

# **How the Word Heals**

## Hypnosis in Scriptures

### Introduction

I have always wondered how the Bible's words could have so much power. Somehow just being told that the Holy Spirit inspired the work did not answer my questions. I wanted to know how the actual words could leave such an impression. I had felt the power of those words, and on many occasions had seen others dramatically changed by reading those words. There had to be some trace in this world that would show how this transformation happens. It seemed to me that taking some of the mystery out of the writing would also simplify the task of understanding. There was a secret code that I wanted to know. When I first discovered that I could crack the code, I was so excited that I could hardly stand the suspense. Was the same code used all through the Bible? Was it understandable? I have taken representative styles of writing from the entire Bible to demonstrate that the code is used throughout. The code is broken and explained here. Each type of writing is different, and to understand the code different approaches had to be used. Each approach is described in this book.

This book is written to show ways in which you can be transformed spiritually by how you read the scriptures. It is designed to stimulate your relationship with God and the Bible in ways that open new possibilities for deepening your understanding and walk with God. I believe that by letting the Bible interpret itself to us, we do the best job of understanding the text. I am inviting us to allow the text to show us a new way to read and comprehend the text. While I may or may not adequately capture how best to describe methods and mindsets to read the Bible from, I believe emphatically that the text can give us clues on ways to best receive from it.

Even if you adopt this type of understanding about scriptures, it does not erase or decrease anything that you have received in the past. This is only another way to allow scriptures to open themselves to us through understanding a bit more about the language and style in which they are written.

None of the suggestions for how to read the text are about the message the text gives. None of the suggestions in this book are meant to contradict any theological approach. These suggestions and information merely gives another ways to understand, interpret, appreciate, and experience the scriptures.

Using the method listed in this book does not require using or learning hypnosis. It means letting yourself read the Bible in ways that will contribute to your health, happiness, and understanding. Rather than a how-to book, this is more of a how-to-let-it-happen book. It is a book that explains how to sit back and let the power of the scriptures enter your life.

The details of analysis allow us to appreciate the ways scripture incorporates devices more powerfully than if we simply noted the surface meanings of words. Each text is examined and referenced in three ways to show how the scripture employs healing devices. The first reference notes the details beside each scriptural passage. A second shows a more complete use of various devices. The third reference is metaphorical, using stories from women in prison. Since those

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who wrote the Bible often communicate indirectly, I have attempted to adopt this style of writing as well. The women's stories are true; these stories provide a different perspective on the text. It is hoped that the stories will also give the reader ideas for life and work from a new perspective. I chose the illustrations carefully in order to stimulate thinking.

When I was prison chaplain, I noticed that the female prisoners in my congregation were able to see through other people's actions. They needed, wanted, and required that scripture be relevant to them, and they sensed when people tried to use scripture to belittle, cause guilt feelings, control, or manipulate them. These women were willing to receive the messages of scripture and recognize what was being said between the lines. For example, the average prostitute learns to survive by being able to read people. Almost every prostitute can share a story about a time when she was almost killed by some crazy patron. Drug addicts and bad-check writers are also astute about seeing through people. In order to lie, they acquire the skill of reading others. Women who have taken a life usually are introspective because they are continuously examining their past actions. As a result, these individuals are very sensitive to what others imply about them. Most folks in regular congregations can also read people well. While they may not possess these skills for survival reasons, living honestly enhances their ability to recognize what is being communicated. As well as survival skills, one other main difference between the prison and any other congregation is that the incarcerated are often more willing to ignore the niceties of social interaction. In other words, they are more will to say it if a sermon stinks. If I have become a better preacher, it is because these women required me to grow, and they were kind enough to give me persistent feedback and allow me to make the necessary changes.

At some point, it became clear to me that the women in prison needed more than what I was giving. They were not responding to Bible studies in the usual sense. They were relying on their head-knowledge about the Bible, and this type of surface information was not producing good morals, impacting daily choices, or bringing about changes. Instead it became a way of keeping themselves from integrating biblical information. I also realized that preaching to the inmates about what they should and should not do only served to irritate them or invite surface-level agreement. Loading a sermon with shoulds and oughts does not produce healing changes. The average woman in prison has so much guilt, shame, and remorse that she cannot hold much more. When a cup is full, it is full. Besides, guilt seldom produces positive changes, and when the guilt feeling wears off, usually the individual wants to protect herself from the church that failed to help her.

As a result of my experience, I began searching for answers. I knew that many of the women were hurting and that therapy from a psychodynamic perspective did not have much impact. By self-admission, two-thirds of women in prison have been abused. The actual figures are most likely higher because many women do not perceive what happened to them as abuse. This is either

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because it was seen as acceptable behavior by those around them, or as a child they said yes to an adult who manipulated them into agreeing to sex. Seeing their pain, and knowing that other effective therapies existed, was frustrating for me.

A counseling supervisor encouraged me to learn the techniques of Milton H. Erickson, MD, a man who is often referred to as the father of modern hypnosis. Erickson's approaches to helping people were unusual and radical ones that worked. Hopeless individuals became better, and uncooperative inmates became model prisoners. In short, Erickson's approaches provided me with new ways to help, and I incorporated his approaches in every aspect of my work as a chaplain. I was impressed with Erickson's compassionate, respectful attitude toward people. Erickson's caring methods allowed me to easily integrate these methods with theology because of the high level of respect for the client. He refused to offer any personality theories. Instead, he insisted that each person be approached as an individual.

When I started preaching at the women's prison, I was unsure of how to construct a sermon, and I had no idea of how to interpret a sermon's content. While I had knowledge that I had been taught in seminary, my understanding was limited to the imitation of sermons I had heard. It was not until a local minister, who out the kindness of his heart was helping me to construct a sermon, that my understanding began to take shape. Since that time I was also studying hypnosis, I began to comprehend sermons at a new level. At the same time, National Public Radio was airing a special on the sermons and speeches of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Listening to King's sermons placed everything I was learning in context. King used hypnotic devices in artistic ways. Suddenly I understood that effective sermons used hypnotic devices that impacted listeners' emotions. In this way, lives could be changed. I set out to learn as much as I could about Erickson's therapy and hypnosis. I admit that after 19 years of practice I still seek this learning.

These techniques can enhance your life's work. For instance, simply visiting someone in the hospital, and praying with him or her, imparts acceptance, worth, and importance. You are seeking to convey that you care about the person and want to evoke a sense of God's presence so they can receive the blessing, comfort, and hope that is found in God's presence. In part, this is accomplished when you prepare your own mind by becoming focused with scripture, prayer, or self-study, to name a few. When you eventually approach the hospital room, you are already filled with an emotion you hope to evoke for that individual. While you want to be responsive to the person's situation, a focus on God will be helpful regardless of what he or she is facing and whether or not you speak your thoughts about God to the person.

Have you ever made a visit that you did not want to make or spent time with someone you did not want to be near? Most of have at some time tried to fake enthusiasm, interest, or compassion for people. In these situations, we can fool ourselves if we believe that we are getting away with being slick and covering our feelings. The average congregation might refrain from telling us; however,

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schizophrenics, paranoid folk, drug addicts, and prostitutes, to name a few, can see right through us. They will also often tell us about ourselves, and sometimes very directly. It is important to note that hypnosis does not cover disingenuous motives, actions, or words, or serve as a substitute for any kind of relating that is dishonest. If anything, using hypnosis invites an even more honest response because it provides no way for us to hide our actions from ourselves.

The hypnotic devices contained in language can be used to communicate effectively, rather than just logically. Since written words are multi-dimensional, hypnotic devices can be used to increase the available levels of language. The stories of the Bible and the parables of Jesus show how the use of healing language and poetry are related because the gestalt of a story is more than just the words used. The gestalt of a story is the way in which the words are used to interact with us in our situations. We are invited into a powerful new manner of thinking, feeling, and seeing.

Honesty has tremendous impact. People can recognize, sense, and accurately identify motivations that they attribute to honesty. They can also correctly notice and detect dishonesty. They may have private reasons for not publicly acknowledging dishonesty, but they usually see it. Hypnotic language can enhance what is already being done in an honest way. In a parable, if the message is only stated on one level in a straightforward manner but not also implied on a different level in a different manner, the reader does not receive the invitation for internal change and thus does not receive the power of the emotional and spiritual discovery of truth.

Discovering the healing nature of scripture has been a significant, life-changing event for me. One of the many ways that it has impacted me is by giving me permission to use hypnotic devices without feeling manipulative or dishonest. I have found that it is a simple way of being even more intentional about what I hope to accomplish. I trust that the information listed in this book can also inspire you to receive more meaningful revelations when you read scripture. It is not meant to be the last word on the subject but an invitation for you to explore further. Perhaps by understanding my appreciation of hypnosis, you can begin to notice how you are already doing many of these things. When you become even more intentional, you can also be even more effective.

There is only one reservation I want to give the reader who things that using hypnotic techniques will bring them recognition as an outstanding preacher. While using these techniques may be helpful, effective, and healing to the congregation, using these techniques is not likely to convince others that you preach especially well. People hearing you may recognize that you love well, and they may notice more about who you are. They also may feel inspired and even become more fascinated with scripture, but becoming an exceptional preacher, or communicator, depends entirely on you.

Hypnosis in many religious circles is a bad word. The term has been misunderstood to mean the removal of personal power and the coercion of behavior. For others even more fearful, it represents the demonic. These

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individual are usually unwilling to study or even attempt to comprehend hypnotic techniques. It is understandable that some people hold these attitudes given the minimal efforts that have been made to explain hypnosis in non-offensive ways. Literature is scant on books written about hypnosis and faith. Some preachers take jabs at hypnosis, either implying or saying directly that hypnosis is evil or bad.

Books about hypnosis are generally written for and read by people who already believe that hypnosis is a useful tool for ministry, therapy, medicine, or sports. Those who do not support the use of hypnosis seldom read books related to the subject.

Certain groups that use hypnosis aid in giving it an intolerable name. Groups associated with strange phenomena, witchcraft, spiritualism, or alien spacecraft add to the sense that hypnosis is something to avoid. Stage hypnotists use hypnosis for entertainment and contribute to the impression of the removal of personal power. Some movies use hypnosis as a device to heighten suspense and even to support a rationale for bizarre killings. Both of these groups add to the misconception that hypnosis involves taking away personal choices against our will.

If hypnosis could take power away from people and use it in coercive ways, it would be appropriately defined as an evil force. Fortunately, this is not the case. In a hypnotic trance state, individuals cannot be forced into any action that they would be unwilling to perform in a non-trance state. A person can actually use resources that they were unaware that they possessed in a non-trance state. These unrecognizable, positive resources have always been a simple part of their overall living skills. In fact, until experiencing hypnosis, most people do not recognize that their own skills can be used for solving specific problems. For example, people may be able to quit smoking or overcome test anxiety through hypnosis because they already have the ability to do so. This occurs even when they are unaware of how to access their resources. Hypnosis serves as a vehicle for uncovering one's own positive resources.

It is an important fact that what we carry in our hearts or allow our minds to dwell upon does become part of what informs us during self-induced trance states. If during non-trance periods we harbor a deep grudge against another, that anger can be revealed during a drug-induced or spontaneously triggered trance state and become misdirected. In such instances, hypnosis does not direct that type of trance. Evil does not originate from outside of us and our control but instead is found within us where we willingly choose the thoughts to be cultivated.

Jesus spoke very eloquently about this idea of where evil comes from. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19-20, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man (person); but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man (person)." In Mark 7:20-23, Jesus said, "What comes out of a man (person) is what defiles a man (person). For from within, out of the heart of a man (person), come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit,

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licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man (person).” It seems clear that Jesus was convinced that what we think, dwell upon, and hold in our hearts either contaminates or purifies us.