

HOW TO LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY
BY
EXPLOITING THE SINFUL NATURE

Behavior Modification Hacks

by T. Nelson Downs

WHINERY PRESS

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First Printing: October, 2019

Reluctantly published by
Whinery Press
2165 Rockdale Road, Dubuque, I.A. 52003

Preface Poem

If you only knew who you are.
If you only knew whose you are.
If you only knew through what I have labored to find you.
If you only knew how long I've waited, and waited.

Will you ever yield? Will you ever come?
What do you have? What do you want?
Am I enough! Aren't I enough!
Why do you search for that which can't satisfy?

Why do you long for mist and mirage?
What have they told you?
What do they have?

Your lover is dead, don't be like them.
In me there is life, come take it all.

JEALOUS
AND
COMING AFTER YOU

The Wonderful Wizard of Lifehacks

“Did you bring me the broom from the wicked witch of dilligence?” Boomed the large green terrifying head, “I see you did. So just sweep yourselves with the broom and you’ll be clean.” So the host of sinners brushed the dust off of themselves with the broom, but they were still dirty on the inside. The chimpanzee smelled fleas, so he pulled back a curtain on the side of the room to reveal a control room operated by a diminutive wizard.

“Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.” Said the green head as his facade of power lost its illusion. But the host of sinners, hungry for righteousness, pulled the little wizard out from behind the curtain.

“You’re a liar!” Said a little girl, who had led the host to seek righteousness, “You promised us righteousness, but we found only death, lies, and failure.”

“What in particular do you want?” Asked the little man.

“I want a heart. To not be self-seeking, but to care about others.” Said a metal man.

“You don’t need a heart.” Said the little man, “There’s folks out there less caring then you are, but they have something you don’t have: They have the knowledge that in order to be the greatest that they must be a servant and put others above themselves. They know that for everything they do that there’s a reward. With that attitude, no one will ever know that you don’t have a heart.”

“Thank you.” Said the metal man, “I see now that being perfect is possible without a heart.”

“That’s the spirit!” Said the little man, “Who’s next?”

“Well.” Said a timid lion, “I want courage, I’m often afraid.”

“Pshaw!” Replied the little man, “You don’t need courage, you just need to redirect your fear. Don’t fear him who can destroy the body, but rather fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.¹ Fear God and nothing else can shake you.”

“Alright. I’m afraid, but I’m only afraid of God anymore. So in effect I’m brave. I hope I don’t do anything to dissappoint him. Oh dear.”

“I’m a lazy sack of garbage.” Said the scarecrow, “I want to be hardworking.”

“There’s tons of people more lazy than you.” Responded the little man, “But they have something you haven’t got, impatience. You see, they’re lazy, but they’re impatient so they work fast so that they can finish and not have to work anymore. The harder and faster you work the sooner you can take your riches, lie back, and retire. Maybe when you’re 55 or 40 maybe.”

“Yeah!” Said the scarecrow, “Not working sounds great. One day I won’t have to work at all. I better get started so I can finish sooner.”

“This sounds like nonsense.” Spoke the young girl. “You’re treating the symptoms,² but underneath everyone you’ve helped is still not righteous. I’m losing my patience! Why I -”

¹Matthew 10:28

²The girl has a large vocabulary, she’s also 5’10”, don’t let that make you doubt the truth of this narrative.

“Losing your patience?!” Interrupted the little man, “You just need a hobby that you can practice any time you have extra time. Here, take this flute and practice it whenever you have a dull moment. Those times of waiting then become opportunity. You’ll start to love waiting.” He handed her a flute and she played while she waited for him to stop talking, it was an hour.

“It doesn’t feel like I’m righteous.” She said, breaking the silence.

“Feel . . . feel? feel!” Said the little man, “Why does it matter what you feel?”

“Because that’s how I live. That’s how everyone lives, We live by feelings.” Said the girl.

“Hmm. . . Take these drugs, they’ll change how you feel.” Said the man as he handed the girl a prescription bottle.

“I have OCD. It sucks.” Said a chimpanzee as he searched the little man for fleas.

“OCD! There’s tons of people with more obsessive compulsion than you. But they have got one thing you haven’t got, a different word for it.” Said the little man, “Don’t call it OCD, call it ‘excellence’ and you will be applauded for it.”

“Wow.” Said a lizard, “But I’m filled with hate, is there a cure for that?”

“A cure!?” Cried the little man, “You don’t need a cure. There’s tons of people out there with more hate than you, but they look like they love others. It’s because they hate the devil. When you hate the devil enough, you have to do things that he hates; and those things are good works.”

“I struggle with making decisions and resisting people. I’m a pushover.” Said a giant weeble-wobble toy.

“Pshaw! There’s folks out there with less backbone than you, but they have one thing you haven’t got, an authority to submit to. You’ll be the most loyal person ever, because you don’t have the drive or independence to do anything else.”

“Ok, but who do I serve?”

“There’s only two options.” Said a voice as it burst into the room covered in a very bright light. “*Me, or him.*”

“What has this guy done for you?” Said the little man, “He’ll tell you that you aren’t good enough, that you need something that he’s selling, but the power is already inside of you.”

“This fake wizard’s advice might seem to work.” Said the shiny man, “But, it’s a cheap imitation of my righteousness. It’s not real. You won’t have real victory.”

“What do I have to do to be righteous like you?” Asked the weeble-wobble toy.

“You can’t! You’re not worthy. You can’t earn it.” Interrupted the little man.

“Exactly.” Said the glowing man.

“No! You can’t agree with me, we’re enemies.” Said the little man.

“Just because you’re a liar doesn’t preclude you from accidentally telling the truth. It just so happens that I give my righteousness freely because there’s no other way for them to be righteous.”

“Not true! They can be righteous by doing enough righteous things.”

“Keep your FILTHY RAGS out of my face! You think that pleases me or my father?” And with that, the glowing man tossed the little fake wizard into the abyss.

“You need me to change who you are, not what you do or how you act.” Said the man of light. The girl was too medicated to listen, she jumped into the abyss, not able to bear the light. The scarecrow, the lizard, the metal man, the chimpanzee, and the lion jumped in after her. But the weeble-wobble came and tried to bow³ at the man of light’s feet. But every time he tried to bow he stood right back up, because it wasn’t his nature to bow.

“I can’t do it on my own. Forgive me for all my sin, be my master.” Said the toy as he burst into light like the glowing man. He ceased being a weeble-wobble but instead turned into a real boy.

“You’re righteous by my sacrifice, by my love. I’ve given you my heart. You’re my brother, and you have my spirit. You will now do good works out of who you are, not out of performance or trying to gain my favor.” Said the man of light.

Then the flying monkeys flew out of the abyss and grabbed the new boy and they dragged⁴ him to the edge of the chasm.

“Help me!” Cried the boy.

“Don’t you know who you are now? You have my victory, I’m living inside of you- live like it.” And so the boy commanded the monkeys to flee, and they did. Then he went out to share real righteousness with the world.

The host of seekers were told to change their behavior through various tricks, but it could not change their nature. Only by submitting to the glowing man could they be changed.

³As in prostrate himself in submission and honor.

⁴Tried using “drug,” but it didn’t sound right.

Jealousy

The preceding example was mostly silly, but it illustrates the power of a change in perception. The wizard was able to change people's behavior by getting them to redefine the adjectives that they identified with. But that only changed small parts of their identity, leaving them still yet with the sinful nature, although they were reformed in minor ways. But Christ came to give us full restoration, and that's the difference between being and doing. The actions flow out of the nature. "We are filled with Jesus' fullness and nothing less."⁵ When we accept Christ, we are changed and we have a new nature, and out of that we act differently because of who we are. And who are we? We are children of God, perfect, righteous, fully equipped, blameless, holy; "By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he (Christ) is so also are we in this world."⁶ It's clear from the word that the gospel is about our identification with Christ, because there is power in Christ and that power is unleashed by accepting that, by internalizing it and saying it.

Rules are an external construct seeking to conform its adherents, but songs are an internal declaration of identity or being. "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its law."⁷ Rules have limited power, they only cause wickedness to be revealed. "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death."⁸ Laws are an external force seeking to conform wicked people, but they are powerless to do so, on the contrary, they awaken and taunt the sinful nature and spur on wicked deeds.

"The law results in legalistic self-centeredness. The gospel focuses man upon Christ and what he has done for us."⁹

That's how you can pick out a false gospel, is it about me and myself? Or is it about Christ?

Often times I felt guilty, thinking that maybe I had lost my salvation by betraying God to habitual sin, selfishness, and indifference. But, "No act of man in sinning will exhaust the act of God in salvation so as to make it no longer effective or valid."¹⁰ It's not about me, I have died, and now Christ lives in me.

People act in accordance to their perceived identity. "No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."¹¹ The soldier knows his position, his job, and his role in the military, he won't abandon that for civilian frivolity, because his desire is for his country and he no longer heeds his old civilian desires. It all boils down to how we perceive ourselves. Even if we don't change the words we identify with, we can still change our perceptions of what those words mean to us. For example, a person (who identifies as lazy) that is riding a bicycle up a hill may want to give up and walk the rest of the way. They'll declare that they're lazy and that is why they're going to walk. But it's just as possible for that person instead to realize how much they hate both biking up

⁵Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 1, Page 18

⁶1 John 4:17 (ESV)

⁷Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Introduction, Page 7, quoting: Andrew Fletcher, Scottish Parliamentarian 1653-1716

⁸Romans 7:5 (ESV)

⁹Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 6, Page 105

¹⁰Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 8, Page 142

¹¹2 Timothy 2:4 (ESV)

hills and walking up hills that they instead push forward just to get it done because they don't want to suffer doing it any longer than they have to. This alternative view of laziness will produce all the fruit of diligence, merely because of that person's deviance in perception.

This negative view, of exploiting flaws to the point where they are not flaws is effective because the person using this technique very quickly accepts the new ramifications because they don't feel like they've changed or have to change, but are just living in accordance to their revelation. As shown in the *Wonderful Wizard of Lifehacks* there are many ways to do this, and this perception change is effective and can change our behavior, but still our righteousness is as "filthy rags"¹² to God. It's not about what we do, it's about who we are. However, we as Christians need to do the same thing as the people in that story, to reassess what being who we are really means. But in Christianity instead of redefining bad terms to be good, we have to recognize that being in Christ actually means we are good and there's no longer any evil in us. We are righteous through Christ's blood, not because of anything we've done or will do.

"The great truth here is that you are not what you do. You are not a sinner through personal acts of sin and you are not righteous through personal acts of righteousness."¹³

Some see this as a deception, as if becoming a Christian isn't a real change, but that God instead changes his perception of us and we are still wicked and enslaved to the sinful nature. But Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through [him]."¹⁴ So lies will not bring us to the father, because Jesus is the only way and he is the truth. "God can never see things other than the way that things really are."¹⁵ So that means if God says we are righteous that we actually are so. However, we won't see the fruit of his righteousness unless we know who we really are in him. There is no dual nature, Christ cannot exist with darkness.

We've seen many self-help books, and they help man change his behavior to different degrees. But that is not man's issue. The problem of man is who he is, not what he does. What man does is merely a product of what he is. Man can't become righteous by doing because he did not become unrighteous by doing, it's as simple as that. "For as through the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, many will be made righteous."¹⁶ Now this may be in the future tense, but Paul elucidates elsewhere that Christians have this righteousness now.

"I don't make void the grace of God. For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!"¹⁷

The title of this article was a reference to how people try to change their behavior by only "holding a form of godliness, but having denied its power."¹⁸ They act good, but they are missing the power of God, inside they are still wicked and do not hold to Christ's identity.

Christ came to restore our identity. He came to make us holy, perfect, righteous, filled with the fullness of the Godhead, which is Jesus.¹⁹ God made the world by speaking it into

¹²Isaiah 64:6

¹³Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 2, Page 33

¹⁴John 14:6 (WEB)

¹⁵Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 3, Page 56

¹⁶Romans 5:19 (ESV)

¹⁷Galatians 2:21 (WEB)

¹⁸2 Timothy 3:5b (WEB)

¹⁹Colossians 2:9-10

being.²⁰ “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”²¹ So from this verse we see that God paid particular attention to man, he didn’t create him by speaking, but actually formed him out of the ground and then breathed the same breath that made the world into man. We are made in God’s image²² and the very same power that made the world dwells in us.

“But man fell,” you might say, but Jesus has redeemed us back to original fellowship with God through his work on the cross. Jesus is greater than Satan, and his redemption is greater than the fall. We have this now, we may be waiting for resurrected bodies²³, but “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”²⁴ As Jesus is now, we are now (in this world even). So what we say and speak has great power; so are we going to say negative things that are contrary to the word of God? Or are we going to speak the Word, by which the universe was formed? “A great part of living your new identity is learning to refuse, by faith, your old one.”²⁵

People will often say stuff based off their experiences or how they feel, but the word of God is truer, it doesn’t change. So instead of saying we’re sick, we should speak the truth, and the truth is that Jesus paid for our sickness when he was beaten. “By his wounds you have been healed.”²⁶ I’ve seen so many people miraculously healed by God and I testify that this is for today and all time.

We’re no longer sinners (even saved by Grace), but we are the righteousness of God. When we understand our identity by reading the word, by speaking it, by meditating on it, we act in accordance to our identity. James relates it to looking in a mirror and knowing who we are.

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”²⁷

The devil tries to make us forgetful so that we forget who we really are and thus be ineffective; living in defeat instead of Christ’s victory.

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”²⁸

There’s two types of testimonies (origin stories) for Christians, there’s the popular *cool* ones where someone deep in sin and party living finds the love of God and changes, and then there’s my testimony. I had Godly parents, I went to church multiple times a week, I was fairly well-behaved. I made an initial commitment to Christ when I was seven or so and

²⁰Genesis 1

²¹Genesis 2:7

²²Genesis 1:27

²³Romans 8:23

²⁴1 John 4:17

²⁵Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 5, Page 89

²⁶1 Peter 2:24b

²⁷James 1:23-25 (ESV)

²⁸John 17:22-23

I got baptized. I knew I had salvation, but I didn't understand all the ramifications of that decision.

As I grew up I loved Jesus, I sought him sometimes, but my focus was quickly directed elsewhere. I did acrobatics, photo editing, film-making, played video games, made video games, read books, studied genetics, gardening, and foraging. But my joy was not in the Lord, I was not fully devoted to him; however, I figured that was alright, because I was still more devoted to Christ than most Christians (or so I thought).

I even did works for Christ, took some mission trips, and at those times I was fully committed, but they were short, and I felt my shortcomings manifest in them. I wasn't disciplined enough in my regular life to have enough of Christ to share with others, I was not walking in confidence and full knowledge of who I was in Christ.

I was living rather passively, letting life happen to me, not loving God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.²⁹ I struggled with lust periodically because I was not trusting God and relying on him for my joy. No good habit I formed could stop the sin in my life, because it didn't come out of circumstances, it came out of the state of my heart. I tried to go to God, and there was limited success there, because as soon as I got discouraged I would turn back. I really tried to love God more, I worked at it, some of the time, but all my effort to abstain from sin and evil thoughts was short-term and even then, my heart was still corrupt. I was living in guilt and condemnation.

But God, rich in mercy, showed me an earthly example of what our relationship was supposed to look like. I've been single my whole life and been content (mostly) that way. My siblings began to find spouses and get married, and I started to have more friends who were married. One night I shared in a wife's grief, she was jealous over her husband and started to wonder if he really loved her. She questioned if she was enough for him. She was very deeply hurt.

From that night, I saw it differently, I realized that I indeed was married to Jesus. That he was jealous for me, he didn't want to have me just 98% of the time, but all the time; because he is enough for me. He gave all of himself for me and he's hurt when we settle for anything less than the best, anything less than him. "God has no vested interest in sharing us with anyone other than himself and he would be guilty of violating his own character [if]³⁰ he left us in such a divided condition."³¹

Paul shows God's heart when he says, "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I married you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ."³²

I came to see how much Christ really loves me. That I'm his, that I've been bought with a price, and I learned that, "You do not fall in love with God by trying to love him more, but by focusing on how much he has loved you."³³

The tragedy is that in the church we reduce purity to merely abstaining from sexual sin and impure thoughts.

"But isn't that exactly what purity is?" You might ask? No! No! **NO!** Purity is *NOT* abstaining from evil! Purity is having singular focus, to be wholly devoted to Christ. You can

²⁹Mark 12:30

³⁰Was "is" in the book, but I believe that to be a typo.

³¹Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 7, Page 119

³²2 Corinthians 11:2 (WEB)

³³Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 4, Page 72

have pure gold, but if it's only a dust speck, then who cares? It's "pure" but it's worthless. Whereas our focus is not on sin, but on Christ. Because when you're full of Christ there is no room for sin; just like a soldier has no time for civilian affairs. It's not hatred of others that keeps a husband and wife faithful, but a strong love, a unity of will, and of body. Their relationship has emotions but it's not founded on that, it's founded on commitment. "The Christian life is not a matter of *dying* to sin, but of *living* to God."³⁴

Now don't imagine that I find my relationship with Christ at all "sexual," but yet there are still some similarities that can be drawn. Intimacy with Christ is possible because we have the same spirit, we are no longer two but one, just like marriage. I am his body. We talk, we enjoy each other's company, and we go everywhere together.

I committed myself fully to Christ, recognizing that it is a covenant just like marriage. He gives me all of himself, I give him all of myself, and there's no room for infidelity because infidelity destroys marriages and I don't want to hurt our relationship, because it is very precious.

I've taken his name, all that he has is mine, all that I have is his. Hallelujah! How humbling! God looked down from Heaven and wanted me to share in everything he has, to be married to his son, to have all the authority that he has! Any thing that Jesus did, I can do, because he's inside of me. Christ even said that I would do greater miracles than he did.³⁵ My will is his will, and I live to please him, there's nothing else that matters, no one else can take me from him. He's given me responsibility, joy, and life more abundantly.

"And he said to them, Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."³⁶

I'm not going to settle for anything less than what Christ has for me.

Sometimes people ask what the bare minimum they can do to get into Heaven is, and that question grieves my heart. And it grieves the father too. What an offense! What a shame! To be given the fullness of Christ on earth but to neglect it and defer it until death. We delay punishment, we delay loans, so why are we delaying blessing? What on earth is there that can compare to Christ? What does the world have that's worth more than a God who loves you more than himself? What could there possibly be? It's like marrying a billionaire just so you can have citizenship, and then never seeing them again!

Instead of seeking all the fullness of what he has for them they're settling for the minimum. They want Jesus so that they can get a name change but they don't want any of the intimacy or any of the blessings that come with the relationship that is Christianity. What pray tell does the world have to offer that's better than Christ? That's why God is a jealous God, because he has everything and wants to give it to us but we run to other stuff that's inferior. Christ has bought us; to not give him all of ourselves is unjust and wrong.

You can't have a happy marriage by trying to do the least for your spouse; likewise in Christianity, you can't have a happy relationship if you don't give all of yourself. Purity is about giving all of yourself! Don't cheat God, don't cheat yourself!

³⁴Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Chapter 9, Page 145

³⁵John 14:12

³⁶Mark 16:15-18 (ESV)

References

Petzer, Gospel of Identity, Introduction, Page 7, quoting: Andrew Fletcher, Scottish Parliamentarian 1653-1716: “Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its law.”

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