

Chapter THREE

Blinds Spots: Instinctive Reactivity

When we walked into the Chrysler dealership, all we wanted was to buy a used minivan. During the 1980s, minivans were rapidly becoming the family vehicle of choice for couples with two or more children. Iris and I qualified. We had four children. The salesman went out of his way to point out that one particular minivan, the Dodge Caravan, was a very safe vehicle because the manufacturer had minimized the vehicle's blind spots. Initially, his words did not make a significant impression on me (outside the fact that we ended up buying the van). However, as we drove off, I began to ponder the salesman's statement. This particular minivan model was a safer vehicle because it gave the driver a wider view of the road and of approaching vehicles from both sides of the road. I knew about vehicles' blind spots. After all, I had been driving since I was sixteen. Nevertheless, I found the salesman's statement helpful. It made perfect sense to me. I got it: "This particular minivan is safer because it has smaller blind spots."

Definition of Blind Spots

A blind spot in a car is an area around the vehicle that hides oncoming traffic from the driver's rearview mirrors. Obviously, blind spots in cars make the road more dangerous. However, they are not as dangerous as driving while ignorant of the fact that vehicles have blind spots. The good news for drivers is that they can remedy the situation. Drivers can take proactive steps to protect themselves by identifying where the blind spots are located around their vehicle. Once drivers have identified their blind spots, all they have to do is glance to the area of the blind spots before making turns. As it often happens, I began to look for a spiritual application for the blind spots metaphor. For years I kept the salesman's words tucked away.

God created us with at least one built-in deficiency: we are not omniscient. We cannot anticipate every possible option to events or life's circumstances because we do not have exhaustive knowledge to

Bishop Luis R. Scott

evaluate all the variables that contribute to an event. Our limited knowledge leaves us blinded to many areas in our lives because we cannot see them or anticipate their outcomes. Most of our mistakes in relationships, business, church leadership, etc., can be traced back to insufficient information, immaturity, or to the blind spots we have developed throughout our lives. We need to come to terms with the fact that we can never have exhaustive information about any of the decisions we make.

There are two additional items we need to keep in mind. First, we need to accept that blind spots are real. We ignore them to our peril. Second, we need to be intentional about reducing their influence over our decision-making process or our instinctive reactions to people or circumstances. We can reduce the negative effects of blind spots by gathering as much information as possible before jumping to any conclusions. We can also recognize that our initial reaction to any issue, would likely be the wrong one.

Blind spots represent the fourth stage of the spiritual injuries' process. They create an emotional vacuum (an empty space) in people's subconscious that hinders their ability to be proactive in responses to people and circumstances. This concept is of such importance that I will use the next chapter to expand on the effects of blind spots. I will focus on the four main areas that are symptomatic of blind spots: (1) behavioral reactivity, (2) false guilt, (3) false shame, and (4) lack of transparency.

Rick asked me if I would consider conducting his wedding ceremony. As a military chaplain, we would conduct weddings for soldiers in our units all the time. This was not a special request. Rick appeared to be in a rush to get married. As I do with everyone who asks me to conduct a wedding ceremony, I asked Rick if he had been married and divorced before. He was young, but it is important to ask the question so that we don't get involved in marrying someone who might still be married. This is against the law. Rick's answer surprised me. He said, without flinching, that he had been married four times and he had divorced four times. Incredulous regarding his answer, I asked him how old was he? He said he was twenty-four years old. My surprise turn into astonishment. If we assume that he married for the first time at twenty, this would mean that Rick's marriages, on the average, had lasted less than a year each.

I told Rick that, unfortunately, I could not perform his wedding because there was a problem with the multiple marriages and divorces, and he was the common denominator. He needed to do a psychological evaluation to find out what made him susceptible to having so many broken relationships. There was no doubt in my mind that Rick had a relational blind spot that made him fall in relationships that were doomed to fail. It is possible that he was unlucky. It was possible the girls were all bad wives. But in all likelihood, the problem was that Rick had experienced a catastrophic spiritual injury that had severely damaged his intimacy mechanism. He had a blind spot so large you could have driven a semi-truck through without him noticing. Rick wanted to love and be loved, but he did not know how. I encouraged him to find answers for his many failures in relationships before pursuing this marriage. I told him that if he really wanted to have a good relationship with this girl, he needed to find out what caused the previous divorces. I never saw Rick again.

Recognizing Blind Spots

Spiritual blind spots are an empty area in our consciousness that prevents us from making sense of a situation that causes fear and pain. They are invisible emotional pockets in a person's spirit. Blind spots are, basically, vacuums of insight. People with relational blind spots will always be in a struggle to develop healthy intimacy with others. The main reason for this difficulty is that relational blind spots often manifest themselves as inability to trust others.

Another issue with blind spots is that people are not always able to connect this vacuum of insight to the original spiritual injury. However, if they are able to identify any of the various character altering elements, they can identify the presence of a blind spot. And once they have identified the presence of a blind spot, they can be sure a character altering spiritual trauma took place at some point in the person's life. At this stage of people's struggle, the emotional pain is the open window to the event. They still don't know which spiritual injury caused a particular blind spot, but now they would have a starting point to address the dysfunctional and self-destructive behaviors.

The apostle Paul suggested that growing in love could be the key to solve this spiritual relational vacuum. Listen to his words: “I pray that your love would grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” (Phil. 1:9 NIV). While the disconnection between the pain and the injury makes it difficult to understand the instinctive reactions to events and people, it does not negate that an injury exists. On the contrary, the presence of the instinctive reactions is a good indicator that a catastrophic event created the irreconcilable contradiction in our souls, even when they are not aware of it.

The individual does not need to associate the pain with a specific event to know that an injury in fact has taken place. The presence of the pain is itself an indicator that the injury exists. The pain could be the result of something as simple as experiencing rejection in a business venture. For example: suppose someone rejects a business opportunity solely because they “do not like sales.” They are actually saying that they would rather not succeed in this business than to experience the pain of rejection. In other words, if the price for success requires any form of rejection, they are unwilling to pay it.

This fear of rejection is especially significant if the pain they fear reminds them of the original injury in which they were rejected by loved ones. People can overcome the fear of rejection when the alternative fear is greater. Anyone interested in growing in a particular area of his life should consider, at least, two alternatives. They can ignore the pain and plow through to their goals in spite of their fears. The reader needs to know that it’s difficult to overcome fear and pain at the same time. Or, people can discern the source of the pain and take proactive action against the reactivity created by the blind spot.

Instinctive Reactions

Allow me to share a three-step process that can assist us in identifying and managing blind spots. The most practical way to discover the presence of a blind spot is to detect consistently reactive or defensive emotional responses to people and situations. Reactive and defensive responses are the first indicator that a spiritual scar is present. The importance of the spiritual scars is that they always indicate that either a blind spot or a pet peeve is present. The difference between the blind spots and pet peeves has to do with the intensity and the frequency of the reactive responses. Knee jerk

defensiveness is an additional indicator that we are dealing with a blind spot. When individuals have identified any instinctive reactive behaviors, they can move to identify the similarity of the situations that cause the reactions. Most people are not even aware of their defensive and instinctive behaviors. In many instances, they need a friend to identify the behavior before the person has the opportunity to make any healthy corrections to it. Having knowledge of the types of situations that provoke these reactive reactions provides us with the opportunity to become more proactive and less reactive.

For example, let us assume that I become reactive or defensive whenever people call into question my qualifications as a preacher. Before I jump to any conclusions, I should consider whether the claim is true. If it is true that I am a lousy preacher, then, I need to make adjustments. If the person makes the claim out of bitterness or jealousy, we don't need to have the same response. Their assessment can also be the claims of a well-intentioned person that does not know any better. Let us consider several options as why I could become overly reactive to this example. First, I may truly believe that I am incompetent because I was told many years ago that God had not called me into the ministry. Second, I could feel incompetent because I am not fully trained to be in a pastoral position. Third, I might be fully trained, but I lack confidence in my speech. Fourth, I could be very sure of my speech and training, but I feel insecure about my leadership abilities because a previous church went through a painful division while I was their pastor, etc. The possibilities are endless.

It is not always possible to determine the different types of circumstances that can produce fear on a particular person. Therefore, people should not try to overcome their fears without first identifying their source. Rather, they should identify their reactive responses first, and then as they find a way to associate the fears to past experiences, they can find a more proactive response to their fears. A person does not have to stop being fearful of wild animals to live a healthy life. On the contrary, the fear of wild animals could be a very healthy approach to living. For instance, I suggest that being afraid of poisonous snakes is a healthy fear.

Eventually, people need to get to the point where they can make an association between their reactive behaviors and their spiritual injuries. When we can find a direct correlation between our

Bishop Luis R. Scott

defensiveness and a possible painful event in our past, we could begin the process to replace the lie created by the injury with the truth that I was created in God's image. Anything that distracts or corrupts God's image in us is a deceptive lie that must be uprooted.

The apostle Paul encouraged the Roman believers to "be transformed by the renewing of their minds" (Rom. 12:2). The mind needs to be transformed from the rebellious thinking against God, which is the result of our sinful condition that confines us to a temporal and fleshly thinking, to a new perspective in which we begin to think from an eternal and spiritual perspective. Paul desired that we develop a transformed mind. In order to make that possible, we need to renew our minds. And the only spiritual way to renew the mind is to recognize the lies we have believed all our lives and replaced them with the truth of God's word. In other words, there is only one way to uproot the lies that have enslaved us, and that is with the truth of God. Allow me to share a transformational principle: The only way to transform a mind is to replace the lies we have come to believe as a result of past irreconcilable contradictions with the truth of God's word about God and about the human condition.

The presence of blind spots is an indication that the spiritual injury has reached its final stage. It is necessary to state here that there is no set timeline to go from the catastrophic event to the blind spots. For some people, the movement could be very quickly. For others, it could take years before the symptoms that identify the presence of a blind spot become clear. But one thing is certain, the catastrophic event's final stage is the blind spot. Once a blind spot has been developed, it's there to stay. It's like the blind spot in a car, it's not going anywhere. The good news is that while, like in a car, the blind spots cannot be eliminated, they can be neutralized.

Blind spots do not produce pain or feelings of any kind. They are cognitive gaps in a person's ability to perceive the world around them. They block the person from preventing instinctive reactions to particular events. As soon as we become aware that certain attitudes and actions produce the same response, we can begin the process of accepting that a blind spot is present. Unless people are aware of the types of situations that make them reactive or defensive, they are susceptible to manipulation by people that know how to "push their buttons." Blind spots are similar to a sore on the skin that does not

hurt but which makes us defensive and reactive to any suspicion that the sore might be touched.

Obviously, the sore on the skin is not hidden, while the blind spot cannot be seen until the individuals have connected their reactivity and defensiveness to a specific spiritual injury. Whenever a situation brings back memories of the pain caused by a spiritual injury, there is going to be an instinctive reaction. Even when people are unaware of the emotional connection between their blind spots and their spiritual injuries, their reactivity should be taken as a signpost that the connection exists. The recognition of the instinctive behavior helps people to accept the presence of a blind spot, which in turn helps them accept their brokenness.

Accepting that our hearts have been broken is a non-negotiable aspect of the healing process. I know many people would like to present a front of absolute strength and health. This attitude is counterproductive, especially if the person is already engaged in self-destructive behaviors. Our desire is to move people from injury to health before they hit rock bottom. However, if they have hit rock bottom, then, this book is essential to escape the trap. When an event or situation, unrelated to the original trauma, awakens memories of the contradiction, this allows people to make the connection between their reactivity and their injury much faster. This realization could facilitate the discussion that will expose the blind spot. This is the essential step in becoming proactive to neutralize the blind spot.

Allow me to share another personal example. There was a time in which whenever I would go to a restaurant, I would become quite agitated if the waitress did not attend us in a timely manner. My agitation could turn into anger if people whom I knew arrived after us were served before us. I know many people have similar reactions, but I had to find out why this situation could create that much anxiety and anger in me. After a few incidents, it became clear that my behavior was irrational because, in the scheme of things, being served five or ten minutes late was an insignificant event.

Eventually, I was able to accept the possibility that I had an irreconcilable contradiction traceable to my abandonment as a child. My father left when I was two, and my mother left when I was four. I never blamed them for their decisions. They were young and

Bishop Luis R. Scott

inexperienced. They made the best decision they could with their circumstances. As an adult, I have maintained a very cordial and friendly relationship with both of them. However, the fact that I never blamed them does not negate the possibility that growing up without my biological parents may have become an irreconcilable contradiction that turned into the spiritual injury of abandonment. This injury eventually turned into the blind spot that associates a perceived neglect of service by a waitress to my parents' abandonment. As a direct result of my parents' abandonment in childhood, I experience most events through the abandonment filter. Generally, I do not experience many other situations that produce the same type of reactivity in my heart. This fact allowed me to pinpoint the source to the abandonment I felt growing up.

Recognizing my behavior was not difficult. The difficult part was making a connection to a spiritual injury I did not even know existed. I knew I could become uncomfortable and reactive when the waitress was not prompt. I also knew I did not like my negative reactions, but they always appeared to catch me off guard. Something had to change. Since I was not fully aware of the intensity of my own reactions, there was not much I could do to change them. My overreactions to the *restaurant neglect syndrome* (not a real illness) went on for years until a friend pointed out the incongruence between the behavior and my character. This is the nature of blind spots. They produce instinctive, and on occasion violent, reactions to otherwise insignificant events. The goal is to become aware of our reactions to become proactive against the reactivity caused by the blind spots. Let me talk a little about physical blindness as a metaphor for the spiritual blind spots.

The apostle John wrote extensively about both types of blindness. John spoke about darkness, night, blindness, lack of understanding, and unbelief as forms of spiritual blindness. I suggest to you that he was not merely describing people's feelings and choices. I believe the biblical discussion about blindness is a reference to a hardening of people's hearts to the point that they are unable or unwilling to believe God's revealed truth, especially in the person of Jesus Christ. Spiritual blindness is a deep-seated condition of the heart that prevents people to come to a full knowledge of God.

Created as Spiritual Beings

As we have already discussed that the term spiritual injury assumes that we are more than just flesh and bones. Our spirituality is the expression of God's invisible image within us. It is clearly different from our physical experience of life. Human life is incomprehensible without an understanding of how God's personality traits define us, specifically, in relationship to God's character. Most people are aware of their dual formation; they are physical creatures with a spiritual component. However, most people do not grasp fully the significance of the spiritual aspect that manages their emotions, their ability to process information, and their knowledge of good and evil. Some have argued that true science (here you can read: atheistic or Darwinian evolution) requires that we discard anything spiritual.

The proponents of this atheistic science live with an inherent hypocrisy.¹ Barash defined their hypocrisy this way. These scientists believe in absolute biological determinism, but they live as "if freewill reign supreme."² Their rejection of moral freedom is the rejection of the very thing that allows them to make their arguments. But, they must reject moral freedom because this is a distinctively Christian concept, and Christianity is the very thing they want to destroy. This attitude is the most persistent and rigid blind spot for postmodern society. They simply don't have solutions to the broken heart because they reject the very idea that people may even have a spiritual soul. These people hold these ideas even though addictions are everywhere in society. This is the reason that, an honest atheist like Barash, recognizes the hypocrisy of the scientific community.

Therefore, the deniers of our spiritual character qualities don't even realize they are also rejecting our very consciousness of the world around us. Our consciousness cannot be explained with atoms and molecules. It is a component of our existence that resides in a different realm from matter and the physical world. We are aware of our existence as well as the existence of the other. If our lives were defined through simple biological processes, we would not have any feelings associated with non-material character traits. But that is not the case.

¹ Barash.

² Ibid.

For example, some of our non-physical qualities that define, and that are intrinsic to our humanity include, guilt, shame, the need to take responsibility for our actions, and a sense of accountability to others and to God. These are undeniable aspects of the human experience that cannot be explained through our senses. But they are as real to us as our own skin. This is the reason I say that we need to come to terms with the spiritual aspect of our human existence. If we want to build a bridge that allows people to cross from their addictions and dysfunctional self-destructive behaviors to spiritual health, we must recognize our own spirituality. If we accept the concept that we are spiritual beings, as we have discussed, then, we can proceed to discuss how we struggle with the irreconcilable contradictions created by spiritual injuries. Let us take a look at Jesus's teaching about spiritual blindness through the healing of the man born blind.

Healing Blind Hearts

In the book of John, we find one of the most powerful stories in the Bible. Jesus met a man that had been born blind (Jn. 9:1-41). The religious tradition of the time would judge the blind man's condition solely from a legalistic perspective. They understood the man's blindness as a direct consequence of sin. It was not a surprise that the disciples had assumed some sin in the man's life when they asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn. 9:2). Jesus answered that neither, the man nor his parents had sinned. Jesus, then, healed the man and sent him home with sight.

Jesus's answer did not fit the conventional wisdom of the day. Do not miss his point here. Jesus had not merely healed the blind man. Since the man was born blind, Jesus had to recreate the entire optic system in the man's eyes, and he had to open the brain's ability to read light as it entered through the now restored vision for the first time in his life. Jesus said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23) Jesus's message is quite compelling. If people only have partial visions their whole existence is in darkness, but imagine the deep their blindness

would be, if their spiritual life did not even have the partial light of a bad eye.

The real controversy began after Jesus had performed the miracle and the people recognized that the blind man had received his sight. The Pharisees started an investigation of the event, but not because they were unaware of the claims. They needed to discredit the miracle to refute Jesus's authority. They could not allow people to believe that the Messiah was among them.

Jesus took the opportunity of this controversy to interject the teaching on the dangers of spiritual blindness. The real issue here was that the religious leaders had designed a worldview that excluded faith in God's promised Messiah as a suffering servant. As a result, they had developed spiritual blind spots that prevented them from recognizing Jesus as God's Son. Their worldview was an internal contradiction between what they believed to be true (the Messiah has not come) and what was actually true (the Messiah was among them in the person of Jesus). As we have already discussed, blind spots are the result of spiritual injuries that make the person instinctively reactive and defensive against anything that threatens their established reality.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day had a blind spot that had shut off the reality of the spiritual world in which God resides as an explanation for their religious existence. John declared that Jesus was the Light of the world (Jn. 1:4-9). Jesus's assumption was that anyone with healthy spiritual eyes should have been able to see him for who he was. The purpose of the Light was to bring illumination into the darkness of men's hearts. There is one condition. The spiritual optic nerve must be in working order. The deepest darkness belongs to the man who, in his own righteousness and pride, rejects the light (the truth) entering in his soul.

Jesus, as the Light of God's Word, came to restore the sight for men and women. This was Jesus's point about the man born blind. We are blind to the things of the Spirit by virtue of our sinful condition—just as the man born blind had suffered the ravages of sin on his physical body. And just like the man born blind, we need Jesus's intervention to have our spiritual sight restored.

Darkness, as a condition, is not exclusive to the lost. Many saved people have areas in their lives that are darkened by sin or by brokenness. This is not to say that they are not saved or that they are outside fellowship with God. These dark areas (blind spots) require illumination. This is the case of people having the ability to see but having “a log” blocking the light (Matt. 7:4). People must remove the obstacle so that they can assimilate Jesus’s light. These dark pockets are spiritually or emotionally sensitive areas in the soul that prevent others from having access to them. Some people even try to keep God out. This is not to say that God does not know how these dark areas affect a person. On the contrary, we know that God knows, but we are still unable to overcome the darkness (guilt and shame) to face God. We keep our fears hidden inside hoping that no one, including God, will notice. This is self-deceptive and wishful thinking.

Our desire to hide from God was inherited from Adam and Eve. Sin became their blind spot and our inheritance. Their response to their shame lingers to this day. We have convinced ourselves that not even God should have access to our shame. As far as we are concerned, God has become too intrusive. The contrast between human sin and God’s holiness is an obstacle that makes it difficult for us to understand God as good, caring, and gracious. This is one of the reasons many people reject God today. How can a good God, they ask, allow so much suffering in the world? Many people perceive him as judgmental, ruthless, and uncaring. So, we ask the question, does God really care about our suffering? All of us have secrets, and we do not want anyone to know them, including God. Those secrets are not to be shared. They hurt too much. In the process of hiding our shame, we condemn ourselves to endless suffering and pain behind the shadows. We have not discovered that our hiddenness strengthens the sins that caused the shame and the broken fellowship with God.

The Pharisees were the spiritual guides of Jesus’s day, but they had been blinded by their pride. They lacked the necessary spiritual insight to recognize Jesus’s light. If anyone should have been able to recognize God’s message, it should have been the Pharisees. The opposite was true. Their religion, the instrument that should have been their salvation, had created the darkened areas in their souls. Their spiritual optic nerve (the possibility of faith) was damaged. The Pharisees were unable to recognize God’s message being preached by

and through Jesus. The blind spot created by their religious legalism would not allow them to believe.

The Pharisees' blindness to spiritual truth was the result of a prideful devotion to the Law. They had reinterpreted God's truth to look more like their own cultural preferences. This is the reason Paul asserted that the Law is spiritual, and it was given with the purpose to guide the conscience. However, the religious leaders had reinterpreted the Law mostly as a set of rules to regulate conduct. This contradiction became a spiritual injury for the Pharisees, which eventually became their blind spot. When Jesus came, they could not see him because his behavior did not conform to their interpretation of the Law.

The Law did not provide a way out of the sinful condition. As a result of that failure of the Law, the Pharisees projected their spiritual contradiction onto the people. They misunderstood and misapplied the Law, and the people were paying for their blindness. This is the reason Jesus said: "If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the pit" (Matt. 15:14). Additionally, Jesus made the following clarifications about the Law (Matt. 5:17-48). He used the phrase "you have heard...but I tell you" six times in this passage. The Pharisees had misunderstood the Law as a series of *do's and don'ts*. Jesus, on the other hand, understood the Law, both as a guide to discern people's motives and as God's prescription for godly living. The Pharisees' pride prevented them from examining their own attitudes and motives. They were convinced they had the truth, but they were the blind guiding the blind.

As stated earlier, blind spots make people susceptible to believe in lies, or to hide from the truth. If they knew that only the truth can overcome lies, they could have seen the light that Jesus brought to the world. The lies could be philosophical, political, relational, or historical. Jesus's presence represented a contradiction for them because he brought the truth with him. For the rest of Jesus's ministry, the Pharisees were mostly preoccupied with judging his behavior to discredit his message. For them to accept Jesus's message would have been to acknowledge that they had believed lies.

The healing of the man born blind was the climax of the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees. This event was even

more critical than the raising of Lazarus. It was in this chapter that Jesus exposed the religious leaders as the blind guiding of the blind. They had instinctive and predictable negative reactions to spiritual truth. Jesus knew of their blindness and exposed them at every term, but they refused to change. Their reactions were predictable because they behaved like men living in darkness. This is the reason Jesus said to them: “If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did” (Jn. 8:39-40). In other words, they believed the lies the devil was propagating instead of the truth Jesus was teaching them.

The religious leaders were sure that they were following the Law of Moses. Listen to their words. “Then they hurled insults at him and said, ‘You are this fellow’s disciple!’ We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from” (Jn. 9:28-29). They had forgotten that it was not Moses’s Law. It was God’s Law. They were totally committed to the Law and to Moses, but as a result of their blind commitment they had failed to see that Moses had spoken about the Christ.

Physically blind people do not have to be told they are blind. They are fully aware of their condition. The same is not true for spiritually blinded people. The spiritually blind are not aware of their blindness, or of the causes for their blindness. They have come to believe that the world is in reality exactly as they experience it. Spiritually blinded people see the rest of the world as being wrong for not believing as they do. As stated earlier, there is one remedy for spiritual blindness—they need an encounter with an objective truth outside of themselves. Only God can provide this objective truth. As long as spiritually blinded people believe that they possess the truth independently of God, they will remain blind. John, in his customary masterful way, used physical language to describe this spiritual truth. When the Pharisees asked the question, “Are we blind too?” Jesus replied: “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (Jn. 9:40-41).

Jesus’s point was that blind people know they are blind and are willing to accept that fact without much argument. But spiritually blind people refuse to accept the error of their ways, even at the

expense of the truth. The spiritually blind can see by accepting the light of the truth. But when the spiritually blind reject the truth, their sin (their blindness) will remain. That's the point of spiritual blindness—men refuse to accept God's truth. It is not that they cannot accept the truth. It is that they refuse to accept it. Jesus stated that God had tried to bring Jerusalem to repentance, but they "were not willing" (Lk. 13:34).

There are two basic reasons people are not willing to accept the truth. First, pride blinds people to their own needs. The proud person has difficulties accepting their sins, their errors, and their need to change their ways. The second reason is love for the world. Jesus stated that people reject the light because they love darkness more than the light.

There are three other types of spiritual blindness mentioned in Scripture. First is the spiritual blindness produced by an unyielding legalistic belief system. Legalistic systems are very rigid regarding external practices. The most important aspect of religious legalism is conformity to codes of conduct. People participating in legalistic systems develop a spirit of superiority. They feel better than others because they are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to live according to the dictates of their moral codes. These systems have two fundamental flaws: they have the tendency to claim exclusive access to the truth, and they have the need to eliminate competition from the arena of ideas. Legalistic belief systems produce a self-centered pride that necessarily looks at those outside the system as inferior, or as being downright evil.

When these types of systems are in full force, they become too hardened to be useful. This was the blindness that afflicted the Pharisees—they could not connect with the people while claiming to be their guides. The religious leaders of Jesus's day were committed to the Law and their spiritual optic nerve was damaged by their reluctance to receive new information. The Pharisees did not want to hear anything that may have shed light on their spiritual condition. After all, they had dedicated their entire lives to upholding the Law as they understood it—it was too late for them to change. The light of God's Word could not penetrate a damaged spiritual optic nerve. They had all the information they needed, but they chose not to act upon it.

Then, we have the blindness produced by lack of information. This is the person who does not see, but it is not because any damage to the spiritual optic nerve. Rather, this person cannot see because they do not know what they are looking for. They are ready to respond to the truth, but the truth has not reached them yet. Once the light (truth) shines on them, people in this category have no problem accepting its blessings. Their spiritual optic nerve has not been hardened with an unyielding belief system, and they are open to receive new revelation.

For example, the man that was born blind was available and open to receive new information, but he had not been properly instructed. Soon after he had received his sight, Jesus revealed himself to the man, and he “worshiped [Jesus]” (Jn. 9:38). He was ready and available to believe and worship, which is the basic understanding of receiving spiritual sight. The prophet declared: “My people perish for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). This phrase has at least two possible meanings: (1) people have not received knowledge or (2) people have refused to act upon the knowledge they already have. Regardless of the reasons for our lack of knowledge, the result is the same; people perish without it.

The third form of spiritual blindness is the one created by spiritual injuries. Negative experiences can prevent us from recognizing some aspects of God’s truths. In these cases, people do not suffer from the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, or of the neo-atheist. Often people in this category are believers that have difficulties grasping the fullness of God’s grace. For example, Solomon, who was the wisest man that ever lived, had this type of spiritual blindness. He spoke extensively and eloquently about the dangers of multiple marital entanglements. And yet he almost never lived according to his own advice by keeping more than one thousand women in his household. How can the wisest man that ever lived be so susceptible to making the exact mistake he warned others against?

I suggest to you that Solomon had suffered a spiritual injury that turned into a blind spot in relationships. At some point in his life, he must have found out that his mother Bathsheba had an affair with his father David. He also must have found out that David had his mother’s husband killed. These must have been a shameful series of events for Solomon. Imagine Solomon as a young man living in the

king's palace listening to the whispers behind the curtains about David and his mother. This is the kind of story that leaves permanent spiritual marks in a person. While the Bible does not specifically identify this type of spiritual blindness, there are multiple examples contained in Scripture that can only be explained from the perspective of a spiritual injury.

Spiritual blindness is the condition that prevents people from appreciating the spiritual dimension of the world around them. In matters of salvation, spiritual blindness mostly refers to unbelievers. However, Christians can also experience the spiritual blindness the Bible identifies as immaturity. Being an immature Christian means that believers have not attained the necessary wisdom to comprehend and apply eternal truths to their daily living. They believe the truth as revealed in Scripture, but they are not able to grasp the full meaning of how the truth applies practically to their lives. Their inability to grasp eternal truths translates into a worldly mindset for the Christian, mostly because immature Christians continue explaining their relationship with God from a worldly perspective.

The church has the task of helping the new Christian move past this stage of their spiritual development through an intentional discipleship process. This problem is so prevalent that, according to Paul, unbelievers and baby Christians are indistinguishable in their conduct. The difference lies in that the baby Christian has embarked in the journey to “be conformed to the image of Christ” while the unbeliever remains unredeemed by refusing to accept the truth of God’s revelation in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1-4; Rom. 8:29).

A blind spot is different from other forms of blindness in that it is limited in scope. Spiritual blindness leads to eternal death as a result of unbelief. Blind spots, on the other hand, are dangerous and could also be deadly. They block a limited area of the individuals’ spiritual awareness, but they do not lead to eternal death. Blind spots are common even for the saved person. Their common occurrence is due to their connection to spiritual injuries, which are a routine aspect of the human experience. However, since individuals have different coping skills, the resulting blind spot does not have the same effect on everyone. The Church could play a major role for Christians to overcome the compulsive nature of blind spots through the exercise of spiritual disciplines, which include truth telling and transparency.

Through a discipleship process based on God's character that leads to a deeper insight into who we are, the Christian grows in the knowledge of God's eternal truths. This is the maturing process that every Christian embarks upon receiving Christ as Savior.

The Nature of Blindness

Physical blindness occurs when the *optic nerve* is either damaged or paralyzed, preventing light from entering into the brain.³ Without light entering the brain, there is no information for the brain to process to make sense of the external world. Without light, we cannot appreciate the world around us.

Conversely, spiritual blindness occurs when the *spiritual optic nerve* does not allow the light of God's Word to enter a man's heart. The Bible uses the phrase that Pharaoh "hardened his heart" as a metaphor for spiritual blindness (Ex. 7:13). Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church included the phrase that, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you" (Eph. 1:18). Paul understood that without the light of God's Word we would lack an essential element to replace the lies we have believed all our lives with the truth of God's character. Paul's message was that we need to encourage people to become receptive to the proclamation of the truth of the gospel message. To see the truth, we need the Creator's perspective.

The Nature of Blind Spots

A car's blind spot, as I mentioned earlier, is an area on the vehicle that is not visible to the driver. The rearview mirrors are not enough to overcome a vehicle's blind spots. The fact that drivers may not be aware of the blind areas around their cars does not negate their existence. Drivers can overcome their vehicles' blind spots when they know where they are and can take preventive action to neutralize their danger. Inexperienced drivers, on the highway for the first time, may not be aware of the blind spots on both sides of their vehicles. Their inability to see approaching vehicles on their right or left sides does

³ NOTE: I am using the phrase optic nerve as a metaphor and not as a medical or scientific term.

not protect them from a possible accident. The driver does not want to have an accident. However, if drivers do not know how to neutralize their cars' blind spots, they are closer to an accident than they are aware. If the driver changes lanes without recognizing the presence of the blind spots, he could drift into incoming traffic unintentionally. Their move to the right or left lane was innocent enough, but since inexperienced drivers might be ignorant regarding their cars' blind spots, they may not have known their own car was hiding upcoming traffic from view.

These drivers could make all kinds of excuses to the police for the reasons they got into the accident. "I did not see the car." "I did not intend to get in an accident." "This is my father's car." "This is my first time on the highway." The excuses do not matter. The blind spots do not care about your feelings. A blind spot just is. People either know they are there and address them, as best they can, or they will drift into reoccurring accidents. Every driver should know that cars have blind spots and should take precautionary measures accordingly. As we have already seen, blind spots are not limited to cars. Every person on this planet has them, even if most people are not aware of their existence. And yet blind spots are as real as our ability to think or breathe.

Bill McCartney once wrote, "Some of us just don't want to see certain things."⁴ This was the problem with the Pharisees during Jesus's time. They could not bring themselves to believe that their Messiah had come, and nobody had told them. The contradiction between their self-importance (what they believed about themselves) and the fact that they were not informed about the coming Messiah (the reality around them) had blinded them to Jesus. They were accustomed to leading every religious event. But the Messiah had come, and nobody informed them of his appearing. Allow me to share three attitudes regarding blind spots.

The first attitude people refuse to accept is the possibility they may, in fact, have a blind spot. Isaiah described the Pharisees' attitude when he said: "Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf" (Isa. 43:8). The blindness of the religious leaders of

⁴ Bill McCartney. *Blind Spots: What You Don't See Might be Keeping Your Church From Greatness*. (Promise Keepers, 2003), p. 9

Jesus's time was greater than the blindness of the man born blind. At least the man born blind was able to recognize Jesus as soon as he saw him, while the Pharisees could not see him even after he had performed many miracles among them. The man born blind received physical as well as spiritual sight.

In contrast, the religious leaders, who claimed to see, suffered the worst kind of blindness—a blindness of the spirit that kept them ignorant of God's true revelation in Christ. Healing a blind man is not a big deal to God. After all, he created the eye. But opening the spiritual eyes of a person is a much more complicated transaction. God has chosen not to violate our moral freedom even if it means that we will continue to walk in darkness. God's light shines, but "men love darkness more than the light because their deeds were evil" (Jn. 3:19). God pleads with us to let his light in, but God's light cannot be effective in sinners' souls until they choose to accept it.

The Pharisees asked Jesus the following question. "What? Are we blind too?" (Jn. 9:40) The question did not need an answer because the answer was implied with the question. Yes, you are blind. If they were not blind, they would have been able to recognize Jesus. The Pharisees sat at Moses's seat, but could not recognize the One Moses spoke about. Jesus's answer was brilliant. He said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains" (Jn. 9:41). Jesus described the Pharisees' blindness as a willful and stubborn decision to refuse to see what should have been readily apparent to them. The Pharisees' ignorance and self-deception were exposed when Jesus gave sight to the blind man. They could also have received God's light through Jesus if they had acknowledged who he was. But instead they claimed to see (to have understanding), and their confession was their judgment. If they were truly ignorant, Jesus may have considered them innocent. In the same way that Jesus offered forgiveness to the blind man, the Pharisees could have asked and received the same forgiveness.

Jesus would have extended his grace to the Pharisees, as he did to many of them individually, but their pride did not allow them to accept Jesus's testimony. Instead of moving to faith after Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, they moved to blasphemy. The Pharisees represent the person that refuses to come to grips with his

own personal blindness (prejudices). They simply refused to see. Or said in another way, the Pharisees are the kind of people who know their cars have blind spots that can cause an accident but refuse to take action. They were blind guides of the blind (or, they were the ignorant guiding the ignorant). Their pride and stubbornness drove them and their followers into the pit.

The second attitude is feeling powerless to make the necessary adjustments. The apostle Paul described the sinful condition as an enemy living within us. His desire was to do what was right, but there was a power inside him that pushed him to sin (Rom. 7). He was blinded by his sinful desires. The flesh would cause him to stumble when he least expected it. Paul understood the power the flesh had over him. But in spite of the fact that he recognized the sinfulness within, he lacked the power to overcome its influence on his own. He needed the Holy Spirit action in his life. This is not to say the apostle was making excuses for evil behavior. On the contrary, Paul was committed to doing God's will, but he could not escape the contradiction in his spirit between his desire to do good and his temptation to sin. This is how he describes his struggle:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it (Rom. 7:14-20).

Paul's point is that our sinful condition is responsible for our instinctive impulses to sinful attitudes and behaviors. The sinful nature is a metaphor to describe our innate bent towards rebellion against God. This bent toward evil is so ingrained in our subconscious that we are not even aware when the flesh is controlling our thinking. In other words, our sinful nature itself is a blind spot that prevents us from living a life pleasing to God. We really cannot help ourselves unless we surrender to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. We were

Bishop Luis R. Scott

created to be good, but sin reprogrammed us to do evil. A blind spot created by a spiritual injury has the same effect in our souls as the sinful condition—they function like vacuums in our consciences that prevent us from realizing our own instinctive reactivity and defensiveness to people and events.

The third attitude is that people are not even aware they have blind spots. This is the most prevalent and dangerous attitude because people go from temptation to temptation without realizing the conditions that make them vulnerable. The suggestion that people are not aware of their own blind spots is not an exaggeration. Some of these blind spots are the result of superficial injuries and thus, they do not have crippling effects on our relationships. That is, while blind spots created by superficial injuries may have contributed to shaping our character they have not made us instinctively reactive to circumstances.

However, the blind spots created by a catastrophic spiritual injury have a controlling effect in people's ability to interact with their environment. The instinctive reactivity is the normal response to anything that may remind people of the original spiritual injury. This is the reason we want to focus our attention in the process to identify blind spots. If we are able to identify the reactivity or defensiveness, then we have an opportunity to identify the catastrophic spiritual injury. This process is essential to develop proactive responses to the "knowledge vacuum" we have called blind spots.

Over the next few paragraphs I will share the three emotional symptoms people exhibit that indicate the presence of a blind spot, which in turn means that a spiritual injury has occurred.

Identifying Blind Spots

Most people do not have difficulties recognizing critical events in their lives. People can remember when they were lost in the woods as teenagers and a feeling of panic that overtook them, or when they broke a leg falling from a horse, etc. The problem most people have is identifying whether a particular event left a permanent spiritual scar (a mark) in their character.

Allow me to illustrate. Growing up in Puerto Rico, during the summers we would go to the rivers to swim. We would spend hours playing, jumping from rocks into the rivers, and swimming. I was not an expert swimmer, but I held my own. I remember one particular day when we were playing a game and two friends were holding my legs up in the water. For a while, I was able to keep myself afloat by balancing myself with my arms, but as the game continued, my arms became tired. Twice I went under water. My friends thought this was funny, but I began to feel a sense of panic and started kicking as hard as I could to get myself free. Finally, they released me, and I swam to the side of the river. I was relieved, but I was also very frustrated and angry.

That event is still very vivid in my memory. I have never had any problems going to swimming pools, rivers, or the beach. I can still swim without any particular fears. For years, I could not identify any visible or hidden issues associated with that particular event. Then I became a father. One day we took the children to the pool for a day of fun, and while the children were jumping in the water and having fun, I found myself on the side of the pool in a near state of panic. I could not get in the water because I wanted to be able to respond just in case one of the kids got in trouble. All of a sudden, I realized that my panic at seeing my children around the water was directly connected to my experience as a thirteen-year-old in a small river in Puerto Rico.

This is the problem that most people face. They, like me, can identify the traumatic events in their lives. However, most people cannot connect the dots of present behavior to a particular event in the past. This is what we know: every event or experience has a cumulative effect in our character. We become what we have experienced throughout our lives. Therefore, if we are going to know whether an event has turned into a spiritual injury, we need to identify the behaviors and reactions that point people back to the original event.

First: Instinctive Reactivity

Spiritual injuries produce erratic relationships because of the damage they do to the intimacy mechanism. A damaged intimacy

mechanism manifests itself mostly in the form of false shame. False shame is not merely negative feelings. When false shame is the result of a spiritual injury that damages the intimacy mechanism, it becomes an instinctive expression of the self. People feel real shame for personal sins, potentially leading to repentance and wholeness. False shame never produces sincere repentance and reconciliation, because it is the result of the internalization of the behavior of the perpetrator. Shame is internalized when injured individuals blame themselves for their victimization. An example of this could be when children suffer from sexual abuse. If the abuser is successful in passing the blame to them, the victims have the tendency to assume responsibility for their victimization. This vicious manipulation shifts the shame from the victimizer to the victim. An example of this false shame is the Stockholm Syndrome.

The Stockholm Syndrome is the psychological term that defines the cases in which the victim assumes the shame of the victimizer. The Stockholm Syndrome describes the behavior of kidnap victims who, over time, become sympathetic to their captors. The name derives from a 1973 hostage incident in Stockholm, Sweden.⁵ At the end of six days of captivity in a bank, several kidnap victims actually resisted rescue attempts, and afterwards refused to testify against their captors. When the victim of abuse internalizes the victimizer's shame, they have developed a false sense of shame.

False shame traps individuals into believing they have the need to repent for their role in the event that caused their injury. In order for people to overcome their shame, they must be able to identify the violence of their perpetrators. However, once people have identified with the perpetrator's violence, overcoming their false shame is a very difficult task indeed. People cannot repent or reconcile based on someone else's actions. This would be analogous to asking a victim of rape to repent for her role in the rape. This request would victimize the woman twice. First, she was the victim of the rape. Then, she is victimized by the demand to repent for a sin she did not commit. The rape victim, like the individual who was abused as a child, has not done anything for which to repent.

⁵ Stockholm Syndrome.

Second: Impulsive Negativity

A reaction is a negative emotional response to a person or a situation that creates discomfort or fear. These negative reactions tend to be instinctive in nature. They suggest a subconscious need to avoid an unidentified spiritual contradiction. On occasions people know why they are having these reactions, but they cannot stop themselves. Until people become fully aware of the events or people that trigger their reactions, they will struggle with their negative reactivity.

The goal is to become aware of how the original brokenness can condition people's perception of the reality around them. When people come to terms with the spiritual injury that altered their character, they can plan a proactive response to the situations that resemble their spiritual injury. This would allow the person to turn his defensiveness into a healthier proactive response to situations and people. As we have already discussed, most people can identify the injury responsible for their pain. The problem is in making the connection between the spiritual injury and its corresponding blind spot. This is the area in which the instinctive reactivity plays its biggest role. When people have reactive reactions, chances are, they know the event that produces these reactions.

Thus, in spite of the difficulty people have in making the connection between the source of their pain and their blind spots, I suggest we can begin with making the connection between our reactivity to people and events and the present cause that provoked it. It is important to note that these negative reactions are defense mechanisms to elude the discomfort caused by the original spiritual injury as the person experience it in the present events. I have discovered that any situation, or words, that may bring back the memory of the original injury produces these unconscious reactions and these reactions are indicators of the presence of a blind spot, which in turn is the result of the irreconcilable contradiction that was produced by a traumatic event.

These reactions are instinctive because people do not have to *think* about them before responding. In many instances, people are not able to override or prevent these reactions because by the time they realize what is happening they have already taken the action. One of the dangers of our reactions is that we are not fully aware how they

impact other people. Probably all of us have heard sarcastic comments directed at us and before we had assimilated what the person was trying to say, we have responded with another sarcastic remark. This is the natural response to sarcasm in everyday conversations. Have you ever regretted a response because it might have gone over the top, or it may have created the wrong impression of what you were trying to say? Normally, regrets come after we have put our foot in our mouths, which is a daily occurrence for some people. These common interactions lead me to ask the question: what steps can we take to avoid this emotional roller coaster of impulsive reactivity?

We can summarize our reactivity to uncomfortable situations as instinctive, negative, unconscious, and with a defensive attitude. Allow me to suggest three practical approaches to manage our negative reactions.

First, people need to make a situation analysis after each reactive response. Whenever a situation leaves a bad taste in our mouths, we need to go back to the event and ask a series of questions: “What happened?” There are several things we need to know. What was said or done and what was my response? Who said it and how did I understand it? What was the context, and was I aware of the context and the intent of the statement or of the event? What was the tone of voice and why did it impact me in such a negative way? What triggered my reaction? Did I feel threatened or disrespected?

Whatever answer we come up with, the response needs to be expressed in feelings language. For example, instead of saying, “The waitress is an idiot”; I could say, “When the waitress did not serve me in a timely manner I felt disrespected.” The first response is a personal judgment against the waitress, who probably is not at fault. The second response is my reflection regarding an event that did not match my expectations for that situation. It is also a more appropriate response because instead of reacting to the perceived neglect from the waitress, I am reflecting on my own attitude. This is a more appropriate and fair statement regarding the situation because since I don’t have all the information that prevented the waitress from serving me in the appropriate term, it is an unfair accusation that the waitress is an idiot for something she did not control. Besides, I have no empirical evidence to the waitress’s intelligence level. For all I know, she could be the number one graduate of her college class. I

need to describe my inner turmoil and not what I perceive as the waitress's carelessness.

Generally speaking, the initial feeling describing the situation is not the bottom-line issue, especially if people's initial response is anger. Expressing our reactions from a feelings perspective gives us insight into what is going on in our subconscious. Using feelings to evaluate the event gives proper context to the problem at hand because our reactions were emotionally based. Thus, expressing our responses in feelings language better describes the emotional triggers that produced the reaction. Once people accept the emotional aspect of their reactivity, they would be better prepared to define their situation, which gives them greater insight into the effect of the spiritual injury.

Men will struggle in this area more than women, but not for the reasons most people think. Men are as able as women to express their feelings. However, men are more reluctant to do so because of a cultural bias that associates the expression of feelings with feminine qualities. Additionally, since men's starting point for relationships is logic, their first impulse is rarely expressed through feelings. That is, men can express their feelings, but only after they have seen the logic of the event.

Therefore, when dealing with men we have to allow more time for them to find the necessary composure to express the feelings honestly. Otherwise, some men would mimic expressing feelings without being fully transparent. Many men have to work through the perceived contradiction that feelings are signs of weakness before they can make a genuine feeling statement. In some instances, a subtle coaching might be necessary. Some men may express a strong reaction against making feelings statements because as a child they were told that boys could not cry or feel like girls. This lie has become seared into many men's sub-consciences and it has to be replaced with a more truthful statement about male feelings. Some men have actually stormed out of my office after making the statement that their feelings were irrelevant to the issue at hand.

Second, do not dismiss a friend's observations to your defensive reactions without first making a dispassionate evaluation of the validity of those observations. Many times, people get offended

Bishop Luis R. Scott

with a friend for pointing out their negative reactions or a defensive attitude over a situation. It is natural to be dismissive of a friend's comment in the heat of the moment. But after the emotions have cooled down and they are alone with their thoughts, they need to ask the question, "Why did Joe say I was defensive or reactive?" I will share two possible alternatives.

First, is that people need to be honest about evaluating their inner feelings. And they need to be honest with their own negative reaction to their friend's comments. Accepting input from our friends is essential if we are going to make healthy corrections to our reactivity. One problem still remains with this situation. When the trauma that caused the spiritual injury becomes a determining factor in our character, we may not be able to do the necessary self-assessment regarding our friend's input at the moment of the event. While a hidden blind spot could stop us from receiving feedback from a friend, we need to work diligently to identify the blind spots before they become a crippling handicap. Trusting a friend is a key aspect to overcome our fears because a friend can describe our reaction in a non-judgmental way. Additionally, we also need to have the courage to accept the truthfulness of his words.

Another suggestion is that people need to make adjustment to the expectations they bring to their daily interactions. Let me provide a simple definition. *Expectations are personal standards acquired over years of experiences that we project onto other people.* All of us have developed personal standards we abide by. These standards, while not always kept perfectly, give us confidence to respond to circumstances and people. There is one key element that could help us prevent projecting our standards onto others. We have to recognize that our personal standards are based on our personal experiences, developed over the course of years, and that others have not shared those experiences with us.

Our home environment and our cultural experiences shaped our understanding of how the world functions. Even someone who grew up in the same neighborhood, or even in the same household, does not share the same experiences. There is at least one reason for this. Two people in the same context cannot respond to a shared event with the same emotional intensity. Personal experiences are unique to each individual because people are different. This is the reason that

personal experiences have limited value as tools to establish societal or spiritual principles, and they should be understood as such.

For example: growing up I had a difficult time understanding God as a Father because my earthly father left us when I was about three-years-old. Our grandmother, who was a faithful Christian, introduced us to a father figure that served as a spiritual guide for me. He was the pastor of the church I grew up in. She also gave us the gift of faith through the example of a gentle pastor who played the father role for us. While I was able later in life to identify with God as a Father, as a teenager I was not able to relate with God as a Father. The image I used to relate to God was that of a Friend. It wasn't until I became a father myself that I was able to fully grasp the significance of God's role as a Father.

Most people with whom we interact do not necessarily share our standards because they have not shared our experiences. Personal and cultural standards are often intertwined, and on many occasions, they become indistinguishable. However, individuals within a society do not always conform to the accepted cultural expressions. For instance, the American culture places a high value on timeliness. This cultural standard is generally accepted as a good thing. But, does the fact that the American culture frowns on tardiness mean that Americans are never late? Of course not! The personal standard regarding timeliness is often not as strict as the cultural one.

I am not culturally American, but I like to arrive on time to appointments and events. This is my standard, and I adhere to it faithfully. I learned this in the United States Army since in Puerto Rico and in most Latin American countries timeliness is not a highly valued standard. I believe other people's time is as valuable as mine and I have to respect their time. But when my standard becomes an expectation of how other people should behave, I could feel anxious or angry if they fail to meet the expectation. My reasoning goes like this: I prefer that other people appreciate my time as being valuable. Everybody knows it is common sense to arrive at meetings on time (which of course is not true even if people thought it was common sense to be on time to meetings). Therefore, everybody should arrive to meetings on time.

The, so-called, common sense approach is not a standard that everybody shares. Who determines what common sense looks like? Sometimes common sense is not as common as some of us think. Many times, common sense is limited to an individual's perception of how things ought to be done.

Cultures can be identified by their shared values. It is those shared values that can be considered common sense within a particular context. However, individuals violate cultural customs all the time, and their reasons are more closely associated to their personal experiences than to their cultural influences. We need to be careful not to project our standards, developed as a result of our personal experiences, onto other people. When we avoid the emotional trap of projecting our standards onto others, we can curb our negative reactions to perceived failed expectations.

As stated earlier, expectations are personal standards applied to others. We have expectations of how other people should behave. These expectations are not always based on what we know about the person's character. They are normally based on our personal standard or simply a personal preference for these types of situations. Since standards are based on personal experience, it is not possible to expect that other people could meet our projection of the standard onto them. I will usually behave in ways that affirm as true what I have experienced as true in my life. An expectation demands that other people behave in the way I think they should behave. The problem is obvious. We cannot control how other people respond to situations because they have not shared all our life experiences.

Expectations have become so prevalent that some marriage counselors have designed sessions with the main goal of helping couples meet each other's expectations. The solution to this dilemma is readily apparent. Since in reality we cannot live up to other people's expectations, we should concentrate on living according to our standards without projecting them onto others. A wife cannot live according to a husband's expectations unless she knows his standard and vice versa. The ideal would be for husband and wife to share their preferences and then give their partners the freedom to find a way to meet the shared standard.

Iris and I were struggling with a couple of minor issues early on in our marriage. Iris could not, for the life of her, squeeze the paste tube from the bottom. And I could not push my dining table chair under the table after a meal. We were both frustrated with each other's behavior, but we could not figure out how to change the behavior or make the other change theirs. One day, I decided that since the tube paste was my issue, I would take the responsibility to fix the tube paste every day. After I made that choice, my frustrations ended, and I have not mentioned the issue to Iris again.

Iris made the same decision regarding my inability to push the chair under the table, and she has lived happier ever since. The teaching point is that we can only control what we control, and fortunately that does not include our mates, friends, and associates, etc. This discussion about expectations is important because blind spots are the result of personal experiences we don't share with other people, but they produce in us expectations from others. Since the blind spot is mine, there is no conceivable way that another person can meet my expectations. This failure results in my instinctive reactivity against other people and situations.

Blind spots block people's ability to recognize the feelings associated with the original spiritual injury. This fact makes it imperative to step back and make an objective analysis, not of the original feelings, but of any reactions that may appear to be out of touch with the current event. Our primary concern cannot be about other people's reactions to the situations, but ours. Explaining other people's reactions does not help us identify our blind spots. In the process to discover my blind spots, only my reactions are important. Additionally, we need to stay away from analyzing our reactions based on other people's behaviors, especially because their behaviors have nothing to do with my personal struggles. If we express any interest in other people's behavior it must be guided by a sincere commitment to contribute to their wellbeing. We can help others only when we illustrate their reactivity and compulsiveness without a judgmental or superior attitude. A positive attitude on our part can open the door for others to intervene with us in a positive and healthy way as well.

We can avoid many negative reactions to events by simply stopping the projection of our standards onto other people.

Bishop Luis R. Scott

Conversely, we can become more proactive in building relationships with others instead of waiting for negative actions to define our behavior. In the previous example about the issue of timeliness, we can share with our business associates our standard that we prefer to start our meetings in a timely manner. We can also tell them that we would appreciate a call if they fall behind schedule or are going to arrive late to accommodate their situation. With this approach, we let our associates know our standard for meetings, instead of trying to manipulate them into compliance. The healthier approach is to share our standards with others to encourage them to meet us halfway and not to force compliance with a standard they probably do not share with us. Failure to conform to a standard is more due to lack of understanding than to an act of rebellion.

Personal standards are rules people develop through personal life experiences that have limited application. As such, my personal standards can be applied to other people when they choose to accept the reasoning behind it. This is not to say that we cannot have common standards, or that anarchy must reign. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need objective standards in a civil society, and this includes the church.

The Bible provides objective principles by which we can measure our personal and social standards. Our personal standards differ from biblical principles in that the former are almost entirely based on family or cultural heritage. The latter are the result of divine revelation that takes place within a human context and are eternal in nature and scope. Revealed principles are inspired and take into account God's design for human nature. God, as the Creator of our nature, has exhaustive insight into our psychological make-up. Thus, a divinely revealed principle has inclusive application, i.e., they apply cross-culturally. Eternal principles do not differ from culture to culture in their day-to-day application. But cultural practices are exclusive to a culture and have limited application beyond that culture.

The biblical principle that men are “created in the image of God” means that every individual in every culture has God's imprint in their souls. This principle provides an objective standard by which we can judge people's dignity and worth—all of us have the same intrinsic worth before God. We are equally valuable, but we are not

the same. This is the reason that divine principles serve as parameters that guide all human standards. We need to know that human standards are not equivalent nor are as authoritative as God's principles.

Therefore, when I am applying an eternal principle my primary task is to ensure that my understanding of the principle is as faithful to God's character as I can possibly make it. This is a key aspect of this argument. We cannot identify blind spots unless we have objective standards outside ourselves to measure our personal struggles. In other words, unless we know that God is the One that defines human dignity, we cannot know how abhorrent child abuse is to God. Whenever a society or cultural group takes God (the Christian God) out of the equation, all kinds of abuses against human dignity ensue. Take for example Muslim societies. They approved of two things we find criminal and morally corrupt: (1) slavery and (2) forcing girls as young as six years old to marry grown men. If a child's dignity has been violated, the damage can only be assessed as such if it is evaluated against an eternal principle that conforms to God's character.

As long as my personal standards conform to God's eternal principles, I will avoid unnecessary spiritual contradictions that may turn into spiritual injuries. Since an expectation, as defined earlier, is the projection of a personal standard onto other people, we will always be disappointed by other people's failures to meet our standards. However, if instead of projecting our expectations onto others we share our standards with them, people will be more sympathetic to our perspective. The same is true when we are willing to listen to other people's standards.

Third: Emotional Hot Buttons

A young mother said that her eighteen-month-old daughter would do certain things just to aggravate her. The mother felt that her baby was pushing her hot buttons intentionally. I was present when the mother made the statement, and since I know the mother fairly well, I asked her: "Do you really believe that your eighteen-month-old daughter gets up in the morning with the express purpose to make your day miserable?" She started laughing. Of course, she did not

Bishop Luis R. Scott

believe that. But there was something within her that reacted to her daughter's behavior. It would have been a good exercise for her to find out her blind spot so that she would not be as reactive to her daughter. The obvious issue here is that children that young do not know that their mothers have emotional hot buttons they can push. How do they know that their behaviors produce a predictable reaction by pushing their mothers' hot buttons? What are these buttons, anyway?

These so-called emotional buttons are blind spots finding expression in the parent's reactions to the child's behavior. If people are able to push our buttons on a regular basis and we continue to react in predictable ways, chances are good that we have let people know that we have blind spots. The apostle Paul encouraged children to respect their parents and for parents not to provoke their children to anger or not embitter them (Col. 3:19-21). Paul's words can be applied to the emotional manipulation that can take place between children and parents. These relationships are healthier and happier when they are not spending their time trying to take advantage of each other.

Another common expression says, "You are getting on my nerves." This is a different phrase with the same connotation. It should become clear that when our buttons are pushed and we are running out of patience, then something must be afoot. Pay attention to how easy people push your hot buttons or how easy they can "get on your nerves." These are good indicators that your emotions are not properly balanced as a result of a highly emotional event that makes you susceptible to manipulation. Something is out of kilter.

Fourth: Persistent Temptations

Another indicator that people have developed blind spots is evident when they consistently fall for similar temptations in specific areas of their lives. Please allow me to give a brief definition of temptation for this context. Temptation is not limited to sinful behavior. A temptation is the desire to engage in behaviors that are clearly unhealthy, or the inability to avoid falling for the same craving. There are two basic attitudes about temptations. The first

attitude is from people that know when they are being tempted and make the conscious decision not to resist the temptation.

The second attitude about temptations is when people fail to recognize temptations for what they are—an enticement to violate God’s character. People with blind spots can experience the same temptation a thousand times, recognize its dangers, and are still unable to prevent the fall or the subsequent shame associated with their susceptibility to it. They can see the temptation coming but feel impotent to overcome it. In either case, the temptation becomes clear after the fall.

For example, a woman needs intimacy, but she has the tendency to enter relationships with abusive men, which are incapable to provide her with true emotional intimacy. Her desperate need for intimacy blinds her to the warning signs that she is about to connect with a man who has abusive tendencies. This means that her intimacy needs will remain unmet. She recognizes the man’s abusive tendencies, but she is convinced that she can change him or manage the abuse because she has done it before. However, after the initial emotional attachment wears off she feels shame for making the same mistake once again. In some of the more dysfunctional cases, she may actually believe the lie that “this is what God wants for me.”

Fifth: Inability to Complete Projects

A young man decided to join the United States Army. He was excited about his new life. Just before joining the army, he married his high school sweetheart so that she could follow him as soon as his basic training was over. His excitement came to a sudden end when, halfway into basic training, he quit. At the time of his decision, little did he know how this failure would become a spiritual injury that would mark him for life. For the rest of his life, that young man (now an aging man) has not been able to hold a job for more than two or three years at a time and finally ended up divorcing his wife. His failure to finish his military training and career became a metaphor for his life that turned into a vicious cycle of failure and incomplete results. The contradiction created by his failure with the army can be described thus:

His instinctive belief was that he was mentally and physically prepared to survive basic training. He should have made it. He was young enough and strong enough to make it with the rest of his class. His reality was that he failed in his basic training, and even though 90% of recruits pass without any problems, he was not able to accomplish what he believed he should have. This contradiction became the spiritual injury that altered his perception of self. He was no longer the confident young man that left his home for the army. In his mind, he had become a failure and his inability to finish basic training was his evidence. For many years, he was not able to think rationally about his military experience. Allow me to make three observations and three suggestions in this area to assist us move past similar issues.

A first observation is that a significant experience of failure has the tendency to create the resilient lie that we cannot be successful. The lie becomes the *modus operandi* (or our new truth), that can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As long as people follow the lie, they will experience failure. This is not to say that they are incapable of success. Rather, people fail because they cannot visualize themselves succeeding in light of their initial failure. The lie affirms the failures, and every new failure reaffirms the lie. This is the classical vicious cycle.

Solution to the first observation: people have to replace the lie with a truth in order to change the self-fulfilling prophecy cycle.

A second observation is that a significant experience of failure can create mistrust of our own giftedness. That is, we could believe that we failed because our talents and gifts let us down. We could become reluctant to depend on our gifts and talents. One of the consequences is that we don't believe in the sufficiency of our giftedness. The issue here is that if people cannot trust their own giftedness, they cannot achieve anything. Losing confidence in our gifts is an indication that we can no longer see God's glory manifested in them.

Solution to the second observation: people have to rebuild the concept of God's image in them. God loves us. God created us in his image with all the benefits that entails. Until people are confident and able to experience God's image in them, they will flounder aimlessly.

A final observation is that the lie and the personal mistrust could result in a deeply rooted perception of low self-esteem. This type of low self-esteem is more than just a poor perception of self. This type of low self-esteem robs people of their dignity and becomes a determining factor in how they relate to other people and God. There is a sense that people have lost all sense of self-worth. Another expression of this type of low self-esteem is our tendency to lash out in anger at people every time anything threatens our comfort zone.

Solution to the final observation: people can rebuild their self-esteem by focusing on the inherent value that God has placed on each one of them. That is, instead of believing the lie, people could focus their energies in reinforcing the truth that their worth comes from God and no man can take it from them. People's worthiness is determined by God's love and not by men's approval. God loves them to the point of sending his only Son to rescue them from the hell of an existence without God. That is, God has valued them so highly that he decided to take upon himself the scorn that broke our relationship with him. If God loves us so, we need to change how we evaluate our self-worth to include God's opinion on the matter.

Let me summarize this chapter. Catastrophic spiritual injuries are the result of an inherent irreconcilable contradiction between what a person believes to be true and what is actually true. The result of these contradictions is that they produce an invisible spiritual pain in people's souls. Spiritual injuries leave spiritual scars that turn into blind spots when people create a lie to survive the trauma. These blind spots are emotional *gaps* (a vacuum of feelings) in the intimacy mechanism that could make people susceptible to temptations from within and without, while preventing them from engaging in healthy intimate relationships with God and others. These blind spots could make people susceptible to manipulation and control by others. The best way to identify blind spots is to watch for the following behavioral patterns: (1) susceptibility to similar types of temptations, (2) susceptibility to being manipulated by others, (3) instinctive reactivity to certain events or people.

After years of habit-forming behaviors, it is very difficult to recognize people's instinctive reactions to circumstances. They need other people's help to recognize the instinctive reactions and the temptations to which they can so easily succumb. All behavioral

Bishop Luis R. Scott

patterns have a cause. People need to know these patterns in order to search for their initial cause. Understanding their behaviors will help people accept the presence of blind spots, which in turn can help them recognize the trauma that produced the original spiritual injury or the original irreconcilable contradiction. Once people have identified these patterns in their conduct, they can finally enter into the healing process.

I need to give one more word of caution. We cannot engage people's reactivity without their permission. That is, the fact that I may have noticed reactivity and defensiveness on someone does not authorize me to become their counselor or their conscience. If we notice that a friend shows signs of instinctive reactivity, we should ask their permission before we start pointing out the issue because we don't know how complicated this issue could turn out to be. We can say something like this: "Matt, can I make an observation? I noticed that you became very defensive when Joe said this or that. Have you noticed if this is a pattern in how you respond to situations?" If permission is granted, we may have gained a friend. If permission is not granted, silence is the better part of wisdom.