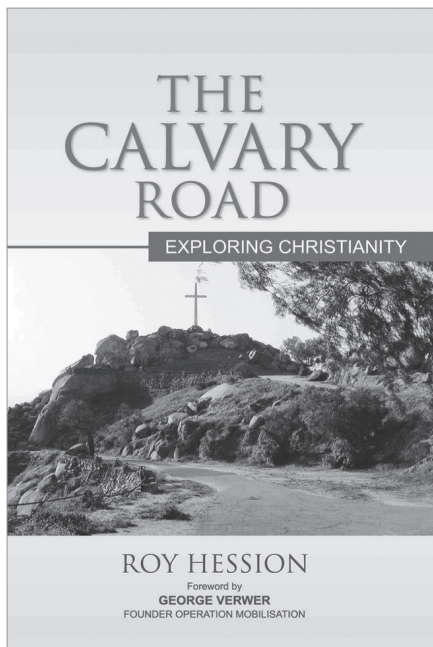
**15 DESCRIPTIONS OF
LOVE**
by Alexander Strauch

**IF YOU BITE &
DEVOUR
ONE ANOTHER**
by Alexander Strauch

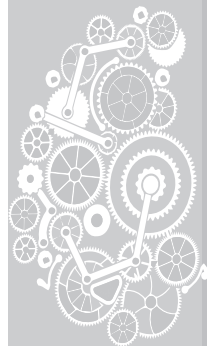


Available at www.christianstore.in

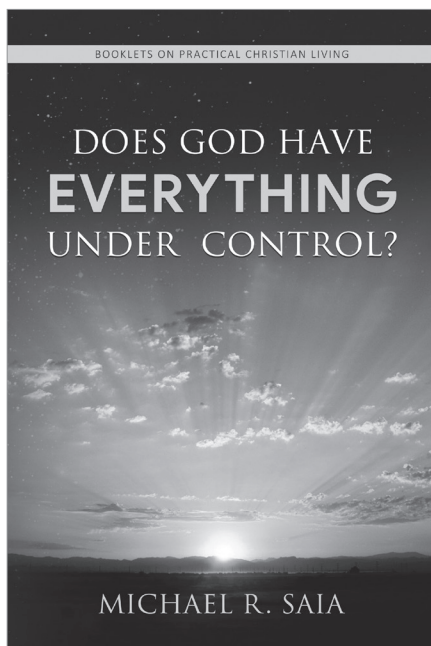
Other Helpful Books on the Subject



THE CALVARY ROAD
by Roy Hession



**DOES GOD HAVE
EVERYTHING UNDER
CONTROL**
by Michael R. Saia



Available at www.christianstore.in