
“Souls are made sweet not by taking the acid fluids out, but by putting something in--a great Love, a new Spirit. . .”

Henry Drummond

Chapter Nineteen

One Warm Sunny Afternoon

Insight # 19: The Creator who gave you life can give you a new life--a new heart, a new chance.

One man said, after reading this book, “It reminds me of the man I was, the man I am now, and the man I hope to become.” This chapter is personally directed to those who “hope to become” more loving and more honorable. It’s the conversation that maybe you and I would have together--one, warm, sunny afternoon.

Stephen came to me one summer afternoon. I had known him before--when life was still with him. His mother and I had been friends; she died in childbirth several years before. His appearance was eerie, but there was an earnestness about him. The kids would say he looked wasted and old for his twenty years of age. His hair had been dyed so many times that now it resembled the lifeless straw of a cheap doll--the synthetic look. His complexion was ghostly white; his eyes had a lost look. I see that same look on many of the youth who hang around town dressed all in black.

After some initial small talk, he told me that he had come to see me because he thought I might be able to help him. He had heard that I was writing a book on chastity, and he remembered that I had been a friend with his mother. We went out to the front porch where we could be alone. The warm summer sun seemed to lighten the mood.

“I don’t know if I can help,” I said, “but let’s talk about it. What’s happened to you? ”

“Since you were a friend to my mom, I thought maybe I could tell you a few things,” he said. “I really need help.”

Two hours later, while the sun sank behind the trees, his horror story was over. He had gone from addiction to pornography to being

addicted to sexual exploitation and adventurism. For several minutes we sat in silence. My heart was heavy; his heart was breaking.

“What do I do now?” he asked.

“Go back,” I said.

“Go back to what?”

“Go back to the way you were; go back to being alive again.”

“I’ve gone too far,” he said with despair.

“If you really had gone too far you wouldn’t be here today,” I assured him.

“How do you know that?” he asked.

“You’re here because you’re looking for help; that means your conscience is still working. You haven’t shut it down all together. You’re in pain. That’s good, too. It’s telling you to stop doing what you’re doing. You seem to still care; that means your heart is still alive. You haven’t gone too far, but you’re dying, and your soul knows it.”

“Dying? You mean suicide?” he asked.

“A piecemeal kind of suicide that’s already begun--I suspect that’s why you’re feeling the way you are now. It’s uglier than death--it’s dying while you’re still alive. You know what I mean; you maybe see it more clearly in some of your friends. They don’t care. They don’t feel. Nothing matters anymore.”

He was listening. His heart was still feeling! His conscience was hurting. Oh, blessed guilt that nags to let us know when we’re off course! His mind was still functioning and searching for answers. His soul was dying of spiritual starvation, but he knew it! He was listening. The sun hid behind a gray cloud. There was a chill in the air.

Go Back To Being Alive

A scene popped into my memory of the first time I ever noticed Stephen. He was a young boy. I went to his house to visit with his mother. As we sat in the kitchen talking over lemonade, the children peered at me from behind doors. They seemed excited that someone different was there.

As I was leaving, Stephen came up to me holding a huge pumpkin he had grown all by himself. He said, “Mrs. Sorensen, would you like to have one of my pumpkins?”

I looked over to the garden spot. “Are you sure you want to give me this one?” I asked. “It’s the biggest you have.”

“Yes,” he said, “I want you to have this one.”

I took the pumpkin, amazed by the giving heart of this young boy. “Stephen,” I said, “do you remember when you were just a little boy

and you gave me the largest pumpkin that you had grown?"

"I did? No, I don't remember that," he said.

"It was the first time that I really noticed you. You had a heart that was so sensitive and caring. It's still there! Reach back to the Stephen that was full of life and love."

"Go back to being a kid? Are you serious?" he asked.

"Go back to being alive," I said once again.

"You're right; I actually feel like I'm dying inside; I don't feel anything anymore. I've gone from one sexual experience to another just for the high. Now I don't get a high on anything. But I don't know how to change. I don't know how to get back."

"Remember the Stephen that was, and at least you have some idea of what you're shooting for. You walked away from him, but you can go back if you really want to. You can turn it around."

"I don't know. I'd like to think that. I don't have sex anymore; it has me. Every minute--it has me. Everywhere I look I see sex. I can't even see a jogger on the street without thinking of him or her sexually, and I imagine in my mind that everyone wants to have sex with me. I know it sounds bizarre, but it's the way things are with me all the time. I've created a monster and now I can't control it."

While I listened I was reminded of the upside-down man--led around by twisted sexual passions. He had become a slave to himself.

"How can I stop doing something when it's always on my mind? Worse, how can I stop doing something that I want to do? I can't stop thinking about it; I can't stop the thoughts that keep haunting me. I want to change; I want to be like other people. I want to get on with my life, but I'm caught in one sexual relationship after another. Some of them last for just a night; others last for a few weeks, but I'm a slave to it all. Life's hell."

"You've created your own hell," I urged. "We're not created to do bad and feel good. Something inside is trying to tell you that you're off course. Think about it, Stephen. There is no other more disgraceful abuse of our brothers and sisters than in reducing human intimacy to a meat market. If one lies, the truth can be told; if one steals from another, the stolen property can be returned. But the deliberate plotting to use someone's body to gratify sexual cravings or pride is like the cravings of an evil spirit to possess the body of the living. It's to say, 'I care not for your soul, I merely want to use your body.' Nothing takes the life or the love from the human heart like sexual exploitation. But

you can change.”

“Right now, the only way I

think I can handle it is to shut it off completely.”

“I recently read the book, Don’t Call It Love, by Patrick Carnes. He deals with people who are in one way or another addicted to sex--pornography, destructive affairs, or prostitution. In the book he tells the value of the celibacy treatment--no sex at all--even in marriage. It makes sense--allowing time for the mind, heart and conscience to regain control of the flesh.

“I recall reading that one of his patients said it was like returning to childhood and starting all over again. It really helped his patients.”

“I know that I need to stop the acts, but how do I stop the thoughts that are continually haunting me?”

Clean The House, Junk the Lies

“I think the first step would be to clean house.”

“Clean house?”

“Your house--your spirit. Well, actually, you could begin with your actual house--clean out all the junk. Stop allowing yourself to be seduced by propaganda. Get rid of the pornography--magazines, movies, and books.

“You’ll feel fantastic with this first step, but the next step won’t be as easy. It takes minutes to clean out a house, but it takes months, even years to clean out your mind--your thoughts that led to the sexual addiction. You’ve allowed your mind to be programmed by pornography to believe lies about human life, love and sex. Now, you’ve got to junk the lies--or do a housecleaning on your mind.”

“Lies?”

“You’ve bought into lies about human life and human sexuality. You see yourself first as a sexual being--wrong. First you’re a spiritual being. You said that you’re always thinking that the person you’re looking at wants to have a sexual experience with you. That’s another lie.

“You can only see people from your own perspective. Because you’re a sex addict, you think that everyone else is, too. You’re like the thief who thinks that everyone’s going to steal from him, or the gossip who thinks that everyone’s talking behind her back. How can it be any other way? We see others through ourselves, and by what we are. That’s one reason why we can’t hurt others without first hurting

ourselves. You've given your life over to lies that have corrupted the way you think, how you feel and how you act. To get back, you need to exchange the lies for truth."

Not only does pornography misrepresent the whole issue of human sexuality, there's an evil power in it, a power that drains your strength to love. That's the reason why you feel so weak, so helpless. You've invited this power into your life, and now it has taken control. That's why you feel so out-of-control. You've allowed another power to take control of your life."

"So you believe in evil? Are you serious?"

"Absolutely. You would have to have your head in the sand not to believe in evil powers. Every day we hear about gross, bizarre things. They are inspired by something. Besides, I have felt this power in my life. I know both the powers that strengthen and the powers that weaken. Both are very real."

He shook his head. "I guess the whole idea of a Devil seems like something out of Halloween; I don't know if I buy into that. I do know, though, that I feel helpless. I don't know what's a lie and what's not. I don't know what reality is. I don't even know what normal is."

"Normal? Um. Maybe that's the wrong word. What's normal is not necessarily right and wholesome. It gives the idea that we ought to determine what's right by what's popular.

"Probably a better word would be 'natural.' It's natural to have sexual feelings, but it's not natural to want to use those feelings as an excuse to take advantage of someone. It may be natural to get angry, but it would be wrong to allow feelings of anger to lead you to clobber someone over the head. We were given the sexual power, but we can use this power to love, or to use and abuse. You've used this power against yourself and others. It will take time to change, but you can do it with divine help."

"What do you mean?" he said. "Are you talking about God? I hear that all the time from my Dad and I get tired of listening to him."

"Then stop listening to him and start listening to yourself; it's there deep inside."

Stephen was sitting with his head bowed; hands covering his face. The sun was fading behind the rows of trees on the other side of the lawn. It was almost time to begin dinner, but I hoped that the family would fend for themselves. Our time together was precious; healing was taking place.

Without looking up, Stephen said, "I know I want to change, or at least I think I want to change. The truth is, I don't know what I want.

Life without sex seems so boring; I don't know what would get me up in the morning. It's been my reason to live."

Dying From the Inside Out

"Now it's become your reason to die. You're dying and you know it. You have to do something. Before you started the sex thing, why did you get up in the morning? What was your motivation then?"

"I don't know if I can remember back that far. I got excited about the things that kids do--you know, going for a bike ride, playing a game of basketball with the guys--things like that."

"Just being alive? That's what you're talking about--just being alive! Have you ever thought that the sex addiction might be a way of trying to feel alive again? Like pouring hot salsa on food to give it some taste, pretty soon you can't taste anything at all. Food can taste pretty bland after you've been pouring on the hot salsa. But eventually the taste buds come alive again, and everything tastes better than ever. Since you can't see the future and how life will be better once you're healthy again, it might be a good idea to think of your past. Keep remembering what life was like as a child."

Stephen looked across the lawn where a group of neighborhood children and our two youngest were jumping on the trampoline, talking, laughing, and sometimes colliding into one another.

With a sigh, he said, "It seems so long ago. No, more than that, it seems like a former life. But I remember feeling like that--so happy, so strong, so excited about doing anything--even jumping on a trampoline. I remember being with girls and not even thinking about them sexually. Now I feel so weak, so lost. I don't think I can change, but I know I can go back to that."

"I bet if you ran across the lawn right now and started jumping along with the children, you would recapture it--at least a little. I've been thinking about that lately. As we grow up we hate being called a child or a baby or immature, and yet look who's happiest--the children!"

Reach for Divine Strength for a New Life

We sat in silence, watching the children. My mind wandered to a simple event that day. Jessica (9) and I had gone to visit the ducks after she came home from school; we have a whole family of ducks--a mom named Mollie with eleven babies. Jessica named each baby after her brothers and sisters. We gave them some grain, filled their pond with water, and just sat watching them. They chased one another through the pond and explored every nook and cranny searching for a

bug or worm. We've had the ducks for several weeks now, but I still can't tell the babies apart. They all look alike to me--with their grey streaked bodies and black-green wings. One of the ducks approached us, cocking her head to the left, then to the right.

I asked Jess, "Who is this one?"

"That's Signe," she said. "She's the prettiest one because her head is thinner than the others and the white lines around her eyes are just perfect. She's my favorite."

"Do you know each one?" I asked her.

"Well, sometimes I get them mixed up," she said, "but I can usually tell them apart. The one in the pond is the one who teases everyone all the time. The one over by the water is always getting in fights with the one over in the mud. That one playing with the bag is the curious one who is always checking everything out. I kinda know them."

She knew each of them; I was amazed. That's the way children are. They see what we don't see. They love with such tender hearts. We go around half alive, while the children are totally alive. No wonder Jesus said that the way to enter into the "kingdom of Heaven" is to become as a little child. His advice to those who have become lost is to look to the children.

Stephen was still staring at the children; his spirit seemed in despair.

I broke the silence, "Look at them, Stephen, Look at them. That's the way you used to be. Go back. You've chosen to go to the dark side of life, but now you can choose to go into the light just as well. You can choose to go back to the wonderful child you were when life was sweet. The Creator who gave you life can give you a new life--a new heart."

"A new life? A new heart? Is that possible?"

"That's what it's all about. The scriptures call it being born again, or having a change of heart. Promiscuous sex uses and abuses others and is a problem of the heart. The man who hits someone with his fist doesn't have a problem with his hand, but his heart. I used to have a passion problem, too--a horrible temper that caused a hell for me and everyone else in our family. In fact one time, I was "going off" as the kids say, and one of our sons who was about sixteen at the time said, 'You're the problem in this family, Mom--you and your temper.'

"I hated to hear that, but I knew that he was right: I was the problem--or my temper was. I knew I had to change, but I didn't know how to do it. My temper would just flash before I was even aware of it

happening. I kept asking myself, ‘How can I control my temper when it just happens? By the time I realize what I’m doing, I’ve already done it.

“Over and over I would make a resolve that it would never happen again. Then it would. One time I got so mad at one of the children that I slapped him across the face--something I absolutely abhorred. I think children might need a spanking once in awhile, but never a slap in the face. I hiked up a mountain, determined to ask God for help--to know that it would never happen again. I pleaded with God all day and into the evening. I had to know that I would never lose my temper to violence again.

“Finally the impression came into my mind that it was not within the powers of God to grant my wish, but that it *would* never happen again if I stayed spiritually strong and connected to divine power. Upon returning home, my son was happily playing with friends. I asked for his forgiveness; he hugged me and said, ‘It’s all right, Mom. I pushed you, too far. I’m sorry, too.’

“I realized the temper was a symptom of being spiritually weak, so tried to stay spiritually strong. I read scriptures daily and prayed a lot; once in awhile I fasted. I also kept track of the circumstances that led up to losing my temper. I found that when the house was a mess, I was a mess. The false idea that I had to be a Supermom and have an immaculate house at all times didn’t help.

“Eventually I experienced a total change of heart and disposition. I haven’t lost my temper for some time, and when I do get angry I’m not destructive like I was in those dark days. I used to think that there were some people who were just good, and others who were naturally bad--and that I was one of the bad guys. Now I see it in a different perspective. When we aren’t spiritually healthy, we’re prone to all sorts of diseases of the soul. Mine was the passion of anger; yours is passion of the flesh. Both need Higher Power to overcome. And by the way, ask explicitly for what you need and don’t think that God will be shocked; He already knows.”

“If He already knows, why doesn’t He just help me--without my asking for it?” Stephen asked.

“Because He waits to be invited. Evil power just barges in uninvited, but God waits to be invited.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think I can go to God. I used to pray, but I would feel like a hypocrite praying now--after making so many mistakes.”

“Do you ever have dinner at your Dad’s house?” I asked.

“What are you trying to say?”

“Do you feel like a hypocrite going for dinner?”

"I don't know what you're getting at. Of course I don't feel like a hypocrite going to my Dad's house for dinner."

"Well, look at it this way--when you're hungry you might go to your Dad's for dinner. He's happy because you've come over and he gets to see you, and you walk away happy because you get to see him and your tummy's full. In this same way, our Heavenly Father is happy to feed us when we're spiritually hungry. We make Him happy and ourselves happy at the same time. I don't think that either one is going to say, 'Hey, Stephen you're a hypocrite coming to me for food when you've made some mistakes in your life.'"

"I always thought that you first have to get your life together before you start praying or going to church," he said.

"By praying and going to church we connect with the power to get our lives together."

"You're saying I shouldn't wait."

"You're starving spiritually; you need the help now. Go for it."

"You make it sound simple," he said.

"The concept is pretty simple," I answered, "and I know that it works. But you're right. Doing it is not easy, especially if you have walked so far and so deep into the darkness. You have given yourself to the dark side of passion--as I call it. You've surrendered to a power force that drains your spiritual strength. That's why you feel so out-of-control--so weak. It takes time to build strength again. If you really want to change, the Higher Power is there to help you."

"You think so?"

"Think of it this way--you were given the gift of life and the right to direct that life by making choices. You have chosen to make choices that don't work. You know they don't work because after doing them you feel like you're dying. You're like someone starving, but it's not your body that's starving, it's your soul. So go to the source of life and get the strength to live again. Plugged into the power source, the human heart becomes energized to a newness of life like putting a charger on a battery. Paul taught that when we've got the battery charger on our hearts they will become filled with ". . . love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Gal 5:22)

"Many of us have the idea that God is critical, judgmental, harsh, impatient, unkind, aloof, cynical, preachy. I think He would say simply and with love, 'You have chosen to disconnect from the powers of life and love. This has resulted in your weakness and pain. Reconnect with the life force and your heart will be healed.'"

"I'll try," he said, and left.

Summary

It has been several years since this conversation with Stephen. I see him every once in awhile, and when I do I'm amazed. He's Stephen again--happy, whole, alive and loving. Through sincere effort and divine help, he has healed. Once again, he looks like the bright, smiling young man who long ago held a huge pumpkin out to me in love. His experiences with the dark side of passion, comments and suggestions have made a tremendous contribution in the research for this book. Thank you, Stephen.