
Bible Studies on Recovery!

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This series is designed to “supplement” a treatment or counseling program.

This guide is designed to help you and your church get the most out of your recovery ministries and help your people grow deeper and closer to our Lord! Prayer is essential in your personal walk with and to be the best pastor or church leader as you can be. By being filled with the Holy Spirit, being people of prayer and trained to know and teach the Bible effectively: A powerful synergistic combination!

These studies can also be easily converted into a sermon series, thus you can use them for your Bible study, sermons in personal devotions, church and group use. See our online resources for more Bible studies, curriculums and articles.

Resources for a Bible Based Christian 12 Step Recovery

Are you a mental health worker, pastor or **counselor** and want a better way to do recovery? Do you need quality materials to supplement your people that are Biblical and effectual?

Are you personally dealing with any kind of addiction or dependency or hurt? Do you have issues with Alcohol, Smoking, Drugs, Overeating, Pornography, Sexual Addiction or...? Any past hurts that **have** caused you to be living in a bondage or dysfunction? Is your life in chaos or on the road to ruin? Then you need to find a good counselor or recovery program, and we can offer you these Bible Studies resources for your successful recovery.

The goal and purpose of this Twelve Step series is to offer you helps and insights on recovery. These are written from a theological perspective and not about any particular psychological theory. These are timeless truths found in God's Word from an inductive study in the Bible.

This recovery program works!

There has been no better way that earnestly helps people recover from their past hurts, addictions and dependency than the Twelve-Step program. When it is properly administered and followed with good Biblical principles. This series is designed to supplement a treatment or counseling program.

Introduction to the Bible Studies on Recovery

The goal and purpose of this Bible study series is to offer you helps and insights on recovery. These are written from a theological perspective and not about any particular psychological theory. These are timeless truths found in God's Word from an inductive study in the Bible. Also, this is written by someone who has personally been a counselor and in recovery. We are following the basic 12-step program developed by a pastor whose heart is to help those who hurt. I originally wrote this series for *Rapha Treatment Centers* in Southern California when I was on staff at the Fuller Institute in the late 80's and early 90's; this organization no longer exists, although its parent one still operates in Houston Texas. Since I re-did these, I have used them as a pastor to help countless people; you can be helped too. These are not my ideas; rather, they are God's from His Word.

This recovery program works! There has been no better way that earnestly helps people recover from their past hurts, addictions and dependency than the Twelve-Step program. This series is designed to supplement a treatment or counseling program. We are not licensed counselors or a treatment center; we merely offer you God's Word and His insights to your journey of recovery. If you are dealing with any type of addiction or dependency, any substance such as chemical, alcohol, tobacco, sexual, pornography, lust, overeating, a victim of abuse or any abuse to self or others, this study series is for you. We also wholeheartedly recommend you seek the proper help. Be part of a 12 Step program such as *Rapha*, www.rapha.info, AA, or *Al-Anon*, www.alanon.org or any good qualified treatment center or counselor or licensed professional and use this series to supplement and help you through it.

Is the 12 Step program good for a Bible-believing Christian?

YES! The twelve-step program developed and used by *Alcoholics Anonymous* www.alcoholics-anonymous.org has its roots in the research and teachings of Episcopal priest Rev. Samuel Moor Shoemaker, Jr., and Dr. Frank N.D. Buchman, a Lutheran pastor from an Oxford Christian group in England who gleaned their ideas directly from Scripture. Thus, the 12-step method is based on Christian biblical precepts. And yes, there are a myriad of versions of this from atheistic, new age, self based, Buddhist—and the list goes on. Just because something is abused or distorted does not make the original bad.

The *Alcoholics Anonymous* program is based from:

- informal home-like settings for meetings, intended to highlight the pleasures of spiritual fellowship;
- an expectation that members would remain in their own churches, turning to A.A. not for theological interpretations, but for support in living a moral life;
- a focus on gradually realizing a "changed life" by passing through "stages," a concept that presents sobriety as something positive rather than merely the absence of alcohol or drunkenness;

- the policy that A.A. workers, especially its founders, should never be paid;
- an emphasis on helping others in order to change one's own life.

The *Oxford Group's* teachings in the early 1930's are based on the following six, basic, biblical principles:

- Human beings are sinners.
- Human beings can be changed.
- Confession is a prerequisite to change.
- The changed soul has direct access to God.
- The age of miracles has returned.
- Those who have been changed are to change others.

In addition, A.A. incorporated the philosophy the *Oxford Group's* five procedures, which were:

- Giving in to God.
- Listening to God's directions.
- Checking guidance.
- Restitution.
- Sharing, both confession and witness.

Alcoholics Anonymous, in a 1937 book, by one of its founders, Wilson laid down six steps of a successful Christian recovery program, based on what he and other A.A. members experienced and learned from Pastor Shoemaker and the Oxford Group. The six steps were:

1. We admitted that we were licked, that we were powerless over alcohol.
2. We made an inventory of our defects or sins.
3. We confessed or shared our shortcomings with another person in confidence.
4. We made restitution to all those we had harmed by our drinking.
5. We tried to help other alcoholics, with no thought of reward in money or prestige.
6. We prayed to whatever god (As a follower of Christ we seek the One TRUE GOD) we thought there was for power to practice these precepts.

The twelve steps now are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we *understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our selves.
5. Admitted to God, to our selves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

12 Christian Steps of *Alcoholics Anonymous* & Biblical References

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| 1. <i>We admitted we were powerless over alcohol ... that our lives had become unmanageable.</i> | "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." (Romans 7:18) |
| 2. <i>Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.</i> | "... my grace is sufficient for you, for my POWER is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)
..for it God Who works in you to will and act according to His good purpose.. (Phil. 2:13) |
| 3. <i>Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of GOD as we understood Him.</i> | "... If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23) |
| 4. <i>Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our selves.</i> | "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord." (Lamentations 3:40) |
| 5. <i>Admitted to GOD, to our selves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.</i> | "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16) |
| 6. <i>Were entirely ready to have GOD remove all these defects of character.</i> | "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land." (Isaiah 1:19) |
| 7. <i>Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.</i> | "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10) |

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| 8. <i>Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.</i> | "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23, 24) |
| 9. <i>Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.</i> | Give and it shall be given you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38) |
| 10. <i>Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.</i> | "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith GOD has given you." (Romans 12:3) |
| 11. <i>Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with GOD, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will, and the power to carry that out.</i> | "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)
"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly..." (Col. 3:16) |
| 12. <i>Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and practice these principles in all our affairs.</i> | "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2) |

(Christian Steps Distilled from many Christian recovery programs, this chart inspired from www.alcoholicsvictorious.org, Research on this history and steps from Ernest Kurtz, *Not-God, A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*)

In my nearly thirty years of experience in this area, I have come to understand that when an addict does not do these 12 steps, especially 1, 5 and 8, they almost

always go back to their dependency! That is why these steps are so essential and timeless and they work if you work them!

You cannot help someone who does not want to be helped. We have to realize that for us to go anywhere in our recovery as well as in our life as a Christian we have to surrender it and our will to Him. As our Lord moves among us, He will only ask this question of those who want to be healed. *Do you want to be healed* (John 5:6)? He may say nothing to those who do not or will not look to Him. It has been my experience and research that most Christians may not yet have reached the place this man in John 5 had reached. They are not helpless enough yet. They are not ready to give up on human efforts to solve their problems. They have not realized their need or the plan that God has for them. They are not ready to admit they cannot make it on their own. They are still determined to get into the water by themselves when it is stirred, when they determine to do so, when it is their will—regardless of God's will.

Jesus usually works within the parameters of what we will allow, so when we put up barriers, although He could easily penetrate them, He chooses to do nothing for those who do not want His help (Psalm 139 1-24; Isaiah 40:29; Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 7:7-11; 9:12-13; Mark 9:23-24; John 3:16-18; 14:1-3; Philippians 2:12-13).

Do you want to be healed?

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The Christian Twelve Steps

Step 1: I am powerless to do this on my own. I admit my need for help and Jesus Christ is the One, the only one who can fully heal and restore me.

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. Romans 7: 15-19

I will accept help from others who are qualified and any treatment I may need. My life has become chaos and unmanageable and I surrender my problem and life to Christ, His Lordship for my recovery.

- Read and reflect on these passages for the next week and beyond—why we need to place our trust in Christ: 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Eph. 3:14-21; Heb. 11:32-34
- Read and reflect on these passages for the next week and beyond: why we need to place our trust in Christ: Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 9:23-24; Rom. 7:18-20; 2 Cor. 1:9; 3:4-5
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 1; 51:17; 116:1-9
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 5; 20:2-3; 147:10-11

STEP 2: Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore I can be helped. I believe only He can help me recover!

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13

Jesus Christ: His Lordship is the Only Power that can Help me Recover!

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 139; Isa. 40:29; Jer. 29:11; Matt. 7:7-11; John 3:16-18; 14:1-3

Step 3: Make the Determination to Turn your Life over to Jesus Christ as LORD!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

You are in God's care, so allow His hand to move and heal you!

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Gen. 3:1-7; Psalm 99:3-5; Isa. 55:8-9; John 3:16-18; Rom. 5:6-11; 8:12-30; 12: 1-21; 15:7; Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 2:13-14; 3:13; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 4:9-10

Step 4: We must take a hard look in us to see what comes out of us.

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.
Lamentations 3:40

We need to be examined to see what needs to be fixed.

- Meditate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 19:14; 51:10; Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 7:21; 9:23-24; 12:29-31; Ephesians 4:29-32; Philippians 4:8
- Meditate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 4; 25:11; 28:13; Matthew 12:33-35; Luke 6:45; 2 Corinthians 3:2; Colossians 3:5-17; 4:6; James 3:9-12

Step 5: Be willing to admit your wrongs to God, self, and others.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

I have wronged and hurt others by my actions and words; I will commit to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Luke 11:2-4; Acts 1:14; 4:24
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: 2 Samuel 11; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:8-13; 1 John 1:9
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Peter 1: 1-4

Step 6: Commit yourself to obey God, His precepts so you do not go back to your old ways that cause you dysfunction!

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10

Allow God to smash the substance out of your life that hinders your growth, character and Fruit.

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Romans 10:8-17; Col. 1:15-20
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Gal. 5:16-22; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 2:14-15; 4:15

Step 7: Ask God to humble and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12: 2

Go before God and ask Him to cleanse or remove anything that is in the way of Him and your recovery

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: John 8:44; Rom. 3:19-28; 4:4-5; Eph. 4:17-19;

Step 8: Who have you wronged and hurt?

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12

Make a list and be willing with God's help to make amends.

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Matt. 18:21-35; Romans 12 with careful attention to verses 17-19
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-13; Heb. 12:1-2

Step 9: Be diligent to pursue forgiveness whenever possible.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

When we make amends, we have to be careful we do not further injure people or cause strife.

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Ezek. 33:15; Matt. 18: 21-35; Luke 15:11-24; Rom. 12:18

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Luke 23:34; 2 Cor. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:2-4

Step 10: Continue to make amends by examining your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others and then take responsibility for it.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12

Keep on God's path for recovery so you do not fall off of it and go back to your old harmful ways.

- Mediate on this passage for the next week or more: Romans chap 8
- Mediate on this passage for the next week or more: Galatians chap 5

Step 11: Seek to grow, go to prayer, and improve your relationship with Christ.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. James 1:5-6

Pray for strength, God's Will, and the continual empowerment for recovery

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 66:16-20; Matt. 5:23-24; John 10:1-4, 14; 1 John 4:9-19
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 5:3; 32:8; Matt. 6:5-15, 33; 2 Cor. 7:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:12

Step 12: Having achieved success in spiritual growth and recovery, now seek how you can continue your success.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ. Galatians 6:1-2

How can you help others and carry the Gospel message that Christ transforms lives?

- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: 2 Cor. 1:3-4; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:6-7
- Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Ecc. 4:9-10; Matt. 28:18-20; Phil. 1:27; 4:8-9; 1 Pet. 2:9; 4:11

- Mediate on these passages on the basics of these 12 Steps, for the next week or more: Psalm 19:14; Isa. 1:19; Lam. 3:40; Matt. 5:23-24; Luke 6:38; 9:23; Rom. 7:18; 12. 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:1-2; Phil. 2:13; James 4:10; 5:16

Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore you can be helped!

The Serenity Prayer

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living ONE DAY AT A TIME; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen (Reinhold Neibuhr-1926)

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Bible Studies for a Successful Recovery

Step 1: I am powerless to do this on my own. I admit my need for help and Jesus Christ is the One, the only one who can fully heal and restore me.

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. Romans 7: 15-19

I will accept help from others who are qualified and any treatment I may need. My life has become chaos and unmanageable and I surrender my problem and life to Christ, His Lordship for my recovery.

Jesus' Authority over Sin Part 1

Matthew 9: 1-8

Step 1: I am powerless to fight this problem that I face on my own. I admit my need for help and Jesus Christ is the One, the only one who can fully heal and restore me.

Sin is the ultimate cause of spiritual paralysis. No worse infection or illness or addiction or dependency can confine us. It will control all aspects of our life and eternity to come, unless we are redeemed from it. Sin causes us to get into the issues we face in recovery and healing. We have to acknowledge our sin and give it to Jesus for healing. We are powerless in our sin and issues and we are powerful when we confess that sin or addiction to our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot overcome any addiction or dependency unless we realize and then confess our sin and hand over our lives to Him who will enable us to recover!

This passage continues the theme in Matthew of how Jesus repeatedly goes out of His way to minister to us who are sinners! He seeks us out who are unworthy to receive Him, and then He forgives and heals us. Why does Jesus do this for us? Perhaps because we are sick and paralyzed, needing forgiveness and recovery. We have no way to get off our "mat" without His help! We may not be confined to a bed or have our only mobility be a wheelchair, or we may think we can effectively deal with our drinking or substance of addiction; we may not think it is a problem. Nevertheless, we are still paralyzed by sin, and in need of His forgiveness.

- *Came to his own town.* Jesus went home. Capernaum is at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. Recent archeological evidence indicates it was not a small town, as many believed. Rather, it was a considerably large town, perhaps even a city in Jesus' time.
- *Saw their faith.* Jesus also singled out the faith of the ones who brought the paralyzed man. These four men modeled Faith, not only in what Jesus could do, but also the determination to get their friend to Him. This sick man must have done something to earn him the favor of having such passionate friends. Remember, these were friends, not relatives!
- *Take heart, son/be of good cheer.* These are words of incredible comfort. Jesus sought to redirect the focus from the suffering to what is really important, that is, eternity.
- *Lying on a mat.* This refers to his regular bed, not a cot, or some kind of gurney. They literally grabbed his bed, with him on it, and went to seek Jesus (Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:18-26). This house was centrally located to the roads, and had easy access to the entire Galilean region. Perhaps it was Jesus' own family home, or even Peter's house (Mark 1:29). This house was Jesus' base of operations during his ministry in Galilee (Mark 2:1; 9:33).

- *Teachers of the Law.* This refers to the Scribes and Pharisees whose job centered on interpreting the Law. Josephus, a first century historian, recorded that there were more than 6,000 Pharisees. Also, according to him as a Jew, many were good and godly, but they overemphasized outward appearances. Jesus did not play their game of pretentiousness (looking good with their decorative garments and long public prayers, then going out, lying, and cheating widows and orphans), and they hated Him for it. Hypocrites hate honest men with fervor!

They were filled with awe. The effect on the people was amazement and wonder. *They praised God,* the ultimate reaction and response we are to make (Matt. 17:6; 28:5,10). They may have praised Him because they thought people were given such authority. For us, as Christians, our primary purpose, outside of receiving Christ, is to glorify God in all that we do! It was Christ's inherent authority that amazed people, as regular teachers just quoted one another with no authority attached. Jesus did not quote human authorities, as did the *teachers of the Law*, because His authority was directly from God. Because of this, the religious authorities were there to investigate Jesus. *Who is this guy? Why is He doing this? and, is He a threat?* they wondered. However, their quest was not to seek truth, but rather feed their critical and hostile mindsets with more judgmental attitudes. The result was their quick accusations that He was a fake.

Christ seeks you and your hurt; He wants you well and recovered! But you have to take His hand just as a drowning person needs to take the hand of the lifeguard to rescue him or her. Look to Christ; allow His intervention and rescue in your life!

Questions

1. What is it you are struggling with? How can Christ help you?
2. How often do you use or abuse what you are struggling with? What goes through your mind in doing so? What can you do to focus on Christ?
3. Why did you get into the predicament you are in, whether it is alcohol, drugs, sex, codependency, a bad habit or...?
4. Why did you continue in it?
5. What have you lost because of this predicament?
6. Do you want recovery? If so, why? If not, why?
7. What have you done to try to control this problem? Did it work? If so, how? If not, why?
8. Do you realize that your life is unmanageable without Christ working in you? If not, what will it take for you to hand your life and sin to Him?

9. Jesus seeks us, who are unworthy, to receive Him, and then He forgives and heals us. Why does Jesus do this for us?
10. What kind of faith and determination would Jesus see in you?
11. This sick man must have done something to earn him the favor of such passionate friends. What could be some of the possibilities?
12. If Jesus said, *take heart*, to you, to what would He be referring? What do you need to do to take in the reality of these precious words of Jesus?
13. What is your *mat*? In other words, what holds you back? Or, wherein lies your identification? Or, what is the chief motivation in your life that drives you?
14. What did Jesus do for you to get you off your *mat*? Do you think you are still on your mat? If so, why?
15. Do you think you would have more passion if your attitude of the urgency of humanity's condition struck you more deeply?
16. Why do you think the religious leadership saw Jesus as a fake?
17. What do you think the factors are that cause Christians to overemphasize outward appearances?
18. What are the themes in this passage that make pronouncements of Jesus' divinity?
19. Jesus challenged the leaders to reconsider their mindset and judgment. Does He have to do this to you? If so, what? What will you do about it?
20. Jesus' earthly mission, besides redemption, was, and still is, to redirect our focus from our sufferings and experiences, which are temporary, to what is really important, eternity (The Kingdom of God). What needs to take place to give you the mindset that looks to eternity while your feet remain on this earth? By that, we mean to be and to learn all you can while you are here, so nothing is wasted, while at the same time, keeping your focus and hope on Christ and what is still to come.

Read and reflect on these passages for the next week and beyond—why we need to place our trust in Christ: 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Eph. 3:14-21; Heb. 11:32-34

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Jesus' Authority over Sin Part 2

Matthew 9: 1-8

Step 1: We are powerless in our sin or any dependency or addiction we face, yet we are powerful when we confess that sin to our Lord Jesus Christ!

The second aspect of this passage is the reaction of the religious custodians of the people, and the people themselves. The leadership saw Jesus as a fake. Perhaps they feared His righteousness because they had none, or maybe it was His abilities and compassion, of which they also had none. The people were attracted to Him by His fame and His demonstrations of wonder from which they sought either a show or a chance to be healed themselves. The question we need to ask ourselves is, *what is it about Jesus that attracts us?* Is it the show, the healing, or do we have the determination and faith to make Him our Lord so He can get us up from our *mat*?

- *Your sins are forgiven.* This gives us the picture of our Lord as Redeemer and Deliver. Only the person who was offended has the prerogative and right to offer forgiveness. You cannot forgive an offence that was not done to you. Jesus, as a mere man, could have no right to forgive sins because He would not have been offended by this man's original sin or the deeds and transgressions he had done. The Messiah, in first century Jewish theology, could not forgive sins. So, there was a lot of confusion about who this guy was. By forgiving this man, Jesus claimed His full Godhood (Ex. 34:7; Isa. 1:18; 43:25)!
- Sin is our root problem, our greatest pursuit, and our felt need. Our real need is the cleansing of our hearts (Isa. 51:21). We do not know if sin did cause this man's paralysis, but sin can and does cause physical problems and even death (John 5:14; 1 Cor. 11:29-30). This man did not come to have his sins forgiven; he and his friends sought physical healing. We, too, get so caught up in what we think we need, that we miss what we really need. God is more concerned about our maturity and character than anything else. Sin is our greatest illness! Even if we are never physically healed, our predicament is temporary; the real need is the forgiveness of our soul. By forgiving this man's sins, Jesus was testifying to His deity. He proved His deity by also healing him.
- *Which is easier.* To the scribes, forgiving was much harder than healing. Both are equally impossible for us, and equally easy to God. The scribes were right in a way, because in medical science miracles are not possible, but God is the one who gives physicians the knowledge and tools to do medical procedures and He is also the One who heals. In reality, real healings are impossible without God. They knew only God could perform such an act of forgiveness, so Jesus was, as C.S. Lewis stated, *a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.* They would have been correct in their accusation of blasphemy if Jesus was a mere man, but His demonstration of power over sickness would put this to rest (John 5:36; 10:25, 38). Only God could forgive sins and perform this healing.
- *Blaspheming* was pronouncing one's self as divine, inviting others to worship other gods, or it could be an insult to God's honor (Num. 15:30). The penalty for

such an act of forgiving sins was death (Lev. 24:10-23). Jesus obviously was not guilty of this or any offence. This was also a challenge to the leaders to reconsider their mindset and judgment. Even faced with a miracle, they refused to embrace His Lordship (Psalm 41:1; Jer. 3:22; Hosea 14:4) because it would have sacrificed their presumptions and authority, as well as their power and influence. Healing, to the Jewish mindset, was something that also only came from God.

Take heart and hear the words of *good cheer!* These are words of incredible comfort, as they display our Lord's power over our sin and any problem we may have. Christ will help us through the healing processes! It can be smoking, codependency, substance abuse, or any addiction or struggle we have by our weakness, and whatever stresses we face. In Him, we can prevail and overcome and even recover! His mission is to redirect our focus from the suffering we experience, which is temporary, to what is really important, eternity. Do not let the paralysis of sin condemn you to a bed of misery and hopelessness. Do not rely on your abilities to walk when our Lord can give you the Word. We respond with faith and the determination to be His in all that we do. He can, and will, remove our distress with a word. So, be of good cheer, get up from your *mat*, and take hold of what our Lord has for you.

Questions

1. What would your life look like if you were healed and/or recovered?
2. Has your life become *chaos and unmanageable*?
3. Have you realized that you are powerless to control your addiction? If so why? If not, why?
4. Why are you powerless in your sin?
5. How are you powerful when you confess that sin to our Lord Jesus Christ?
6. Why can't you overcome you addiction or dependency when you do not recognize and then confess your sin?
7. What was it about Christ and Christianity that first attracted you? Has it changed? How does this motivational mindset prompt your faith and behaviors?
8. How can you hand over your life to Jesus Christ who will enable you to recover?
9. We cannot overcome any addiction or dependency when we do not realize and then confess our sin and hand over our lives to Him who will enable us to recover!
10. Where and what does home mean to you...a place, an event, a memory, or what? What makes home a place that is special to you?

11. Do you agree that Sin is the ultimate cause of spiritual paralysis? If not, why not?
12. Is there something worse, such as an infection or illness to which we can be confined other than sin or the issue you face? Then why do most Christians rarely acknowledge their sin or seek to deal with it?
13. What does it take to enable someone to have the determination and faith to make Jesus the Lord of their lives?
14. We, as Christians, tend to get so caught up in what we think we need, we miss what we really need. So, what do you really need, and on what has your focus been?
15. What is the ultimate reaction and response we are to make (Matt. 17:6; 28:5, 10)? What do you need to do to make praise and worship (not just songs, but a life style) a daily reality and passion?
16. Examine your life and see what is needed from God and those who can help you. What do you need to confess? What help and support do you need?
17. Have you completely admitted that you have a problem? If not, what is in the way? What do you need to do?
18. How can Jesus Christ help you through the healing processes?
19. How and when will Jesus Christ help you through the healing processes?
20. What can you do to accept help from others who are qualified and any treatment you may need? How can you realize if you have not yet, that, *My life has become chaos and unmanageable*? What can you do or what has to take place to say, *I surrender my problem and life to Christ, His Lordship for my recovery*?

Read and reflect on these passages for the next week and beyond: why we need to place our trust in Christ: Isa. 55:8-9; Jer. 9:23-24; Rom. 7:18-20; 2 Cor. 1:9; 3:4-5

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Our Conflict with Dependency Part 1

Romans 7: 7- 25

Step 1: I will accept help from others who are qualified and any treatment I may need!

One of the Big Problems all people face, including Christians, is answered in this verse; *does sin still affect me?* The answer is a yes to the rules, and yes to the Spirit and the virtue of it. Basically, we are powerless over sin; that is why we need a Savior. And we are powerless over our dependencies and addictions, also why we need a Savior. Let Jesus save you! You may think you are in control but in fact, you are not; your control is only an illusion whereas Christ's ability to help you is a reality! You cannot manage your problem; you need help!

- The Law reflects God's character, His holiness. It shows us our sins and inadequacies. The Law not only defines sin but also provokes us to react to God by either running to or away from Him. We must realize the veracity of this struggle and fight against it in the power of Spirit and the Word (1 Cor. 4:4). The Law is spiritual; we are carnal. The Law is perfect and we are corrupt. If we ignore the Old Testament and the Law, we will not realize our sin! The Pharisees manipulated and misrepresented it (Matt. 5-7). The Law depended on our righteousness; grace depends on Christ's righteousness that covers us.
- "*Lust*" or "*Covet*", (Gr. *epithumia*), is desire, craving, longing, and desire for what is forbidden; the active side of a vice. This is a word comprehensive in meaning, not limited to sexual desire! Thus this can mean, "over desire." "*I had not known lust (to be sin) except the Law had said...*" Thus, it can be alcohol, drugs, sex, codependency, a bad habit or...whatever you struggle with!
- Paul even said the Law could motivate us to sin, thus what offensive sinners we are. He realized that he could not live under the Law and be free from lust and the evil desires of the human heart. He knew he was breaking the Law, but could not stop it. This is why people want to escape the Law, but without Christ we escape only to find ourselves in Hell!
- Sin is the great deceiver (Gen 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:4). People tend to like extremes, and to live as they please, but they cannot ignore the Law. The Law brings out the worst in us, while the love of Christ brings out the best (Lev. 18:5; Deut. 30:15-19).
- The Law cannot change us, only reveal what is already there. Sin deceives, the Law reveals truth, and Christ brings us the hope. The Law cannot enable us to do good, because by nature we are bad. The Law is absurd to those who see their hope in themselves or in pleasure and have closed themselves off from Christ's work. The Law cannot set us free from sin; it only shows the chains of our bondage to sin as in our addiction or dependency.

- The Law does not take into account our failings or weaknesses; it is absolute. Once we realize who we are to the Law, that we have no hope in ourselves, then the Spirit will convict us. *I am a guilty sinner and have no right*, is our start for hope (James 2:10).
- What causes despair (vs. 18)? There is nothing we can do until we realize who Christ is and who we are!
- We have no right to turn sin into a right (Ezek. 37:3-12)!

We desire to have our cake and eat it too, to have both sin and Christ. We struggle to compartmentalize and rationalize, but the key is "struggle". Christians are the only ones to have this "flesh" struggle; the people of the world can live in comfort and harmony with sin, and rationalize it; just watch the day time talk shows or listen to the excuses at any 12 step meeting before a person takes on this first step (we recommend you get into a good 12 step program!) The only thing we can do is fall at His feet, dead to ourselves (Duet. 33:27; John 3:30; Rev. 1:17). Righteousness cannot be achieved by any human effort; we can do nothing outside of Christ. God's will is in complete control, and we must remove whatever is blocking us to realize this—pleasures and choices that are deliberately contrary to His character. Unless we see what is blocking us to see sin and what is blocking us to remove the sin, we will not be able to do so! Allow the Spirit and the Law to show you! Then be obedient! Our relief and joy is in Christ; unspeakable gratitude for our deliverance must flow from within us. We cannot struggle in vain to ourselves for what Christ did for free.

Questions

1. Did you read Dr. Seuss as a child or have you read it to your children? If so, how did you like his use of words? Did you feel like Dr. Seuss got his inspiration from this passage, as it seems Paul is so excited he cannot describe what the Lord is having him say?
2. Some people think they can manage substance or addiction problems. Why is this not true in your experience?
3. What financial, legal, or relational problems have occurred because of your struggles?
4. How does addiction or dependency compromise your values and beliefs in Christ?
5. What has been the greatest conflict in your life?
6. Why is it that you cannot manage your problem; why do you need help? Have you sought help? If so, why? If not, why?

7. What is your delight in? That is, what gives you the greatest pleasure in life?
8. Is there any doubt that Christ has control in your life? If not, what is in the way?
9. What will it take for your trust in our Lord 110%?
10. What are some of the leading causes of addiction and dependency? How are they similar to our “breakups” with our Lord?
11. How do addictions or dependencies derail your opportunities in life and growth in our Lord?
12. When coworkers and fellow students see you, as a Christian, struggling with your issues, they may get their perceptions and ideas about God from you. Such as, if a Christian is a jerk, then they may see God as uncaring. What do you think of this?
13. How do you think people see God through your character and interrelations with others?
14. What do you see as your inadequacy?
15. Have you struggled with lust? If so, what steps do you take to prevent its ugly head from affecting your relationships?
16. What brings out the worst in you? What brings out the best in you?
17. How has sin deceived you? What indicators do you use to determine right from wrong?
18. What circumstances have revealed truth in your life? (personal and/or observed)
19. If you say, “Christ brings us the hope”, and then someone said back to you “so what!” How would you respond?
20. What enables you to do good vs. doing *bad*?
21. Do you have anyone in your life that enables you to do *bad*? What do you need to do about it?
22. What needs to be removed from you or someone you know whose faulty thinking is blocking you/them from realizing that misplaced overabundance of pleasure and bad choices are deliberately contrary to His character and call for our life?
23. Have you accepted quality help from others who are qualified and any treatment you may need? If not why not? How can you “take care if business” in this area? Who will help you?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 1; 51:17; 116:1-9

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Our Conflict with Addiction Part 2

Romans 7: 7- 25

Step 1: My life has become chaos and unmanageable and I surrender my problem and life to Christ, His Lordship for my recovery.

Paul is excited and is agonizing with the conflict of our sinful nature and what we are saved to do. In the English, we feel he is sounding more like Dr. Seuss than the Apostle of God. But in fact, Paul's argument is logical and sound, that we can "*delight in the Law of God,*" even though we cannot keep it. Even though we will have conflicts between our sinful nature and His Holiness, and between our faith and the ways of the world, nevertheless verse 25 lays to rest that conflict in the ultimate and final sense. We will prevail through our Lord Jesus Christ. We can take our comfort in this, and that through Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit will give us the means to persevere and overcome all things: if not in this temporary life, then in the life to come. So our hope and trust is purely through our deliverance by Christ.

- It is human sinful nature and our depraved hearts that cause the problems we face. It is Christ who is the healer who can help us and carry us to recovery!
- We cannot live with just common sense and our religion. Our struggle is complex; we are new creatures, yet we still have our fallen nature. Thus the struggle is between the dominance of the two, our struggle and His help. God's purpose and our growth and maturity are found here (1 Cor. 4:4; Gal 2:20; Phil. 2:12-18; 3:20).
- One aspect of our being is agony, with our sin or struggle as Christ bore it; the other is triumph as Christ did after the cross, and we are in total identification from suffering to freedom in Christ. We are then to loath sin and embrace Christ.
- One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to bring us to do what the Lord desires us to do, away from our desires (Gal. 5:22-23).
- The Holy Spirit keeps our love relationship with Christ alive and exciting, causing us to desire Him and not our ambitions and sin. His Spirit will continue to reveal our nature and His Holiness; we are to work it out (Phil. 2:1-18).
- We are not to live a separated life (Rom. 6:15-23). We are to be true and surrendered to Christ, as in a good marriage where the spouses are in love and supportive and not there as an arrangement of convenience. Our role is being a fighter of sin and any addiction or dependency we may face. Remember, you are not alone! Be the one who embraces Christ.
- When we are "ourselves," we are just planning our own funeral. Thus, we need to carry it to the end so we are dead to ourselves, then we can let God be God!

Jesus knows us intimately; He knows our situation, our struggles, and our opportunities. He wants us to take hold of His grace and love so we can focus upon Him and lean on Him both in our jubilations and also in our struggles. The key in this passage is to stay faithful in our Christian identity and our leadership of others, and to remain loyal to Christ. We are not to allow our doubts, fears, or state of affairs to occupy His place in our hearts and minds.

The bottom line is this, if you want help over your addiction and dependency no matter how hard or much or long you have had it, you must surrender to God. He is the only Way you can be helped effectively and completely. And please see a qualified therapist or licensed counselor if you have any chemical addictions. You also need their help and intervention too. *Into Thy Word* recommends *Rapha Treatment Centers* at www.rapha.info!

Questions

1. Have you ever been so excited that your words came stumbling out like nonsense?
2. Have you ever faced crises because of your struggles in this?
3. Have you been destructive to others? If so, why? If not, could you be? How does Jesus feel about these behaviors?
4. Have you or have you known someone who has closed himself off from Christ's work (either from letting Christ work in him or his working for Christ)? If so, what were the factors that caused it to fail and what would have or could now rekindle that relationship?
5. How would you describe the anguish or grief or problems this has taken on your body? What about family? Friends? School or career or?
6. When people put their hope in pleasure, such as drugs, what do they expect to get out of it in the long run?
7. "The Law does not *take into account our failings or weakness*, it is absolute." So, what does?
8. If you or someone you know has not been convicted by the Holy Spirit, what needs to happen for the Spirit to convict?
9. What causes despair (vs. 18)?
10. There is nothing we can do until we realize who Christ is and who we are! So what did you, or do you need to do to make this happen?
11. We cannot turn a sin into a right, so why do so many people try?

12. What can happen if we just use “common sense” and our “religion” to make decisions?
13. We as Christians still struggle between the dominance of our fallen nature and our new life. So, how can this struggle help you out of your addiction or dependency and into recovery? What about knowing God and yourself and growing in maturity?
14. Think of your favorite sport. What would your spiritual life be like if it was converted into a score; you, with God as your coach vs. Satan and the world. How is the game going?
15. What do you think of the daytime talk shows or news that show people (of the world) who live in comfort and harmony with their sin, who fight for it and even rationalize it?
16. What was the key that unlocked your will to loathe sin and embrace Christ?
17. What steps would a Christian need to do to live a separated life from Christ?
18. How can the church help you to better fight your battle or issue? How can they help you be a fighter of sin while being the ones who show the world how to embrace Christ?
19. Read Duet. 33:27; Rev. 1:17. What do you need to do in your life and in the life of your church to fall at His feet, dead to yourselves?
20. When we are "ourselves," we are just planning our own funeral, thus, we need to _____?
21. Righteousness cannot be achieved by any human effort; we can do nothing outside of Christ. So why do we Christians worry so much?
22. God's will is in complete control, so what can you do to live your Christian life with complete trust and faith?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 5; 20:2-3; 147:10-11

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STEP 2: Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore I can be helped. I believe only He can help me recover!

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13

Jesus Christ: His Lordship is the Only Power that can Help me Recover!

Jesus the Healer

Matthew 8: 14-17

Step 2: Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore I can be helped. I believe only He can help me recover!

Peter writes later in his Epistle, “*cast all of your cares upon Him.*” (1 Peter 5:7) In this passage, we begin to see the roots of Peter’s spiritual trust and formation. Jesus personally performed several miracles for Peter. Jesus enabled Peter to catch a lot of fish (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-8), to catch a coin in a fish (Matt. 17:24-27), to walk on water (Matt. 14:22-33), and after His resurrection, helped Peter escape from prison (Acts 12), plus many more miracles. So, Peter has firsthand experience and can give us assurance that we can trust in Jesus. This passage testifies to this fact with the healing of his mother-in-Law. Peter knew quite well that we could indeed cast all of our cares upon Him!

Sometimes, we forget that the disciples were real people with real problems with families, loved ones, and friends, and lived life with all of the frustrations, challenges, and options we have in important things such as relationships and life. I do not know if any of them faced the issue you have, or had issues in dependency or addiction. But as humans, we all face these on some level and we know that Jesus heals and restores us. In this passage, Peter was concerned for his mother-in-law. As we can see, nothing is too hard for our Lord. He can bring physical healing. He can bring recovery to you too! However, even if He does not do this for you right away, you can still rest assured that in Him, as you put your faith, trust, and your cares upon Jesus, you will overcome your battle!

- It was customary for the children to take over their parent’s house/compound when they passed on. Most extended families lived together. When a young couple got married, they moved into the husband’s parent’s home. Peter was young here, and possibly had recently married prior to encountering Jesus.

- Peter was married, as were most Jewish men (1 Cor. 9:5). Celibacy was also an option for Jewish men. However, the Bible is clear that Peter was indeed married (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:7-8, 32).
- Adult children were expected to care for their parents. Caring for the extended family was more common and essential than it is today. Luke says she was too ill to speak for herself. The passage gives us the picture that we need to go before the Lord in behalf of others, to plead their case in intercession and prayer!
- *Sick with fever.* Peter's mother-in-law was grievously ill. As indicated by the surprise miracle, she skips the normal convalescence period, getting up immediately to serve them, an event that took a lot of energy.
- God's cures are perfect, immediate, and complete.
- Most Jewish teachers would not have touched a woman at any time for fear of becoming unclean (Lev. 15:19), but Jesus broke the social norms. The Law refers to women who are menstruating, which would mean they had possible germs and viruses from the exposed blood.
- Then, it was the custom for men to work for and obtain the food, and then for the women to prepare and serve the food (Luke 10:40). A family works and complements one another's skills and abilities to the common goal of meeting one another's needs.
- She responds in gratitude! She ministers to Christ and His people. Our willingness to recover from whatever dependency or addiction we face is also a reflection of our gratitude for what He has done for us.
- Luke mentions *high fever* and *He rebuked the fever*, possibly because he is a physician and has a medical interest (Luke 4:40-41). Also, the possibility existed that Satan was behind the illness.
- The word got out about Peter's mother-in-law, so people brought many sick people to Jesus. Since homes were small, they had an inner or outer courtyard where people gathered. Jesus is using the courtyard as a recovery center for the sick and affirmed (Mark 1:33).
- *Demon possessed* can also mean people who were sick as the Greek ancient word meaning. Cultural and medical understandings confuse the definitions. A person with a mental disorder would be considered possessed; Peter's mother-in-law could have been too, with a fever. This does not discount the reality of demon possession and the work of Satan's entourage on your problems or at least escalating them. It is quite possible that many of the people brought to Jesus were actually demonized too. Satan does not cause all sicknesses, but the possibility is always there. So, be grounded in the Word and in faith to always be on guard with His armor (Eph. 6:10-18).

- *Infirmities* represent sin and the ravages of sin that traps us all, such as anything that causes us to be in addiction or dependency. This is a quote from Isaiah, that sin is the main sickness of humanity and the root cause of all that is wrong and evil (Isa. 53:5-6; Hosea 14:1-4; 1 Pet. 2:24-25). Isaiah also points to the physical restoration and healings in the age of the Messiah (Isa. 33:24; 35:5-6).
- Jesus' main role is, in His perfection, to bear our sin and take our place, so He pays our price and takes our curse upon Himself. This means Jesus, in our place, takes the sin, guilt, and our infirmity, thus he takes our dependency and addiction because we are not able to do so!
- The demons know who Christ is; do you? Do you fully know?
- Jesus inaugurates the Messianic era! He is making some of the benefits of the Kingdom available prior to the Cross. Jesus, in His ministry, demonstrated His sovereignty over nature, including our sicknesses and spiritual oppositions.
- Some people teach that Jesus will and must heal you if you are a true believer or have enough faith. This is not true, as He only promised total healing to come after His second coming (Matt. 8:20-23; 1 Cor. 15. 26; Rev. 21:4). It is interesting, as the people I have observed over the years who have made such claims have died in sickness and/or their close family members have. Do not tempt God (I am not saying God made them sick, just that they did get sick after teaching that one cannot get sick if one has enough faith)!

Jesus Christ is the God who cares. He paid the price of our sin, therefore creating the potential for the entire human race to be saved and redeemed. He made it possible for everyone to be brought into a right relationship with God. And he made it possible for you to be restored and healed. Thus, our purpose and primary mission in life is to accept His grace and forgiveness so we can partake of His redemption and apply it to our lives for eternity (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rev. 3:18). It is sad that so few will make that journey, unwilling to give up their will or to be convicted. The gate we pass through is freely given but we do not just pass through it. We still have to abide, trust, and obey, to move our will into that gate. It is not a conveyer belt; it is the heart of the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ, where our sinful nature collides with His holiness, and where the cost of our sin is absorbed, declaring us holy too. This is the reason we live and is the meaning in life. It is up to us to abide in the life that He gives. He makes it possible—we make it work. Christianity is not a spectator sport; we are not to be in the bleachers, but on the field, playing our hardest against the clock of time and opportunities.

Questions:

1. What are you like when you are sick? How do you treat others—especially family—when they are sick or have needs?

2. What would it mean to you to be healed from your addiction and or past hurts? What are you willing to do about it?
3. Do you realize that God is all knowing and all-powerful? How does this help you to trust Him even in your situation?
4. What does it take for you to have assurance in your faith and God's ability and willingness to help you?
5. Do you believe that He is the only One who can help you recover? Do you have difficulty doing this? If so, why not *cast all of your cares upon Him*? How can you do so?
6. How can the fact that realizing the disciples were real people facing the same life challenges with families, frustrations, challenges, and options, help influence you?
7. What would you have felt and how would you have reacted if you were Peter?
8. Why do we not take care of one another today? Why are families broken and living apart today?
9. Do you think your life would be better if you had grown up in an extended close-knit family, with parents, grandparents, and such, as Peter did? Why, or why not?
10. What are some of the fears we have allowed to cause us to live alone and/or apart from family?
11. If you have been abused or hurt, what can you do and what do you need to do to go on and become healthy?
12. How is this passage a picture that we need to go before the Lord in behalf of others to plead their case in intercession and prayer (Luke 4:38)? How much time do you spend in prayer for others (intercession)?
13. The Bible says that God's cures are perfect, immediate, and complete. When you see someone claiming to have been healed by God or a faith healer, and they are still sick, what does that say about them? What about how our Lord is portrayed?
14. *She responds in gratitude, ministering to Christ and His people.* How can our service be a reflection of our gratitude for what He has done for us?
15. Does your family work to compliment one another's skills and abilities, working towards the common goal of one another's benefit and needs? If not, why? What would happen if they did?

16. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. There is always the possibility that Satan will go after you, so, what do you need to do?
17. God is not done with you yet; he still has a plan. Do you want to know what it is? How can you embrace Him and His plan for you?
18. How should we respond when people teach that Jesus will and must heal you if you are a true believer and have enough faith? Can this be true?
19. The demons know who Christ is. Do you? Do you fully know? How can you have more confidence in who He is in your life, so it is proclaimed to others around you even if you do not open your mouth?
20. What needs to happen for you to fully realize and accept that through Jesus Christ you have His power to be in a healing process and in recovery?
21. What is in the way of your being fully assured in Christ and His Lordship over your life so you can put your faith, trust, and cares upon Jesus? How can you then teach this to others close to you?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 139; Isa. 40:29; Jer. 29:11; Matt. 7:7-11; John 3:16-18; 14:1-3

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Let Jesus Restore You!

Philippians 2:12-27; 3:10

Step 2: Jesus Christ: His Lordship is the Only Power that can Help me Recover!

When someone says the word “Restore,” what comes to your mind? Perhaps your thoughts include what your family may have put you through, or a trauma, or an abuse or a hurt or a life of misery that caused your overeating or addiction or alcohol or chemical dependency. We have to realize that no matter what we have been through, Christ is here now. You can't look to your mother or father or relative that may have abused you or an opportunity someone stole. You have to take responsibility for your life and look to Him and not look for others to blame. Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore, you can be helped! Do you believe only He can help you recover?

Maybe your mind goes to the stress of life or, perhaps, the dreaded family or people you feel have hurt you. When you know you will be picked apart by relatives with questions such as “*What are you doing...why did you not...how could you... When are you going to get a real job? Why are you not married yet? Why are your kids wearing that?*” and so forth. You want to go for that drink or that extra doughnut or drug.

Perhaps you are very relieved right now that these are mere memories, and you have no need to worry about it again. However, have you considered that there may be a pattern you could have picked up that has enslaved you?

...stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” Phil. 1:27

The key to overcoming whatever plagues you or to be in recovery is the character of Christ living out in you all year long. The point of the Christian life is not self-realization, but in knowing Jesus Christ, not allowing anything to take His place in your thinking, your emotions, and the daily experiences of life. The spiritual and mature Christian will never think his circumstances are merely haphazard, or think of himself as the center of the universe. Rather, Christians are to be Christ like in “attitude” and in “form.” Whether we dread the menial activities like raking leaves, or tackle big projects like recovery, the mature Christian will see everything as Christ does, even in those times when it seems He has “dumped” on him.

Thus, our traumas or the stress of our daily activities as well as those bad circumstances such as abuse, hurt, pain, stress, setbacks, failures, and such, are means of growth and learning and becoming more like Him. We are to see all of life as a journey to further secure the knowledge of Jesus Christ in our lives, even to the point of being recklessly abandoned to Him. (Gal. 2:20-21)

This “attitude” and “form” are key words for Paul (see questions # 9 & 10) and what the book of Philippians is all about—not to mention what *life* is all about! This is

what the recovered Christian life is all about. This is why Christ came. Yes, He came to save you from your sins, but then what? Are you to sit in a pew and complain, and throw pity parties when things do not go your way? Are you to hate the relatives during the holidays? NO! The Holy Spirit is determined that we realize Jesus Christ in every aspect of our life. If not, He will bring us back to the same scenario repeatedly until we learn the lessons He has for us—until we get it right.

Self-realization is thinking that we are *all* that leads to the believing. It is in thinking that if we are good, we will go to heaven, or that we are good persons, and we work hard, so we do not need Christ in our lives, thus we do not need Him to help us recover. It is saying that if He is there, we will keep Him on a “short leash.” This is totally anti-Biblical and wrong thinking. When we have this mindset, no growth or healing will accrue. There will be no maturity, no seizing the maturity of the Christian life, and no partaking in the real meaning of life.

Instead, the focus in life is on our issues and what took us there—the eating, the drinking, or the drugs—and not upon the washing of our sin by Who Christ is and what He has done for us, for you. We forsake each other for ourselves or use others as a means to spiral downward into oblivion; we seek to gain status or whatever it is we desire. The Holy Spirit is there all along, trying to guide us in, like an airport attendant with two flashlights guiding in a jumbo jet. The pilot must keep a careful eye on the person guiding him as well as the controls of the aircraft or else the multi-million dollar plane and the hundreds on board will be in dire jeopardy. We too, must keep watch on the Holy Spirit and His guiding, a teaching that is clearly seen in these verses.

So, we must take responsibility for our actions, seek His help, and watch His Spirit at work. We must take the controls and steer our life His way, lest we crash, resulting in a consequence to all those around us. It may come small, like a small man compared to the monstrous 747 jet. However, the 747 cannot park, nor can the passengers go on their way without the guidance from two very small flashlights. We have to take the initiative of realizing Jesus Christ in every phase of our daily life. If we don't, a counterfeit will invade in the place of Jesus. And it is that counterfeit that has taken you over and made you miserable.

When Jesus walked this earth in human form, Christ Himself realized His relationship to the Father even in his normal, day-to-day activities.

“After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:5)

Jesus knew that He was God, but as a man He “took a towel,” the most lowly and menial task of His day. It would compare today to our washing a toilet. So, if the Creator of the universe was able to be humble and be guided in by the seemingly small voice in a loud and large world, why cannot we?

The aim of the spiritual Christian, who desires healing and recovery, is to live the true Christian faith. We will have this Christ-like theme imprinted upon our hearts and

minds. This theme will permeate every activity and aspect of our lives—from refusing that drink to forgiving those who have wronged us, from enjoying the daily activities like buying groceries and taking care of the kids to helping someone else to know our Lord and be in recovery too— “*that I may know Him.*” Do you know Him where you are today? If not, you are failing Him. This may seem harsh, but very biblically true. Let us not be confused in our dependencies and addictions, our desires, our needs and wants, or our ideas of what we think the Christian life is to be like, and let us surrender ourselves to what the Word is really calling us, to maturity and growth in Him!

We are not on this earth just to appreciate ourselves, but to know Jesus and to make Him known. Something needs to be fixed and I must be the one to do it. Yes, something must be fixed, work must be done, and we must do it. But it has to be with Christ and by His lead, or our recovery will not work. When we are pursuing the Heart of Christ by following His character in “attitude” and “form,” then we will see our life and circumstances change. Then our behaviors will change too.

Questions to ponder:

1. When someone says the word, “addiction” or “dependency,” what comes to your mind?
2. Have you considered that there may be a pattern you could have picked up that has enslaved you? What is it? What can you do? How can your church help? What do you need? What will you do now?
3. Have you considered that you cannot be helped until you ask for and want it? And mean it? If so, what does that mean?
4. Read Philippians, chaps 1 - 2. What do you see as the connection between these two passages and your life?
5. What was Christ’s attitude toward others? (Remember, He is God, and deserves full worship and adoration)
6. When life does not go your way, what do you do?
 - a. Sit and complain?
 - b. Throw pity parties?
 - c. Abuse yourself by chemicals of over indulgence? Or?
7. What *should* you do when things do not go your way?
8. What does “attitude” mean to you? What are the attitudes in these verses? (In the Greek, “attitude” NIV, or “mind” in NKJV, (2:5) means a *mental state based on feeling, rather than just thinking*. It signifies a concern for others, whereas just *thinking* keeps the focus upon us. The opposite of this is “pride,” which is what Paul was confronting in these verses—Phil. 1:1-4; 2:7.)

9. How can you apply these themes into your life, so you may become more Christ-like? Begin with Philippians 3:10, "*That I may know Him.*" Do you know Him where you are today? If so, what can you do to implement the Christ-like character? If not, what is in the way?

10. Do you believe only Christ can help you to recover? So, what will you do now?

We, as the people of God who have been saved from our sins by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, have a call, a mandate to preserve His Word, and to proclaim His Word. We must remain steadfast in this call to our individual selves, as well as our neighbors.

As people who are His in recovery, we must come to the point that we allow the search and conviction of the Holy Spirit upon our lives to the very core of our being and souls (2 Cor. 13:5)! Once this happens, the result will be more faith and healing, the empowering to overcome and be of more use to Christ. The result for your life will be more focus upon His precepts and increased prayer, which will bring an outpouring of the Spirit and renewal! This will impact your life, your family, your friends, your neighborhood, and the world in which you live. It all starts with your determination to encompass His help, to exercise the faith He has given you to make it happen, and obey! What is stopping you?

Questions from Philippians 2, verses:

11. Are you confessing that *every tongue* (would) *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord?* Are you living and preaching to point you and others *to the glory of God the Father?*

12. Have you *always obeyed...continue(d) to work out your salvation with fear and trembling?*

13. Are you operating as *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose?*

14. Are you doing *everything without complaining or arguing?*

15. Are you operating as *blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe?*

16. Are you *holding out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ?* Do you realize that I (you) *did not run or labor for nothing?*

17. Are you *being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith?*

18. Are you *glad and rejoice with me* (Christ)?

19. Are you operating in the *hope in the Lord Jesus*?
20. Are you taking a *genuine interest in your (the) welfare of others*?
21. Are you just *looking out for his (your) own interests, not those of Jesus Christ*?
22. Are you as a son with his father (he has) *served with me (Jesus) in the work of the gospel*?
23. Are you filled with *hope, therefore, to send (be sent to serve) him*?
24. Are you *confident in the Lord*?
25. Are you taking *care of my (others') needs*?
26. Are you *longing for all ... distressed*?
27. Are you having *mercy... sorrow... on him (others)*?
28. Are you *eager to send him (be used by Christ)? Or are you consumed with anxiety*?
29. Are you *welcoming him (others) in the Lord with great joy, and honor*?
30. Are you *working of (for) Christ, (taking appropriate) risks... helping (others) and giving with what Christ has given you*?

What we experience in life, what we go through, what we suffer through, what we give up, is all just a mere shadow compared to the Eternity to come. What we seem to lose is of no comparison to what we gain in Him! Christianity and suffering are the Ultimate in *delayed gratification*!

Step 3: Make the Determination to Turn your Life over to Jesus Christ as LORD!

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

You are in God's care, so allow His hand to move and heal you!

God's Mercy to You

Romans 12: 1-2

Step 3: Make the Determination to Turn your Life over to Jesus Christ as LORD!

This is about your response to God! For you to recover you must make the determination to turn your life over to Jesus Christ as LORD! And the great News is this: the Gospel of Christ is also the transformation of your life, thinking, and relationships leading to your recovery.

This is how then we must live, because the Gospel is the transforming and converting power of God, because it transforms fallen social relationships by virtue of the dynamics of love, which is the fulfillment of the Law! *By what Christ has done*, must affect our lives and attitudes, and the people around us. Christianity is an offering to others in gratitude, by what Christ has done. Pleasing ourselves is not the goal of the Christian life as so many pursue. We are to follow Christ and be imitators of His character, so it transforms our very core of our being of who we are. We are to do this through love and acceptance of others, just as Christ did with us when we did not deserve it.

In the midst of your trials and troubles, you need to focus on Christ and see who He is and what He has done for you—how He can enable you for the better and for your recovery. You have been saved, not of any effort or reason on your part except by faith; so now what do you do with it? We are to take it to the streets in how we live to ourselves, others, and even our enemies. Yet, most Christians with dependency and addiction problems respond with a rear end firmly planted in a bottle that goes nowhere in service or glory to Christ. They hold on to a will or a hurt that will not allow conviction or change to their routine of dysfunction or life. Thus, the “crutch” of what we use to get high or take us away from our problems is just a club for our comfort that leads to our destruction when our problems could be a “huddle” to strategize and put forward how to engage the Christian life from our orders and help received from the “coach.” We need to know that Christ calls us to change our minds and remove our hurt like we change the oil in the car, to be a, “*devote themselves to him; and avoiding conformity to the world*” Christian. In other words, He wants us to be a changed person so we can be a change agent to others. Not to be infected by the world, but to help it along to His purpose. We cannot do that when we are poured out to our will, disease, or desires only

and not to our Lord. We are “*to be conformed to his holy will*”... “*to think humbly*”... “*to exercise faithfully*”... “*to mutual love, diligence, patience, hope, prayer, hospitality, compassion, and condescension*” “*and becoming conduct towards all men*”! Our devotion to Christ must be rooted in the mind and then the doctrine translates it to the feet and the rest of our bodies in between, the body of us as a human being and a body of believers in relation to all those around us, our duty. Yes, with Christ you can overcome whatever you have been through and live a life of distinction, happiness, and purpose for His glory and your betterment. You can succeed and do this with His help!

- *I beseech you/ I urge you.* Paul's main concern was whether his teaching would be applied, just studied, or ignored. The apprehension was that Christians would turn out like Pharisees, having the knowledge, but ignoring the application. The irony is that many of us are! Being a drunk or a drug addict or a smoker or a glutton with food gets just as much in the way as anything. Being a living sacrifice is a key aspect into maturity, and growth in the faith that leads to your recovery. The purpose of doctrine and study of His Word is not just the knowledge, (which is very important), but it is what we do with that knowledge that is our supreme goal.
- *Brethren/brothers,* meaning in Christ. We, as Christians, are to be deep friends that are bonded as family.
- *Present offer*—our relationship with the Lord must be transparent and not secretive (unless you live in a closed Muslim country)!
- *Mercies of God* flow from our obedience and trust and gratitude for what our Lord has done and for who He is (Luke 10:36-37; Eph. 4:23); they are the compassion for the needy and the lost. Our lives must be motivated by who we are in Christ and His love, and nothing else!
- *Living Sacrifice,* for the ancient Jews, meant to praise God as a continual lifestyle of worship. This motive continues and refers to the fact that we belong solely to God, not to ourselves or anything else (Rom. 3:25; 6:12-17; 8:13; John 15:13-15; 37-38; 1 John 3:16), His shed blood paid for us! You truly have dedicated the right to yourself to Christ! We give Him our all. It is easy to die for a cause, but are you willing to live for Him in perfect obedience, so your life is poured out, that as your strength is gone, you rely on His?
- *Reasonable service/Rational/Spiritual act of worship* means to think right without distractions or personal agendas; this means our judgments must be logical and concise on God as Lord and Motivator.
- *Service* meant the work of the priests in the Temple, holy before the Lord. In context, this refers to being a sacrifice and extending mercy to others. This is a part of our worship to Christ, part of who we are and must be. As the Jews placed a lamb on the altar, Christ is our Lamb, and we should place ourselves on

the altar too. Not because we have to, or to earn something, but because we are dedicated to live for our Lord.

- *Prove.* When we allow God's standard to be our "carrot on a stick", then our paths will be straight and we can overcome our habit and dysfunction. Then, every aspect of our life can be governed by our Lord, in perfect harmony, including our urges and temptations.

The proof test of Christ's work in you is this: Do you use people, or serve them? Do you just gather information, or do you apply it? When we become a Christian, either by birth in a Christian family or through evangelism as an adult, a time must come when the reality of who we are in Christ hits home in power and conviction. We will need to completely change the black dirty oil of the mind with the new golden anointing oil of His love and precepts. This will transform into a practical application of our faith that just does not happen on its own. Something wondrous must take place within us to transform us so we can. In other words, we must become the people of God in order that we are capable and willing to do the work of God.

Remember: we are never to separate theology from practice. Theology is the "who" and "why" that translates in to the "do" and "be" of life. The question is will we be dedicated to our Lord or to ourselves?

For information and studies on *God's will*, see our God's Will channel.

Questions

1. What does it mean to you to turn your life over to Jesus Christ as LORD?
2. Have you made the determination to turn your life over to Jesus Christ as LORD? If not why not? How will this help your recovery?
3. When you worship Christ (in church or at home in your devotions), what is going on in your mind?
4. What does it take for you to totally hand over your life, will, desires, and troubles to God? What gets in the way? What do you need to do?
5. Is the word *duty* something that comes to your mind when you leave church on Sunday?
6. How important is duty to you and your faith? What about your recovery?
7. Why do you think Paul never separates duty from doctrine?
8. If a non-Christian asked you what you do with your faith, how would you respond?

9. What life style do you think Christ has called you to?
10. How have you responded to His call?
11. Why would you consider not responding?
12. Every aspect of our lives is to be governed by our Lord, in perfect harmony. So, does this scare you?
13. How can being 'governed' by Christ be your greatest comfort?
14. How can being "governed" by Christ help you make better judgments and decisions?
15. The incentive for us to surrender our will to Christ is that His way is better than ours! Is this incentive exciting to you or a put-off?
16. Has Paul's fear become a reality in your life? If so, what can be done about it?
17. Why would being a living sacrifice be a key aspect of maturity and growth in the faith and your recovery?
18. What is the difference between cultural and duty versus devotion and lifestyle?
19. The proof test of being a mature Christian is *do you use people, or serve them?* Do you just gather information, or do you apply it? So, what does this proof text say about you?
20. What does the term "*Living Sacrifice*" mean to you? Does this term scare you? Why? How can you get over it?
21. What does the term "*Mercies of God*" mean to you?
22. Do you give Him your all? If you love Jesus, you will find a way to make Him real in all aspects of your life. How can you make this more so?
23. What can you do to make a commitment to have a Christian mindset away from your selfish nature and/or the world's over to His character? Now commit that you will make better judgments and decisions! Write this out as a promise and keep it with you.

Remember, you are in God's care, so allow His hand to move and heal you!

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Gen. 3:1-7; Psalm 99:3-5; Isa. 55:8-9; John 3:16-18; Rom. 5:6-11; 8:12-30; 12: 1-21; 15:7; Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 2:13-14; 3:13; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 4:9-10

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Surrender your will!!!

Step 4: We must take a hard look in us to see what comes out of us.

Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.
Lamentations 3:40

We need to be examined to see what needs to be fixed.

Getting Rid of False Beliefs

Lamentations 3:40

Step 4: We must take a hard look in us to see what comes out of us.

We must take a hard look in us to see what comes out of us. You can take a look at what you have done wrong, and then correct it by removing your false thinking and behaviors.

Your “self thinking” and the words about yourself that come from you will reflect your true character! Your thinking has the power to be used by God to change your life for the better. The greatest gift you have is the ability to communicate; the greatest responsibility is using your ability to communicate with character and distinction within the parameters of God’s call to you. The greatest message you will ever utter is the one that impacts you more in the faith and in so doing glorifying our Lord.

Jesus Christ and His Lordship is the only power that can help you recover! But do your words and thinking own up to this? To be impacted fully, you have to let Him do so, so it changes you from the inside and out. This is the power of the gospel and love to you and those with whom you come in contact. To impact your and other people’s lives from your tongue and character is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Your character is the gospel that most people will read! Thus, your words will either help draw you further into recovery or further away from the help you need.

When you start to be in recovery, you need to be careful with what you say and how you say it. Be honest and move on from the hurt to the healing. If you are willing to change, then you will see your recovery progress and your relationships blossom. Your life will change! How to do this? Well, it is really simple. Just as your mom or grade school teacher must have said, *think before you speak*. This is good but also prayer too before you talk about yourself, your issues and/or your progress. When we pray, and think first and speak later, we are able to make positive affirmations and create happiness and thus, have success in healing for ourselves and for others that we have hurt too.

When we are careless in our self-thinking, those words will boomerang back to us and keep up the cycle of hurt and pain. We will be reliving our abuse and whatever we faced that caused us the pain to embrace dependency and addiction. If we can control our thinking and words, we will experience success in our recovery life and,

most importantly, God will be glorified. Plan ahead for what you will say, so you will have a clear idea of the words you will use. At the same time, be in prayer, asking God to help you say words that encourage and impact, and do not tear down or cause gossip or distraction to Christ-like character. If you do not have encouraging words to say, then do not say anything. It is always best to say less and listen more. We have to guard what we are *not* to say as much as what we are *going* to say!

Here are some practical ideas on how we can make just minor changes to our thinking and reap much greater recovery and relationship skills. You will be able to help your healing and create better friendships and confidence in others as well as yourself. You will be building yourself and others up and not tearing them down; you will be glorifying our Lord and not taking an axe to your and God's efforts to restore you.

Here are some simple plans to put goodness in action by just watching how you use your words.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
Romans 12:17-18

Here are some replacement words you can use to create a better environment at work, school, church, and home.

Substitute Negative Words	With	Positive Words
"I can't" and "I won't"	With	"I haven't yet."
"I don't know"	With	"I will work on it more for you."
"If I"	With	"When I."
"That will be a problem"	With	"That's going to be a challenge."
"I will try"	With	"I will do"
"You are...or, I am...a failure"	With	"We are a success because we learned something."

How many more can you think of?

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 1 Peter 3:13-15

The ups and downs of recovery may get us down, and the arguments, tension, disagreements, gossip, treachery, betrayal, financial disasters, stress, and false

accusations may take its toll on us. Not to mention the problems we have brought onto our own selves. When life seems to rise up and wage war against us, our character can grow stronger and our relationships can improve. We can become even stronger and more loving—even more content. The choice is ours! On the other hand, these tough times can produce despair, confusion, anger, bitterness and loneliness. This will translate into how we use our words, and can escalate the problems into a revolving cycle of despair and chaos. If all that we see is failure and self-pity, cynicism will be produced rather than the person of character that God calls us to be. The same crushed grape will produce a good wine or sour vinegar. It all depends on how it is cared for and crafted. You are in control of your care and crafting when you keep your eyes on His care, and His crafting will enable you to produce the character of a fine wine, not sour vinegar.

Look what you can know:

1. **You are Christ's loved one** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10): Do not take your problem as a personal attack, even if it is. (You may have played the major role in your illness and may need a counselor to help you.) You are Christ's child; He is your identity and defense! When you understand that, you can better see your role in recovery and your road to restoration. Instead of being in dependency or addiction, you will be a relationship builder—even when the other person is seeking to or has torn you down. This first point has saved me a lot of stress and disappointment!
2. **Understand Forgiveness** (Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 43:25; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Colossians 3:12-14): Most Christians have a pale sense of the wonder that we have been forgiven, and often fail to show forgiveness to others when wronged. Forgiveness is absolutely crucial for any recovery or relationship to continue, and critical to resolving any conflict! Remember how much you have been forgiven; do not fail to show it to others! Remember, God does not treat us the way we tend to treat others.
3. **Your Pain and Hurt are also Opportunities** (1 Corinthians 6:1-8): It is an opportunity to learn and give God honor. It is not necessary for us to continue our cycle of hurt, bad, or the ending of a relationship. Know for certain that God can use your past failings, whether it is sin, bad choices, a wrong turn, or a misunderstanding, and transform them into good if you let Him. God will be glorified, and you will grow in character, maturity, trust, love, obedience, and in faith.

The same scenario happens in our “self-thinking” with how we view and respond to ourselves. What we believe shapes what we do and say. That is why a healthy understanding of doctrine and God's Word is so essential, as it will help shape our whole being. Again, this is also why the first step is so important as a foundation to understand fullness and the Kingdom of God as well as ourselves. If what we believe does not reflect the truth of what is in the Word of God, how we recover will fall way short of what we could have been. If what we believe does not reflect His truth, then what we feel will not reflect the reality of Christ's love for us. If we do not have a healthy

self-worth from the realization of who we are in Christ, it will adversely affect our ability to recover and build relations with others!

Questions

1. Who has control of your thinking, God or man? Do you truly know the power your thinking has?
2. Have you taken a hard look in yourself to see what comes out of you?
3. What does your “self thinking” say about yourself to others?
4. What have you done to take a hard look inside you to see what comes out of you? Such as your morality, character, virtue and Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5)?
5. How is Jesus Christ and His Lordship working in your life?
6. How has He helped you with the power that can help you recover?
7. How have you experienced reliving your abuse and whatever you faced that caused you the pain? What can you do?
8. Look at the replacement words. How can you use them to create a better environment at work, school, church, and home? How will this help your recovery?
9. How and why do our words and thinking reflect our true character?
10. Reflect on your “self worth” and thinking, how you think of and treat yourself. How are you doing here?
11. Does your image of yourself represent the fact God deeply loves and care for you? How so? Why not? What do you need to do to grow in this area?
12. How have you experienced careless, self-thinking words boomeranging back to you and keeping up the cycle of hurt and pain? Why would you want to continue this? How can you stop?

Do you have a sponsor or mentor to help you through these steps? If not, why not? Get one! Ask your pastor!

Meditate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 19:14; 51:10; Matt. 9:12-13; Mark 7:21; 9:23-24; 12:29-31; Ephesians 4:29-32; Philippians 4:8

Positive Thinking

Romans 12

Positive thinking has been negatively viewed in Reformed and Evangelical circles due to its abuse by some preachers. Nonetheless, positive thinking is a call from our Lord and it is necessary, even essential for recovery. It does not replace His Spirit and Word, but it will impact all that we are and do in our recovery.

Here are some replacement thoughts to help line up your thinking to God's reality.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

Substitute Negative Thoughts	With	Positive Thoughts
I do not feel loved.	With	God loves me and nothing can buffet that. Romans 8:31; 38-39
I give up.	With	I can. Philippians 4:13
I am too weak.	With	The Lord is my strength. Psalm 27:1
I am a failure.	With	God does not abandon me. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9
I am worthless.	With	I am not worthless because God made me. Psalm 139 13-16
I am confused.	With	God has a plan for me. Jeremiah 29:11
I am afraid.	With	God gives me power, love and no fear. 2 Timothy 1:7
I feel alone.	With	God is with me. Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5
I feel unfulfilled.	With	I can be content. Philippians 4:11
I do not know what to do.	With	God will give me wisdom. James 1:5
I feel judged.	With	I am not condemned. Romans 8:1

Theology is our understanding of who God is and what He has done for us. This directly translates into who we are and what we do. If you think theology is not important in regard to relationships, consider how it relates to our feelings and how we view others and ourselves around us:

Theological Concepts	Theological Results
<p>Justification means we are completely forgiven by God by what Christ has done! God's righteousness is covering us! There is nothing that we can add to it, such as good works or clean living. Thus, we have no balance to weigh a judgment on someone else! (Romans 2:5-16; 3:22; 5:1;10; 9:30; Philippians 3:4-14; I John 1:9).</p>	<p>My response to <i>justification</i> is I do not need to fear the expectations of others or my own failure because God accepts me! Therefore I do not need to withdraw, gossip, manipulate, or be overly driven to succeed; I do not need to please others for my self-approval. My focus is on God's glory and His Kingdom!</p>
<p>Reconciliation means I am at peace with God because Jesus <i>reconciles me to God</i>, so I am not an enemy of God; I am accepted by Him and need not fear His wrath and punishment. Since I am at peace, I am no longer at war with God. I realize as a believer that I am in a fallen world that is still at war with God (2 Cor.5:18-21; Eph.2:16; Col. 1:20-22).</p>	<p>My response to reconciliation is realizing I have harmony in Christ. I do not need the approval of people when I have God's. I do not need to fear being rejected or not accepted by others. I can be an instrument of His peace and character regardless of what others do to me. I can relax and in Him and be vulnerable to build relations with others without fear.</p>
<p>Propitiation means God deeply loves me! His grace covers me. God's wrath is pleased by the sacrifice that Christ made on my behalf. I no longer need to fear losing out on love or being rejected. I know that God loves me and desires me to model His character with love, care, and respect. This allows Christ's amazing grace to cover all the evil within me (Habakkuk. 2:4; Romans 3:21-26; Ephesians 2:8-9).</p>	<p>My response to <i>propitiation</i> is that I do not need to go around feeling unloved, blaming and slandering others to make myself feel good. I do not need to put others down when they do not meet my standards, because I certainly do not meet Gods! So, my actions can be in response to the transformation of Christ's grace by living an honest life. I can remove the hypocrisy in me that can cause so much destruction.</p>
<p>Regeneration means that Christ is at work in me and through the Holy Spirit is making me completely new. He is my hope! This fact hits me when I have a sense of my need and futility. If I continue in sin, I realize that my regeneration is in question because the control of the Christian life is grace, not sin! (Matthew 5:3; Romans 6:15-23; Galatians 4:19).</p>	<p>My response to <i>regeneration</i> is a desire to be humble, knowledgeable and repentant, always seeking God. I can be a changed person and move in the direction of maturity and fullness in His Kingdom. My identity is in Christ and all I do is because of Him. So, my desire is to continue to operate with passion, truth, and conviction.</p>

Understanding who and what God has done for us affects all of our being, including our recovery, relationships, goals, and the direction we take in life. We cannot

rely on our own efforts, skills, personal connections, or beliefs. Remember that is the first step, *I am powerless to do this on my own and I admit my need for help and Jesus*. How we recover and heal is directly related to how we see ourselves in Christ. If our relationship with Christ is on track and growing, so are our recovery and relationships! Our self-esteem must come from who we are in Christ and what Christ has done for us. This should give us enormous satisfaction and sense of worth. The King and Creator of the universe cares for me and loves me! He is living within—guiding, loving, and holding me! There is no adequate substitution for that! But, it is sad that we try so hard to substitute the wonders of the truth of what Christ did for us with stupid insignificant lies.

Building and developing recovery is not just something we learn from a book or hear from a sermon. It is not fully realized from a counselor or a treatment plan, even though these are necessary. It does not come upon us in the night, or sneak up in the day. It does not come automatically, accidentally, or suddenly. It is a process that comes from being parented in it from God Himself. He leads us and in our motives we are to respond in gratitude and diligence. It is a slow process. You may not even realize you have it until others point it out in you.

Remember this; recovery is not permanent once it is formed. It requires our continual grip and practice. There are many times when it falls away—times of great stress and moments of weakness through personal loss or personal sin. I have seen it nearly flee from me on many occasions from all that I have been through in life. But, when we remain in Christ, He remains in us; He even remains in us when we do not remain in Him!

Many great people have said this over the millennia, “Our strength is shown in the things we stand for; our weakness is shown in the things we fall for. People of genius are admired; people of wealth are envied; people of power are feared; but only people of character are trusted.” Can you see yourself in those words? We help create our world of recovery and relationships by our choices through our own use of words, so use them wisely!

This step is not to bring shame and discomfort to you, but allow for reflection to see what you need to do and grow from here.

Questions

1. How are the words from your mouth being used? How are your words guiding you? How are your words touching others?
2. We all make mistakes. So, what is the difference between a deliberate or premeditated sin and a mistake?
3. Carefully look over these charts and be in prayer. How can these thoughts help you? Can you commit to it?

4. If you want to continue in your dependency or addiction what do you hope to gain? How will it improve your life and others around you?
5. Do you have a problem with resentment or unforgiveness? What do you need to do about it?
6. Take some time and write out an inventory of yourself. Concentrate on what you have done well and have not done so well. Then in prayer and the help of a sponsor or counselor, see what you can do to overcome these setbacks and behaviors.
7. How have you handled your recovery so far? What do you still need to do?
8. How is your tongue a reflection of your mind and a mirror to your soul?
9. What would it take for you to fully realize that our thoughts and words are tools at the disposal of our hearts and minds?
10. How do you balance personal responsibility and the grace that God has for you?
11. How you recover and heal is directly related to how you see yourself in Christ. So how are you doing with this?
12. How is your patience in this journey of recovery so far? Read Eph. 4:1-3; what do you need to do more for this step? What still needs to be examined to see what needs to be fixed?

Meditate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 4; 25:11; 28:13; Matthew 12:33-35; Luke 6:45; 2 Corinthians 3:2; Colossians 3:5-17; 4:6; James 3:9-12

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For more on this step see our topic on Forgiveness!

Step 5: Be willing to admit your wrongs to God, self, and others.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16

I have wronged and hurt others by my actions and words; I will commit to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Power of Prayer!

James 5: 13-18

Step 5: Be willing to admit your wrongs to God, self, and others.

When facing problems and obstacles or in any situation, what are we to do *first*? Is it to complain? Argue with one another? Be stressed? Get really upset? Take a smoke, go to the bottle or the extra piece of pie or the needle or...NO! We are called to pray, as prayer not only sets the tone for our behaviors and insights, but it also brings Christ into the picture with us more powerfully and effectively. Life is not about getting what we want, nor is prayer, as we may get a *yes*, or a *no*, or maybe a call to *wait* for the right timing. This passage is a series of calls to prayer and confession. We all indeed are called to seek forgiveness and reconciliation and prayer is a key for this to happen. That is why God says so in this passage.

Prayer is the active communication we have with God; it is the most important act for us in any matter or endeavor. Prayer is not about our will; rather, it is a means of seeking His (Matt. 6:33). Prayer does not just prepare us for recovery and service; prayer *is* our service to enabling His work in us for life and recovery. Prayer is not just a means of preparing us for the encounters and battles of life; it *is* the battle! Prayer is more about being the greatest work we can do than about the results we receive from it! Remember, our obedience is what is important, not how others respond to us. We are even called to bless those unreasonable people, and we do that, as we mature, by remaining true to His Lordship. You cannot be responsible for how others act in response to or treat you when you are conducting yourself with godly character (Romans 12:14-21).

- *Suffering* here means “in distress,” and includes physical sickness, being stressed out, or having emotional and/or personal problems, including our addictions and dependencies. To us in this situation, hope seems to be missing and relief is absent, but when we come to them, we bring the hope and relief!
- *Sing songs* means praising our Lord, in unity and with a willing, loving heart. This is an aspect of real worship and music, which is never a show; rather, it is a response of our love giving praise. We, as a congregation, are the performers, and Christ is the audience. Real, authentic worship is to be inspired by who

Christ is and what He is doing in us. It is not about form or function or type; it is about our hearts showing our love to Him. Prayer and worship share the same heart and attitude (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:12-17).

- *Sick*. The call for us here is to engage them with love and care; it is not about the healing, although, whenever possible, we are to seek the best and continual medical attention and psychological intervention. It is more about showing our love and willingness to be healed coming from His love. Also, the call for the sick person is to make sure others know they are sick so the others can respond. We who are in dysfunction need to reach out our hand for help and remove any pride that would keep us from doing it!
- *Elders* are the people selected to be in charge of the local church, whose call is to train, care for, and administer His love and precepts to the rest of the congregation. They must have the qualities of Christ working in them before they can help others. The connection is that the elders should be the primary ministers to the people of the church, making sure those who need help get the help they need (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim. 3:2-7; 5:15; Titus 1:5-16; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- *Anointed with oil* has two meanings: “the healing power of God,” a call, and also to “seek medical attention.” It is not a ceremonial procedure, although it can also infer actually applying oil to the person and praying over them. We are called both to pray, have the determination to work out our psychological or chemical problem, and to also seek the medical attention we need (Isa. 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34).
- *Power of faith* refers to trusting in God and then being faithful towards our intercessory duty to others. It does not mean a “special power” as some have proclaimed; rather, it is a call to action to show our Christian community and faith displayed in our care toward one another. Yes, God does heal today, but healing is not guaranteed or even normative. However, His empowerment to help you overcome dependency is. How we respond and learn is what matters to God over all else, even an actual healing. If your body is healed and your mind and heart are not centered on him, what good is it; it is merely temporary and of no eternal use.
- *Committed sins*. James is not saying all sickness is from sin, as some Jewish Rabbis thought; harboring resentment and unforgiveness actually deteriorate the body and mind. Seeking forgiveness is very restorative to the soul and body! Sometimes, though, God can cause us to be sick to get us out of sin, as it is far better to be stooped by sickness than to create a much worse environment for others and ourselves. Sin is the biggest barrier between God and us, and prevents God’s work being received by us. Confession breaks these barriers (1 Cor. 11:30; Phil. 2:25-30).

What is prayer? It is receiving the amazing, redemptive work of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, so His power and purpose flow through us and into others. Prayer is spending time and talking with God, expressing our heart to Him, and interceding on behalf of others. It is meant to be exciting, powerful, and fulfilling. Just like a phone conversation, prayer is not a one-way communication. God will speak to us, not from a burning bush, but in quiet ways; so, we must also listen. And, of course, always compare to Scripture what you think He said, as He will never contradict Himself. Then, you will be able to distinguish between your desires and His precepts. There is no need we can ever face that prayer cannot meet; there is never a problem we go through that prayer cannot answer!

Real prayer is not found in formulas, but encouragement that will lead us to pursue God! When we seek Him, we are ready, along with others, to engage in recovery, enabling the actions of forgiveness from our appeal and request to God to the people we have hurt, who need closure and/or understanding and/or reconciliation. We can pray for forgiveness, for our nation, show our gratitude—even pray for our healing. Thus, in all things, we are to be both in personal prayer and collective prayer with other believers. Prayer is not just a means to get what we request; it is the means to line us up with God, His precepts, and His presence. Prayer can meet all things and needs; prayer can and must be a significant part of anything we will ever face in life, from the trivial to things of utmost importance! We can have confidence that our prayers are heard and answered. No matter what we need or face, we have Christ! Thus, we must preface, surround, and empower all that we do with prayer. It is never to be an afterthought; rather, it must be our first thought, our principle action, and our primary plan.

Questions

1. What are we to do *first* in all situations? What causes you to go first to the art of complaining or stress or arguing or to your addiction?
2. What do you do when you are facing hardships? How does that get you in trouble?
3. How is prayer a part of these experiences? How can it be more so in your recovery?
4. Are you willing to admit your wrongs to God, self, and others? If not, why not?
5. What is prayer to you? How many of your prayers involve listening to God? How can you do this in a better way?
6. How does harboring resentment and unforgiveness actually deteriorate your body and mind?
7. Why is seeking forgiveness very restorative to our soul and body?

8. How have you seen and experienced sin and unforgiveness as a barrier between you and God?
9. How does your continual habit prevent God's work being received by you?
10. How does trusting in God and being faithful help you in being effective towards your intercessory duty to others and their recovery from your actions?
11. From whom do you need to ask forgiveness? Start making a list, which we will explore more in Step 8.
12. Make a commitment to admit your wrongs to God first. When and how will you do this?
13. What have you done about admitting your wrongs to God, self, and others?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Luke 11:2-4; Acts 1:14; 4:24

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The Power of Confession!

James 5: 13-18

Step 4: I have wronged and hurt others by my actions and words; I will commit to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

What is Confession? It is the event of responding to the Gospel's message, then acknowledging our faith and recovery by asking those we have offended for forgiveness. This can even be done publicly with discernment and honoring of confidentiality. We must, for our benefit and the continual healing of our relationships with others and ourselves, realize our wrongs. *I have wronged and hurt others by my actions and words; I will commit to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.* As this passage so eloquently states, this starts with our mind, then our prayers and our surrender to God, who is our Higher Power.

We have to realize we cannot change the wrongs of our past. What's done is done. But we can seek healing and some degree of restoration. Some relationships can't be healed, but they and we can move on in a better way. In so doing, we will have greater joy, peace, patience, and healing!

Our *confession* becomes a continual process where we conform our lives to His Way so our faith applies to our lives and our battle with sin and dependency. This means we come to the grace, forgiveness, and authority of Christ; because of Him, we keep submitting by the application of His precepts to our lives that results in maturity and spiritual growth that fuel our recovery. This is a "grace" in that we receive the ability from Christ, and a "discipline" in that it requires the commitment on our part to own up to and acknowledge the sins that show our deep, hurtful flaws and faults. Thus, we also continue to lead a life that confesses wrongdoings and is accountable.

This means we change our minds and ways so we are souls at rest in Him, and so our motives, values, goals, aspirations, and plans are about seeking Christ's Lordship and standing firm in Him, not seeking our own personal agenda. Repentance is done before God; *confession* is done before God, then others, and also by having others hold us accountable to our faith. *Why can't I just confess to God?* Because you will leave a path of devastation without help and healing for those you have hurt. A real Christian would never do that! This also helps us learn humbleness and the release of our pride; that opens the floodgates of healing and recovery!

The distinction between *confession* and *repentance* is that *confession* is taking our *repentance* before God and telling someone besides God (of course you go to Him first and foremost!) to hold us accountable and help in restoring.

What happens when we do not confess?

The waywardness of our sinful nature will resume and take control; this allows us, as a "Christian," to go back to the bottle or the smoke or the extra piece of cake,

or... So such things as peace, joy, and contentment will become lost, and bitterness, anger, and withdrawal will engage us to act the opposite of God's call! When we do not *confess*, we are not doing what is right; in fact, we are even fighting against God and our recovery (Matt. 4:17; 27:3; John 10:10; 2 Cor. 7:10-11). Confession helps us recognize the magnitude of what we have done. This is liberation and frees us; it is not pretense, bondage, or oppression!

Remember, His Way is better than yours! You do not need the bottle or the smoke or the extra piece of pie, you just need Him! Our recovery is enabled and strengthened by our communication and encounter with our loving, living Lord! Prayer is a call, not to bend our knees, but to bend our heart, and for this call, we need to know the veracity and importance of it (2 Peter 1: 1-4).

So, *what can I do?* Do not laugh at sin or your dependency or dysfunction, or rationalize or minimize it; rather, guard against it. This is where our *confession* in Christ and being held accountable helps us stay focused, grow, and be the person who is authentic in the faith. Thus, we must allow Christ's conviction and our accountability to others to assess who we are and who we ought to be. If we are in a self-indulgent lifestyle, with the desire to live and do as we please, we are headed back to trouble and for a life that is sad and pathetic. We may be Christians, sealed by His Grace, but do we serve Him as we "run" our personal lives? God wants us to "hear this word," not bow to our pleasure-seeking mindsets, so our personal aspirations of control are surrendered to Him, allowing His Lordship to be manifested in all parts of our lives (Isaiah 28:7-8; Amos 4:1).

Prior to beginning this step, seek out some same-gender people who are more mature and/or further in their walk with Christ than you, and ask them to hold you accountable (if you think there are none, you have pride, or fear, or anger, or perhaps the desire to stay in your sins clouding you, because even Billy Graham has such people in his life!). Perhaps your counselor, pastor or qualified mentor will suffice. We have many resources on our **Small Groups** Channel. Also, as in all these disciplines, be prepared to take "baby steps."

This step is also a picture of hope with a call to trust in Christ as LORD. He is our confidence and conviction over all, including our daily struggles of life. When we trust Him, we have His help and we are on our way to glory. It is a call to recognize who Jesus is and what He has done so we can be impacted by faith and be an impact for Him.

Questions

1. What is a picture of hope that motivates you? How does the "world to come" give you hope?
2. How do you feel that you have wronged and hurt others by your actions and words?

3. How do you feel about this step to seek forgiveness and reconciliation?
4. Why is it scary? What do you fear? Why do you not want to do it?
5. How will this step help you recover? How will it help those who you have hurt?
6. How does prayer go with forgiveness and reconciliation?
7. How does *the refusal to be responsible with our faith* counteract our recovery?
8. What is the cost to your recovery as well as the Kingdom of God when we refuse to confess?
9. How much of your life is under Christ's domain and control? Where do you fail in your judgments and decisions and how can you improve?
10. When and how will you commit to seeking forgiveness and reconciliation?
11. How will confession break these barriers and help you recover? What do you need to do? To whom?
12. Write out a list and commit to doing so soon (you may write it out in two columns, first with the names and second the offence. Just like the TV show *Earl*). This is to receive God's forgiveness before we can move to step 8 and seek the forgiveness of others.

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: 2 Samuel 11; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:8-13; 1 John 1:9

The Serenity Prayer

GOD, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living ONE DAY AT A TIME; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace. Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen (Reinhold Niebuhr-1926)

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Confess your Wrongs

James 5: 13-18

Step 5: I have wronged and hurt others by my actions and words; I will commit to seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Confession needs your prayers, accountability, and diligence! Prayer is not just an exercise we do. Rather, it is the active communication we have with God; it is the most important act for us in any matter or endeavor. Prayer is not about our will; rather, it is a means of seeking His (Matt. 6:33). Prayer does not just prepare us for recovery and healing; prayer *is* our healing. Prayer is not just a means of preparing us for the encounters and battles of life; it *is* the battle! Prayer is more about being the greatest work we can do than about the results we receive from it! Remember, our obedience is what is important, not how others respond to us. We are even called to bless those unreasonable people who hurt us, and as we do that, we mature by remaining true to His Lordship. You cannot be responsible for how others respond and treat you when you seek their forgiveness, because you are acting in godly character (Romans 12:14-21).

Ask God, be real, be honest, be yourself, and make sure your motives are right. We are never to seek to manipulate God to get our way, just as we are not to do so with others. In this spirit, we can come to one another and seek accountability and reconciliation. We can confess and be on guard with sin, so it stops and does not fester or escalate. And, as Elijah demonstrated to us, always remember that a righteous person is a praying person; we cannot do anything of meaning or significance for our Lord unless we are a person and a church of prayer!

- *Confess*. We are called to be accountable to one another, to state what we are going through and struggling with to someone in confidence who will listen and help guide us by His Word. It is not about going to a pastor or priest, but to God directly, and with accountability, to another trusted person, small group, or mentor. We cannot do the Christian life by ourselves; it is not a spectator or an individual sport! Christianity is not for *lone rangers*, it is for community!
- *Righteous man* means a person who is rooted in his or her faith to Christ and has a growing prayer life that also shows up in his or her behavior.
- *Elijah*, in 1 Kings 18, was a miracle worker. James uses him as an inspiration and incentive to the power and prominence we have available to us. Elijah represents the “everyman,” who, by his prayer life, was powerfully used by God (1 Kings 17:1; 18: 1, 41-46; 1 Sam. 12:17-18)!
- This also refers to submitting to the sovereignty of God (Proverbs 1:24-33; 6:16; 8:13, Isaiah 57:15; 66:2; Micah 6:8). We remove our pride by “clinging” to the cross, confessing our sins, and seeking forgiveness from God and others whom

we have offended. Our discipline in the faith will help strengthen our walk as we continue to grow in Him.

- God judges us by the knowledge of what we have learned. Staying ignorant, thinking "I will not seek forgiveness so I will not be held accountable" is an even a greater offence. It is not the amount of the matter we have; it is our response to it that matters. He knows the truth about each of us, there is nothing to hide, so confess and repent!

We need to hear His call. Christ calls us to take up the cross and deny ourselves; this is extreme discipleship, a call that is to cancel out our will so we can submit to His. When we confess Christ as our Savior, it means He is our Lord. We are to surrender to His direction, call, and purpose. When we claim to be His, we need to commit and follow, leaving behind all that hinders and causes us to go astray. This goes against our will, experiences, and our culture that says, *you are number one, and you deserve whatever you want*. But, usually what we want is not what is best. This is what got you in trouble in the first place! Yes, we deserve better; and *better* is to be in Christ and to follow His ways. When we deny ourselves, we are liberating ourselves from misdirected ways to His way—from temporary, skewed fun to eternal wonder.

How do I do this? Keep your eyes on God, not on people! If you only seek God for your needs, you will never understand God, yourself, or His wonderful plan for you (John 17:22)! Your faith would be on your terms only. How sad that would be! How much you would lose!

Keep up with your spiritual growth and prayer. Our private prayers are the ones that shape us; our public prayers are the ones that are to help others be shaped, and be in spiritual agreement to express praise, worship, seek forgiveness from God and each other, confess sins, make petitions for one another, and teach one another (Luke 11:2-4; Acts 1:14; 4:24).

Many misguided Christians will say to another Christian who is ill or going through troubles, that he or she does not have enough faith or that he or she has unconfessed sin in his or her life and that is why the sickness or dysfunction has come; then they use this passage to back up their uncaring and insensitive claims. But, this is not what God is saying! It is not about the healing; it is about showing the love and care of our Lord. Making statements such as these does otherwise, and misses the call of the Scriptures! If you are earnestly praying, and perhaps are frustrated that you have not received an answer or the healing you desire, remember: while you are waiting, God is working (Matt. 21:22; John 14:14)!

Prayer is our primary means of communication with our Lord. It is also the bond that builds community, churches, and marriages, as it synergizes and brings out God's love! It is a marvel and a wonder that we, as created human beings, can obtain direct communication with God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Prayer shows us His love and concern for us just in allowing us to make our presence and requests known, and His even further, unfathomable love in that He earnestly hears us and gives

us an answer and intervention! Prayer is precious; it is not to be a half-hearted endeavor, or just an empty routine, an unctuous ceremony, or a meaningless ritual. Prayer is not about the recitation of words, nor is it about posture, place, or expression usage; it is an outpouring of the posture of our heart to His. Prayer is an expression of our connection of love for what Christ has done for us in giving each of us this precious relationship with God. It shows our love and dependence on Him. It is a primary avenue for us to learn and grow in Him, and to be better equipped in life to touch others in His Name. Therefore, it is a relationship of dependency, as any real growth must involve the surrender of our will to His Will. Prayer pulls us up by the roots and plants us further in His presence and will! Beware! We are deceiving ourselves if we think we can live our Christian life without prayer, as one could be married or have a child and never have communication with that spouse or child. It could be done, but the relationship would be absent and soon would be bankrupt; we cannot *do* life on our own. Even if we could (and many Christians seem to), God just might let you; this would really be the time for fear and dropping to our knees!

Prayer is not just about what our own needs are. It is about putting our lives and experiences in Him, sharing our days and lives, both in times of urgency and times of happiness, and bringing others to our thoughts and into our prayers. Continual and effective prayer will build our relationship with God and motivate our recovery. We will realize that He is in charge of all that happens in our lives, and that we are in His Hands. How we interact with Christ as Lord and respond to others is rooted in how we communicate. Our spiritual growth and how we can connect to God with an effectual relationship is determined by how effective our prayer life is. It can be put this way: all we do in life is based on our ability to communicate—and our principle communication is to our loving Lord!

Questions

1. What does Confession involve and mean for you?
2. When you start to confess to others, what do you think you will lose? Consider what you lose is your isolation, pain, bad health, and bad relationships.
3. How does prayer set a tone for us in our behaviors and insights? How can prayer help your church or relationships?
4. Why do some Christians feel that prayer is all about getting what we want? How do you feel about that? What can be done to show people the primary purpose of prayer?
5. How does prayer become the means to line us up with God? What can you do to make sure your motives are right with prayer? How will this help overcoming your dependency?

6. Do you believe that prayer can meet all the things and needs that you will ever face? Do you have the confidence that your prayers are heard and are answered? How can you have more confidence in prayer?
7. How does harboring resentment and unforgiveness deteriorate your body and mind? Can you give an example?
8. How does knowing that God can cause us to be sick to get us out of sin keep you motivated in the right direction?
9. What can you do to make your prayer life more time-invested, more exciting, more powerful, and more fulfilling?
10. What will you do about confession and repentance? How will that play a part in your Fruit and character? When will you do it?
11. What does it mean to you to *cling* to the cross? How will confessing your sins and seeking forgiveness from God and others whom you have offended help you? Now, what are you going to do about it?
12. Look over your list and be in prayer and continue to seek these people out, remember they may fear you, so go to public places, bring a friend, and have them do so too. And keep in mind when you do this in step 8, most people will not be positively responsive to you. You are not responsible how they respond; you are only responsible that you seek forgiveness.

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Peter 1: 1-4

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Step 6: Commit yourself to obey God, His precepts so you do not go back to your old ways that cause you dysfunction!

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10

Allow God to smash the substance out of your life that hinders your growth, character and Fruit.

How to Succeed in Recovery! Part 1

James 4: 7-10

Step 6: Commit yourself to obey God, His precepts so you do not go back to your old ways that cause you dysfunction!

Do you struggle with which direction in life to go? Has your dependence or addiction caused you so much internal strife that you have experienced physical and emotional damage? Have you struggled with relapses? It is James' intent in this passage to show us the direction by imperatively grabbing us with ten commands that are essential to honoring God and relating to people. These commands call us to direct, hands-on action without delay. We are to humble ourselves before God and, at the same time, resist the devil, as we cannot serve both. When we draw near to God, the devil is pushed further away. If we draw near to the devil, then God is pushed further away. The signpost is clear where we are to go; the direction we choose is up to us.

You must commit yourself to obey God and His precepts so you do not go back to your old ways that caused you dysfunction! This passage asks us the crucial question: *are we resisting God or resisting the devil?* How we respond to recovery, life, and other people will be rooted in how we respond to God. Do we fight Him or do we glorify Him? How do we know? The answer is in how we are with our attitudes and mindsets; are we humble or proud? If we are proud, we are serving the devil, even though we may think we are serving ourselves. If we are humble, then we are serving our Lord. Then we can have the assurance that He is with you, that He can and will transform you, and that you can do this. This strikes at the root of our mindset and motivation in life.

Obedience is submitting to what God requires of us. This call of our Lord will help motivate us to keep seeking Him and cleaving to Him, regardless of the circumstances, so we will be able to keep His precepts and be loyal to His call and our recovery. It is also recognizing authority and direction from others, such as the pastor and counselor, so winning situations can result.

- *Submit* means to obey! It is our surrender to God in His will. We are urgently called to accept the absolute authority of God. We are under His authority whether or not we acknowledge Him, so we might as well acquiesce. It does no

good to fight God, as Jacob discovered (Gen. 32:22-32). In this context, it also refers to fights and quarrels so they do not build and take us over (James 4:1-6). Jacob's dispute with his brother had to be resolved (Gen 33).

- *Resist the devil.* This means to flee the devil's kingdom, his values, and his wisdom and embrace God's kingdom, values, and wisdom. This has more to do with moral values than spiritual warfare. Your devil is the devil and the battle that you have. It is the bottle or the needle or the pill or the smoke or the extra piece of pie, or... The great news is that the devil does not have equal authority or power as the popular "Ying/Yang" philosophy states; rather, he only has the power we give to Him, while God has absolute power. The devil is not invincible; he is easily thwarted when we don God's armor, so we can disregard his temptations and flee from him. We evade the lusts of our heart and world by running from it, not toward it (Eph. 6:11-18; James. 3:15, 17; 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8-9)!
- The knowledge of who we are in Christ will be the driving force of how we are with others (Galatians 2:20-21; 6: 3-5; Philippians 3:10)!
- We are best able to function in ministry by concentrating our efforts of growing in our relationship with Christ into a daily love endeavor (Hebrews 10:19-25; 11:1-3).
- *Draw near to God* means purification, developing your personal relationship with God through the disciplines of the faith (Ex. 30:19; Matt. 7:7; Rev. 3:20). We are responsible for our spiritual growth. God provides the *plan*, Christ is the *way*, and the Spirit is the *guidance*; however, we provide the *will* of our hearts from our humbleness, and further exhibit it with our hands and feet. The focus is on trust and obedience.
- *Cleanse your hands* refers to Psalm 24:4, "clean hands and a pure heart." Our inner purity guards us against moral defilement. This is illustrated by how a priest cleaned his hands and feet at the bronze basin before he approached God at the Tabernacle/Temple. They had an elaborate ritual that cleansed them from the dirt of the land and the dirt of the heart (Ex. 20:16; 30:17-21; Lev 19:12; Deut. 21:6; Psalm 24:4; Jer. 5:2; 7:9; Zech. 5:4; Mal 3:5; Matt. 5:8; Eph. 6:11-18; James 4:2, 14; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).
- *Purify your heart.* This means that submission to God produces humbleness which then produces right attitudes and motives.
- *Double minded.* This is a harsh diatribe that describes a *hypocrite*. James is directly calling his people, "you sinners!" Greek philosophers, as well as many Jewish teachers, detested hypocrisy and considered it the most heinous sin. James, as did his brother, Jesus, in Matthew 23, makes the point that the people are being "two faced," insincere, and treacherous. Our behaviors must show our beliefs, and the commitment not to go back to our old ways.

- Hope is the effect of obedience and trust in our Lord (Heb. 6:18). If you have no hope, then you have no vision and purpose, no trust in the One who loves.

How do I maintain my direction in life, so I am pleasing Him and seeking His purpose in my recovery? The answer lies in the direction in which we are heading. When we draw to God, we undertake His precepts and apply them to life. God is consistent; when we seek Him, we find that He has already sought us and will continue to reveal Himself and the depths of His love to us all our days on earth as well as throughout eternity. The key to this is our willingness to confess our sin and move toward Him and away from false and deceitful ways.

James is also plainly telling us that God hates pride and God hates worldliness! God loves humility and He loves you. What did our Lord exercise while He walked this earth? Humility! He is God incarnate, Lord of the universe. Born as a baby, he lived in the lower social order of human life in devotion and meekness, serving as our ultimate example. He did not have to live that way. He could easily have lived as the greatest king in the most lavish lifestyle imaginable, yet He chose humility because it was the best way; it was His way (John 3:16; 17:24; 1 John 2:15-17).

Questions:

1. If God asked you if you were resisting Him or resisting the devil, what would you say? How does this affect your recovery?
2. Why do you suppose James gives this diatribe of ten imperative commands? How do these affect your recovery?
3. How would you respond if your pastor or friend passionately preached this to you while you were using? Would you resist? Why? How is your compliancy level?
4. What does it mean to you to *Draw near to God*?
5. How does being humble before God help us resist the devil at the same time?
6. When we draw near to God, the devil is pushed further away; if we draw near to the devil, then God is pushed further away. How has this been so in your life?
7. Compare your life to this passage. What has been the pattern in your life, your dependency issues, and your closeness with God?
8. What do you need to do to allow Christ to be your only Lord and direction?
9. How can the fact that He will lift us up beyond our desires and plans to a much greater plane and purpose in life give you the confidence and passion to follow through with recovery?

10. How does humbleness produce right attitudes and motives in us? What can you do to be more humble and at the same time not be self-defacing?

11. What do you need to do to commit not to go back to your old ways?

12. Commit yourself to obey God, His precepts so you do not go back to your old ways and causes you dysfunction! How will you respond with your obedience? When? Who will help you?

Remember, we are to flee the world's influence while being the influencers of it!

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Romans 10:8-17; Col. 1:15-20

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matt. 23:12.

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How to Succeed in Recovery! Part 2

James 4: 7-10

Step 6: Allow God to smash the substance out of your life that hinders your growth, character and Fruit.

God wants us to make the fervent attempt to repent and get right with Him. He does not want us to lead a double life in trying to serve two contradictory paths in life because when we do, we are being hypocritical, creating broken relationships, shattered lives, and unmet opportunities. This leaves us in despair as the devil and our ways have no hope or purpose other than to steal what God has to give to us. We already have joy and completeness in Christ when our hearts and minds are centered on Him. So, the bottom line of this passage is the call to submit and surrender to God, allowing Him to be our only Lord and direction. Then, He will lift us up beyond our greatest desires and plans to a much greater plan and purpose in life! Thus, commit to smash the substance from your life that hinders your growth, character, and Fruit.

- *Mourn/Lament/Grieve* is a call to us for authentic repentance. When we do wrong, we will realize it because of the Law written on our hearts. We will feel remorse and guilt. This recovery process hurts; it is opening us up to the past. But keep in mind; the results are far better and worth the effort than the moments of pain we experience as we grow through it.
- *Wail/Weep* means to express grief for our sins! We must see the heinousness of our sin, and in humbleness and honesty, sincerely be upset so we can fully accept His grace and forgiveness. There was a connection in the ancient Jewish world between grief and self-humiliation. At funerals, families would wail loudly; when they tired out, they hired others to continue on, to pronounce to the community humiliation to show their grief. In the same way, they could show true repentance, as wailing was the cultural thing to do to prove, by self-humiliation, the mourning of one's sins (Lev. 23:29; 26:41; 2 Kings 22:11; Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-13).
- *Repent* means to completely and utterly turn away from our desires and deeds and toward His love and plan. Real, authentic repentance is sincere; we will regret our past behavior and be on guard in future relationships so that a moral and lifestyle change will result. It is God's desire that we repent of our sins and come to His way (Matt. 4:17; Acts 17:30; 24:14; Rom. 2:4; 1Thess. 5:6, 8; 2 Tim. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:22-24)!
- *Humble*. This passage quotes Proverbs 3:34, and refers to submitting to the sovereignty of God. God's plan for our life is far better than any desire, evil or good, we could ever have. Thus, it is logical and beneficial to be humble in Him (1 Pet. 5:5)!

- *He will lift you up.* God alone deserves the right to be exalted and honored. This is an essential attitude before effective Christian character, maturity, and/or spiritual growth can be possible (Chron. 7:14-15; Prov. 3:34; 25:6-7; Isa. 2:11-12; 5:15; Matt. Mt 18:4; 23:12 Luke 11:43; 14:11; 18:14; 20:46; 1 Pet. 5:62).
- We are adopted into God's family and made new. So, because of what Christ has done, we should be willing to be obedient (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 5:1; Col. 3:1-4, 1 Pet. 1:2-3, 22). Obedience means that as Christians, we are to submit to what God requires of us; we are to follow His precepts regardless of the circumstances (Deut.13: 4; 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 19:16; Acts 5:29; John 14:14; 15:14; 2 Cor. 10:5; Heb. 13:17; 1 John 1:7).

When we accept Christ in our life, He needs to be Lord of our life. We are to take responsibility for our addiction and dependence, allowing His conviction to touch us deeply; then we can let go of our ways and surrender to His way (Matt. 11:28; Luke 11:9-10). Then God will remove your defects of character! We must stop trying to manipulate God to give us our desires and needs, and concentrate on how we are to worship Him in all that we do, in total trust and total devotion. So, let us stop combating with God, stop fighting with ourselves, and stop the hostility with one another, and concentrate our efforts toward God's glorification and worship. This means we are to recognize sin and its destructive nature. It may look good, but it will take us away from God and others, leave us bankrupt in our relationships, and fill us with bitterness and despair.

This passage is a roadmap of how to repent. God tells us both what to do and what not to do which will lead us to a victorious life that is transformed in Him. The call is simple: we are to *submit, come near, wash, purify, grieve, mourn, wail, change, and humble* ourselves. Each one leads to a closer relationship with God, and to a life that is bearing fruit, building character, and becoming more mature and effectual to others around us. This is exhibited and practiced by maximizing our time with God through the disciplines of the faith, Bible reading, devotions, prayer, and godly fellowship. It comes from trusting our Lord and His plan, thereby taking the focus off the ways of Satan, the world, and us. We are to be vulnerable in confessing our sins and drawing to Him as LORD. When we are humble, God is glorified and He lifts us up. It is not about our way; it is all about HIS WAY (Prov. 24:3-4; Isa. 45:7; Jer. 29:11-14; Phil. 2:3-4)! When we chase the devil and/or our pride, we will sink below the tossing waves in a sea of despair, a life that boils over with trouble (James 1:6-8). The key to preventing that sinking is to allow these commands to take root and God's work in us so our lives reflect righteousness. When we remove our sinful attitude of pride, He is glorified.

So, *what can I do?* Do not laugh at sin; guard against it. Do not accept the worldliness of the world; rather, model maturity and character because you are being empowered by the Lord. We are to flee the world's influence while being the influencers of it. We are to flee the devil while being on guard of his tricks and trade. You may be thinking that only the weak and cowardly would surrender themselves—even to God. But, the fact is, only a coward would refuse to allow the ultimate greatness in himself

that is only achieved by yielding totally to Christ. He is greater than those who are His (John 3:30)!

Questions:

1. What does obedience mean to you? How have you demonstrated it? Can you recall a situation in which you were *not* obedient and why?
2. How is obedience a call to action? How could your personal and spiritual life be improved with the ability to move faster in your recovery?
3. Have you struggled with relapses?
4. Do we fight Him or do we glorify Him? How do we know?
5. How does this passage point us to honoring God and relating to people?
6. Why can't we serve both our desires and God's will?
7. Are you willing to have God remove your defects of character? Now pray that he does so!
8. Why do so many Christians try with all of their might to do as they want and also seek God? What will this double mindedness give them?
9. The signpost is clear where we are to go; the direction we choose is up to us. So what does the signpost say to you?
10. How can you submit to and surrender to God? What would this mean? What would it look like? How will you go about it?
11. The devil does not have equal authority or power as the popular "Ying/Yang" philosophy states; rather, he has only the power we give to Him, while God has absolute power. How does knowing this help you resist the devil and your desires?
12. What do clean hands and a pure heart mean to you? What would it mean to your church?
13. What needs to be cleansed from the dirt of the land (your deeds) and the dirt of your heart (your desires)?
14. What would real authentic repentance look like in your recovery? What can you do to stop combating God, stop fighting within yourself, and stop hostility with one another? So, what will you do?

15. How can the exercise of self-control and obedience help you submit to what God requires of you and His precepts—regardless of your circumstances? What can you do to help yourself in recovery? Can you think of specific instances or situations?

16. Commit to smash the substance from your life that hinders your growth, character and Fruit! How will you do this? With whom? When? Where?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Gal. 5:16-22; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 2:14-15; 4:15

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Step 7: Ask God to humble and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12: 2

Go before God and ask Him to cleanse or remove anything that is in the way of Him and your recovery

The Road to Recovery

Romans 12: 1-2

Step 7: Ask God to humble and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns.

The road to recovery is the renewal of your mind! Just focus and use the determination Jesus gives you to turn your life over to Christ as LORD! Ask God to humble you and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns or go back to your old bad ways. This is a continual process. As long as there is a hint of a bad desire in you (and there will always be), you must center yourself in Christ.

Paul calls us, his church folks, and then urges us passionately that God's will is to think rightly of His precepts. Then Paul pleads with them to make their faith real so it impacts others around them. When we who are in recovery do this, we move far ahead in our healing. Then he gives us all a simple way we can do this, to see our lives as extensions of God's grace and hands, so we are willing and able to be lined up to Him, and so we can be committed to sobriety or the healing that we need. Then, with a goal to be better used by Him, we are called to be a *living sacrifice*, which means we are to be living, growing and performing agents of God. We are not alone in this essential manner. As a Christian, the Spirit transforms us completely, all we are and then all that we are to do, our will, plans, and our opportunities (2 Cor. 3:18). And we cannot do this unless we give up our selfish will that leads to our reliance on Christ and revisit our evils or addictions or keep harboring past hurts (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14)!

The incentive for us to surrender to Christ is that His Way is better than ours! You do not need the bottle or the smoke or the extra piece of pie, you just need Him. He gave us a gift we cannot fathom, yet alone earn the gift of grace and eternal life, so why would we not seek to please our Living, Loving Lord? Then Paul tells us that God's will is for us to be willing and able to please Him and serve Him. When you are growing and in recovery, you are pleasing Him and in so doing reaping the benefits and rewards too. This is accomplished when we are on guard so that the distractions of the sinful life do not entice, motivate, or divert us from Him and His plan for us! The call is simple: be willing to allow God to transform you—not the world. Simple? Yes, but it takes diligence

effort from the trust we have in Christ to succeed! When we do this, our thinking, attitude, mindset, all that we are in thought, will change and then impact all that we do in life.

- *Do not be conformed...* infers that our mind and thinking must have root in Christ and Scripture, and that the Spirit guides us (2 Cor. 4:18; 1 John 2:17). If not, the culture, our addictions, desires, and pleasures of life will sweep us away from God's best for us. This is our Christian life and purpose!
- *Age* refers to “evil powers” and “amoral acts,” the worldly, sinful temptations in our human culture, whether they are tradition, custom, ritual, or rationale. This translates to whatever tempts and allures us into thinking this is what we need, when in fact it is what tears us down. Our standing before our Lord is solely upon His mercy; thus we are to reciprocate it, such as since God forgave us we need to forgive others and ourselves too.... Thus, do not just ask God to use you; rather give yourself to Him to use!
- *Renewing of your mind* is changing our pagan or even Christian mindset away from our selfish nature to His character. Until we do, God's will and the deeper things of God will not be available to us. Our ideas and attitudes directly shape our values and lifestyle. To get it right, we are to be shaping our minds to God's Word (Rom. 8:5-9; 13:11-14; 2 Cor. 4:18; 1 John 2:17).
- *Transformed*, the opposite of obedience is not just selfishness or laziness, but rather creating your own opportunities with zeal instead of going with the Lord's. In other words, misplacing your passion on the wrong things (1 Sam. 15:22; John 7:17; 13:17). We are to cling to His highest standard, not compromise to the flow of the group we hang out with (peer pressure). Will you obey?
- *Acceptable*, means God accepting a sacrifice. When we debate with God and refuse His guidance, we lose sight of His path, and fall in rocky terrain, stop, drop to your knees, and wake up to Him (Eph. 4:30). The question is will we be dedicated to our Lord or to ourselves (1 Cor. 6:19; 9:27; Gal. 2:21; Phil. 2:12)?
- Being freed from sin must produce a response and a responsibility. So what is yours?

Theology is our boot camp and the army is our duty in application that leads to our revitalization. Yet, it is the least thing considered by the average Christian's pursuit, especially those who never take ownership of their problem or faith, who grew up in dysfunction, or experienced great hurt and see it as their identity and lifestyle. The danger is for the Christian to remain in the pain and never move from it, or learn all that they can from programs, but never apply the principles. We take comfort in our knowledge, but never do anything with it. It is the addict that refuses to get over it, the Christian that refuses to share their pain, or model Christ on Mondays, as well as Sundays. Be aware you will be harshly judged; you are no better than the Pharisees

and pagans (Hos.6:6; Micah 6:6-8; Matt. 12 9-14; James 1:21-27)! But take comfort; when you embrace Christ you are embracing your recovery too!

Questions:

1. How were you (or are you) affected by peer pressure in school (clothes, job, car, friends, etc)? How does this simulate your habit?
2. Is the word “doctrine” a friend or a foe? How does it, or can it, help your healing?
3. If you have ever seen or done an oil change for a car, have you noticed the dirty blackness of the old oil versus the golden color of the new oil? How is this like your dependence and the renewing of your mind to overcome it?
4. When you are growing and in recovery, how are you pleasing Him? In so doing, what are the benefits and rewards you can receive?
5. Have you considered that Christianity is like a football or baseball or soccer game? Thus, the church is the dugout (Baseball term, where the payers sit waiting to go to bat, listening to the coach and practicing skills), Christ is the coach and the field of play is the community and world around the church. So, when the players of the other team are the obstacles, pain, and problems you face, how can you win that game?
6. What would it take for you to see His Way is better than yours?
7. Why is it that you do not need the bottle or the smoke or the extra piece of pie, you just need Him? How would this mindset help you in recovery?
8. For a Christian, a time must come when the reality of who you are in Christ must hit home in power and conviction. Has this happen to you? If so, how? If not, what would it take?
9. Why would the Holy Spirit be hindered in transforming you if your will is in the way?
10. Pharisees have a bad reputation in the church for good reason. Paul's concern was that Christians would turn out like them—having the knowledge, but ignoring the application. Why did he have that fear?
11. The purpose of doctrine and study of His Word is not just the knowledge but what we do with that knowledge that is our supreme goal. Why would this be true?
12. Why is it so hard for so many of us Christians to have a relationship with the Lord that is transparent (out going, honest, and real), and not secretive? How does this affect your recovery from addiction or dependency?

13. Has the reality that you belong solely to God, not to yourself or anything else hit you? If it has not, what would it take for you to dedicate the right to yourself over to Christ?
14. It is easy to die for a cause, but are you willing to live for Him? Dependency and addiction are forms of slavery to sin and evil. Why would you want that back? How can you move on?
15. How can you live the life of faith in perfect obedience (as much as you can), so your life is poured out and your strength is gone so you must rely on His?
16. What does "*reasonable service*" mean to your daily life? Recovery?
17. Service is something we do because we are dedicated to live for our Lord out of our gratitude. But we all have different definitions of dedication. We do not earn points by our service nor need it for our salvation. So on what level and time commitment should you serve Him?
18. *Do not be conformed...* to what? What entices you away from our Lord?
19. How could evaluating your gratitude help you grow more deeply in Christ and be more able to recover from what ill's you?
20. When you do, then the deeper things of God will be available to you. We do this by reshaping our mind to God's Word. How can you put this in to practice?
21. What can you do to turn your life more over to Jesus Christ as LORD?

God's Cleaning Power! Part 1

Revelation 22:1-6

Step 7: Ask God to humble and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns.

We have access to God and His life-giving blessings, cleansing, and renewal! The angel shows John more of Heaven—the water and river of life flowing from God Himself, coursing down upon His faithful, watering the Tree of Life. This is the essential life of the universe that also heals the nations, fuels the faithful, and keeps us on the road to recovery. God's creation is no longer under the curse of sin; it has been renewed. Instead of evil and strife, there will be praise and worship of the Lamb. The faithful will see His face and bathe in His presence; our loyalty will be set and pure, and the Lord will shine upon us all! Then, the angel reassures John (and us through the ages) that these Words are from God and they are trustworthy and true. We can have hope beyond hope of His wonder beyond wonders. We have a future in and with Christ as Lord; we have a place in Him for eternity!

This passage is also describing *Paradise* restored; it is also about our intimacy with God who is with us now, *Immanuel*, meaning, "God among us," "God with us." The garden imagery is that of God empowering and keeping us; this is the real, effectual Paradise of which we have just a taste now, but will see its fruition in eternity. This is also about our blessings for being with and in Him, as God is the One who loves us and restores our communion with Him. God restores His creation back to its utopian, unailing state before sin entered into it.

- *River of the water of life* means that what is needed for life, even life itself, comes from God. It perhaps refers to the Garden of Eden, and the rivers that flowed there. This also refers to the river that flowed under Jerusalem; each of these themes means Paradise and "God with us." *Water* means life, both in the ancient world and now; water is everything to life, and the growing and prospering of crops. Without it, everything dies. The Greeks saw *water* and *river* together to mean "virtue" and John uses this imagery to represent the Spirit and renewal in his Gospel. This also means Jesus is the answer to our thirst in life and for salvation! God is our abundant supply of all we need now and forevermore (Gen. 2:10-14; Psalm 46:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8; John 4:10-14; 7:37-39).
- *Tree of life* refers to the garden of Paradise and Heaven. In context, it means the guarantee of an everlasting life, and that this life is to be abundant, vivid, pure, and true. The central focus of Heaven is our effectual, eternal relationship in and with Christ. The images from Genesis and Ezekiel mean having access to God's blessings and Fruit. The tree of life was in the Garden of Eden from which humanity was locked out after the Fall. And, this refers to trees that are always fruit bearing, not just in their season, just as God's blessings are continual and forevermore. The promise here is the restoration of Paradise, and that this tree

will grow again (Gen. 2:9; 3:22-24; Ezek. 47:7-12; 2 Cor. 12:2-4; Rev. 2:1-7, 14, 19)!

- *Healing of the nations.* This is not about political boundaries or even people groups; it is about people in general. For the Jew, “nations” meant Gentiles or everyone. Through Christ, there is no division or caste. We have direct, intimate access to Him. This also means that Jesus is Sovereign and greater than any nation, government, power, or authority. And, in context, it means no sickness or divisions or conflict or prejudices—thus, countries are not needed (Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 1:6; 2:26-27; 20:4, 6)!
- *No longer will there be any curse.* This means restoration and refers to “Paradise” and “pleasure garden.” This points to our restored, sinless state and/or the millennial kingdom, that God will reverse the Fall and remove the curse of sin from the universe (Gen. 2:8; 3:16-19; Ezek. 28:13; Zech. 14:11; Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7).
- *His servants.* This suggests that there is no special elite class in the Kingdom of God. We all are His servants; we are all special and anointed to serve (Matt. 5:8; Rev. 1:1).

This incredible passage is more about hope—hope that we need more than anything else including *eschatology*, the study of end times. Our hope of Heaven is our fuel, our motivation—like gas is to a car; it will get us through life, the great and the tough times, and our adversities, so our soul will travel well. It is about our motivation to grow in faith, to be loyal to our Lord so we look to Him and not our troubles and trials. Heaven is our *hope of hope*, and so much more; it is a reality, a wonder, and a place we will be forever and ever. Our biggest problem has been solved, that of our sin causing us to die with no hope or salvation. Christ paid that debt. Now you can focus on Him and His help for your recovery. As a Christian, we have been saved; if you are not saved, you can be and then you can become a new creation in Him, set for eternity (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17)!

Christ brings you Heaven! He brings you peace and a future to us who do not deserve it. Because of Him, we have hope and a future and most of all, we have Him both now and forevermore! What is better than that?! There is nothing that can be a greater motivator and comfort than knowing for certain who Christ is, what He has done, and what place He has for you and me! Now, let us live our lives as if that is true—because it is true. And, keep in mind these powerful passages as well as John 14 in mind, as love and obedience are connected in Him!

Questions

1. What is the most beautiful place you have ever been?
2. Do you fully realize that all things are under His control? Even your problems? How does this affect your hope and staying power?

3. What would it take for you to earnestly feel and see that God is in control? What do you need to do?
4. How do you feel, knowing that you have access to God and His life-giving blessings and renewal now, and not just in Heaven?
5. How can your hope in Heaven help you eliminate the evil and strife that is in our churches so we can better praise and worship of the Lamb now?
6. God has prepared a place for us; what is more wonderful than that? How is this fact going to assure and inspire you?
7. How is God keeping you faithful and watering you now? How is your church doing this? How can they do so better?
8. What fuels the faithful in your church? What can your church do to better “water” you and its people?
9. What can your church or counselor do to help you see and feel Hope and the wonder of Christ?
10. How will knowing Who Christ is and what He did for you help prosper and grow you even in times of stress, suffering, and confusion?
11. Ask God to humble you and renew you so you do not continue any bad patterns! When will you do this? How? Who will help you?
12. How can you renew your commitment to Christ? When and how will you do it?
13. What tempts and allures you into thinking “this is what I need?” How can you know that this is, in fact, what tears you down? What are you going to do about it now?
14. What tempts and allures you into thinking “this is what I need?” How can you know that this is, in fact, what tears you down?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: John 8:44; Rom. 3:19-28; 4:4-5; Eph. 4:17-19

For more on this study go to our sister ministry www.intothyword.org for a verse-by-verse full study on this passage and the rest of Revelation too.

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God's Cleaning Power! Part 2

Revelation 22:1-6

Step 7: What tempts and allures you into thinking “this is what I need?” How can you know that this is, in fact, what tears you down?

Why does John give us this preview of Heaven? Perhaps it is all about Hope, that vital fuel and stimulant necessary for all that we do successfully in life and for Him. It is also the fuel for us to be encouraged to move on from our hurts and past into a triumphant life. A life so we can encourage others—to prosper and grow in times of stress, suffering, and confusion. So we do not need to repeat our bad habits of dysfunction; we can be secure and content and joyful in Christ. We can take comfort that our eternity is secured too, as He has prepared a place for us; what is more wonderful than that (John 14:1-6)!?

This passage brings to a close John's visions with a testimony to their importance, veracity, reality, and truthfulness. This passage also sets up the promise for Christ's return. This is also about our assurance in Christ—that we will receive our rewards, comfort, and bliss in Him, but that we can also have just a taste of it now—in our trials, setbacks, and failures—and can still be triumphant in Him as long as we have faith and allow it to mature and keep growing. Heaven is not just a carrot on a stick to those in persecution or recovery to reveal what awaits them. Heaven gives hope and a sign to stay on His path now; it is a reality now, it is a wonder now, it is a comfort now and a means by which to stay focused on Christ rather than on our circumstances. Best of all, it is real; and one day we will be there for all time!

As Adam and Eve started out in the Garden of Eden of perfection and utopia, and then it was ruined by their sin, now it is resurrected beyond measure for all those in Christ to live in and enjoy. The Bible starts off the history of humanity in a garden; after our journeys in sin, our fall, pride, struggle, falling off the wagon, and the work of Christ redeeming us, we end up back in the garden of Paradise—the garden of being in Him! This symbolism is based on fact and gives us hope and a sense of the reality and presence of God in our lives and His working in our church. This is meant to inspire us for the deployment of our faith so we can be confident in the reliability and steadfastness of our Christian life. He is empowering us. He gives us more than just a preview of what is to come; this is real. His presence is a genuine, effectual presence, a hope, and abundance for us now!

- *See his face.* God's self-disclosure and our extreme blessing of eternity will enable us to see our Lord and be in His presence face to face. Currently, God cannot be seen, but in some phenomenal way, He will allow us to do so. In ancient cultures, to see a king's face meant blessing and honor; to be removed from the king and not be able to look onto his face meant punishment and banishment (Ex. 33:20; Esther 7:8; 2 Sam. 14:24; John 1:14-18; 1 Cor. 13:12).

- *His name will be...* This refers to the seal of God's ownership, as names meant not only possessions, but also who possessed you and that person's character. This also means that Christ is LORD Supreme; He is our "all in all." (1 Cor. 15:27, 28; Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 21:2, 10)
- *On their foreheads* means that God marks and protects the faithful who accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and who He claims as His. In ancient times, the forehead and hands were the only parts of the body that were visible to others. This, too, is symbolic; God will not "rubber stamp" people or give us some kind of a visible mark, tattoo, "branding," or a "cross sign" (because the Hebrew letter *Taw*, looks like an X or cross sign), nor is this some kind of replacement for circumcision. God sees us as important and worth protecting (Ex. 13:9-16; 28:38; Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Is. 44:5; 66:19; Ezek. 9:4-6; Gal. 6:17; Rev. 7:3)!
- *No more night.* The original curse of sin is "no longer;" it is removed along with all subsequent curses. This is an image of sin and how God works it out, that even though we do not deserve it, we need it; we need His grace and redemption. This may imply that God resets His creation back to its previous "un-fallen" state where sin has not affected it (Gen. 3:14-19).
- *They will reign.* All of God's people are holy to Him, and in the future, each of us will reign with Him. This means we will partake in His authority and rule as His representatives and holders of His promise. (Psalm 2:8-9; Dan. 7:18, 27; Matt. 25:21-23; Luke 19:17; 1 Cor. 15:41; Col. 1; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 2:26-27; 20:4).
- *Things that must soon take place.* A declaration of closure restating what was first said. The point here and throughout Revelation is not just for the future events, but also how we conduct ourselves in them. Whatever unfolds is irrelevant if we do not have the strength of faith to endure and learn from it (Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 1:3, 7; 22:10). (See Revelation 1:1 study).

Do you long for intimacy with Christ as Lord and love of your life? In this passage, He shows us He restores and seeks us to be renewed and to be in Him. Christ gave us grace from His love to make Him our home of faith and motivation in life. Then, He prepares an eternal home for us too. The question is, *as Christians, do we give back our worship, praise, gratitude, and devotion to Him? Are we at home with Him as our main inspiration, impulse, and comfort in this life, not just in the life to come (John 14:23)?* What about what allures you back to your dysfunction or addiction or dependency? We can be assured He cares and loves us beyond description; but, do we love Him back? God has a purpose for this world and for our lives and it is all about communion in and with Him. We must find a way to increase our awareness and love for Christ in our daily lives so our lives mean something more than just "what I want" and "what I can get." It must be Christ-focused, for this is what Heaven is all about too!

Questions

1. What does God's cleansing power mean to you? How can you have more of it?

2. How does this passage give you hope for the fact that you can overcome your old life and embrace your new life in recovery?
3. How can this passage help you endure for the future? What do you think it meant to a persecuted people?
4. Why do you think John gives us this preview of Heaven? What does it mean to you to have “hope beyond hope?”
5. Can you picture Heaven? What do you think this water and river of life, flowing from God Himself and coursing down upon you, will look like?
6. What needs to take place to reassure you that these words in Revelation are from God and that they are trustworthy and true?
7. What does it mean to you that you have a future in and with Christ as Lord and that you have a place in Him for eternity?
8. How does Hope play a role in your relationships and recovery? How does Hope play a role in your spiritual growth? What about other areas in your life?
9. How does Hope help you be encouraged so you can encourage others? How and when are you going to do this more?
10. How is Hope a vital fuel and stimulant necessary for all that you do successfully in life and for Him?
11. What are some other valuable faith stimulants and how can you use them? What can your counselor and/or church do to help you?
12. Go before God and ask Him to cleanse or remove anything that is in the way of Him and your recovery! When will you do this? How? Who will help you?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: John 17:19-26; 20:17; Rom. 3:9-23; 5:1-11; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1:21-22

For more on this study go to our sister ministry www.intothyword.org for a verse-by-verse full study on this passage and the rest of Revelation too.

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Step 8: Who have you wronged and hurt?

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12

Make a list and be willing with God's help to make amends.

Making Amends! Part 1

Matthew 7: 7-12

Step 8: Who have you wronged and hurt?

Jesus shows us the virtue of perseverance and its application in prayer and in our willingness to make amends with those we have hurt. As we discovered in step 5, our seeking amends has a healing affect to those whom we have hurt as well as to us. And this must be done in conjunction with our prayer and spiritual growth. It has to be real and not forced or pretended. Our motivation to persist in our service to God is the desire to draw near to Him for what He has done for us. Consider the amount of time the Apostles, and even Jesus (when He walked this Earth) spent in prayer. Now, consider how much more we need to pray, then compare it with how much time you actually spend in prayer. The Christian life does not run on autopilot. It needs persistence—constant navigational resetting, and hands-on steering. In order to line up our lives with His plan and Will, we have to be willing and able to surrender to His concerns. We do this through knowing His Word and praying. Then we can have the calm and commitment in confidence to go to those we hurt.

- *Ask and it will be given*—This is saying that we have the right and ability (by what Christ has done on the cross) to go directly to God in prayer. There is no need for intermediaries or special priests or rituals.
- There is a promise in this passage that gives us the confidence that He hears our prayers and even answers them. But, we are not to assume that God answers our whims and desires. We are not the focus of the prayer, nor are we God. He, God and Lord of the universe, is sovereign, and His Will is to be sought, brought into our hearts and minds, and then put into practice.
- We also have to have the confidence that His answer is best! We often seek those things that are not beneficial or right for us because our view, understanding, and thinking do not include all of the information. We only see our temporary and immediate needs, whereas God sees it all—the outcome that we do not see.
- His answers are conditioned upon our abiding in Him and His Will (John 15:7; James 4:3; 1 John 5:14-15)! How sad it is that so many Christians never enjoy

God's favor, simply because they do not ask! Have you asked, sought, or knocked today? This takes our continuous action and persistence (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8)!

- For us to really learn and apply the Bible so we are on the road to recovery, we have to learn to be persistent so we can receive His blessings, be a blessing to others, and hear His call. Making amends will be a blessing beyond measure; this is why we do this. It is to bring healing and reconciliation not dead and fear (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104)!
- *Being evil*—this often refers to the universal, sinful nature that all of humanity shares, which was the prime reason Christ came to pay that debt of sin so we could go directly to Him in prayer. So we can *seek*... You know the sin that got you in your situation; now you have Christ to help get you out of it!
- As a Christian, saved by grace, our original sin has been covered (atonement means covering); however, we are still filled with sin. As we grow in Christ, we should have the inclination to sin less and be more devoted to His Will. But, we are still in sin.
- *Good gifts/things* are the things that are important, that are essential in the practice of the faith. They include righteousness, sincerity, purity, wisdom, and humility. Without such characters as the proof test that Christ has saved us and the Holy Spirit is working in us (Luke 11:13 parallel that adds the Spirit), we would fail to follow His precepts and be of no good to those around us.
- When you realize you have made a mistake, take immediate initiative to correct it! This way you do not have to do this step again! Keep in mind respect for yourself, respect for the other person(s), and your responsibility for all your actions!

This step is hard for most. But it is necessary in our healing and recovery process. It removes the baggage we carry, helping and freeing us of guilt. It is liberating and worth our efforts ever so much more than you may ever think. This passage needs not to be memorized as much as it needs to be functional! It calls for commitment, and is something to be accomplished! God desires that we be in close relationship to Him, not merely seeking what we can get. He will give us what we need, and much more! If you only seek what you think you want, you will never have a clue what maturity and surrender mean (Gal. 2:20-21).

Do not take it personally when people do not want to meet with you or take your forgiveness! They may not be ready or maybe they have already given up, but the fact you made an effort will have a lasting impression on them even if they do not say or show it!

Questions

1. What does making amends mean to you? What are your fears and obstacles? What help do you need and who can do it?
2. How will making amends give you peace and contentment and help you recover?
3. Have you considered the value of perseverance and its application to prayer?
4. Why would some Christians think that prayer is like a vending machine or God like a bellhop, so we seek what we want, and what we want to do if we have enough faith? Why is that appealing to some people? How appealing is seeking His will? Which really requires more faith: to get what you want or to serve Him?
5. Prayer is getting our mindset aligned with His. What are some of the things that get you sidetracked from pursuing your faith more deeply through prayer?
6. Do you have the confidence that He hears your prayers and answers them? What is your focus in prayer?
7. Do you also have the confidence that His answers are best? If so, why do we experience stress and worry?
8. How does this passage deal with making amends?
9. What are the *good gifts* that you seek?
10. How can this passage influence your ability to make amends? How can your counselor and/or church help you? What do you need to do to make this happen in your mindset, prayers, determination, and follow through?
11. So what is a plan to get started on this journey of making amends?
12. Take your list from step 5, (you may write it out in two columns, first with the names and second the offence. Just like the TV show *Earl*) review it to make sure no one is left out and now go for it!

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Matt. 18:21-35; Romans 12 with careful attention to verses 17-19

See our forgiveness channel for more helps on this:

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Making Amends! Part 2

Matthew 7: 7-12

Step 8: Make a list and be willing with God's help to make amends.

It is painful and we may still have fear, but we can do this successfully and be a healing and a relief. A huge load will be off your back as you embrace more freedom and joy in your Christian walk and in a life free from dependency.

Remember, prayer is not a vending machine where we can pick what we want, and what we want to do. Rather, it is the way of aligning our mindset with His. This passage has led many people to think that God is a divine bellhop who will give us what we seek and what we want if we just have enough faith. But, that is plainly not the message this passage gives to us. Yes, we are to seek, we are to knock, we are to be persistent with our prayers and amends. But, we are not to seek just to help our selfish concerns. Prayer is seeking the Son-ship and Lordship of Christ because He is in control, not just because of a friendship with Him. Prayer is the instrument for seeking how to get His Will done, not our will.

- Seeking to make amends is also part of the process of building character, and what we are to *seek*. God's concern is our character and maturity. This is of paramount importance in our ongoing recovery efforts.
- We are living in the Kingdom of God, as He is the King! The greatest gift we could ever receive, besides our salvation, is the Spirit!
- This passage is often referred to as the *Golden rule*. It has been said; *he who has the gold makes the rules*. And, if you consider that we own nothing, yet all of space, time, and eternity are His, then He has the gold and makes the rules. But *golden rule* means the "most important rule," as this passage is about the treatment of others. It all comes down to how you want to be treated, then treating others in that way. Of course, for this to work, you have to have a self esteem that is rooted in Christ and the character traits as prescribed by His Word (Gal 5)
- *Do also to them*—this was based on a common saying amongst many Jewish thinkers as well as Greek philosophers that goes back to the most ancient of literature. The saying was a negative statement that said; *Do not do to others what you do not want done to you*. Jesus replaces the emphasis as a positive obligation, based on God's goodness.
- In the process of our healing, Jesus asks us to do something positively to others: *Do unto others what you want them to do to you!* Our God is willing and able to give! He wants to give every good and perfect gift to you! It is up to us to ask so we can receive it! But, remember, we are always to *seek* what is according to His Will and character as the prime prize!

- Prayer is a relationship that builds, molds, and grows us deeper to His heart. It is not just an asking machine, even if you have right, pure motives, spending your time on intercession for others, as we all should. Jesus is telling us to keep on asking (inquiry), seeking (finding it) and knocking (then it will be opened to you so you can find it) and it will be given to you. Asking, plus action, plus perseverance equals the quest for character and growth to be a more mature Christian; it leads us to go deeper in our relationship to Him and others, and be of more use to God and others.
- This one *rule* summarizes what the Law and the Prophets were all about in human relating, just as the commandment *Love your neighbor as yourself* summed up the Law (Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 13:8-10).
- This also applies to our outreach at the very least, when we are someone who is loving and caring, along with listening and positive, constructive encouragement is so needed (Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)!

To make amends work, your prayer, accountability, motives, obedience, and persevering will be the key! Be in love with Christ. Seek His presence, and be persistent in your prayers. If you fear you will ask Him for the wrong thing, remember, we all do that. As you draw closer to Him, you will learn the right things to ask. Prayer is persistence and learning! And keep in mind that most people will not be positively responsive. You are not responsible how they respond; you are only responsible that you seek forgiveness. The people who will not receive it may not be ready yet; give it time and give it to God if they totally refuse. (Do not stalk or hound; once or twice is enough.) That is between them and God!

Questions

1. If you could have whatever you wanted, and God gave it to you, what bearing, what impact would that have on your life and faith—or, would it be a hindrance?
2. Have you ever thought through your dreams and wishes to their logical conclusion and impact? If so, what would you think they would be like from God's perspective?
3. How much time do you spend in prayer? How much should you? What is in the way? How will prayer help you to make amends?
4. Do you seek great things for yourself (Jer. 45:5)? How and why would this be beneficial to the Christian faith, and how, and why would it distract from God's Will?
5. What do you think Jesus stresses in this passage? How would you put it in your own words?

6. Read Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104. How does persistence have a significant bearing on receiving His blessings, being a blessing to others, and hearing His call? What about getting more out of the Word?
7. What are the conditions we must meet in order to have our prayers answered? How will this help you in making amends?
8. Do you feel confident that God has provided for you? How do you feel when you hear about Christians who do not have enough food, or even suffer and die for their faith?
9. What is necessary for the *Golden Rule* to work perfectly? What keeps society from practicing it? What would you want done to you?
10. Our God is willing and able to give! He wants to give to you every good and perfect gift! It is up to you to ask so you can receive it! What can you do to be better at asking?
11. So how is your journey progressing with making amends? What do you need to be more successful? Remember: do not take it personally when people do not want to meet with you or accept your forgiveness. They may not be ready or have given up, but the fact you made an effort will have a lasting impression on them even if they do not say so or show it!
12. Take your list review it to make sure no one is left out and continue to go for it!

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-13; Heb. 12:1-2

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Step 9: Be diligent to pursue forgiveness whenever possible.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

When we make amends, we have to be careful we do not further injure people or cause strife.

Beware of Anger!

Matthew 5: 21-26

Step 9: Be diligent to pursue forgiveness whenever possible.

The process of what got us into our dependency or addiction that led to our dysfunction may have caused a lot of anger build-up in those we have hurt and in us. In the course of our recovery, we need to deal with our anger properly and not cause further hurt.

Because God's Law is a reflection of God's purity and holiness, and because He is a God of details, He gives us specific issues that are to show root causes of sin and unrighteousness. Our behaviors are reflections of our motives, each one leading to another, as a chain reaction. By cutting the top of the link of the sin chain, we can remove most of the problems we cause, experience, and endure from others in our personal life, church, and even society at large.

We must be aware of the serious destructive nature of anger. Jesus calls us to deal with our anger that so often leads to murder in various forms, from literally killing someone, to destroying relationships, and escalating small problem into big ones, because our pride is in the way. If we truly desire to be His disciples, we will be committed to reconciliation with others as He is with us (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23)!

- Applying The Sixth Commandment (Exodus. 20:13): Murder just does not happen, something leads up to it—and that *something* is the sin and uncontrolled anger we have.
- “*You have heard it said*” was a common rabbinic way to draw attention to the lesson and give personal commentary to a Scriptural passage. Jesus was referring to the teachings of the Pharisees, not the Old Testament Law, and taking what they said to task (Matt. 5:21; 27; 31; 33; 38; 43). Jesus is, of course, the ultimate commentator!
- *Reca* means, “empty headed one,” and is a Hebrew colloquialism for *contempt*, i.e. *stupid*. Jesus cuts right to the issue of pride and arrogance, the quintessential

thing God hates most, and the root cause of all sin, including murder (Job 41:34; 2 Chron. 26:16; 32:26; Psalm 10:4-5; 18:27; 31:18; 56:2; 59:12; 62:10; 73:6-12; 101:5; 131:1; 6:17; Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 21:4; 24; 29:23; 30:13; Isa. 2:11-21; 13:19; 16: 6; 23:9; Ezek. 28:2; Obadiah 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:12; 7:4; Gal. 6:4; and these are just a few!)

- “*Without a cause*” is a right cause, which means anger would be just when there is unrepentant sin (Rom. 1: 18-32).
- “*You fool*” refers to verbal abuse and swearing. The Pharisees had very specific words and ways of word usage that were considered wrong and must be avoided. Thus, Jesus countermands them by saying **all** foul and harmful language is wrong. This should cause us to take an inventory on how we use language and our mouths—to edify, or to put down—and what Christ expects of our words.
- *Hell fire (Gehenna)* refers to the valley of Hinnom, the place where the heinous child sacrifices took place under Ahaz and Mansasseh (2 Chron. 28; 33). Jeremiah referred to it as the *Valley of Slaughter* (Jer. 7:32). This was the wickedest place a Jewish mind could conceive of, and where the first century Jews burned their trash. It also refers to everlasting torment (Mark 9:43-48).
- Our refusal to deal with sin through repentance will have lasting and dire consequences, both here on earth, and for eternity to come!
- We must be aware of the serious, destructive nature of anger. It leads to bitterness and self-destruction and the ending of precious relationships, which leaves everyone around us and us in utter despair and dysfunction (Psalm 37:8; Prov. 6:16-19; Rom. 12:18-21; Gal. 5:19- 21; Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 3:7)! The inward choice to hold onto anger is murder because one will lead to the other—maybe not literally—but as a destroyer of relationships. And, in God’s eyes, relationships are the most important things in our lives—besides Him!
- Do not neglect your motives and the root causes of broken relationships, sin, and murder.
- We have a call to keep the Law! Not every aspect and dietary guideline, although you would be much healthier if you did, but, to let it show how much you need the cross! It is essential to the Gospel, because without the Law, the Gospel is meaningless, because Christ would not have been needed to redeem us.
- *Agree with your adversary* gives us an image of God’s Heavenly court and how He reconciled Himself to us. Therefore, when we refuse to do so to others, it is an extreme insult to Him.
- We have a call to keep our relationships healthy by being people who are willing to relinquish pride and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. This is essential

before we can go to God and succeed in our recovery (Gen. 4:4-7; Prov. 15:8; Isa. 1:10-15; Jer.6: 20; Amos 5:21-24).

- What good is it to ask for forgiveness or help from Christ if we are unwilling to do such a small thing for someone else! We are to seek resolution to problems quickly, as they come up. When we do not, they fester, get worse, and kill the relationship. So, be a person who is willing to reconcile, to solve problems, and not escalate them, that you do all in your power to end it (Eph. 4:26-27)!
- *Last penny* (Greek last is *quadrans penny is "Kodrantēs"*) to the very last was the smallest and one of the least valuable Roman coins. Jesus is referring to a contrast from the minor debt imprisonment like small claims court (although you could be held until you repaid what you owed, and your family may be sold for it) to the Sanhedrim, which was like the Supreme Court.

By being a person who seeks reconciliation, we will avoid needless strife and stress in our lives—especially in our recovery. You have to go to people personally if possible; do not do so with anonymous notes and phone calls as that does not work or count! This is not to seek blame even if the person caused you harm; you have to seek their forgiveness for your actions. And then, it is up to them and God if they will seek yours if they wronged you. When we make penitence and ask for forgiveness, we have to be careful we do not escalate matters or cause more conflict and strife. How sad it is when secular courts have to go in and resolve disputes between brothers in the Lord! Having an unforgiving attitude is fatal to worship; we cannot truly worship God with a heart of anger, contempt, and/or bitterness! When we seek to worship Him in that state, it, too, is an extreme insult to Him! This attitude will have lasting consequences into eternity and judgment! Jesus calls us to deal with our anger that so often leads to murder in various forms, from literally killing someone, to destroying relationships and escalating small problems into big ones, because our pride is in the way. If we truly desire to be His disciple, we will be as committed to reconciliation as He is with us (John 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23)!

Questions:

1. If you grew up in a family with other brothers and sisters, how did your parents settle disputes?
2. How do you handle anger, yours as well as other's anger directed at you or a family member?
3. How would you define "uncontrolled anger?" How has it caused some of your dependence or addiction?
4. How do you feel, knowing that God is concerned with details, and that He gives us specific issues that are the root causes of sin and unrighteousness?

5. When you see specific issues you are struggling with in Scripture, such as anger, how do you respond? How should you respond?
6. Can you name a behavior that you have exhibited that is a reflection of your motives?
7. In your experience, what “sin chain” or root problem, have you seen as the cause of most problems in your personal life, church, or society at large?
8. What led up to that problem?
9. What could have happened if you had cut the top link of the sin chain in that problem?
10. How do you feel when someone calls you stupid? How should you respond to it?
11. What is the quintessential thing that God hates the most? Why do you practice it?
12. How should you handle foul and harmful language either coming from you or directed at you? What does Christ expect of your words?
13. As a Christian, you have been liberated from God’s wrath and a future in Hell. Did that liberation cause a sense of wonder and a response of, “Wow, look what God did for me?”
14. What would happen to your recovery if you refused to deal with amends through repentance (In my thirty years of experience in this area when an addict does not do steps 5 and 8, he almost always goes back to his dependency! That is why these steps are so essential and timeless and they will work if you work them!)? What would be the lasting and dire consequences both here on earth and for eternity to come?
15. What can you do to consider and control your motives and the root causes of broken relationships, sin, and murder?
16. We have a call to keep our relationships healthy by being people who are willing to relinquish pride, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation. This is essential before we can go to God and continue in our healing. So, what are the steps you need to take to make this more of a reality in your life and relationships?
17. Why would an unforgiving attitude be fatal to recovery? What about to worship?
18. Since God reconciled Himself to us, how would it be an extreme insult to Him when we refuse to do likewise with others?

19. What good would it do to ask for forgiveness or help from Christ if we are unwilling to do such a small thing for someone else?
20. How can you prepare yourself to seek resolution to problems quickly, as they come up?
21. So how is your journey progressing with making amends? What do you need to do to succeed more? Remember: do not take it personally when people do not want to meet with you or accept your forgiveness. They may not be ready, have given up, you have hurt them too badly; they don't think it was a problem, or they do not understand about forgiveness. Know this: the fact you made an effort will have a lasting impact on them even if they do not say so or show it!
22. Take your list and review it to make sure no one is left out, then continue to go for it!

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Ezek. 33:15; Matt. 18: 21-35; Luke 15:11-24; Rom. 12:18

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The Problem of Not Forgiving

Matthew 18: 21-35

Step 9: When we make amends, we have to be careful we do not further injure people or cause strife.

For you to be on the road to recovery, you must be willing to forgive and seek others forgiveness. If not, you will stagnate and stay in your hurts and dysfunction! This passage teaches that there is no limit on forgiveness. Peter thinks seven times was a lot—possibly more than Jesus would require—but Jesus responds with the call that forgiveness is not limited.

For any Christian, especially those of us in recovery, it is actually the canceling of a debt. It is as if someone owed you one thousand dollars, but he or she could not pay you back. You forgive the debt, which means you never expect to receive the money back. The amount owed to you is no longer owed or expected. You give up your right to seek the repayment of that debt. This takes a huge load off us and frees us to be more in Christ and less to problems and ourselves.

As Christians, we who have been saved and have received His mercy are called to give mercy to others when we are wronged! Refusing to forgive makes us the ones who destroy relationships and forfeit the opportunity to glorify our Lord. We imprison ourselves in isolation, cutting ourselves off from real life and from seeing God's redemptive power in action. Unforgiveness is a price that is way too high for any true Christian to pay. Forgiveness gives us the freedom to move on and to build bridges for right relationships and growth. Unforgiveness blows up those bridges that we must cross if we would obtain personal healing, recovery, and maturity.

- *Forgive.* How often shall we forgive, Peter asks? It is the realization of how much we have been forgiven by Christ (Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 23:34; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13) that enables us to forgive the insignificant things that are done to us. It involves refusing to be resentful to others, and ignoring the wrongs that we have received so relationships can be healed through the expression of Christ's love.
- *Seventy times seven* was not a math formula for 490; rather, it was a colloquialism meaning, *forever*. It was also a Jewish saying, which meant never to hold a grudge. Jesus is confirming that we are to let it go. Holding onto grudges imprisons us in bitterness and derails us from our growth in Him. Some rabbis taught that the number “three” was sufficient in the amount of times to forgive. Perhaps Peter, in saying “seven,” was being over twice as generous.
- *Settle accounts.* Satraps would often gather the taxes for the king. Perhaps in this case, the means and methods of collecting did not meet the king's standards; perhaps it involved embezzlement, or bad management, or the people

could not pay the king's demands and the collector was sympathetic. It is interesting that a king would allow a servant to get that much in debt.

- *Ten thousand talents* would be the entire annual income for a very rich king. A talent is usually one year's wages for the rich, and a sliver talent was up to 6,000 days of wages for an average worker.
- *A denarii* was the daily wage for a worker. The amounts of Jesus parable could also be *hyperbole* speech, as Jesus often uses exaggerations to grab people's attention. Some rabbis saw sins as debts before God.
- *Master, have patience with me.* Most kings in the ancient era would never have accepted an excuse. Here, a person begs for forgiveness and receives it, when he neither deserves it nor is entitled to it. It would be impossible for a servant ever to pay such a debt; it would be like a pastor (me), who makes very little money, personally saying that I will get California out of its deficit!
- *Moved with compassion.* Most kings were ruthless and unfeeling. Here is a picture of benevolence and grace. It is the kind of grace our Lord gives us, grace without a possibility of earning it and, certainly, undeserving of it (Psalm 45:2; Gal. 5:4; Eph. 2:5-10).
- Because we receive grace, we should also impart it to others (2 Cor. 6:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:2-4).
- *Laid hands on him.* He was owed a hundred days of wages, an exponentially much, much smaller amount than that for which he was forgiven. He chose not to apply this principle of grace; rather, he became as ruthless to another as the king should have been with him.
- *Choking* refers to the anger this man had. When we do not exercise grace, we become infused with bitterness that blinds us from God and others. It is a heinous attribute we must never exercise! A person who was in prison where no wages could be earned could never pay off a debt. It then became the responsibility of the family, if they chose to redeem him (Lev. 25:25-34; Rom. 4:3-10).
- *Saw what he had done.* The king became angry, and justifiably so. This king, perhaps, had the motivation to receive more revenue by showing how benevolent he was. Now, this servant had ruined that idea as well as the king's income.
- *Torture.* The Law forbade torture and it was never practiced officially; it was, perhaps, rarely practiced at all in Judaism. However, Gentile kings would use it as a tool to extract information or receive penance. When we do not forgive, it is not the wrongdoer who is tortured; they "feel" they got off free. It is we who refuse to forgive who are tortured! A forgiving attitude is freedom, and contentment is a result of our rebirth (John 3:3).

Forgiveness is bankruptcy; once filed, the creditor may not retrieve the debt—it is wiped out. If we do not seek it or give it, we will be infused with anger and bitterness that blinds us from God and others. This will move us permanently into our dependency, addiction, and dysfunction! We need to see the cancellation of the debt as a write-off, and not some form of embezzlement or theft. When we forgive, we forget; that is, we are no longer to even have a desire for restitution, pay back, or punishment.

God is not determined by income or wealth but by our trust and obedience in Him. It is trust, not wealth that forms real and authentic relationships with others. How do you suppose God feels when we do as this servant did? The king was angry because the servant's actions reflected negatively on Him! How do our actions reflect on our Lord?

Forgiveness, on our part, does not earn salvation. Forgiveness is a response we give to others because of what Christ has given us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). We receive forgiveness as a part of our salvation. So, because we have been forgiven for such a high debt, why would we not forgive others for such a small debt? The cost of forgiveness was extremely high for our Lord, and not at all high for us in comparison! It is a part of our fallen nature to receive forgiveness and still not experience forgiveness, so we refuse to share forgiveness (Rom 12:10). The reason we forgive is solely and simply because Christ has done so with us, and calls us to do likewise with others. It is not about how we may feel; it is about what He has done!

Forgiveness is an aspect of God's love for us, and shows us how we are to love others (1 Cor 13: 4). When God tells us that love keeps no record of wrongs, He means we are not to go around with a list, writing down or keeping track of the faults of one another. Rather, we are to look for the positive things that happen in our recovery, relationships, and to affirm others. We are to seek reconciliation and forgiveness, never strife or dissention. We should not go around with a negative attitude, but, rather, with one that is positive, enthusiastic, and equipping to God's people. We are not to keep track of the mistreatments we may receive from friends or our spouse. Because God loves us so much, He does not keep a scorecard of our sins as long as we honestly repent of them. We do not need to reflect or gossip about the flaws of other people in order to elevate ourselves. God refuses to do that to us. Love lets things such as resentment and anger go so they do not build up and destroy our relationships and us (Matthew 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Hebrews 13:21-21). Authentic Love does not keep a scorecard!

Questions:

1. Have you ever gotten yourself into debt besides for a home or car—perhaps credit cards? If so, what did you do? What do you think of people who go bankrupt because of miscellaneous and frivolous spending with credit cards?
2. Be honest; in what ways do you put a limit on forgiveness?

3. What do you think Peter's motive was in this passage?
4. Why should a Christian be generous with forgiveness? How will this help your recovery?
5. How can the realization of how much we have been forgiven by God help fuel our ability and willingness to forgive someone?
6. In what ways have you seen Christians being resentful to others or holding a grudge? How does this glorify our Lord or build up their character? Why do they do it?
7. Have you ever seen someone—perhaps you—who was imprisoned in isolation because he or she refused to forgive? How so? What does bitterness do to that person?
8. How does refusing to forgive help destroy relationships and opportunities to glorify our Lord?
9. Why did the king exercise such grace and mercy? How is the king's mercy like our Lord's?
10. This servant begged for forgiveness and received it when he neither deserved nor was entitled to it. So, why would he "shake down" a fellow servant who owed him so little in comparison?
11. The Bible tells us that because we have received grace, we should also impart it to others. So, why should we? Why would we not want to?
12. How is forgiveness like canceling a debt or declaring bankruptcy?
13. When the king became angry, was it justifiable? Why, or why not?
14. How do you suppose God feels when we do as this servant did?
15. Why would a Christian not be generous with forgiveness?
16. When should we not forgive?
17. Why is refusing to forgive a price that is way too high for any true Christian to pay?
18. How is forgiveness an aspect of God's love for us and our love for others?
19. What can you do to make sure forgiveness is offered more freely so you can build more on your recovery as well as a bridge to relationships and growth?

20. Who do you need to seek reconciliation and forgiveness from? What are you doing so far about making amends?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Luke 23:34; 2 Cor. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 2 Pet. 1:2-4

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Step 10: Continue to make amends by examining your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others and then take responsibility for it.

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12

Keep on God's path for recovery so you do not fall off of it and go back to your old harmful ways.

How is your Recovery Going? Part 1

Matthew 7:13-20

Step 10: Continue to make amends by examining your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others and then take responsibility for it.

We live in an age where all ways and religions are accepted as equally valid and good. People in the ways of the world tell us that sin and dysfunction is OK too. It is very easy to find so called friends and enablers who will help you go back to your old ways and keep you there. They will tell you it is OK, that a little drug or a drink will not hurt you. But, you have to know they are lying and seeking to ruin you. They do not want help themselves and thus want to take you and others down with them. Do not let this happen to you! You need to trust in Christ and have the willpower to keep on God's path for your recovery so you do not fall off it and go back to your old harmful ways.

This passage tells us that we are narrow-minded and bigoted if we suggest anything else. However, political correctness aside, there is only One Way, and it is both the hardest way, and the easiest. Hard, because it cost our Lord so much; hard, because it requires us to surrender our Will; hard, because it is so easy, we think we do not need it. Jesus is the One and only Way, the gate that is narrow, the Way that is difficult, and to say otherwise neutralizes the Majesty and holiness of Jesus, His teaching, and it cheapens His Gospel. Added to this, we have so many false religions, cults, lifestyles, and ways of living, we can be overwhelmed and confused. The price for choosing the wrong or wide gate will lead us from recovery back to our hurt and pain. And in doing so, will be the ultimate cost of eternal consequences and despair. Do not cheat yourself, and exchange what seems easy and fun for ultimate loneliness and desolation.

- *Narrow gate:* The illustration of two gates is from Ezra, and would be familiar to all first century Jews, as that passage is about coming back from captivity to rebuild the temple and wall (Ezra 4). One leads to Life (water, food); the other, death (waste and dung). This represents the beginning to the "Way" that leads to life and for us our healing and recovery (Matt. 14:6; 16:24; 25:46; John 10:1-18). The narrowness is not determined by God's anger or callousness, rather by our

free Will and sin that rebels (Mt 6:14-20), so He has to chase after us. Many still refuse His Grace (Matt. 22:14).

- The *wide gate* represents the beginning of the life of destruction as what is seemingly free and open allows us to believe whatever we want. It does not require our Will, because our Will becomes the controlling factor. Materialism, hatred, refusing to forgive, prejudice, and the rest of the rotten fruits will take hold and glue us to that destructive lifestyle, then rationalize it as good. It seems the easy path, but will soon be more difficult and destructive than we could have thought (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:15; 21:8).
- The life of recovery, as well as the Christian life, requires the surrender of our Will, as in self-denial and obedience to Him (Rom. 6:3-7; 17-22). Few people desire to be convicted or challenged in their thinking or comfort zone, which they see as confining or bigoted. It will change our behavior, which is the main theme of chapters 5, 6, and 7 (Matt. 28:19-20).
- *Difficult* is the Christian way. To teach that it is easy is true on the surface; however, it minimizes who and what Christ did and the price He paid (Acts 14:21-22). It also minimizes the realization of how much you have been forgiven, and how much sin corrupts and destroys. We will go through difficulties and sufferings, but these cannot distract us; rather, we need to see the hope and glory we have to come.

Our recovery and the Christian life can be difficult journeys! We live in a fallen world corrupted by sin. Consequently, all we do is imperfect, and a struggle. We will make choices that affect the direction in which we proceed in life and in relationships. In so doing, we affect others around us in both positive and negative ways. Yet, when our efforts and motivations are centered upon being righteous, we will do as we are called to do, and even be blessed for it.

As Christ's disciples, we must be willing to be led by the truth of His Word and by our faith and trust in Him. Everything that is worthy and excellent requires more work, from painting a house to preaching the Word. This journey of difficulty should not discourage us because it will build us up to be much better, stronger and of better use to God as we put into practice what He puts in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

Questions

1. Have you ever locked yourself out of your house or car? How did it feel? How would it feel to be locked out of Heaven because you made a lot of wrong choices? Thank Christ He gives us Grace when we trust in Him!
2. How are you doing with your list and efforts to make amends?
3. Now do some more examining of your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others, and then take responsibility for it.

4. Why is it appealing to be open-minded to the point that everything is acceptable and permissible as long as no one is hurt? How does this philosophy destroy?
5. What is the price for choosing the wrong or wide gate? How can you help motivate others not to make that big mistake?
6. What do you think is the point of the two gates?
7. When we take away essential truths of the faith, and believe what we want, how does this neutralize the Majesty and holiness of Jesus, His teachings, how much we have been forgiven, as well as cheapen His Gospel?
8. Do you believe that a lot of people dealing with what you have dealt with, even Christians, need to be "set straight" as we have so many bad influences in life leading people far away?
9. The Christian life requires surrender of our Will, as in self-denial and obedience to Him (Rom. 6:3-7; 17-22). How is this so for you?
10. Few people desire to be convicted or challenged from their thinking and comfort zones. They see this as confining, or being intrusive. What needs to take place, besides the work of the Spirit, to make this happen? In so doing, will it change our behavior, which is the main theme of chapters 5, 6, and 7 (Matt. 28:19-20)?
11. Are you concerned about people of bad influence today?
12. In what ways have you seen bad influencers switch "gates" on you, claiming lies as truth? How do they make them seem attractive?
13. How have you been a bad influence? How do you feel about it now?
14. Do you believe that even though you may have been misled, you are still responsible for your choices? Why, or why not?
15. The only way you can expose a bad influencer is to know the truth from the Bible, watch them closely, and test them. What do you think would be some good tests?
16. What happens to your life, church, neighborhood, and relationships when you produce Fruit to nourish and impact others?
17. What happens when you give out your rotten fruit to discourage and repulse all the people whom God brings to you? Can you see this from the perspective of others, or perhaps how God might see it?

18. Making a public profession or testimony of recovery is essential. Maybe if you have not done so, this is a good time for it; ask your counselor.

Mediate on this passage for the next week or more: Romans chap 8

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How is your Recovery Going? Part 2

Matthew 7:13-20

Step 10: Keep on God's path for recovery so you do not fall off of it and go back to your old harmful ways.

Continue to make amends by examining your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others, and then take responsibility for it. This step is to help focus you and give you encouragement to continue to make amends by examining your life and what you have done to cause hurt to others; then take responsibility for it. This is like exercising to keep fit; you have to keep at it.

Even though the Way is simple in concept, people, since the early Apostles and Jews who kept the Law, while believing in Jesus, have tried to add extra burdens on the Gospel of Grace. From circumcision to the scores of false teachers, Paul and Barnabas were plagued with this until Peter, through the Holy Spirit, set them straight (Acts 10-15). It is no different today. We still need to be "set straight" because of so many false ideas, corruption, sin, and evil people and their evil ways seeking to get you back to your addiction or dependency. Sometimes the temptations seem overwhelming and dauntless. Yet all you need to do is look to Christ and His simple, yet profound teachings to lead you home, safe, and in recovery.

The illustration in this passage of the trees and fruit is the quintessential proof text for who you are, where you came from, and what you have or can become. You have the choice to live out Galatians 5:19-21 or Galatians 5: 22-23. The choice is yours; the fruit is to be made by you through the Holy Spirit. The key is to receive and work it out (Phil. 2:12-13). You can be a good tree or a bad one. You can produce Fruit to nourish and impact others, or give out your *rotten fruit* to discourage and repulse all those who are brought to you by God. Faith that is professed may be good, but until it moves your will and feet, it is no good to God or those around you!

- The key to make this work is simple: Do not focus on your situation, but on Christ. See our articles on our *Suffering* channel under "Topics."
- *Find it or found*, suggests effort must be extended. Luke adds the word *strive* (Luke 13:24). It indicates not just any kind of effort, but the right driving force (Eph. 4).
- *False prophets*: this can be anyone who enables you; they will switch the gates on you and claim lies as truth. They are denying who and what Christ has done for you and replacing the truth with lies! They seem attractive at first, until you realize you have been shamed—hopefully before it is too late. Even though you may have been misled, you are still responsible for your choices! We can know them by their character, by how they live (Matt. 7:21-23; Luke 6:43-45), and if their words come to pass (Duet. 13; 18:21-22). They will lead you astray and must be corrected. If they refuse to listen (Matt. 18), they must be silenced.

- *Sheep's clothing*: Here is where we get our phrase, "a wolf in sheep's clothing!" And, the phrase is quite true! It is saying and representing what is not really what you intend or mean to deliberately misreport truth, even though you may believe it as true. People of bad influence will rarely come across as the evil type, with shifty eyes and whispers in the dark. They come looking like you with persuasive, emotional, and attractive words and temptations to captivate you. The only way you can tell is to know the truth from the Bible, watch them closely, and test them (Gal. 1:8-9; 1 John 4:1). In addition, know this: their lifestyle and character will soon give them away (2 Cor. 8:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:14-16; 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). They will also cause divisions and strife in you and your family and church, and lead people away from the True faith (1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:18; 2 Pet. 2:1).
- *Fruits*, is an illustration of good and valuable food such as barley, figs, and pomegranates, versus what is worthless and harmful to the harvesters, such as thorns or thistles (Isa. 5:2-6; 27:6; Hos.10: 1-13; 14:7-8; Prov. 11:30-31). This, in the Old Testament, refers to being obedient to God in order to receive His blessings. Now, it is more of a mirror to our character, to who we are, or can be in Christ (Gal. 5:18-23).

Another key to recovery success is to focus on the benefits of getting better and not the guilt for what you have done. Making amends is also designed to erase guilt so you can focus on your improvement and move on in Christ and the wondrous life He has for you! So, enjoy your recovery; you are getting better! Wow! See it as an adventure from which to learn and grow. Our character will improve and enable us to overcome all obstacles and help others through them. Thus, we should make it a point to give Christ our best for His glory because He first loved us, and we respond to His Grace with our gratitude. At the same time, we can take comfort in the fact that He will not give us anything we cannot handle (Phil 2:10-13; Heb. 2:10)! So, let us live with excellence, to our best for His glory!

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)

Questions

1. In what ways is the Christian life hard? In what way is it easy? How has it been for you? What do you need to grow further?
2. What are some bad beliefs or influences you may have that get in the way of your recovery? How can you remove them? Who can help you?
3. What you have seen as the key to make your recovery work is simple: do not focus on your situation, but on Christ
4. How is the Way (Christian life) simple in concept? What about the steps to your recovery? Why do some people feel the need to add to it or that it is too hard to do?

5. Do you believe that humility (see our character study on *Humility*) prevents those who are godly from promoting themselves, as we are called to promote Christ crucified?
6. What would be the driving force for the godly leader whose heart is after Christ? How is this so for those in recovery?
7. How is it that the illustration of trees and fruit (Fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:18-23) can be the quintessential proof text of who you are and what you need to do?
8. Compare how and why the Christian life costs so much to what you receive in return. Now do the same with recovery.
9. Where are you in your spiritual journey and sojourn with Christ? What about your recovery sojourn?
10. How can you show others that Jesus is directing you along the narrow way?
11. Are you equipped to identify a wolf in sheep's clothing if you saw one? How can you be so equipped?
12. What does it take to move your will and feet further in your recovery?
13. Now, think through what you can do to make sure your recovery testimony stays on God's track and the Fruits you produce are from Gal 5:22-23, not from verses 18-21?
14. How is your journey of making amends going? What are the barriers you faced? How can you overcome them? Remember do not take negative feedback personally!
15. What do you need to keep on God's path for recovery so you do not fall off of it and go back to your old harmful ways? Who will help you?

Mediate on this passage for the next week or more: Galatians chap 5

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Step 11: Seek to grow, go to prayer, and improve your relationship with Christ.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. James 1:5-6

Pray for strength, God's Will, and the continual empowerment for recovery

Seeking Wisdom to Deal with Recovery!

James 1:5-8

Step 11: Seek to grow, go to prayer, and improve your relationship with Christ.

Are you relying on yourself or God? How really wholeheartedly are you seeking after God for your recovery? If you are at the point that you think *I can do this on my own*, you are headed for trouble! Perhaps what you need is some more smarts to see God at work? God implores us to literally beg for wisdom because we are empty in of ourselves. If we do not seek wisdom, but remain in our own thinking, we will be untethered like a small boat without an anchor in a storm, tossed and tumbled in the waves of stress and life. Thus, all of our efforts to move on and away from our addiction and dependency will be in vain. We will be back where we started and have to start all over again—if we survive. We will be literally unstable—mentally, relationally, and spiritually—without our Lord's direction!

We, as Christians in recovery and in life, need wisdom to take us through all of the avenues of life, especially through the hard times of stress and suffering that force us back in our addiction or dependency. If we do not seek wisdom, we will never learn from our mistakes and experiences. We will never grow; in fact, we just may keep repeating the same mistakes over and over. This is why people go back to the bottle. How sad it would be to go through a tough time and not get anything out of it! It would just be a waste, an empty experience void of meaning or benefit—to us, or others around us. Without wisdom, we will neither learn His precepts nor have His wisdom and help. We will not be infused with faith; therefore, the ways of our selves and the world will toss us about until we drown in anxiety and despair. Our lives will have been a vapor that had little meaning or benefit—a life wasted instead of a life triumphant. What is the key? It is learning that our hope is in the Lord, not in our expectations (Psalm 25:4-5; Mark 9:17-27; John 16:33; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; 11:23-27; Heb. 12: 6-10)!

We are to accept God's plan for our lives and then ask for wisdom to deal with it, not seeking what we think or want or what others who are less mature have to say; rather, we are to seek God and His Word to give us the knowledge to grow and to get through. God assures us that when we seek Him, He will respond. When we ask for

wisdom, He will give it to us! The key is to ask by faith. This is the confidence in God's power that without doubt, He is there and He will help you through any dysfunction you face. For if we doubt, we will not have confidence, and we will be tossed by our struggles, to the point that they drown us.

1. *Wisdom* is not just knowledge and information; rather, it is practical, spiritual insight from God's values and then application of righteousness and truth. It means to be wise, as in understanding, and to ask God for comprehension, for what His perspective is, and cooperate with Him, not just asking why, but rather how we can learn and grow. It is also a response of being godly, and how we can please God in character and maturity (Prov. 1:2-4; 2:10-15; 4:5-9; 9:10-12; 1 Kings 3; Heb. 5:14).
2. *Ask God* means to beg God passionately, realizing we are helpless and in great need. He is the source of wisdom and the One we are to go to in all aspects of life! He will grant our requests as long as they are sincere and in His will (1 Kings 3:5-9; Prov. 2:6; Luke 11:9; James 4:2; 1 John 3:21-24; 5:14-15)!
3. *Be given*. Life is about pleasing God, not pleasing one's self! It is about abandoning our desires and focusing on Him! His plan is far better than our desires!
4. *Faith* is our object and loyalty. Christ is what we hope for; Christ is what is to be seen! Faith is the promise of God that gives us the hope and confidence so we can receive, act on, obey, and trust God's promises, certain that God is sovereign and trustworthy. Faith will help us perceive the world by what its potential is, not just by the suffering we experience and see. This helps us be implanted with hope (Matt. 6:33; John 14:9; Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8; Hebrews 11:1).
5. *Doubt* comes when we do not exercise our faith. We become consumed with doubt and distrust—the opposite of God's call and plan for us. We lose our trust and hope that God is in control! When we do this, we will lose or miss out on seeing God come through with His promises!

We may not understand our problems or ever get a reason, as Job did not; however, we can still trust in Him who loves us and is "caring" us through! Do you accept His caring? It is sad how so few Christians, when faced with problems, will really seek and rely on God. They tend to only see their situation, cowering in bitterness and anger, even aiming that anger toward God. They do not see that He is, indeed, in control (2 Cor. 4:7-12). Thus, many Christians withdraw into isolation, bitterness, and denial, and avoid His true love and plan for them. We have to learn to learn; we have to grow, so we can grow. If not, we stagnate and our circumstances will sink us. We have been given victory. That is what the Christian experience is all about, our victory over sin and despair by what Christ has done on our behalf. If we do not declare the victory, we will only see defeat. Even though we already have the victory, we will be defeated!

Doubts should not derail us unless it is the Holy Spirit saying we are going in the wrong direction. To know the difference, be in prayer. Take comfort; the impossible becomes the possible in Christ (Matt. 21:21-22)! Doubt will hinder you greatly in your service and growth in Christ; doubt can actually cancel out your prayer and His work in you! We are not called to be perfect, as He uses our weakness and failures, but doubt is like putting our shoes on backwards; we will be uncomfortable, hurt, and not go very far! Doubt will greatly hinder us! We have to see how much God loves and cares for us, so we do not need to doubt! Have sin and discouragement got you by the heel or throat? Seek out why you are doubting; is there a good reason, or are past experiences and fears hindering you (Luke 11:10)?

Jesus Christ is your Good Shepherd in life and in recovery. Allow Him to be so!

Questions

1. Are you impulsive? Why and how so? How does this benefit your personal life? How can it distract you from growing in faith?
2. How would you define Wisdom?
3. How have you sought to grow and go to prayer to improve your relationship with Christ?
4. What is not right in your life that needs wisdom and attention from God?
5. How can you become more confident that God gives the plan and the victory?
6. Why do we Christians need wisdom to take us through the avenues of life?
7. What happens if we do not seek wisdom?
8. How will never learning from our mistakes and experiences affect us as well as others?
9. How can you better deal with your expectations and experiences so they do not turn into disappointments?
10. How can you learn to take your life and your surroundings as they are, and then strive to become what you can be for His glory, not just for what you want?
11. What would your life be like with God's wisdom at work in you? How would you benefit others? How can you make this so?
12. What do you need to do better to seek to grow and go to prayer to improve your relationship with Christ? If you do not have people regularly praying for you, now is the time to get some; seek your pastor for help.

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal. Isaiah 26:3-4

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 66:16-20; Matt. 5:23-24; John 10:1-4, 14; 1 John 4:9-19

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Dealing with Disappointments

James 1:5-8

Step 11: Pray for strength, God's Will and the continual empowerment for recovery!

Take the Initiative! We have to take the initiative in our spiritual formation. We must reach out and accept His Hand. Allow Him lead you out. Do not try to swim by yourself, as the waters of life are too strong; the currents and tides of desires and wrong opportunities will overwhelm you. Anticipate what may lie ahead and prepare; this is James' whole point! Unequivocally, we have to reach out for Christ and Him only! We can choose not to be bitter—rather be better! What we receive from God is good. What we receive from self and others, with personal agendas that are not centered on God, will be bad and distract us from our growth. If we are being real with our spiritual formation, we will realize our need for Christ and our continual need for His wisdom (Matt. 5:3)!

- *Tossed* refers to being unstable, immature, and weak in faith (Eph. 4:14-16). We can only become un-tossed by the Anchor of who Christ is in us, and pursuing Him!
- *Sea* is a term that drove fear into Jews then; they did not venture into the ocean, but relied on others to do that in fishing and commerce (Isa. 57:20).
- *Double minded* refers to being unstable emotionally and in thoughts, like a split personality or *schizophrenia*. It also means to be a person who has two souls in conflict, two desires that cannot be reconciled, two masters who ask different things at the same time. This is "I want my will *and* God's will." This just cannot be!
- *Doubt*, along with *double-minded*, is also a form of inconsistent living and hypocrisy, and is greatly condemned by God. It is saying one thing and doing another (1 Chron. 12:33; Psalm 12:2; Matt. 6:24; James 4:8). This is also indecision! It is not being willing to make up your mind and go in the right direction!
- *Unstable*. We are called to make decisions based on God's values and not our ideas or indecisions. How do our decisions affect others? How are they relational and beneficial to others and God's glory?

Disappointments are the collision between our expectations and experiences, while ignoring the signposts of God's promises. Our expectations will collide with our experiences and then create a wrecked life of self-pity and resentment. Or, that can lead to a triumphant life. The choice is ours and the key is where we look for our hope! This is about our circumstances and how we look at our Lord. How we see adversity and His sovereignty will totally affect how we learn and deal with it (Phil 1:27-30).

Unanchored stress and disappointments along with detachment from looking to God will take us away from seeing His signposts of precepts. Thus, we ignore God's plan and this dumps us in the middle of a tossed sea (Job 23:10; Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). We cannot just expect God to get us through without any effort on our part. To grow, we have to struggle and work it out (Phil. 2). It is the struggle that helps us; that is what builds us and forms us. Without it, there is no growth or real impacting faith, honest character, genuine patience, or maturity (Prov. 3:5-6; 20:30; Job. 36:5; Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 1:9; 1 Peter 1:6-7). When we do not rely on God, we are, in fact, not taking care of ourselves by helping Him out; rather, we are insulting Him!

The key is to learn to take your life and your surroundings as they are, and then strive to build them to what they can be for His glory, not just as you want it. If our hearts and minds are divided between seeking God or seeking ourselves, we will become double minded and unstable. We will become spiritually and emotionally unstable and thus sink in the waves of stress and life! We will literally be torn apart spiritually and physically by our stress and worry, because we have not yielded to Him. Let go and let God; allow your wholehearted devotion to be on Christ and not on yourself. God will not make your decisions for you; you need to seek His precepts and distil what is best for value's and character's sake; then, He will enable us to form it and grow (Isa. 26:3; Matt. 6:33)

What do I do when I am overwhelmed? Are you allured to your previous addictions or dependencies? Are they crying to you and you are yearning for them? Then ask God for help; He is able! Trust in His control! He is the God who can keep us walking above the waves, and keep us alive and going when we are under them! Go through His Word, seek what you can learn, how you can get through, and for wisdom. If we do not learn, all those "waves" will just be a waste, and perhaps we will keep going through them until we do learn (Psalm 142:1-7; John 7:17; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Do not escalate your situation by complaining, or distort it by denial, bitterness, or isolation! Do not be dumb, trapped in your own anger and regret. Be smart; be a Christian who learns and grows and who is committed to obedience, spiritual growth, and maturity. Instead of moaning, seek His grace to solve the situation! Do not blame, or seek fault in others or yourself; rather, get on with life and your commitment to Christ. Allow His amazing work in you! Resistance to God, our bad attitudes, and anger only cause us more harm, choosing for ourselves to be tossed by the seas of life without hope or purpose. Let Christ be your anchor, or else you will drown and your life will be a series of wasted opportunities. When you could have and should have grown, you will have squandered His call and put your energies into complaints, and your mindsets and attitudes into bitterness and anger. We need to come to the point that we trust in the Lord, regardless of how good or how bad life is, for it is temporary. What we learn will be eternal (John 7:17-18)!

Questions

1. What would be a healthy biblical balance for you to be free and spontaneous yet be pious and reliant on Him? How does help your self-control for your recovery?

2. What causes you to be *unstable*, desiring your former dysfunction?
3. What do you do when you are overwhelmed? Because of this passage, what will you do now?
4. Pray for strength, God's Will, and the continual empowerment for recovery. When will you do this? How often? Who can keep you accountable and help?
5. What happens in your life that causes you to be overwhelmed or frustrated?
6. What do you need to do to become more stable and to have an Anchor for the storms of life?
7. How can you handle disappointments better? What can your church do to help you?
8. How do you make decisions? How can this passage help you be more decisive?
9. How will you receive, act on, obey, and trust in God's promises?
10. How does Faith give us the promise of God, hope, and confidence?
11. What happens when Doubt comes into your life? What will you do about it next time it happens?
12. What gets in your way of making time with God? What are you going to do about it?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Psalm 5:3; 32:8; Matt. 6:5-15, 33; 2 Cor. 7:9-10; 1 Pet. 3:12

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Step 12: Having achieved success in spiritual growth and recovery, now seek how you can continue your success.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the Law of Christ. Galatians 6:1-2

How can you help others and carry the Gospel message that Christ transforms lives?

Dealing with Temptations

Matthew 4:1-11

Step 12: Having achieved success in spiritual growth and recovery, now seek how you can continue your success.

Jesus Himself dealt with temptations, and He will empower you to move on from them. Jesus was led out into the desert to be tempted by Satan with the destiny of His creation and humanity at stake. During this time, He fasted and remained true and loyal to who He was and to His coming mission. Satan pulled out all of his efforts and abilities in a futile attempt to convince Jesus to serve him. In so doing, he promised Jesus greater honor and glory faster by having more control. The problem is that Jesus was already fully God, thus had total sovereignty, glory, and control. Satan based his attack on what he thought would be Jesus' greatest weakness, His humanity. However, Satan failed, as Christ, using His humanity and not His divinity as identification and model for us, defeated Satan's attack through Scripture, the Spirit, prayer, and obedience.

- Immediately following His baptism by John (John 1:29) and just before the start of His public ministry, Jesus was hammered! (Matt. 3:13-17; 4:12-17) The Spirit leads Jesus to this "challenge," after He endorses Him at the baptism, to go to the wilderness of Judea, a desolate place (Luke 3:22). Jesus fasted, and was tempted for forty days, as were Moses and Elijah before Him (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Luke 4:2). Whenever we receive the Spirit or achieve advancements in our spiritual life and recovery, we will be targets of opportunity! But we can prevail by following Jesus' example and empowerment! Satan will come and try to attack us with all he has. He will use everything he can to convince us we have made a mistake and we need to turn to ourselves, or a substitute other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!
- Satan's chief job is to try to rob us of what God gives; but we have the power to stop him! This passage is a parallel to the forty years of testing of the nation of Israel in the desert (Num. 14:34; Duet. 4:4; 7; 10; 6:13-16; 8:3). These quotes from Deuteronomy were commands God gave Israel during their 40-year desert

experience where He tested and prepared them for the nation they would and could become.

- Here, Jesus is the representative of Israel! In addition, He overcame it in our place as our representative and example! This is a great comfort to us, because He overcame with the power and ability we have, thus, we too can overcome tribulations and temptations, even from Satan himself (Heb. 2:18; 4:14-16; 12:2-3)!
- Take heart; Jesus understands us and what we go through; therefore, we can never say, *but, but, you do not understand...* We can overcome our dependency or addiction and remain sober when we yield to His truth, example, strength, and faith!
- Satan thought he “had” Jesus, and attacked Him at the classic place of weakness in humanity. The first temptation is Satan's appeal to the lust of the flesh, as being without food for forty days, Jesus must have been very hungry! He challenged Jesus' identity to break His obedience and satisfy His fleshly hunger. Jesus responds with Scripture, quoting Deut. 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone..." We need to be dependent upon the Lord and the Word to help us fulfill physical needs.
- In the second temptation, Satan appeals to pride (5-7). He again challenges Jesus' identity, and sets Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple, telling Him to *throw Yourself down*. Jesus responds again with the Word, quoting Psalm 91:11,12, then Deut. 6:16. Satan also uses Scripture, but he abuses it by taking it out of its context and twisting it to serve his purpose and not God's. When we misuse Scripture, we are modeling ourselves after Satan! Furthermore, we should never even consider testing God!
- The third temptation had Satan appealing to the lust of power by taking Jesus to a high mountain and showing Him the kingdoms of the world. Then Satan offered to give them to Him if Jesus would worship him (8-10). Jesus again responds with Scripture, quoting Deut. 6:13, *you shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve*. Jesus does not take the easy path or a shortcut to power over the nations. (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21)
- The temptations ended, and our Lord was victorious without caving to sin! Angels came and ministered to Jesus. It is not mentioned what they did. However, we can assume they gave Him food.
- You can call this “temptation, round one,” because more confrontations were to come, climaxing with Satan's defeat on the cross (Luke 4:13; Matt. 16:21-23). We share the same adversary and the same temptations! As Satan and the woes of life tempted Jesus, we are also tempted. (1 Pet. 5:8-9) He faced temptations such as immorality, materialism, and pride (1 John 2:15-16). After Satan's

humiliating defeat, he turned his interest towards the faith-struggling disciples, and then the Church (Rev. 12:17).

- We have the same ability to overcome as Jesus had! What He did on the cross pulls the synergistic combination of the Holy Spirit working in us and the Word....Well, you need not worry about the devil as much as you need to worry about and act on your character!
- We have the same tools to overcome Satan and temptations in general. Remember, Satan has been defeated! We even have authority and ability to repel Satan by the blood of the Cross. However, we must never take him lightly, for spiritual warfare and our conflict with him is very real (Eph. 6:12)!
- Jesus used the Word of God and prayer as both offensive and defensive weapons, and so can we (Mt 26:41; Eph. 6:17).
- Jesus was focused on God's plan, as we must be with our faith, trust, and then obedience to it in the plan of God (Eph. 6:16; Heb. 10:35-39).
- The Bible, our faith, and prayer pack a three-prong attack and defense from which Satan does not have a chance!
- Jesus was taken care of by angels. We will be also, even though we may never be aware of it (Luke 16:22)! We have hope, and a place in eternity to keep in mind (Rev. 2:10,26-27; 3:21).

For us today, we can learn that we can trust and rely on our Lord. Material things will not satisfy us. Maybe they will for a while, but all we will have is longing for more, never satisfied. True spiritual nourishment comes from God's Word and our spiritual growth through worship, service, and prayer. When we abuse the Bible, we are behaving like Satan! When we use it well, we are modeling Christ (2 Pet. 3:16).

Satan does not tempt us just to get us into trouble or to do wrong, but to distract us from God. Satan seeks to get us to lose what God has given or has to offer. In so doing, we are of no use to God, because we have bought the lie. Our outlook has gone from truth to fiction, from betterment for others and ourselves to causing harm! The way to spiritual maturity and the glory of our reward is not in finding shortcuts, but temperance through learning, experience, and overcoming adversities. It is a long and difficult process (Acts 14:22; Rom. 2:7)

Remember the 12 Step process never ceases; it is a continual effort. See our other Bible Studies and Discipleship tools to continue your growth. We recommend our *Faith* series after you finish this one.

Questions

1. Have you ever been hammered by Satan and/or temptations? If so, how did you handle them? How did it affect your sobriety?
2. What were or are some of the biggest temptations that you have struggled with?
3. Why do you suppose the Spirit led Jesus to be tempted?
4. How important is being loyal to your family and friends to you? What about your loyalty to God? How can this motivate you with you amends?
5. Satan tried with all of his efforts and abilities to convince Jesus to serve him. What might Satan do to get you to serve him?
6. Satan will attack us—which we should expect! So, do you?
7. What can you do to stop Satan's threats and indictments from appealing to you?
8. Does the fact that when we receive the Spirit or do great with our recovery and spiritual growth, Satan will come with all of his power to attack and cause fear in you? What can you do to alleviate that fear with faith and assurance?
9. Read James 1:12-15. How does this verse relate to Matthew and your life?
10. Satan's chief job is to try to rob us of what God gives. You have the power to stop him! What is that power, and how do you or can you use it?
11. Christ has overcome Satan with the power resources and abilities we also have available to us. Thus, we too can overcome tribulations and temptations, even from Satan himself. How can this be of a comfort to you?
12. Even the devil cannot stop God's plan for us. So, how does this passage affect spiritual warfare?
13. Jesus understands our situations and what we go through. So, have you ever said to Him, *but, but, you do not understand...*? How does it feel knowing that He does understand?
14. Which of the temptations Jesus faced would have tempted you?
15. How can you be dependent upon the Lord and the Word to help fulfill your physical needs? What is the balance between your work and what He gives?
16. Have you learned that material things will not satisfy you? Maybe they will for a while, but all you will have is longing for more, yet never be satisfied. True, spiritual nourishment comes from God's Word and our spiritual growth through worship, prayer, and service. How can you make this real in your life?

17. How and/or what can you learn from this passage about how you can trust and rely on our Lord more?
18. Read Eph. 6 and 1 Pet 5:8: What can you do to develop a response to Satan's attacks?
19. The way to spiritual maturity and the glory of our reward is not from finding shortcuts, but tempered through learning, experience, and overcoming adversities. It is a long and difficult process (Acts 14:22; Rom. 2:7). How can you make this a reality in your life?
20. How have these 12 Steps helped you? Now, what are you going to do more to grow and improve your relationship with Christ?

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: 2 Cor. 1:3-4; Titus 3:3-7; 1 John 1:6-7

Mediate on these passages for the next week or more: Ecc. 4:9-10; Matt. 28:18-20; Phil. 1:27; 4:8-9; 1 Pet. 2:9; 4:11

For more helps see our Spiritual Warfare channel!

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Our Faithful Growth in Christ!

2 Peter 1: 5-11

Step 12: How can you help others and carry the Gospel message that Christ transforms lives?

The authentic knowledge of Christ revealed to us is the foundation of our faith. We are being directly called to make every conceivable effort to put into practice our faith and the Fruit that is given and is at our disposal to use. Having achieved success in our spiritual growth and recovery, we need to realize we have to continue this. Thus, we have to seek how we can continually be transformed by the Gospel message that Christ lives! In so doing, we can be a display case to others lives as well.

Our faith is a benefit we have as Christians, just like working for a company and having health and life insurance, a retirement account, and various other benefits. Employers are not always obligated to provide this, but in order to make a healthier and more productive work environment, they do. The employees are responsible to sign up and use the benefits. If they do not, those benefits will not be available for use. Their use is not mandatory, but needed and necessary for life. The parallels are similar with what God has given us. He is not obligated to give to us of His love and grace, but He does so because of that love and grace.

The order of the Fruits here is not comprehensive or in a sequential order like in Galatians where each one is a stage that begets the next one. Rather, here it is arranged in rhetorical “sorites,” a type of argument that uses syllogisms to build to the climax of love. Each end is a “bookend” that holds the others; faith is what we all start with. It is the foundation. Then others build to the preeminent, essential significance of what love is, the quintessential fruit of the Christian life.

Look over these key words and ask how do they relate to you?

- *Add to/supplement.* This is referring to fruit, which is what we are given when we grow in Him, what we add to, and what He then multiplies (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13).
- *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1). Christ is what we hope for; Christ is what is to be seen! Faith is the promise of God that gives us the hope and confidence so we can receive, act on, obey, and trust God's promises, because God is sovereign and trustworthy. We can trust God for the future because we can see what He has done in the past—from creation, to testimonies, to His infallible Word (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:1-14; Heb. 2:4; 11: 1-6; 12:2; James 1:2-4; 2:14-26).
- *Goodness/virtue* refers to moral excellence, the engagement of love, and doing the right thing. Virtue is the application of being good from both the conscious will to do what is right and from personal responsibility. It encompasses integrity,

honesty, compassion, and endearment and this is the quintessence of what biblical Character (that is, right standards, strength, courage, modesty, and purity all done in excellence) is to be. We acquire Virtue by our faith, our obedience to Christ, being persistent in Him, and clothing ourselves in Him. This is what results when we truly repent; we will represent the nobility that we have in Christ (Amos 5:15; Psalm 103:17; 131; Prov. 8:13; 25:22; Matthew 7:12; 19:16; Luke 6:27, 35; Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 5:8-9; Col. 3:12-17; Phil. 2:14-18; 4:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; 5:22; Tit. 1: 15; Heb. 10: 5-10; 1 Pet. 3:11; 2 Pet. 1:3-8; 2:9).

- *Knowledge* here refers to knowing the salvation we have in Christ because we have a personal relationship with Him. The Christian message, if it is real in our lives, will affect our attitudes and lifestyle (Luke 11:42; 18:10-14; John 14:1-6; Eph. 2:8-9).
- *Self-control* is allowing God to be in control of our will and heart, and seeking the Spirit to enable us. This is imperative in order to keep up our recovery. If we lose self-control we lose it all! Then we will know what not to do and guard the areas in which we are weak. This will allow us to have discipline and restraint with obedience to God and others. It is refusing to let distractions derail or remove us from His will and plan so we will not be held back from what Christ called us to do (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; Rom 13:12-14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:25-27; 1 Thess. 5: 22; Titus 2:12; Heb. 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).
- *Perseverance* is having confidence in God so we trust Him in difficult situations and still see His grace and love. We can do this by being encouraging with Christ-like temperament (2 Chron. 32:1-8; Esther 7; Luke 16:22-31; 18:9; Acts 19:8-10; 26:19-23; Rom. 15:14-16; Phil. 1:6; 12-14, 25; 2 Tim. 2:25).
- *Godliness* means living out our disposition with respect and reverence to Christ in all aspects of our life. This is rearranging our priorities, mindsets, and character to line up with God's character, and to be able to see the importance of virtue then be equipped to use it to value others. Godliness is a collection of personality traits within our personality that show our attitude, moral fiber, and how we treat one another—good or bad, which is what Character is about. This results from being pious and living a good, reverent life toward God and others because of what Christ has done in us (Psalm 15; Micah 6:8; Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31; Eph. 5:1; Col. 3:15-17; 1 Tim. 3:16; 4:8; 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; 3:5; 2 Pet. 1:3, 6; 3 John 11; Rev 14:6).
- *Brotherly kindness/Brotherly affection* means love for a brother or friend (in the Greek, *Philia*). It is a call to treat others as family because we are all in God's family (Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:1).
- *Love* is the turning our backs on our self-concerns and facing God and our neighbors. It will enable us to appreciate others in the Lord. Love desires to seek and apply what God has to say. When you have the wrong idea and definition of love, it will adversely impose on all those areas in your life. Understanding what

love is not is as important as understanding what love is. God's love must be our model for life. It must flow into us from Christ, and in return flow out from us to those around us (John 13:1; 15:13; 1 Cor. 13; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 5:8-13; 1 John)!

- *Possess these qualities.* The Greeks believed that the knowledge of something was what was important, not the practice of it. Here we are called to not just know but also to do.
- *Ineffective/...unproductive.* This means we are being called on to be productive and useful in the Kingdom as well as the community. If not, we are in disobedience and ignoring His love and gifts for us. Why would a Christian not want to be productive for the Kingdom (Phil. 4:8-9)?

We have privileges and responsibilities in Him. God has given us gifts, abilities, and promises that we are not to put in storage when needed. Even when we have devastated our lives and others, we have grace and can get our lives back together. When these gifts are needed, they are there for us to persistently use! Such benefits given will not only benefit us in our intimate relationship to Christ, but also empower and build much heartier relationships with others, too. We may not recover all of our relationships and status, but we can be used powerfully. At the very least be a beacon of what not to do and even more so a light to help others in similar situations.

There is a stern warning here for all of us! We have a responsibility to pursue our faith development and produce a good result of modeling Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)! If we ignore our call to pursue our spiritual growth, thus not developing our virtue and character, we will face life without God's empowerment and benefits. When we have forsaken Him, He does not forsake us; nevertheless, because we did not take hold of the benefits He gave, they will not be in our arsenal or developed enough to be of much use in dealing with life. Our shortsightedness and refusal to be prepared results from taking our eyes off Christ and placing them on our circumstances and stresses, thus making us empty and bankrupt to deal with those circumstances! Do not let this *myopic* thinking happen to you!

Questions

1. Why are we called to grow in Him? What does this mean for you?
2. If Christ has called you to grow in Him, what is getting in the way? Why?
3. What have you received from Christ that energizes your life? What is in the way? What are you going to do about it?
4. Do you realize that we all have privileges and responsibilities in Christ? What are yours?
5. What does it mean to you to make every conceivable effort to put into practice

your faith and fruit? How is this necessary for your life?

6. What must happen in you for more character and Fruit to be exhibited?
7. When you receive a faith and a salvation that you do not deserve or earn, how should you respond? How does gratitude for what He has given play a part?
8. What do you need Christ's empowerment for now?
9. What in your life can benefit from knowing Him, growing in Him, and then having the desire for more?
10. How will neglecting our faith and Lord cause us to fail at what is important? How have you seen this?
11. What will you do about confession and repentance? How will that play a part in your Fruit and character? When will you do it?
12. Take a close look at each of the virtues listed. Which ones are you exhibiting well? Which ones do you lack? What are you going to do about the ones in which you are weak?

Having achieved success in your spiritual growth and recovery, now seek how you can help others and carry the Gospel message that Christ transforms lives!

Mediate on these passages on the basics of these 12 Steps, for the next week or more: Psalm 19:14; Isa. 1:19; Lam. 3:40; Matt. 5:23-24; Luke 6:38; 9:23; Rom. 7:18; 12. 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:1-2; Phil. 2:13; James 4:10; 5:16

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Living with Holiness!

Read 1 Peter 1: 13-21

To continue our Christian live and life in recovery, we are called to get our minds lined up with God—His Way, His precepts, and His plan. We still have the old sinful nature residing within us. God declares us clean, but we do not become *completely* clean. Perhaps, the reason for this is that if we were “scrubbed clean,” we would not face the struggles in life that produce depth and holiness. We would never struggle with thoughts, desires, sin, and life; therefore, we would never learn, grow, or respond to God within the realities of life. We would be robots preprogrammed to respond—and such mechanisms do not produce real fruit or love.

Thus, to be in a life of sobriety, we have to exercise self-control. In addition, as with all exercise, we gain the strength and endurance that provide the fortitude and courage to engage life. Along with faith, we have the staying power—for all we experience in life—to be His child and be a blessing to Him and others around us. God does not just command us to be self-controlled; He gives us a reason to remain in our faith development. He will give us His wondrous, special blessings for our trust and obedience. His reward is His salvation and to be with Him in eternity. However, we are also given the strength to enjoy life and make the most of what we have now! Therefore, Peter urges us not to slip back into our old ways, because they will cause us to slip away from God’s best and blessings. We are His children. Like all children, we need structure and discipline and to know we are loved. God has this for us!

- We are called to be holy! Do you have problems with containing your desires and thinking? Do you seek the distractions of the world that will cause you to stray off God’s path? Perhaps what we need is a further realization of the boundless love Christ has for us so we will seek to please Him and not our desires. Because, His way is better than any plan we could produce on our own. Before we were Christians, we did not know better. Now, as Christians, we do know better. Therefore, we must remain self-controlled and holy!
- God tells us to *gird up the loins of your mind/prepare your minds* in a vivid call to action. It refers to tucking one’s robe into one’s belt to move faster. This also alludes to the Passover (Ex.12:11). It means to be prepared as in “fasten your seat belt,” not because you *will* crash, but *in case* you do. We are called to guard our minds so we can always be prepared and ready (Eph. 6:10; 1 Pet. 3:15). This also means our spiritual formation is to be continual. So, to be prepared takes action and application on our part. It is not a *free ride* where we just sit and wait. Our spiritual journey requires our active participation. We should be ready to follow Him because we are redeemed (verses 4 &19).
- *Sober/self controlled*. This is also called “sobriety.” It is not just about abstinence from alcohol, but, rather, being dignified and self-controlled—willing and able to be clear-headed. A person does not have self-control when he/she is drunk. However, this applies to anything—not just drinking and drugs.

- We are adopted into God's family and are made new. So, because of what Christ has done, we should be willing to be obedient (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 5:1; Col. 3:1-4, 1 Pet. 1:2-3, 22). Obedience means that as Christians, we are to submit to what God requires of us; we are to follow His precepts regardless of the circumstances (Deut. 13: 4; 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 19:16; Acts 5:29; John 14:14; 15:14; 2 Cor. 10:5; Heb. 13:17; 1 John 1:7).
- God effectually takes the initiative. He seeks us, He motivates us, He picks us up; but we still have to reach out and grab His Hand and respond! In this context, it is about our portrayal and obedience just as a child obeys and portrays a father.
- *Be holy* means to set one's self apart, in a distinct manner, so to be identified and positioned in and with God and not in or with the world. It also means to be "set apart" from sin and its influences as "garbage-in-creates-garbage-out." God called the Israelites to be set apart from the other nations. They were to worship God and then influence the other nations for God. At the same time, they were not to be contaminated by them. When they succeeded, they were blessed. When they failed, they were judged and taken into captivity. For us, it means we are not to be influenced by sin so we are able to serve and please God, strive for moral purity, and benefit others (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26; Hab 1:13; Matt 5:48; Eph. 5:1; 1 Pet. 2:9).
- We can learn and become responsible in our faith so we can persevere and completely trust in our living, loving Lord. When this comes about, we will not lose hope but be able to stand for as long as necessary in whatever situation we face.
- Do you *Fear* God? Did you know that fear is how we are to come before God, and with humbleness (1 Pet. 5:6)? It is a term of endearment and respect that is supercharged with more meaning and power because it infers intense reverence and awe of God and His holiness (Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 3:5; 8:13; 9:10; 16:6; 31:30; Psalm 2:11; 34:11; 111:10; Isa. 12:6; Eccl. 12: 13; Mal. 1:14; Matt. 10: 27-33; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1). It does not mean being afraid of Him, rather fearful of His wrath (Romans 3).
- Because we are *redeemed*, we are freed from the bondage of sin by the great cost of Christ's sacrifice of His shed blood that gives us "justification." He frees us from the "curse of the Law" and "wickedness" (Ex. 13:13; 21:30; Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:24; 8:2; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Col 1:14; Titus 2:14; Heb. 9:15; Rev. 5:9).
- *Lamb* is the picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. He represents the only effective and ultimate sacrifice; He takes away the sin of the world. The sacrificial animal of the Passover in the O.T. is the foreshadowing of what Christ will do and has done for us. The price was invaluable and could not have been paid by human measures (Ex. 12:3; Isa. 53:7; John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:14).

- Do not be discouraged! Most people get discouraged when they are no longer in control. But, we have to realize that God still is in control. Thus, when our eyes are fixed on God, we will never lose hope (Psalm 62:8; 2 Cor. 1:3-7)!
- We may think that God plays favorites, as some people just seem blessed while others are under constant struggle. However, we can take comfort that God does not play favorites; we are *all* His favorites. Blessings of the world are never a sign of God's favor; they will fade. The faith we exercise will only build and we will come to see more bountiful blessings than we could ever have imagined. God is more concerned about what we do with what we have than with what we have! Always remember that Christ is our living Hope that will never fade away. Because He paid for us, we owe Him more than we could ever know! Thus, we can take comfort that God loves and treats us all the same. God does not show favoritism; He calls us to be unprejudiced, too. He does not condemn us for our wrongs because we have His grace, but God does judge us for our wrongs and rewards us for our obedience. He will reward us just for being in Him and for our merits (Isa. 53:4-5; Rom. 2:11; 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; James 2:11; 1 Pet. 2:24).
- How is your “fertility?” That is, how is the fruit of the Spirit that should be growing in and through you and that is meant to come through you in all things? Our faith will be tested—not to attack or cause us to fail—but to teach us to be more faithful, stronger, and better so we can be better to those around us. God wants us holy and pure in Him.

To make us pure, He needs to prune and refine us. This is not drudgery but an opportunity to be more than we could ever be on our own. Our growth in Him means faith, spiritual maturity, and character development. These are things more precious than any gold, personal success, or financial portfolio. As we go through the tough stuff of life, we will grow and become stronger. We will worship Him more deeply and purely. We will honor Him more deeply, more relevantly, and touch the lives of others more deeply, too.

Life is not about our wants, needs, and comfort; it is about Christ working in us more powerfully and triumphantly. The key to turn on this engine of our spiritual formation is our willingness to pursue, endure, and grow. Allow the holiness of our Lord, His grace, His patience, understanding, faith, loyalty, goodness, and love to be exhibited in you—not by imitation, but with gratitude and submission, *kept by His power* (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; Gal. 5:21-23; 1 Pet. 1:5)!

Questions:

1. Do you think that you need structure and discipline to continue your recovery? Why, or why not? What happens to children when they are not disciplined? How does this compare to adult Christians in recovery?

2. What does it mean to you to get your mind lined up with God? What would your life look like if it were not “lined up” or self-controlled?
3. Have you ever thought that God plays favorites, that some people just seem blessed while others are in a constant struggle? How can you take comfort in knowing that God loves and treats all of us the same?
4. How can the struggles we face in life produce more depth and holiness?
5. What if you were totally “scrubbed clean” of bad desires, temptations, and sin? Would you still be able to build a deep faith and grow closer to God? Why, or why not?
6. Do you get discouraged when you are no longer in control? How does the exercise of self-control give you staying power when you are in tough situations such as temptations or trials?
7. Do you have problems in containing your desires and thinking? How would further realization of the boundless love Christ has for you help you remain disciplined to please Him?
8. Why is your spiritual formation not a “free ride?” Why does it have to be continual? What do you need to do to be prepared for active participation, action, and application in pursuing and growing in Christ?
9. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the *Lamb*, the only effective and ultimate sacrifice for our sins. What does this mean to you? How can you reach out, grab His hand, and respond?
10. What can you do to resist the influences of desires, bad traditions, and sin so you can become more responsible in your faith, serve and please God, strive for moral purity, and benefit others?
11. What does obedience mean to you? How have you demonstrated it? Can you recall a situation in which you were *not* obedient and why? How is obedience a call to action? How could your personal and spiritual life be improved with the ability to move faster in your faith?
12. How can the exercise of self-control and obedience help you submit to what God requires of you and His precepts—regardless of your circumstances? What can you do to help this better obedience come about? Can you think of a specific instance or situation?

He who obeys instructions guards his life, but he who is contemptuous of his ways will die. Proverbs 19:6

Mediate on these passages on the basics of these 12 Steps, for the next week or more: Psalm 19:14; Isa. 1:19; Lam. 3:40; Matt. 5:23-24; Luke 6:38; 9:23; Rom. 7:18; 12. 2 Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:1-2; Phil. 2:13; James 4:10; 5:16

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For more on this helps in recovery see our topic on Forgiveness!

<http://www.discipleshiptools.org/pages.asp?pageid=64845>

Also,

[Understanding and Developing Christian Accountability - Into Thy Word](http://www.discipleshiptools.org/pages.asp?pageid=60401)

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Through Jesus Christ and His power to heal and restore I can be helped, I believe only He can help me recover!

Jesus Christ, His Lordship is the only power that can help me recover!

Remember the 12 Step process never ceases, it is a continual effort, see our other Bible Studies and Discipleship tools to continue your growth. We recommend our Faith series after you finish this one.

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Into Thy Word Ministries

129 South Lotus Avenue

Pasadena, Ca 91107

info@intothyword.com

www.intothyword.org

www.churchleadership.org

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Richard Joseph Krejcir is the Founder and Director of “Into Thy Word Ministries,” a missions and discipling ministry. He is the author of several books including, *Into Thy Word*, and *A Field Guide to Healthy Relationships*. He is also a pastor, teacher, and speaker. He is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (M.Div.) and holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Practical Theology in London, England (Ph.D). He has garnered over 20 years of pastoral ministry experience, mostly in youth ministry, including serving as a church growth consultant.

“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”
Nub. 6:24-26