



A HURTING WORLD

By: Richard Massman



**Christ-Centered Workbook on Recovery
and Coordinating Twelve-Step Meetings**



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and Coordinating Twelve-Step Meetings**

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From Ruin To Redemption

A deep, dark cavern of emptiness,
nothing this world can fill.

Mental anguish and gut wrenching pain,
surely this must be hell.

My mind is racing and always searching,
for a place that I belong.

Feelings of being inadequate and worthless,
are forever very strong.

Always anxious and always tense,
ready to fight or run.

Looking for love in all the wrong places,
settling for "questionable" fun.

Depression, despair and misery,
haunt me at every turn.

Resentment, anger and hate,
lead me to crash and burn.

What is left is a pile of ashes,
results of living in strife.

Jesus embraces me with His love,
in the gutter of my life.

His love is very warm and secure,
overflowing with no end.

His unending grace and mercy,
did my heart begin to mend.

There's a gaping hole in every life,
only the Spirit can fill.

To receive the Father's many blessings,
we need only yield our will.

So if you too are a weary traveler,
and dying a day at a time.

What is it that you have to lose,
drink your fill of New Wine.

And, that is Jesus!

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NOTE: The comments in this book were written by Richard Massman (one of the Ministry's founders) and are his opinions. Use what is helpful and leave the rest.

INTRODUCTION

This book is intended to help establish and assist Christ-centered support groups and encourage Christians in the recovery process. The comments in this book are written from the perspective of a fellow Christian in recovery. This book attempts to be a plain-talking recovery tool to minister to hurting people and equip pastors, ministers and missionaries to help those in need.

A little over a decade ago, I got to the point in my spiritual growth where I was able to totally surrender to the Lord. It was the end of a road called "My Way." In a powerful and decisive way, Jesus led me to become involved in twelve step groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

I was completely set free from alcohol and drugs at my point of totally yielding to the Lord. However, that was the beginning of my recovery and not the end. Addiction is symptomatic of a greater underlying cause. My life was out of balance, out of order and in much need of repair. I was in need of, "a renewing of the mind."

No price tag can be placed on the help I received through these twelve step programs. Regular religion and medical help didn't work for me and a treatment program was not readily available when I entered into recovery. I considered myself beyond hope and beyond help. There wouldn't have been any problem in getting many others to agree.

It seems like I tried everything this world had to offer in search for some semblance of happiness and peace. Nothing worked and suicide became an option. When the pain is bad enough for a long enough time, a person will consider anything. I attempted to take my own life several times before entering into recovery. In my eyes - there was no hope at all.

To my amazement, the recovery process worked for me. Just being OK was a big miracle as far as I was concerned. However, I became more than OK, I actually started to feel good and enjoy life. I believed that if there was hope for me, there is hope for anybody.

I am very grateful to the regular Twelve Step groups for the invaluable help given to me in my recovery. There is no measure to the unconditional love and acceptance that I received from the people involved in these groups.

I am grateful for the twelve steps that were first introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous. The steps came from the Lord Himself and millions of people have been healed through working the steps because God Himself is the power behind all these spiritual principles.

Being involved in Christ-centered recovery gives us an opportunity to have fellowship with other Christians who understand our faith. It also allows us to act as a bridge for those people in the Church who need to be in recovery. It is also a bridge for those in recovery who need to be in church.

I am thankful for every person who ever spoke in a meeting. I always hear the Lord speak through others who share the truth in love. A warm thank you to all who encouraged me to write this book, including: Bernice Fleming, Joe Santolucito, Robert Greenwald and Dr. Louise Doliveiria.

Special thanks to my mother, Bridget Massman, who provided a comfortable place for me to write when I returned to the United States from the mission field. I also have a deep appreciation for Pastor Bob Adams who has been of significant spiritual inspiration in my life.



RECOVERY IN CHRIST MINISTRIES

Recovery In Christ Ministries, Inc., informally began in 1985. A handful of Christians who were involved with traditional 12-step groups came together for coffee in a local restaurant after a regular meeting.

The Lord blessed the gathering with His presence in a special way. Genuine Christian fellowship and prayer took place.

There was a consensus that it would be great to have a regular meeting where recovering people could freely talk about Jesus and discuss the Bible.

The first meeting was scheduled within a few weeks. Only a couple of people showed up at this meeting. However, ministry and healing took place. Since the first meeting, hundreds of lives have been touched by these gatherings.

In June of 1990, Recovery in Christ Ministries, Inc., was formally incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of Florida and is approved by the IRS as 501(c)(3) tax exempt. The following are the stated purposes of the organization:

- As a Christ-centered interdenominational ministry, to communicate the message of the hope of recovery in Jesus Christ from chemical dependency, codependency, other addictions and dysfunctional family issues.
- Encourage people to enter into a personal and saving relationship with Jesus Christ and encourage them to attend a Christian Church of their choice.
- Assist churches in setting up Christ-centered recovery support groups and promote cooperation between various groups and recovery ministries.
- Publish and distribute recovery materials to individuals, leaders and groups.
- Provide Christ-centered Biblical based counseling to those who are hurting.
- Teach other Lay Christians and Leaders how to effectively help those who are suffering.

Please pray for this Ministry - that the Lord will direct all of its activities and use it as an instrument of His healing, peace and righteousness.

Section One

Support Group Meetings



"How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth
peace; that bring good tidings of good."

Isaiah 52:7

SHARING IN SMALL GROUPS - Small groups have an important role in the body of Christ. It is difficult for intimate fellowship to take place in large Bible studies or other sizable church gatherings.

The small group (either formal or informal) holds the potential of enabling Christians to share and minister to one another. The small group offers the opportunity of an effective form of "body ministry".

One of the definitions of fellowship is, "A gathering of equals." It's impossible for a few church leaders to minister to all the deep needs of a congregation. However, people can minister to one another if they have the capacity to be honest, open-minded and willing to apply spiritual principles in their lives.

The Bible commands us in James 5:16 to "Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, and be healed." A small group affords the time and opportunity for a person to honestly share what is going on in their life. In sharing the truth about ourselves, others get to know the real us. If we are not transparent with others on a real gut level, others can't really love us. They can only love who we are pretending to be.

A major problem with a church-connected group is that people have a tendency to pretend how good they are doing and live in denial about what is really going on. Another trap is to sit around and talk about Scripture and spiritual principles without actually applying them in our lives.

It is very possible to have much knowledge about the Bible and about Jesus and not even be saved. It is also possible to have much intellectual knowledge about recovery principles and not apply them. We must walk the talk.

If we truly enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; we will do more than TALK differently, we will BE different. As we abide in Him, we manifest the very life of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit. (John 15:5)

At first it is difficult to be honest with ourselves and almost impossible to be honest with others. However, if we are in a confidential meeting and some people begin to truthfully share, it should become easier for others.

We shall forever remain in bondage if we don't learn how to be transparent and accountable to one another. ***"Know the truth and it shall make you free."*** (John 8:32) God is truth and God is love. As we lovingly share the truth of our lives, we are actually imparting God, one to another. As we listen to others, it helps break through denial by us being able to identify with their problems. We also get hope from their victories.

The 12 steps that many recovery groups use are Biblical principles backed up by numerous Scripture verses. Working the steps is simply applying the Scriptures. It is a step-by-step process of getting out of self and becoming God-centered.

When Jesus is totally in the center of our lives and the foundation of all that we do, we are walking in victory. The happiness, peace and joy we have been searching for becomes REALITY.

MEETING FORMAT
(Suggested)

- 1. Opening Prayer (praise & worship - depending on group)**
- 2. Read Opening Group Statement and/or Ground Rules**
- 3. Read the Twelve Steps**
- 4. Introduce and welcome new members (first name only)**
- 5. Announcements**
- 6. Pass around phone list (optional)**
- 7. Introduce Topic:**
 - A. Step/Study**
 - B. Open Discussion**
 - C. Special Topic**
 - D. Review DVD's**
 - Special Recovery Materials**
 - E. Speakers Meeting**
 - F. Teaching**
- 8. Prayer Requests**
- 9. Closing Prayer**
- 10. Fellowship**

OPENING GROUP REMARKS

Hello, my name is _____ and I am recovering in Christ.

Recovery In Christ is a fellowship of Christians who share our own experiences, strength, and hope with each other so that we may grow in Jesus Christ.

We are committed to a Christ centered approach to solving our common problems, and we believe that the Twelve Steps are Biblical principles that have great value in recovery and spiritual growth.

People who regularly attend meetings and sincerely work the steps do recover and experience healing and spiritual progress.

God is truth and God is love. We further our recovery by being honest with one another. In this unique and healing way we share God's love. ***"Know the truth and the truth shall make you free."*** (John 8:32)

We let others know who we are by being transparent about our own lives. Please remember to use "I" messages instead of "You" messages, if possible.

This needs to be a safe place, and we need to love and encourage one another. Everything said in this room must remain confidential.

We are not here to fix, control, argue or criticize. We only confront one another when necessary, and we make every effort to do so in a loving way and as the Lord leads.

Therefore, let us all prayerfully agree that God's love, the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be in control of this meeting and all that takes place.

Ground Rules For SUPPORT GROUPS

1. **THE COVENANT OF CONFIDENTIALITY** - What ever is said in the group stays in the group.
2. **ONLY TALK ABOUT THOSE PRESENT** - Sometimes we think others are our problem, but we can only deal with those present when the group meets.
3. **DON'T TAKE UP ANOTHER'S DEFENSE (or offense)** - We need to support and walk with one another through our problems by God's grace and allow others to speak for themselves.
4. **DON'T DOMINATE** - The time spent in small groups is precious, and many come with significant hurts and wounds; be considerate, and realize that none of us has all the answers.
5. **DON'T COUNSEL OR GIVE ADVICE** - Only share where you can identify the same difficulty in your own life. Share from your own experience, strength and hope.
6. **NO SPECTATORS** - All members of a small group whenever it meets are to be participants in the process of getting healthy. If you come to help others, but you can't see any problems that you need help with, you need to disqualify yourself from the support group setting.
7. **NO PROFANITY** – Coarse talk has no place in a Christ-centered support group.
8. **NO CROSS TALK** – Cross talk excludes people from the conversation.
9. **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE LEADER** - The group leader does not have all the answers; he/she is just the facilitator.

THE TWELVE STEPS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that Jesus Christ could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the Lord.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, 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 people 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 the Lord, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions

It has been beneficial to have guidelines in recovery to insure the groups are able to continue to perform the function for which they were intended. The following traditions are similar in principle to those which have proved invaluable to many Twelve-Step groups:

1. The welfare of the group is of primary importance, since personal recovery depends on group unity.
2. For our groups there is but one authority, Jesus Christ, as He lovingly expresses Himself through the Scriptures and as the Holy Spirit leads the group. Our leaders are but caretakers of God's will. They do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is the desire to allow the Lord to set us free from our life controlling problems, and seek greater knowledge of His will and purpose in our lives.
4. Groups shall remain autonomous, except in matters affecting the ministry as a whole.
5. The groups have but one primary purpose, to carry the message to those who still suffer and are in need of Jesus' redeeming love, forgiveness, salvation, freedom and healing.
6. The groups should never endorse finance or lend its name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, prestige or prosperity divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Groups should be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Groups should remain forever non-professional, although we may hire special workers.
9. Groups ought never to be organized, though we may create service boards, responsible directly to those they serve.
10. Groups have no opinions on outside issues, hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, we need always to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and television.
12. Anonymity (Unconditional love) is the spiritual foundation of all of our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

(Adapted from: *Christians Under Construction*)

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

The Serenity Prayer

(short version)

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.

The Serenity Prayer

(complete version)

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 a pathway to peace. Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, Not as I would have it, Trusting that You will make all things right, If I surrender to Your will, So that I may be reasonably happy in this life, And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen *(Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971))*

Prayer of Saint Francis

"Lord, make me a channel of thy peace - that where there is hatred, I may bring love - that where there is wrong, I may bring a spirit of forgiveness - that where there is discord, I may bring harmony - that where there is error, I may bring truth - that where there is doubt, I may bring faith - that where there is despair, I may bring hope - that where there are shadows, I may bring light - that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted - to understand, than to be understood - to love, than to be loved - For it is by self forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to Eternal Life. Amen."

VISITING AA AND OTHER MEETINGS - Those who are attending Alcoholics Anonymous and other traditional twelve step groups, are encouraged to continue such meetings. These meetings can be of great benefit in recovery, especially where specific Christian programs are not available. We can let our light shine in these places.

Some Christians have hang-ups about attending meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Overeaters Anonymous. This concern is understandable in this age of cult awareness. AA's use of the term "higher power" instead of God is often a specific point of alarm.

AA was born out of the evangelical Oxford movement, which was popular in a number of Christian denominations in the 1940's. Christians started these programs and many Christians are involved in attending meetings. However, some people are not Christians and may even have been abused by authority figures in the Christian church. They need to come to a correct understanding of who Jesus is. They have to be reached at the point of where they are right now.

Jesus Christ will respond to people who are really searching for the truth and want to recover. If somebody has a distorted idea of who God is, God will reveal Himself if the person is open, willing, and looking for the truth.

When people who are not Christians first come into recovery, some would run out the door if Christianity was immediately forced on them. They must develop their own personal relationship with Christ.

Those who are strong in their Christian faith have no fear in attending these meetings. Some of them may have religious ideas that are strange to us. However, they will not talk us out of our faith and salvation.

When we attend non-Christian meetings, we can share our experience and faith in such a way as to not exhibit spiritual pride. Without being arrogant, we can say things that let them know we are Christians. If we are truly expressing God's love, others will want to come up to us and talk when the meeting is over. This could be an opportunity to invite them to be involved in a Christian fellowship.

Christian twelve step groups give us an opportunity to fellowship with other Christians and to freely talk about Jesus and the Bible. Our Christian groups can also act as a bridge to disciple people into the Church.

Christian groups can also be a bridge to get people in the Church into recovery and educate the Christian community about recovery opportunities. Attending other meetings gives us an opportunity to reaching out and witnessing to others.

The reality is that recovery is available for those who want it. Sometimes our unwillingness to go to particular meetings is another form of denial and an excuse not to do what's necessary to get better.

Section Two

About Addiction Recovery



"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted."

Isaiah 61:1

ADDICTION - Perhaps there are some people who came from balanced families and are otherwise healthy, who happened to get "hooked," simply by using "an addictive agent." You probably wouldn't have to take off your socks to count the people you know, who fall into this category.

Most addiction is symptomatic of a greater underlying cause. Addiction is often born in the pain of rejection and escalates into isolation and self-centeredness. Therefore the manifestation of the addiction itself is really just the "tip of the iceberg."

The kind of rejection that says - "You're no good, you're not wanted and you don't measure up," is a killer. After hearing these messages long enough, they are eventually believed, and the subsequent pain is excruciating.

People who are saturated with these messages end up rejecting themselves. They convict themselves of not measuring up, not being wanted and being no good. At this point they become self destructive, like the rogue elephant that was thrown out of the herd.

Whether a person is actually rejected is not the issue. If there is a perception of rejection, then it is as if it were true as far as the pain and subsequent results. A person's feelings are not debatable - they do exist. What caused the feelings may be subject to much argument.

A rejected person will withdraw from others, maybe with thoughts like "They don't want me around." The withdrawal and isolation may not be physical. It may be an emotional isolation and breaking of meaningful fellowship out of fear of further rejection - "If they find out who I really am, they won't like me. I don't like me either."

Continued isolation leads to self-centeredness. The individual becomes an island unto themselves - "It's me against them." A person in this condition finds it difficult to be in a right relationship with God and others. They have a hard time trusting anybody. They only trust themselves.

There are a couple of ways we can go at this point. We can use the "positive addictions" like - work, money, power, prestige, adventure, doing good or even religion. These can be sought after in a compulsive and obsessive search to prove that we're somebody.

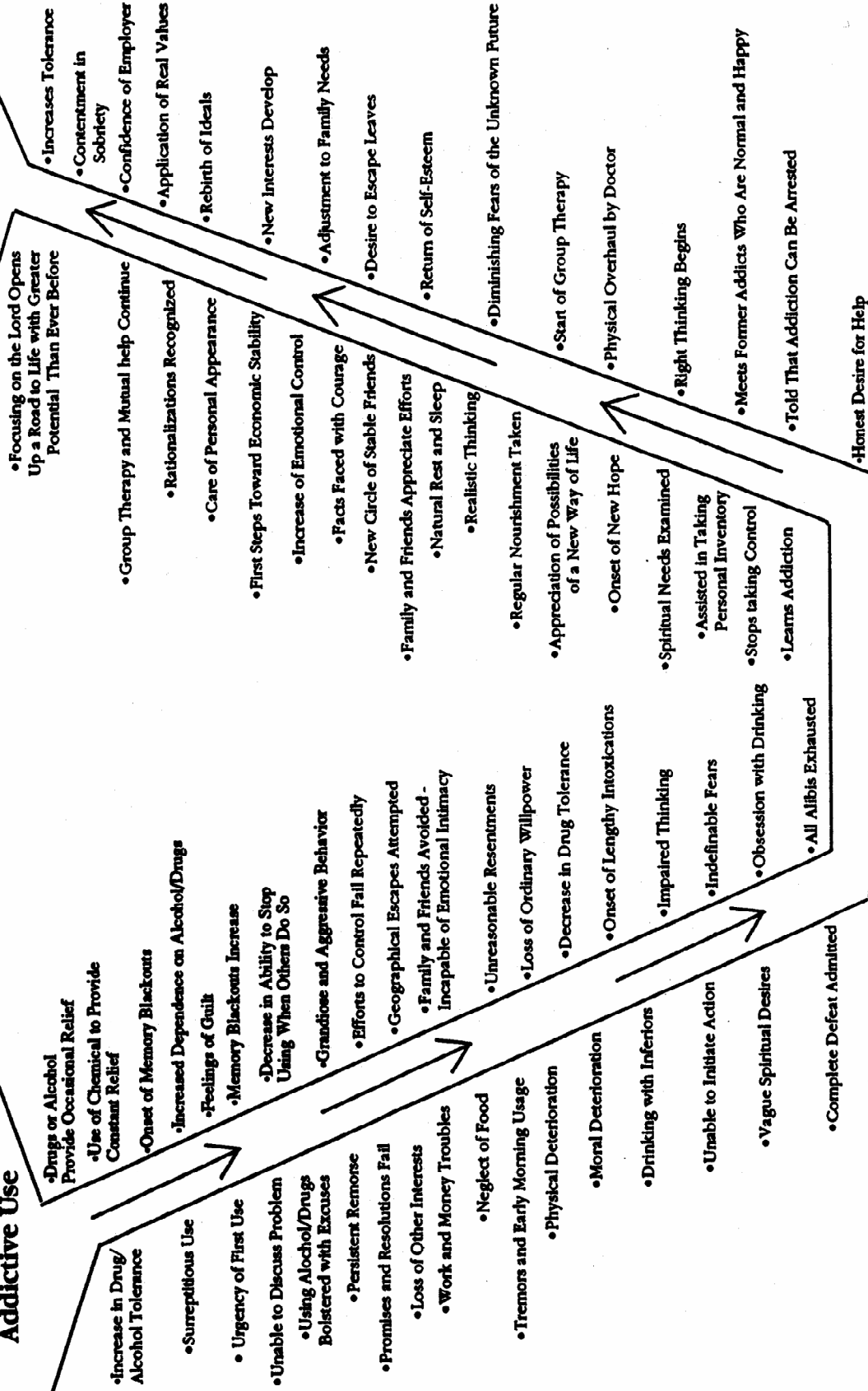
We may use the negative things to fill the emptiness and medicate the emotional pain. This list could start with alcohol, drugs, illicit sex, dysfunctional relationships, lying, cheating, stealing and continue without end. Almost anything or behavior can become an addiction. These addictions are also referred to as, "life controlling problems."

Some addictions look better than others. However, they all end in destruction. If the person is alive when he or she hits bottom, restoration into a right relationship with God, others and self, is possible!

Addiction and Recovery

Progression of Spiritual, Social, Emotional and Physical Recovery

Progression of Social, Abusive and Addictive Use



• Obsessive Chemical Use Continues in Vicious Circles Institutionalization, Insanity, Death

CODEPENDENCY - Codependency is a term that is in vogue in recovery circles. In other circles in society, people may ask - "What's that?"

Codependency originally referred to the immediate family members of a chemically dependent person who were adversely affected by the dependency. Today it is much broader than that and is continually being redefined by the experts in the field.

Nowadays, anybody connected with a dysfunctional family is suspected of being codependent. If someone's life is out of order in a family, it will most likely affect all family members in a negative way. In this sense, their lives are controlled by a person with a problem.

People controlling one another to get their needs met is out of God's order of things. God's word says, "My God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19) Depending on another person to meet our need instead of the Lord, is elevating that person to a wrong position in our life. It is technically idol worship.

Whether we are doing the controlling or being controlled, is really two sides of the same coin. When we are controlling others, we are playing god in their life. When we play the game of allowing others to control us, we allow them to be our god in an attempt to get them to do what we want in another area. God would have us be controlled or led by the Spirit.

In addition to controlling, "rescuing" and "care-taking" are also traits of the codependent. We tend to rescue the other person when they are in crisis. In doing so, we program them to not be able to handle difficulty when it arises.

Care-taking can be doing ordinary things for another that they should be doing for themselves. This may tend to leave the cared-for person helpless and dependent on the caretaker. The payoff is that the caretaker or rescuer feels good that they are "needed" and doing something "important."

When we look to Jesus as the only true provider of our needs, it sets us free to love others unconditionally. And, that's the way the Lord intended it to be. It's true that the Lord will often supply our need through others. However, it's His business to determine the channel of blessing.

Most codependent families are void of unconditional love. It's everybody for themselves — needy people trying to fill their own emptiness. If somebody does something for another, a payback is expected. Everybody is on a performance based acceptance, "I will like you if you do what I want."

Like most other recovery issues, self-centeredness is the underlying problem, and Christ-centeredness is the solution. The Lord wants to restore us to a right relationship with Him and restore us to a healthy relationship with other people.

Codependency Questionnaire

Check if answer is "yes" -

1. My relationships often involve people who need my help or are some how dependent on me.
2. When I feel I've helped someone I experience a "high" - a sense of success.
3. It is important to be needed.
4. I often find myself "in the middle" giving advice, counseling others.
5. On several occasions, people have become angry when I tried to help.
6. I seem to know when bad things are about to occur.
7. I spend a lot of time thinking through or replaying scenes, trying to figure out what I can do to effect the desired outcome.
8. I seem to have difficulty starting and maintaining healthy relationships.
9. It's difficult for me to receive praise or care from others.
10. I do not like to let myself get angry. When I do, I often lose control.
11. It's difficult for me to say no.
12. It is difficult for me to ask for things I need (work, home, family).
13. I often over commit my time or over promise myself.
14. It's hard for me to act silly, have fun, relax.
15. If I'm not productive, I feel worthless.
16. It's difficult to believe that someone could truly love me.
17. I'm afraid of really allowing myself to love.
18. I am afraid of being abandoned or being alone.
19. Sometimes I think I expect to be hurt.
20. I find it easy to criticize and blame others.
21. I seem to justify or make excuses for the actions of others when they have hurt me.
22. When I know a relationship is about to end, I will stay in it. I will stay in it until I can begin another dependent relationship.
23. It's easy to make me feel guilty and accept blame. I will take responsibility for others. Somehow things end up being my fault.
24. I am not sure what normal life really is.
25. I often take a stand in a relationship and then go back on what I said I would do. It seems as though I get sucked in again and again.
26. My circle of friends seems to have diminished.
27. I am not aware of what I want. I ask other what they want.
28. I tend to be sick a lot. I can't seem to fight off infections.
29. There never seems to be enough time to do things just for me; things I would enjoy doing.

Note: If you have checked yes to three or more of these statements, you probably have a problem with codependency.

RAPHA

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES - One definition of a dysfunctional family could be simply "a family that is not functioning the way the Lord intended."

Certainly, God intended the family to be a loving, nurturing, affirming and encouraging unit. Family was intended as a place of safety and security in an unsure world. Family was intended to be a place where husband and wife love one another and mirror God's parental love to their children.

Family was intended to be a place where children could come to understand their identity through affirmation and reflection by their parental role models. A father would affirm his son as an approved male child. He would be a model of who Father God is and what the boy will become as an adult and perhaps as a husband. The same is true of the girl in the family. Mother is an example of who she is supposed to grow into. When she grows, she will probably expect her mate to operate the way dad did.

It's easy to see how young people can get a reasonably accurate picture of who our loving Father in heaven is from a healthy family. It is also obvious that the family unit is a significant positive influence in learned behavior. It can also be of significant negative influence.

Let's assume that dad does not act out his appropriate God-given role in the family. Maybe the father isn't there for the children because of alcoholism, workaholism, divorce, or even death. That leaves mom to move over to try to fill both roles. She may become a tough dominating figure, mustering all that she has to cope. Obviously, this gives the daughter a distorted image of who she is to become.

The passive or non-existent father will probably leave the son confused. No matter how great a single parent performs, a mom can't be an accurate reflection of a male role model. Conversely, dad can't mirror a mom without substantial distortion.

Children have to guess at what is normal, in a dysfunctional home. We often guess wrong because we tend to see things through the eyes of our experiences.

If a woman came from a home of a dominant mother and her husband came from a dominant-father home, they are programmed to fight and compete for the same position. They may not even know why they are making each other miserable. Both may sincerely want to be happy together; but, happiness eludes them.

The pain and feelings of rejection in a destructive family relationship can move a person to some type of addictive behavior to medicate the pain and fill the emptiness.

Dysfunctional families tend to be superficial in their relationships, instead of fostering intimacy and healthy bonding. Members of dysfunctional families tend to be self-centered and manipulative, instead of expressing unconditional love toward one another. Members of a dysfunctional family are taught not to talk, feel and trust.

When we totally surrender to the love of Jesus Christ through the recovery process, He heals us and restores us to a right relationship with Him, with others and with ourselves. The cycle of dysfunction that is passed on from one generation to another, can be broken!

DENIAL - Addiction is the kind of problem that tells us that we don't have a problem. That becomes the main problem - not knowing that we have one.

Using an addictive agent to fill a person's emptiness, or medicate emotional pain, appears to work for awhile. The addictive agent, whether it be alcohol, drugs, food, work, people or even religion becomes our friend. We feel good when we have fellowship with our friend (engage in our addiction).

We have a tendency to be loyal to our "addictive agent" friends. Even when there is overwhelming evidence that our addiction is now causing great harm, we will lie to others, and even ourselves, that there really isn't a problem.

ENABLING - Often, family or friends encourage a person to pursue their addiction without really knowing they are enabling it. This can be done by making excuses and covering up. This keeps the addictive person from experiencing the consequences of his or her behavior. An example of enabling would be an alcoholic spending his or her food or auto expense money on booze. Giving them money for food or auto expense is really the same as directly funding their addiction.

We might want to assist a person if they are actively pursuing recovery. However, we may want to say no to helping them along a path of destruction. Most addictive people can do a good job of destroying their lives in an expeditious manner without the help of others.

In this area, if we are going to err, it is probably best that we err on the side of mercy - at least, for our own conscience sake. When it is clearly determined that a person is not willing to recover, it may be a good idea to refuse to help at that point.

People will probably get upset with us when we choose not to indulge them in their destructive behavior. However, when they do recover, they will be thanking the people who really helped them. The "enablers" won't be looked on as heroes.

HITTING BOTTOM - Everybody has to hit their own bottom-- their own point of hopelessness. The bottom for some might be the gutter. The bottom for others might be embarrassing themselves at some high-society function. Whatever it takes!

Sometimes, being confronted by the insanity of our behavior through adverse publicity is all it takes for the light to come on. Some very stubborn people do not become willing to recover until the very bitter end.

CARETAKING - Caretaking sounds like a wonderful term and the person who engages in such an endeavor should be a candidate for the "Humanitarian of The Year Award." Not so! This distinction needs to be reserved for the Caregivers.

Caregivers are people who give care to another in need, out of compassion, or even out of job responsibility. They are giving to another based on need and a proper motive.

The Caretaker gives out of their own need to feel good about themselves. It's not really giving, it is taking. The person who is receiving the care may be needy and appreciate the help. The world may applaud outward good deeds of the Caretaker. However, the motivation of the Caretaker is their own need not the need of another. Thus, a Caretaker will give their services when they are not even needed or wanted. Sometimes a Caretaker will (probably subconsciously) keep another sick and dependent so that their services will be "needed."

The conscious or subconscious thought process may go something like this. "I feel like I'm no good and not worth anything. What I will do is something good for somebody else then I will feel better about myself and prove that I am somebody." Of course this is self-centeredness and performance-based acceptance. People who do this can only feel good when they are performing well.

It's OK to use helping others as a tool to get out of a self-centered mode. We should strive to make it an act of unconditional love. We need to guard against doing for others based on what we are going to get out of it. If we continue to operate out of a wrong motive in helping others, we will probably feel unappreciated, taken advantage of and betrayed.

If what we are doing is not out of true motivation, we will cheat ourselves out of the spiritual blessings that come from doing things out of a pure motive. When we help others as an act of love, love is its own reward and everything that happens beyond that is a bonus. God loves to hand out bonus blessings to His children.

RESCUING - There is nothing like the adrenaline rush that comes from being a hero. The rescuer is not the genuine hero the world loves to applaud. The Rescuer likes the good feeling that comes from "saving" other people. We Rescuers like to save people that aren't even lost. The important thing to us is the good feelings we get from pulling people out of desperate circumstances. It's medication for our sick souls. It can be a troublesome and intense addiction that feeds our already distorted egos.

Rescuing and Caretaking are somewhat sophisticated forms of codependency. Codependency is attempting to get our needs met through "using" another human being instead of depending on the Lord to supply all our needs. Both of these behaviors qualify for people-controlling behavior - "I helped you and I feel good because I am a hero and you owe me because of what I did for you." We have to admit, this offers great potential in manipulating family, friends and even strangers.

Anybody can be a Rescuer with little or no training. However, many people who use rescuing and Caretaking as a coping tool are drawn to the "helping professions." If this is the case, it will be more difficult for the person to come out of denial - "It's a noble thing but I have to do it because it's my job." Rescuing or Caretaking can also harm others by keeping them from learning, growing by doing things they should be doing for themselves.

When we go through the healing process, we can be more effective in helping others because we have been set free to help based on a right motive. We don't have to be led by a sense of guilt and need to feel better about ourselves. We can be led by the Spirit and love the people who are put before us to the glory of Jesus Christ!

INTERVENTION - An intervention will sometimes get through to an otherwise unwilling person. An intervention is when the individual is confronted by significant people in their life. The likelihood of the success of an intervention is increased if the people have something significant to barter. An employer may say to an employee that he or she is fired if they don't get help. If they value their addiction more than their job, this tactic won't work.

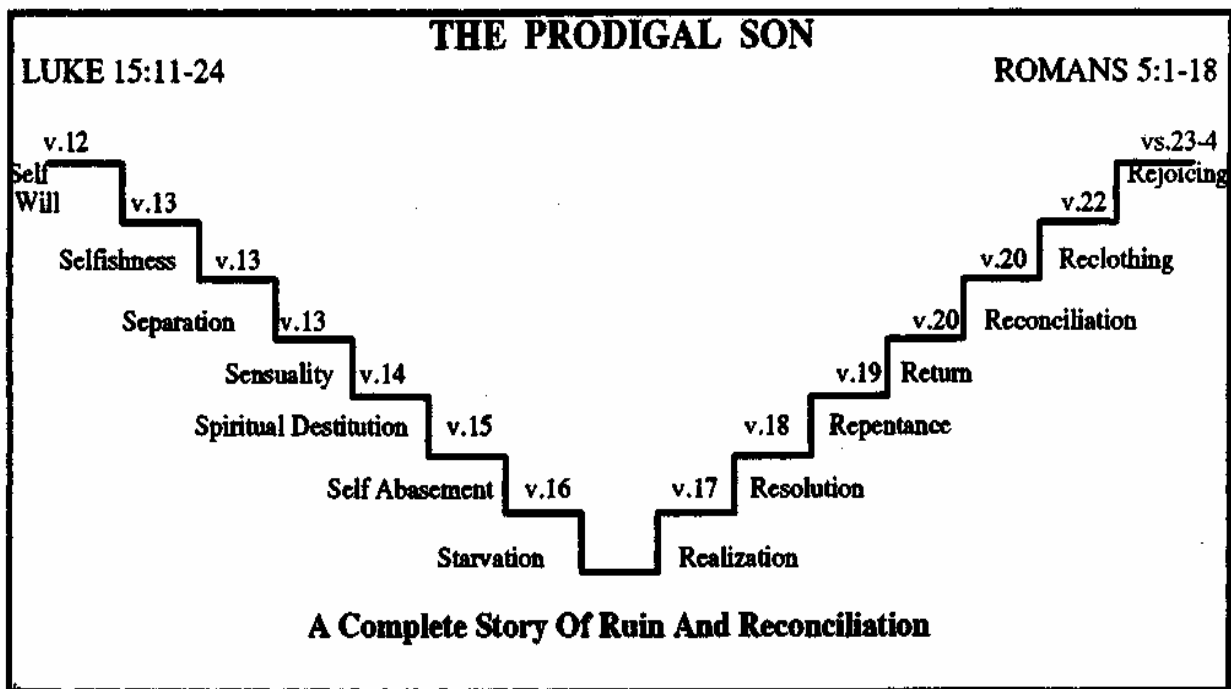
A spouse may be successful in saying "Get help or I am leaving you." A parent may say to an adult child "You can't continue to live here." People will often choose their addictions over family members or friends.

Obviously, the more pressure you can bring to bear, the more likely the person is to become willing. An effective intervention might take every friend and associate confronting the person with a well-organized approach and all at once. This may dissuade the individual from thinking they can manipulate their way out of the situation. The sheer numbers of people confronting may be enough to cause reality to prevail. One enabling "friend" can sabotage a good intervention.

When an intervention takes place, the addictive person will probably get angry and try to intimidate those who are trying to help. There has to be firmness and any stated consequences for refusal to cooperate must be carried out.

Prayer and being led by the Spirit is essential in an intervention. It is important to express love and concern. It is also important for each person to state clearly their evidence of addictive behavior. Hopefully, the evidence will be sufficient to convict the person in his or her own mind.

It might be wise to consult an expert from a Christian treatment program or a recovery professional, if no member of the intervention group has experience in this area.



Defense Mechanisms

Defenses are ways individuals help to neutralize the impact of a stressful situation which is causing them great anxiety. The following list includes some of these defenses:

- **Denial** - a defense used to refuse to admit the reality of a situation.
- **Delusion** - a defense that uses false beliefs that does not represent logical and objective reality. This may become a well developed belief system which the individual believes to a degree that he/she is totally out of touch with reality.
- **Projection** - a defense mechanism which blames others for his/her own feelings, attitudes and values, impulses and thoughts.
- **Interjection** - this defense incorporates the feelings, values and attitudes of another as his/her own. Another person more or less becomes their hero.
- **Rationalization** - this defense is an excuse for ones behavior that usually is motivated by irrational impulses and drives.
- **Regression** - a defense by which an individual faced with a difficult situation reverts to an earlier age what was less demanding, less stressful and less complex.
- **Withdrawal** - a defense that the individual uses to remove themselves either physically or psychologically from a situation.
- **Repression** - a defense an individual uses to force anxiety producing situations into the sub-conscious. These situations may involve feelings, attitudes, impulses and thoughts.
- **Controlling** - a defense by which an individual tries to control someone else's thoughts, feelings and actions to make up for their own inadequacy, insecurity or powerlessness.
- **Compensation** - a defense by which an individual will stress only their strongest and desirable trait to mask or cover up for a weak or undesirable trait.
- **Acting Out** - reducing anxiety and tension by negative behaviors that expresses previously rejected thoughts, impulses and attitudes. Examples; are alcohol abuse, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity and vandalism.
- **Self-aggression** - turning hostile impulses that are felt toward someone else toward self. This self aggression may result in depression, accident proneness, self mutilation and/or suicide.

Recovery Handout

SURRENDER - Before being involved in recovery, most of us were very stubborn people and very set in our ways. Maybe we didn't trust one other human being besides ourselves. What got us into recovery is that we couldn't even trust ourselves anymore.

We lived our lives with ourselves being in control, "the captain of our own soul," as the saying goes. This meant the lunacy of self will run riot for some of us. For others it meant allowing other people whose lives were operating on "self will run riot," to run our lives as well.

Getting to the point where we realize that our plan isn't working, never has and probably never will, is getting close to surrender. Coming to the realization that all our plans, schemes and devices are incapable of providing true happiness is close to coming to the end of ourselves.

Before most of us could consider this "cowardly sounding" thing called surrender, we first had to be thoroughly convinced that our way didn't work. The evidence that our way didn't work was probably as overwhelming and obvious as an elephant sitting in the living room. That is, it was obvious to everybody but us. Addictive people have very powerful "rationalizers" and "deniers." We have the capacity to make believe very big things aren't there.

Many of us came into recovery with totally botched-up lives. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. It seemed every area of our lives was a total disaster and there wasn't anything we could point out that would commend ourselves to the world.

Then, we were faced with the concept that we should totally surrender control of our lives to God, when we don't know what it is that He is going to do with it. We responded "that really scares me." If we do believe that God really does exist and somehow believe that He is a loving God, we come up with this idea that He is going to send us off to suffer in a Third World country with people who are surrounded by flies as they pick garbage from the city dump.

Maybe we have this concept that God is inept and He could somehow bungle our lives worse than we did on our own. Maybe we thought His plan for us would be an impossible task for the kind of people that we were. All of these thoughts were based on an erroneous assumption of who God is.

The truth is that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He also knows better than we do what we are capable of and what would best make us happy and what is the true desire of our hearts. Chapter one of Jeremiah says that God knew him before he was born, that He formed him in his mother's womb. This was revealed in Scripture as a spiritual principle and the same is true for us. God made us and knows our capabilities and desires perfectly because His vision is not distorted as ours has been by our life's experiences.

God not only made us but, he made a plan that perfectly matches what He created us to be. We were harmed greatly as we executed our own or somebody else's plan for our lives. This is not so with God's plan. His plan is for our benefit. He is committed to our best welfare and He stands ready to prove Himself true. You would be hard pressed to come up with a person worldwide who had totally surrendered to the Lord and then regretted it over the long run.

This doesn't mean that if we totally surrender, that the Lord will do for us every instant what feels best. We operated that way most of our lives and it got us nothing but trouble. He does what is best for us and that will transcend our feeling on occasion.

"I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11) Praise the Lord His plan is not for our harm but, to give our lives meaning and significance. Most of us felt very insignificant when we entered recovery. Surrender is our decision and only we can make it. Why not do it right now?

“TOTAL SURRENDER CONTRACT”

Dear Lord, I surrender to You:

My will, mind and emotions, my body, my future plans, hopes and dreams. I give You my home, my marriage, my mate, my children, my geographical location, my recreation and entertainment, my career. I surrender to You my past successes and failures, my habits, my finances, my problems, my time, my integrity and character, my attitudes, my business conduct and relationships, my Christian walk and my response to authority.

Lord, I further surrender to You the following "rights":

- My right to possessions
- My right to a good reputation
- My right to have acceptance
- My right to be successful
- My right to have pleasant circumstances
- My right to presume on the will of God
- My right to life itself
- My right to beauty or strength
- My right to have friendships
- My right to be heard
- My right to take up offense
- My right to avoid reaping from what I sow
- My right to be right
- My right to see results
- My right _____
- My right _____
- My right to anything I forgot to list _____

Dear Lord, I give You permission to do anything You wish to me, with me, in me or through me. I claimed the above items once as mine. Now they all belong to You and are under Your control. You can do with them anything You please. I willingly make this commitment in the Name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I recognize that this is an agreement with You that can never be broken. Now that I have surrendered ownership of my life to You, You will never give it back to me. Amen.

Date _____

Signature _____

RECOVERY - Some people are powerfully set free from a life controlling problem immediately. Others may struggle a long time for freedom from the point they become willing to stop. Either way, freedom from bondage to an addictive agent or behavior is the beginning of the recovery process, not the end.

Recovery is a process! Instant deliverance from "addictive thinking" is not a reality. Recovery is a step-by-step process of our minds being renewed as we yield our lives to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2). It's a process of getting out of being self-centered and into being Christ-centered (Galatians 2:20). Recovery is a process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, to which we have been pre-destined (Romans 8:29).

Often, the origins of addiction have deep roots. If somebody was severely rejected, betrayed or abused in some way, these injuries may take some time to heal completely. However, it's not true that time heals all wounds. If there are unresolved issues in a person's life, those issues will deal with the person until the person deals with the issues. Only by dealing with our problems before God do we experience genuine victory.

Some issues may take years to resolve, from the point that we start working on them. The Lord meets us and accepts us wherever we are in the process if our heart is searching after Him. He will heal us and restore us into a right relationship with Him and others. (Matthew 6:33)

Willingness to actively seek God through a balanced program of recovery is the key to victory. People who say, "I don't have to go to meetings" or "I don't have to work the steps," may be engaged in rebellion or denial, disguised as "spiritual superiority."

Another cliché some people use that sounds holy and righteous is, "I only need Jesus, I don't need any of that stuff." This may be another way of saying, "I'm going to continue to do it my way." You can tell a tree by its fruit! If a person is truly yielding to the Lord, it will be revealed by the outcome. We need to be willing to use the tools the Lord puts in our path as we pray for guidance and discernment.

Every person will have their unique program of recovery and we can't tell another person what their program must look like. However, God is the same yesterday, today and forever and His Word is unchanging. Therefore, the same spiritual principles will apply to our lives.

Recovery is possible for those who are ready to be HONEST, OPEN- MINDED, and WILLING to do what's necessary to get better. The Lord wants us to walk in complete victory! Jesus Himself, not man, is the one who has provided the tools of recovery, that we may be made whole.

We have suffered much too long. We've at least suffered long enough and God wants to restore us! *"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."* (1 Peter 5:10)

We can start enjoying life right now. Wherever we are in the process of recovery, we can experience God's peace, joy and happiness, if our focus is on Him!

SWITCHING ADDICTIONS - Many substances and behaviors can be addictive in addition to alcohol and drugs. Abusing sex and food are on top of the list. Spending, work, reading, sleeping, entertainment, sports, and religious activities can also be lived out in a destructive manner. It is possible to switch from one addiction to another.

We can totally abstain from alcohol and drugs. However, God created these other things to be a healthy part of our lives, and they can't be avoided altogether. Almost anything can be overdone or used as a drug to medicate emotional pain or fill a feeling of emptiness. The question is, why are we doing it? What are our motives? If we are doing it for the wrong reasons, it will have a destructive end. Balance is important.

It is not uncommon for a person to abstain from alcohol or drugs for a long time and be totally unmanageable in another area of life. Someone can make great spiritual progress and even be a respected religious leader in the community and have an "addiction" that has never been surrendered to the Lord.

We are cautioned not to judge another in this area. We have no way of knowing exactly how the Lord may be dealing with them. The Lord has an order and timing as He heals our character defects. While He is working in one area, He will cover other areas with His grace and allow us to have a close relationship with Him.

However, we reach a point in our spiritual journey that the Lord says, "Time is up! You have to deal with this now and turn it over to me." The Lord will not allow us to abuse His grace by refusing to deal with an issue if we are yielded to Him.

If we refuse to cooperate when God says it's time, we run the risk of great danger, as the Lord withdraws His heretofore special protection. He allows us to bear the full consequences of our behavior if we insist on being rebellious.

It takes very little or no effort at all to get off balance in some area of our lives. When we use anything as an excuse not to deal with reality, we erect it as an idol in our life. We choose to embrace the addiction (idol) instead of reality. God is Reality!

When we find these stumbling blocks in our walk with God, it is time to be transparent with the Lord and submit the matter to Him. As we confess our problems and our inability to change ourselves, He responds with a life-changing miracle.

God wants us to apply spiritual principles and be Christ-centered in every area. Sometimes, the Lord will leave some problem in our lives as a thorn in the flesh to keep us depending on Him. Maybe He will use it to deal with our life in another area. Sometimes God's timing and order don't make any worldly sense at all. His ways are higher than our ways!

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS - We don't have to wait to become "experts" in recovery to reach out and help others. God will use even the newest person in recovery as an instrument of His love, mercy and grace.

Timing is important. Trying to help others before they come to the point where they are willing is like trying to push a rope. It just doesn't work. Forcing help on someone before God's timing is right, may render us ineffective when the individual is ready.

The main thing we can do is share our experience with the person who is still caught in a destructive life-style. This way they can respond to those areas they can identify with, knowing it is their idea and not as a result of our manipulation.

Many addictive people are very "independent" people who don't like being told what to do. Trying to intimidate an addictive person into the healing process may send them in the other direction. Recovery has to be their idea. They have to make the decision to recover. Without this determination, there is little or no hope for success in recovery.

When helping others, we don't take control of their lives and play God. Most of us didn't do a very good job controlling our own lives. It's ludicrous to think we can fix the problems of others on our own. We don't do for them what they should be doing for themselves. That's called enabling, not helping. It does more damage than good. We don't tell people what to do regarding life's decisions over such things as jobs and relationships.

The job of trying to change another human being is the most miserable occupation in the world. What we need to do is to share with them the spiritual principles that worked for us. This will encourage them toward being God-dependent rather than us-dependent.

Some people in the early stages of recovery might elevate us to a wrong position in their life and depend on us for things they should trust God to do for them. Because they voluntarily want us to do God's job, that doesn't mean we have to accept the position. It may be a good time to say "no thank you, that position is already filled by someone much more qualified."

We help others to the extent we are able and with the tools we have been provided. We don't have to go on a guilt trip if there is something we don't have or something we can't do in helping another. Philippians 4:19 says "My God shall supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." This means that if there is something we need to be obedient to God in helping another, the Lord will provide it for us. If we don't have it, we are not expected to give it. Therefore, there is no need to run around feeling guilty for not doing what we are not supposed to do.

We are not to become over-burdened in helping others to the detriment of our own recovery and relationship with the Lord. When we are over-burdened in doing good for others, we have probably picked up a load the Lord did not command us to carry. The Lord did not say "Come and I will burden you." He said, "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" (Matthew 11:28)

In helping others, the most important thing to remember is to yield to the Lord to assure that our assistance is not done in our own strength. This doesn't mean that we sit around and refuse to do anything until we hear a loud voice booming down from heaven. It means that we surrender our lives to the Lord and by faith do the good that He puts before us to do. We go forward believing that He is empowering us and will change our course if we start to head in a wrong direction.

"Act justly, love kindly with your

False Beliefs - God's Solution

ness and walk humbly God." (Micah 6:8)

FALSE BELIEFS	CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE BELIEFS	GOD'S SPECIFIC SOLUTION	RESULT OF GOD'S SOLUTION
I must meet certain standards in order to feel good about myself.	The fear of failure: perfectionism; intensity about your own success; withdrawal from risks; manipulate others to help you succeed.	Because of justification, we are completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God. We no longer have to fear failure.	Freedom from the fear of failure; intensity about the right things; Christ and His Kingdom; love for God.
I must have the approval of certain others to feel good about myself.	The fear of rejection: please others at any cost; sensitive to criticism, withdrawal to avoid disapproval.	Because of reconciliation, we are totally accepted by God. We no longer have to fear rejection.	Freedom from the fear of rejection: willingness to be open and vulnerable; able to relax around others; willingness to take criticism; desire to please God no matter what others think.
Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.	The fear of punishment; punishing others; blaming others when you fail; dry spiritual life.	Because of propitiation, we are deeply loved by God. We no longer have to fear punishment or punish others.	Freedom from the fear of punishment; patience and kindness toward others and being quick to forgive; deep love for Christ.
I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.	Inferiority feelings; destructive habits; hopelessness.	Because of regeneration, we have been made brand new, complete in Christ. We no longer have to experience the pain of shame.	Christ-centered self confidence; joy, courage, peace; desire to know Christ.

BECAUSE OF REDEMPTION

I am deeply loved
By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten son into the world that we may have life through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another.- 1 John 4:9-11

I am fully pleasing.
Therefore having been justified by faith we have the peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.—Romans 5:1

I am totally acceptable and accepted.
And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach... - Colossians 1:21-22

I am a new creation - complete in Christ....and in Him YOU have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.—Colossians 2:10

DECLARATION

**Because of Christ's redemption,
I am a new creation of infinite worth.
I am deeply loved.
I am completely forgiven,
I am fully pleasing,
I am totally accepted by God.
I am absolutely complete in Christ.**

**When my performance
reflects my new identity in Christ,
that reflection is dynamically unique.**

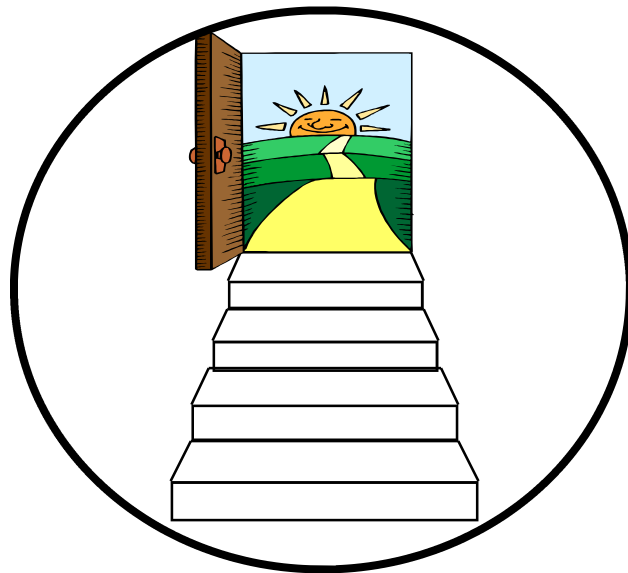
**There never has been another person
like me in the history of mankind,
nor will there ever be.**

**God has made me an original,
one of a kind, a special person.**

Rapha

Section Three

Working The Steps



"Be strong and of good courage;
be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for
the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."
Joshua 1:9

ABOUT THE STEPS - Most of us found out the hard way that if we were really going to get better, we would have to work the steps. Some of us only worked part of the program of recovery. Maybe we went to meetings and listened and shared honestly what was going on in our life. This seemed to work miracles for awhile, then the old negative feelings resurfaced.

What happened is that we received partial and temporary benefit from our partial effort. If we are going to become whole human beings, we will probably have to work the whole program of recovery. If there is some area of the recovery program that we have a hesitancy to work, we need to look at the reason.

Sometimes we come up with real spiritual-sounding reasons not to be thorough in recovery. "I prayed and I believe by faith that Jesus is going to take this problem away from me." It would seem sacrilegious to try to dissuade someone who was taking this tact. They may accuse us of trying to undermine their faith and of not having very much of our own. Denial and refusal to do our part can have a real "holy" ring to it.

The steps are simply New Testament principles. Christian recovery materials document the mandate for each step with many Scripture verses as the authority for each step. The steps were not invented by some human being. If they were, they wouldn't be much good for anything. The steps are God's Scripture concerning the process of healing and spiritual growth organized in a simple and understandable manner. They work because the Lord is faithful to honor His Word - He never fails.

To refuse to work the steps is really to refuse to apply these spiritual principles to our lives. We wouldn't have to call them steps to apply them to our lives and for these principles to work. They will work no matter what names we put on them. Working the steps is simply a step-by-step process of how to get out of being self-centered and into being Christ-centered.

If we can devise a system of arranging these spiritual principles in a more efficient and effective manner, who can argue with us. Until that time we can use the approach that has worked for millions of others. This approach worked when medicine, science and traditional religion failed to produce a workable solution in the area of addiction and dysfunctional family issues.

When we say that traditional religion didn't work, that does not mean that God failed in some way. What it means is that as human beings we failed to appropriately interpret His Word and apply it to our lives as He expected.

Often, people who criticize the steps do so out of ignorance. They are talking about what they don't know and what is not understood. The unknown can be a scary thing. Well-known national TV preachers (probably well-intentioned) have even told people they don't need a program of recovery. This has only aided more people to remain in their state of denial.

Very few people are in recovery as opposed to the number of people who are in need. The vast majority of people don't recover. They continue to endure pain and misery for the number of days they live. And, the number of days they live is shortened by an addictive thought process and life style.

The steps are also a step-by-step process of how to get rid of the defects in character in our lives. As we work the steps, the Lord reveals the next thing that we are to work on and turn over to Him. Nobody can be forced to work the steps or be in recovery. That has to be a personal decision.

When we get sick and tired of being sick and tired, we become willing to go to any lengths to get better. Jesus will bestow many blessings on our lives through applying these spiritual principles.

Step One

We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies - that our lives had become unmanageable.

It seems that the first step is the hardest and that everything that we are pushed against us admitting that we have a problem. Every bit of our human pride and ego works against us crying out for help. We have been programmed from early on to think, "I can handle it."

Step one brings us to the point where we have to admit that we can't handle it. It says that we are in trouble and that we need help. The idea of powerlessness means that we don't have the power to heal ourselves or fix the problem in our own strength.

This step forces us to admit that we have done a poor job in managing our own lives. It also suggests that there is not much hope to expect that things are going to improve if we continue to operate the same way we have.

The end of denial is the beginning of recovery. We have to get to the point where we admit that life is not working for us any more. Maybe our lives never did work for us at all. Nevertheless, we have to quit deceiving and lying to ourselves that things are OK when everything in our lives continues to crumble.

Addictive people have a tendency to highly rationalize life's circumstances even when there is an abundance of evidence that there is a "major problem in Paradise." We tend to be stubborn people and hold out to the very end. Most of us admit to the reality of our circumstances, only when we hit bottom and have no choice in the matter.

Some people have "high bottoms" and their thinking process works enough to understand what is happening before they "crash and burn." There are some who don't have to experience long periods of excruciating pain before they get to the point where they are willing to deal with their problems. Whatever it takes to come to the "end of self!"

A good Biblical example of hitting bottom and admitting powerlessness is found in the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-31. This is the story where the rebellious son demanded his share of the family money and he left home to be able to manage his own life and do whatever he wanted. The son went to a far away city and spent his money on wild living.

This kid obviously had an addictive personality and what we call a "life controlling problem." He blew all his wealth on riotous living and ended up broken and feeding someone's pigs. The pigs were better off than he was because he longed to eat the food they had.

We can't miss the point here - that when he was living under control of the father, he was living in comfort as a wealthy son. The result of self-management was disaster. "***When he came to his senses, he said 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare and here I am starving!'***" (Luke 15:17) He got up and went to his father where he was loved, forgiven and restored. Step one can be summed up in a few words "I have a problem and I need help!"

As we progress in our recovery, our lives will generally improve. There will probably be some specific areas that don't improve and become increasingly unmanageable as time goes on. The areas we have the hardest time admitting having a problem, are usually those areas we thought were our greatest assets. It's the time to specifically apply step one when we discover a specific problem and submit the matter to the recovery process.

Step Two

Came to believe that Jesus Christ could restore us to sanity.

The idea of being restored to sanity is a very sensitive issue. Even people who have been in recovery for a while gulp on this one occasionally. Defensively we say, "I am not insane." If we take this rigid posture, it may keep us from doing this step and experiencing the benefits that flow from thoroughly working all the steps.

In former times, insanity was related to somebody as a raving lunatic bound up in a straight jacket. There may be a few of us who fit into this category. However, most of us see ourselves as fairly rational people. We are able to discern the important aspects of reality.

We tend to see things through the filter of our past problems and have a distorted picture of what is happening around us. These distortions caused us to guess wrong about our circumstances. Then we make wrong decisions about how to respond and reap the negative consequences.

We keep having problems and our lives get worse and we don't know why or what we are doing to bring undesired results. Insanity is doing the same things and expecting different results. Insanity is also escaping reality into an addictive substance or behavior. This is more of the kind of insanity we refer to in recovery.

We are able to identify our problems when we go to meetings and listen to others with similar backgrounds. We are able to identify with the problems and then eventually able to believe there is hope for us too. We hear how other people applied these spiritual principles to their lives and how they got better.

Through listening to others, we learned how others were touched by God and their minds were renewed. Our thinking was changed and our feelings changed. Then our actions changed and we benefited by improved results.

This second step is one of obtaining hope. It is coming to believe that the Lord will do for us what He did for others. As we hear the stories of others, we find that they were as bad if not worse than us. We have to conclude that if God helped them, He will help me.

We can't sit around and hear the many personal testimonies of how the Lord healed and changed lives without coming to believe that this stuff is real. God is real and that there are many people just like us who are walking miracles - alive and happy by the grace of God.

We can't hang around recovery very long without noticing the overwhelming evidence of the Lord's redemptive love and healing power! Millions of otherwise hopeless lives have been transformed through applying these spiritual principles as outlined in the Twelve Steps.

Apart from God's healing grace, there is no program and there is no recovery. This second step is one of acquiring faith. A key part of this step is the willingness to listen to others. We need to listen to others with a sense of expectancy that they have something important to say. Listen with an expectancy that God will speak to us through even the least likely person.

Few people were healed in Jesus' home town because of their unbelief. Scripture says "He healed them all" in referring to the ministry of Jesus traveling from place to place. ***"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people."*** (Matthew 4:23) Believe!

Step Three

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the Lord.

This is perhaps the most important step. If we get this one right, then everything else flows from it. It means that we never have to be alone again. It means that we don't have to work the other steps depending on our own strength, wisdom and courage. The Lord himself will empower us in all else that needs to be done as we continue to yield to Him.

This step requires making an important decision. Other than the decision for salvation, this is the most important choice of our lives. This is a choice to totally surrender our lives to Jesus Christ who indwells our lives through the person of the Holy Spirit. ***"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices."*** (Romans 12:1)

Step three is deciding to quit managing our own lives and giving up all of our rights. We give up our rights to what we are going to be doing, whom we are going to be doing it with and where we are going to do it. It means that Jesus will make the decisions about where we go, what we do, whom we do it with and what we have. To turn our will over is to turn our "chooser" over and that means future choices are no longer ours. We then have a new manager and director.

Growing up in church and inviting Jesus into our lives does not mean that we have taken this step and can skip over it lightly. Jesus may have been resident, but not president. Surrender has meaning and results in relation to the sincerity and the scope of the yieldedness. The Lord won't force us to submit to His loving plan for our lives.

We have to take the step of faith and give Him a chance to prove Himself faithful. Many of us have screwed our lives up so much - that almost no risk or faith is required to give the Lord an opportunity to show what He can do when He is given total control.

Most of us thought of God as being "out there" some place as general overseer of the world. This step reveals the spiritual principle that the Lord has willed a plan for our lives. ***"I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord."*** (Jeremiah 29:11) We give up our will for His will.

He also wants to care for us as we turn our lives and will over to the care of God. ***"Cast all of your cares upon Him, for He cares for you."*** (1 Peter 5:7) The Lord really wants to take care of us, but we need to give Him permission and cooperate.

The reason we haven't seen the evidence of God's care before this time may be as a result of rebellion. We have previously refused to totally yield to His control and to His plan.

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

God has a plan! We are perfectly equipped to carry out God's plan because when He made us He made the plan and the two match perfectly. His plan is better than any we could ever come up with for ourselves. Our own plans end in destruction. His plan is for our highest and best good.

Making a decision means doing business with God. Talking or thinking about making a decision is not doing it. We have to actually do it! We can pray something like: "Dear Lord, right now by an act of my will I totally surrender to you. I Give up all my rights, plans, hopes and dreams. I surrender to your full control from this day forth. Relieve me from bondage to self and deal with my life as you see fit."

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our selves.

Before this step, most of our efforts were in the thinking process. This is where we get a chance for some real action in the physical realm. This step requires writing down the stories of our lives. We write the good and the bad.

The actual work of this step may only take several hours, but often the real work is in working up the courage to do it. That is why it is called a fearless moral inventory. It takes courage to put into writing the bad and embarrassing areas of our lives.

There may be a number of obstacles in our minds to keep us from swinging into action on this step. Some fear having to share the information as is suggested in a future step. We need to take this step as if no other person is ever going to see what we write. We need to take one step at a time at this point.

Maybe we did something illegal or so embarrassing that we are worried that someone will find the paper and know what we did and we will get in trouble. If necessary, we can write these things down in a code that is only understood by ourselves.

This step is for our benefit. It is not a frivolous exercise to give us some busy work to do. We yield to the Lord and begin to write. There is a great healing that takes place simply from the garbage flowing from our minds onto a piece of paper.

As we write, things appear on paper that we didn't realize were inside us. The Lord prompts us in this effort and we begin to see behavior patterns for the first time. Some have realized such immediate help from this step that they said, "It was like poison flowing right out of me onto the sheet of paper."

Another fear in writing a moral inventory is looking at things we did in the past that may stir up painful guilt. Maybe there is a concern that we will stir up painful hurts from what others have done to us. These things from the past may seem too painful to bear and we would rather just keep them buried. We can't stir what is not there. Time does not heal all wounds. Jesus does!

Keeping things buried got us in much of the trouble we got into. In recovery we learn that the problems of the past continue to deal with us in a negative way until we face up to them. We need to own up to the truth and resolve the issues. When we resolve these issues in recovery, we can put them behind us in a way that they won't hurt or control us any more.

There is a saying in recovery that, "We are only as sick as our secrets." As we get out the things that have been stuffed inside for many years it allows us room to breathe. We can begin to relax a little bit and face the truth head on. **"The truth shall make you free."** (John 8:32)

Some people get hung up about where to start for fear that they will get everything out of order and messed up. If we have this concern, writing the events of our lives on a 3x5 card could be a help. This way we can rearrange the cards in chronological order if we are worried about having events in sequence. Another advantage of the card method is that we can carry around some blank ones and write as things come to mind and time permits.

One suggestion is to write about every significant thing in our lives. When we write of what went wrong, we can add how it affected us and what we may have done to bring it about. Just do it!

Step Five

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

A part of doing step five is taking a good look at what we wrote in step four. We have been hiding some of this stuff from ourselves all of our lives. Now, we must muster up the courage and face the truth as we look at our past. We must be as objective as possible.

We look at everything we wrote and we begin to see patterns and things that we never knew were a part of our lives. This may cause some pain as we get an overview of our lives from an angle that we never saw before. We have to be careful here not to beat ourselves up.

Seeing what we wrote down in this new light can act as an obstacle to continuing on in our program of recovery. We may be tempted to say to ourselves, "This is some ugly stuff here, I can't share it with another person because they will think terrible things about me."

Sometimes the only thing that keeps us from completing step four is our fear of doing the fifth step. It's tempting to piddle around in trying to get our writing step four "perfect" before doing step five. We use it as an excuse to not get on with our program. We must muster up all the courage that we can and press on because it is the only way we can get better.

Another trap that we can fall into is the familiar attitude that, "I don't have to share these things with another person - I only need to confess to God to be forgiven." We don't have to debate that point. What we are talking about here is that special healing that takes place when we confess our sins to another human being. ***"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other and be healed."*** (James 5:16)

It's next to impossible to feel accepted, forgiven and loved by God when we have never experienced that with another human being. Other people can't love us if they don't know us. They can only love who they think we are or who we are pretending to be like. Get Real!

As is clearly documented by the above Bible verse, this principle was not devised by people it was ordained by God Himself. When we are ready to take this step, the Lord will provide the exact right person to hear our stories. We need to be prayerful about this matter and the Lord will lead us to the right person to share our inventories.

We want to be courageous, but we do want to exercise caution to share our information with a responsible individual. This person might be a priest, minister, pastor, professional counselor, trusted friend or a "recovery sponsor." A sponsor is somebody that has more experience in recovery than we do and has agreed to help us work the steps.

To our surprise the person who hears our story, does not judge us. They may have done similar things. We were able to get out those secrets that we thought we would be saddled with to the grave. We do this step prayerfully with another person in the presence of God. This is a holy time and a healing time. It is a time that we need to be willing to receive God's forgiveness and rest in that assurance.

We are only as sick as our secrets. After taking this step we have fewer secrets and less sickness. We are different and we feel different. Some of us have felt such overwhelming love, forgiveness and freedom that we didn't know how to handle it. This is also a vulnerable time. We may want to schedule a quiet place to go and have communion and meditation with the Lord.

Step Six

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

This step separates those who are serious about recovery from those who are playing games. At first glance, it appears to be the easiest step and maybe it can be dispensed within just a few moments. Not so! This stage doesn't require us to take any action as such. We don't even have to make the actual decision as outlined in the next step. We "just" have to become ready.

We have already surrendered our lives generally in step three. Perhaps the major problems like drunkenness have already been lifted from us as a result of the work we have done so far. However, we now have a list of specific things in our lives that are out of order and we need to decide what to do about them.

This list of character defects (or sins if you prefer) is those areas in our lives of which we are still in control. We are our own gods in these areas and we need to become willing to turn them over to the care of the Lord. The list could include pride, lust, laziness, greed, envy, gluttony, anger and self righteousness.

Our specific defects could include over-working, over-eating, gambling, lying, grandiosity, manipulating and other obsessions. The Lord requires our ongoing cooperation by us being willing to let these things go.

This step requires a degree of faith. Why go through the effort of being willing to have our lives completely overhauled if nothing is really going to happen? The answer is that God has proved Himself by making things happen for others. We are not so unique or bad that we are beyond the Lord's ability to transform.

Another concern that we might have is that if we let these things go what will be left? Some of us wallowed in our character defects so much that they became a big part of who we were or who we thought we were. Some of us "reveled" in our badness. If we let this stuff go what will there be left? The answer is the beautiful creation that the Lord intended us to be.

The thought of taking a step to put these things behind us could easily invoke the grieving process. Even though these things caused pain and suffering in our lives, they were very familiar to us and it hurts a little to let them go. It is still a loss even if it is a loss of who we thought we were.

That's the bad news. The good news is that this is an important step in obtaining in actuality who we really are. How many of us have pondered the question, "Who am I and what am I doing here?" This is an important step in giving God permission to reveal the real us.

King David was a man after God's own heart, but he was steeped in defects of character including murder and adultery. None of us have committed an offense greater than this Old Testament king. If there is hope for him there is hope for us. King David went on to pen:

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

God loved King David and restored him. He Loves us and will heal our lives if we do our part! Our part is to yield and cooperate. His part is to do the "transforming." (Romans 12:2)

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Now it is time to swing into action again. The key word in this step is humility. Humility is something most of us had very little of before entering into recovery. Self-centered fear is what fueled our addiction and shortcomings.

Self-sufficiency and self reliance are at the foundation of the things that are out of order in our lives. This concept of humility chops right at the roots of our problems and moves us toward reliance on the Lord instead of self.

Our shortcomings are those character defects that keep us from being in a right relationship with God and a right relationship with our fellow human beings. They have served to give us some short term pleasure here and there in exchange for long-term problems.

Now is the time to take the step of faith required to get rid of them with a sense of expectancy that the Lord will take them away. Doing this step is moving out in faith to receive our healing. Many people don't believe in faith healing. Here we must be willing to believe. God's Word promises healing in response to our humility:

"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive them their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

We also have to admit that we are without the power or ability to change our own lives and become willing to let God do for us what we could not do for ourselves. This means actually letting go of control in these specific areas that we have identified.

Even though giving this stuff up is like giving up poison that has hurt us, it still requires an amount of courage to take this step. It will help if we remember that God is all-loving and His plan for our lives is for our highest and best good. He won't take anything away without putting something better in its place.

It would be good to plan a quiet place where we can be alone to take this step. We might want to even pray before we start that the Lord will guide and direct us as we walk through this. Then, it might be a good idea to review the list of shortcomings.

Now is a good time to get down on our knees and pray with all the earnestness and faith that we can muster. We can say whatever words we want as long as they don't water down the intent of this step. We can pray something like:

"Dear Lord, I come to you in the name of Jesus and I admit that I have all these faults. I know that I can't remove them myself or change my own life, but you are able to heal any problem and forgive every sin. Please forgive all these sins and take away anything from my life that is displeasing to you. Take away anything and everything that keeps me from being in a right relationship with you and others. Take away everything that acts as an obstacle of my being used as an instrument of your peace and righteousness. Deal with my life as is pleasing in your sight and I believe by faith that you will. In Jesus name. Amen."

Many of us were amazed at how our lives began to change for the better. Praise the Lord!

Step Eight

Made a list of all people we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

One of the things that might help in doing this step is to take a look at our fourth step inventory of the people who harmed us. Most often, we harmed them back in some way. Maybe we even did some things that encouraged them to do us wrong in the first place.

We realize some people were victims in certain circumstances such as rape. We are not suggesting here that somebody should feel guilty about this and engage in introspection as to what they did wrong. This would only add more injury to an innocent victim.

In fact, the purpose of this step is not to make us feel guilty about anything. It is simply to make a list and is part of the ground work for doing the next step. Perhaps these steps could have been combined. However, the dynamics that we're dealing with in these steps are so intense it is better for us that they are split up.

We need to take this step all by itself to insure that we do it right. We don't need to worry about the next step of having to actually make amends. If we do both steps together, we may leave out some important items on our list for fear of approaching these people to apologize.

The idea here is to put everybody on the list that we can possibly think of that we may have harmed in some way. This doesn't mean that we will have to make amends to everybody on the list. It does mean that we have to become willing. We can't be willing if we refuse to make a thorough list.

Becoming willing to make amends doesn't mean that we dart off and approach everybody we think we harmed. It means that we are willing to make amends to anybody and at any time the Lord leads us and gives us the opportunity.

One of the first things we think of in making such a list is to rationalize our actions based on what other people did to us. We may not be willing to make amends because another hurt us deeply and in the world economy of things we are tempted to say, "They should be making amends to me."

No place in these steps does it say they have to make amends to us. These steps are for our healing and spiritual growth. We can't force others to accept the principles of this program. We can do what we need to do to get better. It is in working these next couple of steps that we enter into a new freedom and come to know peace.

As a result of becoming willing to make amends to them all, we can walk through life with our head held high. We won't have to worry about who we will run into for fear that it will be an awkward moment. When we become willing, the battle has already been won in our minds.

A big part of willingness is forgiveness. We have to forgive all others the harm they did to us. If we don't reconcile this issue we will hold a resentment that will keep us from being willing to clean out our own house. Forgiveness is simply a decision we make before God to not hold another accountable for the harm done to us. This is also required by Scripture:

***"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn,
and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." (Luke 6:17)***

Step Nine

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

This is another step that takes courage. It means facing some people we might never want to deal with again except that we are involved in a program of recovery. This step is necessary for us to get better and to get on with our lives. This step is the last big action step in putting our past behind us so that we can get on with our present and future.

We don't go off half cocked and charging ahead on this step without due thought and prayer. This step takes wisdom, discernment and timing. With our best and enthusiastic intention, we can harm others even more if we don't approach this process in a responsible manner. We don't want to end up making amends for the mistakes we made in making amends.

There are certain amends that we can go forward and correct on an immediate basis and as the Lord provides the opportunity. Those are our financial debts. As money becomes available to meet our past financial obligations we can pay these debts without too much worry that we will hurt someone's feelings.

However, if it was a financial debt that involved some illegal activity or to a party that may do us or another harm, we may want to consider approaching the issue in some safe way. If it was some shady business deal that might implicate another in our attempt to clean up our act, we need to check our motives and thoroughly consider our approach.

Maybe our amends involves a destructive relationship from our past. We need to consider them at this point, and their welfare. A letter might do a better job than a personal visit in this case. No communication with the individual at all might be the right thing, especially if it would cause them a problem with a current spouse, lover or friend.

If we run into a situation where we can't make direct amends without doing further harm to another, we may want to write a letter to them and not mail it. We can discard of the letter after we have sincerely expressed our regrets in writing. We can also do this by using the "empty chair" method. We picture in our minds the person who we are making amends to be sitting in an empty chair and speak the words that are necessary to bring closure to the matter.

There may have been some people we have harmed in some way that have passed away or moved to an unknown location. In these cases we will have no choice but to use an alternate method of making amends.

The main point is that we make amends wherever possible and that we are willing to do so. If we are willing to make amends and it is not possible to do so at this time, that means that it is God's will that we do it at a different time. The Lord doesn't lead us to do the impossible.

The Lord will provide us the opportunity to make things right according to His perfect timing. If we have surrendered to the Lord and continue to yield to Him on a daily basis, He will order our steps in the amends process. ***"God shall supply all of your needs."*** (Philippians 4:19)

Jesus makes it clear that if we are going to be right with Him, we have to get right with others:

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24)

Step Ten

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Having completed the first nine steps we have entered into a new and higher realm of freedom and we have come to experience happiness - perhaps better than we have ever known it. These next three steps are called maintenance steps designed to hold onto what we have and steadily improve on that foundation.

This step ten calls us to take an ongoing personal inventory. Now that we have that huge pile of garbage out of our lives, we want to keep it out. A daily inventory is the best way to keep short accounts and insure we don't accumulate a little excess baggage here and there and get weighted down with a big pile again.

If we are not vigilant, those little things can add up to a lot and steal our peace, joy and new-found freedom. It doesn't take any effort at all to slip back to our old way of doing things. Negative thinking and attitudes toward others can creep back in without our even knowing about it. We need to make a special effort to be on the lookout and guard this serenity the Lord has given us by His grace.

It is suggested that we take this inventory on a daily basis. A good time to do this is when we say our prayers in the evening before going to sleep. A good way to end the day is to give God thanks for all that He has provided. We surrender in the morning and thank Him in the evening. This daily inventory can be a daily "garbage detector."

After our praising and thanking the Lord for His blessings in general, it is a good time to review the specific things that made up our day. Did we contribute to something going wrong? Did we get angry? Did we fail to unconditionally love the people the Lord put before us? Were we impatient or self righteous? Did something happen to cause us to lose our peace or joy?

Did we fail to do what the Lord was leading us to do? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, we can ask for God's forgiveness and take whatever steps are necessary to correct the situation. If what we need to do is to forgive another for harming us in some way, then we simply do it and put it behind us.

When taking our daily inventory, if we come across an instance where we harmed another, we make it right at our earliest opportunity and as the Lord leads. The advantage of doing this inventory often is obvious. It means that we don't have to carry the negative feelings around for a long time and experience the prolonged discomfort that goes with it.

The Lord will reveal those things in our life that were out of order. The Holy Spirit will convict us during this reflective time, if we were too busy to hear during the press of the day's activities.

"I will hear what the Lord will speak. For he will speak peace to his people and His saints; But let them not turn back to folly. Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land." (Psalm 85:8-9)

Another important part of our inventory is our conscious contact with the Lord. Did we practice His presence? Did we walk humbly with Him by faith, believing that He was providentially working out the circumstances of our lives? Did we believe that he was giving us the wisdom, strength and love to accomplish what He puts before us this day?

Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with the Lord, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

This is a program of daily surrender. We take one day at a time. We can't live in the past for it is gone and the future is not here yet. We only have this present day to live. The Lord gives us a daily reprieve from a life of self-propelled destruction as we yield to Him.

The first part of this is prayer and meditation to establish and improve our connection with the Lord. Jesus taught His disciples to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." It was meant to be a daily provision and a daily prayer. Clearly here the Lord wants us to approach Him on a daily basis to request Him to supply our need for the day.

God wants us to meet with Him in the morning and walk with Him during the whole day. Can we imagine going on a trip and not gathering the needed food and other supplies in advance? That's what we do when we start our day without getting plugged into God, who is our supply. We don't get very far before we run out of energy and get in trouble.

Prayer is speaking our needs and praises to God. Meditation is listening to Him in the event that He might have a specific word of direction for us this day. He may want to impress a thought on our mind that we will miss if we don't set aside a moment to listen to Him.

Another part of the Lord's prayer that powerfully speaks to this step is, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." This step doesn't let us get around the fact that God has a plan for our lives. We know that our own plans didn't get us anything but trouble.

The Lord suggests that we pray that His will be done. This is a big hint that if we know what is best for us, we will give Him permission to carry out His program for our lives this day. This is not to say that God is waiting for us to step out of line a little so He can drop a brick on our heads. It is more of a plea for us not to harm ourselves by doing things on our own.

"Then He said to them all; 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" (Luke 9:23)

Dying to self means that we come to the end of our selves and to the end of carrying out our own plan and in our own power. This says that if we are going to be a follower of Jesus and live the spiritual life, we have to surrender on a daily basis. We have to give up self being in control and allow Jesus total control, if we expect the Lord to manifest His plan for our lives.

Taking up our cross is to carry out God's plan for our lives. What an encouragement to know that God has an individual plan for us. It is evidence of His love toward us that he cared enough to provide a plan. Because God is not confused, His plan matches us perfectly. Because God loves us, his plan will not harm us. His plan is meaningful and for our best welfare.

"For I know the plans I have for you." declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

God wants us to be in fellowship with Him on a daily basis and all day long. He wants to be with us in all that we do. We need only to be willing to receive this precious gift.

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

Having had a spiritual awakening means that we have come into a relationship with the Lord. We have worked these steps and have come to the end of ourselves. God has responded to us by causing Jesus to indwell our lives through the person of the Holy Spirit.

We have been given a new beginning and a new life. God who was with us is now in us. We are yielded to Him and His power, wisdom and love are flowing through us. We have a message to carry to others because we have a personal testimony of God's redeeming grace.

The Lord has set us free from the obsession our life-controlling problems. We are armed with the information of what works in people being set free from whatever bondage they are caught up in. We can point the way to recovery because it is a path that we have walked.

Those things in our past over which we had regrets are now our assets as we reach out to others who suffer from the same problems that we did. Our biggest problems now serve as our biggest tools in giving others understanding, love and hope.

We no longer have to hang our head in shame because of the way we led our lives. We are not the same as we used to be. We are different people. We can even look at our worst sin and shortcomings and see how God is using them for good in service to our fellows.

We are able to rejoice in the promise that the Lord made, "to restore the years the canker worm had eaten." Now we can see more clearly what the Lord meant when He had Apostle Paul pen:

"And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Part of our recovery is helping others. It gives us an opportunity to give away what we have received. When we do this in an attitude of unconditional love, we are the ones who receive the biggest blessing.

Many of us thought that we were insignificant and that our lives had no purpose or meaning before being involved in recovery. Now we find that we are equipped to help others in matters that concern life and death. We have been given the gift of light to lead others out of darkness. We now have the gift of life to share with those who are not yet alive.

Amazingly, God's power flowing through us, is making eternal impact on the part of the world that our lives touch. When people are in real trouble they come to us for the answers. Where some of us used to be a burden to society, we are now asset to our communities.

As we continue to help others, it helps us to keep from slipping back into our self-centered mode of living. The Lord puts the people before us that we are perfectly equipped to help. The thing that we see wrong in their lives, helps us to understand areas in our own lives that still need work.

To practice these principles in all our affairs means to work all of the steps in every area of our lives. It means that we apply all these spiritual tools in working out our relationships with others - that we can be in communion with the Lord - in partnership with Him, in all that we do!

SUGGESTED

RECOVERY MEDITATIONS

<u>Step One</u>	<u>Step Two</u>	<u>Step Three</u>	<u>Step Four</u>
Matthew 9:36 Romans 7:18-20 Psalm 6:2-4 Psalm 31:9-10 Psalm 38:1-9 Psalm 44:15-16 Psalm 72:12-13	Matthew 12:18-21 Mark 9:23-24 Luke 13:10-13 John 6:63 John 12:46 Acts 3:16 Psalm 18:1-3	Matthew 11:28-30 Matthew 16:21-26 Ephesians 2:8-9 Psalm 3:5-6 Psalm 23 Psalm 91:1-4 Proverbs 3:5-6	Matthew 23:23-28 Luke 12:1-6 Romans 13:11-14 1 Cor 4:19-20 Galatians 6:3-5 Proverbs 5:3-6 Proverbs 16:2-3
<u>Step Five</u>	<u>Step Six</u>	<u>Step Seven</u>	<u>Step Eight</u>
Luke 5:17-20 Luke 5:31 Acts 19:18 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Hebrews 4:12-16 1 John 1:8-9 Proverbs 28:13-14	Romans 6:11-12 Ephesians 4:17-23 Colossians 3:5-8 1 Peter 1:13-16 1 John 4:18 Revelation 3:19-20 Psalm 119:28-40	Matthew 18:4 Acts 3:19 Hebrews 12:5-11 1 Peter 5:6-7 1 John 5:14-15 Psalm 32:6-8 Psalm 37:23-24	Matthew 18:21-35 Luke 6:37-38 Luke 19:8 John 13:34-35 1 Corinthians 13 2 Timothy 1:7 James 4:11-12
<u>Step Nine</u>	<u>Step Ten</u>	<u>Step Eleven</u>	<u>Step Twelve</u>
Matthew 5:9 Romans 15:2 Philippians 1:9-11 Colossians 4:5-6 Philemon 8:17 Psalm 51:14-17 Proverbs 16:20-24	Mark 14:38 Romans 12:3 1 Thess 5:17-22 Hebrews 2:1-3 1 Peter 2:11 Psalm 85:8-9 Psalm 103:8-18	John 4:13-14 Romans 8:26-28 Galatians 2:20 Philippians 4:6-9 Titus 3:1-7 Psalm 84:5-12 Psalm 127:1-2	Mark 5:18-20 Cor 9:22-27 1 Cor 15:101 1 Timothy 1:12-16 Psalm 92:1-4 Psalm 96:1-2 Proverbs 31:26-31

Serenity Bible

Section Four

Recovery Related Topics



I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

ANGER - This is one area we really need to exercise caution in our recovery. Anger is a valid emotion and it should not be stuffed. Anger turned inward can cause major depression and other problems. Therefore, we need to learn how to handle anger appropriately.

Now that we are trying to live right lives, that doesn't mean that others won't do things that will give occasion for anger. Even though we are trying not to hurt others, somebody will inevitably act contrary to our desires. That's life! Life is full of human beings who will disappoint us no matter what we do to prevent that from happening.

It's like owning a car. If we never take the car out of the garage into traffic, we probably won't have an accident. Of course, if we do this, the car is useless. Our lives will probably feel useless if we stay in hiding all the time.

In life other people will run into us and dent us up a little bit (or a lot) and give us an opportunity to be angry. It's OK to experience anger. However, when we do get angry watch out! It is a dangerous time that we are prone to act on our anger in a wrong way.

If we let anger control us instead of being in control of it, we are the losers. We will probably do or say something that we will regret. Paul says, "***Be angry and sin not. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.***" (Ephesians 4:26) The Word makes it clear that it is not a sin to become angry but it commands us to exercise caution when anger happens.

We are instructed not to hold on to anger too long. This is obviously in our best interest. Anger is an unpleasant emotion. If we choose to stay angry for a long time, we are effectively choosing to inflict pain on ourselves. The pain that we accumulate from staying angry can far outweigh the original injury.

Anger is an intense emotion and it can be toxic by itself. It can cause our adrenaline to flow and produce a high through our own body chemistry. Left unchecked we become addicted to our anger as it takes on a life of its own. It can also lead to us stepping up to other harmful behaviors or substances.

It's important to be honest with God and ourselves about our anger. God doesn't expect us to cover up our anger by saying cute little flowery prayers when our thoughts and feelings are far from that. We need to speak the truth to the Lord. In a very clear way we can tell Him what happened and what we really feel about it. God can handle the truth. He will respond to the truth, embrace us with His love and enable us to forgive and be set free of our anger.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that we forget or make believe that the other person didn't really happen. That's denial and denial won't get us anything but into more trouble.

It may be necessary to confront the person who hurt us. This can be done in a more constructive way after we have worked through the "heat" of anger. When eventually confronting others, we don't blame them for our emotions. Rather, we confront their unacceptable behavior, especially with people who have continued access to our lives. We let them know they don't have permission to abuse us on a regular basis.

Sometimes our anger is not a result of a wrong committed by another. It can be a result of our wrong expectations or incorrect perceptions about another's actions. That's another reason to be very cautious in confronting others when angry - our anger may simply be a misunderstanding. We can save ourselves embarrassment if we don't go on an immediate unbridled counter attack.

As we progress in recovery we learn how to handle previously complex situations. Eventually, some things that used to anger us don't even bother us anymore. The Lord does change lives!

ATTITUDE- Our attitude can make a difference in whether we have a good day or bad day. Moreover, it can make the difference between a good and a miserable life.

In recovery, we are told to have an "attitude of gratitude." That means looking at things from the right perspective. We need to look at our circumstances as being ordered by God and as being exactly as He arranged them for our benefit.

We tend to look at our circumstances as something that just happens. We sometimes fail to recognize the sovereignty of the Lord in the midst of them. It's like "woe is me, God has fallen asleep and doesn't see the terrible things that are going on." God is all-knowing, all-present and all-powerful, over all of our circumstances. Only those things He allows into our lives can get through to us.

We can be living in the best of circumstances, even in a garden paradise, and be in misery through a wrong attitude. Conversely, we can be in very difficult, undesirable surroundings and have joy and peace if our focus is on Him. A bad attitude isn't caught from some virus floating through the air. An attitude doesn't just happen, it is chosen. Nobody can control our minds and make us look at things the way they want. It's our choice.

We can either rejoice in our circumstances as commanded in Scripture (Phil 4:4), or strike up a pity party. The Lord didn't promise to keep us from tribulation. He promised to be with us in the middle of our valleys - that He would walk with us through the dark clouds of life.

***"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; rejoice!
Let your gentleness be evident to all."*** (Philippians 4:4-5)

If our focus is on Him who is light, we shall never despair of the darkness. The problem is that we often focus on our problems and our own abilities to correct them. That's cause enough for despair right there. "Apart from Him, we can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Looking by faith at everything that comes our way as a blessing from the Lord, allows us to experience the hope that flows through seeing through this perspective. Further, it releases our faith to claim the promise that:

***"All things work together for good
of those who love God and are called according to His purpose."*** (Romans 8:28)

The beauty of God's creation is spiritually discerned. This means that we must look at everything through the eyes of Jesus to see the lovely creation He has abundantly provided for us. When we choose to be self-centered, our eyes are blinded to the good and open to the ugly. Then, life becomes an ugly experience. When we are properly connected to God and Christ-centered, we see and experience His gorgeous reality.

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus." (Phil 2.5)

BOUNDARIES - Boundaries were something that told us where one state or city ended and another began. It also let us know where our lot line ended if we happened to have a home. Boundaries gave us the information needed to know when we were finished mowing the lawn and prevented us from unknowingly mowing too much of the neighbor's yard.

Some boundaries are obvious, necessary and helpful. They give us the opportunity to respect the space that belongs to another and lets others know where our space begins. People around us at least have chance of staying out of our territory if they know where it is.

The boundaries that we talk about in recovery are not as clearly defined. They are boundaries that govern our relationships and behavior toward one another and may or may not be physical. The boundaries between human beings are more as an imaginary line in the middle of a large body of water and no device is available to measure where it's at. We have to guess and many times we guess wrong and others guess wrong in figuring out where our boundaries are located.

Others can't know where our boundaries are if we don't tell them. They don't even stand a chance of staying out of our territory if they don't know where our territory begins and ends. In the legal system, farmers have to post notices on the land before they can hope to prosecute somebody for trespassing and enforce their desires for strangers to keep out.

Most of us have had people trespass into many areas of our lives before our involvement in recovery, and it still happens. If it happens because people willingly violate the boundaries and signs we have posted, they are guilty of trespassing. If it happens because we have failed to post "keep out" signs, then we are at fault.

We need to be careful not to erect high walls in our lives that keep people out altogether and prevent us from interacting with others in a healthy way. Our boundaries need to be reasonable. Otherwise, we harm ourselves through isolation. We also harm our family, friends and associates by denying them reasonable access to our lives. This could be more self-centeredness in the name of recovery.

When we set boundaries we communicate to those who do have access to our lives what kind of behavior we consider hurtful and abusive. We do this in a loving way and seek their cooperation.

Habits are habits and they will continue without a specific attempt to break them. We can't just set boundaries and expect people around us to change their behavior automatically at our whim. We have to be prepared to enforce those boundaries and attempt to do that in a loving way also.

A friend may have used sarcastic humor to insult us in some area of our life for a long time. Maybe they didn't know that it was a very sensitive area and that it bothered us deeply. In setting our boundary we may communicate with them in a calm moment. Maybe something like, "You probably don't know it but when you talk about me that way, it really bothers me and I am asking you to make an effort to avoid it in the future."

They are embarrassed and agree to never do that again and said they would never have done that in the first place if they had only known how it hurt us. They honor our request for a while but they slip back into their old negative humor. We need to immediately let them know that they don't have permission to take such liberty with our emotions.

We don't need to let them insult us four or five times and until we are ready to blow up before we enforce the boundary. Some of us are real "people pleasers" and setting and enforcing boundaries will take some discipline and will not come easy. As we improve in our setting and enforcing boundaries, hopefully we will be more mindful of other people's concerns as well.

CHRIST-CENTERED - Before the Lord came into our lives, there was no way we could be Christ-centered. Whether we did wrong or whether we did very well, it was still self-centered. Without Christ being in our lives, we don't stand a chance of Him being in the center of our lives.

Many of us had to come almost to death's door before we would "take a chance" and let Christ into our lives. Some were able to invite Jesus in to become a part of our lives sometime before we became involved in recovery. Some even had a personal relationship with Jesus through a childhood conversion.

We all generally believe that if a person has Christ in their life, they are a Christian. However, it is not true that all Christians are Christ-centered all the time or even part of the time. Christ may be resident in our lives and may not be president. He may be in our life but not necessarily in control of our life.

It's like inviting the greatest pilot in the world into our airplane and then flying the plane ourselves on a very dangerous mission. Jesus doesn't want to be our copilot. He wants to be our pilot. He wants to be in control and be used to the fullest instead of playing a secondary or insignificant role.

Before Christ can be in the center or in control of our lives, we have to come to the point when we are ready to give up control. We have to come to the end of ourselves either through understanding or being broken. It usually happens through being broken where we despair of life itself and we totally give up doing things our own way. This is called "dying to self."

God's Word calls us to die to self and this is intended to be an initial experience and a daily experience. ***"Then He said to them all `if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me, for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."*** (Luke 9:23-4)

To pick up our cross daily is to choose to carry out God's plan for our life each day. God made us to carry our individual cross and he also created that individual cross to dove-tail perfectly with how we were created. Unless we are carrying out this destiny for which we were uniquely created, we will not find true meaning in life. A sense of significance and purpose will escape us until we start to live out God's divine plan for our lives.

After Christ comes into our lives and we come to the end of ourselves, we become candidates for being Christ-centered. Like other spiritual principles, faith plays a big part in this process. We have to appropriate by faith what the Lord has already provided as the inheritance He wants us to have right now and that is "Christ as our life." He is not only to be in our life. He is to be our life. God has already provided it and we need only receive it by faith.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) Here Scripture makes it clear that Christ lives in us by faith. This is not a principle reserved for a few spiritual gurus. It is a blessing the Lord provided for us all and is intended to be used always. Yielding and Christ living through us is walking after the Spirit. Doing things in our own strength is walking after the flesh and God's Word says, "No good thing dwells in the flesh."

We don't need a changed life. What we really need is an exchanged life; where the very life of Christ is flowing through us and enabling us to do what He puts before us to do. However, this is not a performance thing - it's not so much doing, it's being rightly related to Him. We don't perform for Him. We yield to Him so He can perform through us. It becomes clear to those who are spiritual that Jesus Himself is doing the performing and He is glorified through it all!

CONFRONTING OTHERS - Unconditional love does not mean that we love another's unacceptable behavior. It doesn't mean that we don't confront them about behavior that is damaging to themselves, other people or ourselves. We do have a right and responsibility to confront another's inappropriate actions under certain conditions.

We often refuse to confront with the excuse that we are being kind by not upsetting the individual who is acting wrongly. The truth often is that we don't deal with an issue because to do so will have negative consequences toward ourselves. We like being kind to us.

The thought process might go something like, "I'm not going to say anything because they will get mad at me. They are even helping me out in some ways and if I confront them, I will lose out." In this scenario, we are not being concerned about the welfare of the person who is acting wrongly, we are worried about our own interests.

Refusal to confront another when it is appropriate, could be "people-pleasing" on our part. It enables others to remain in denial about their problem behavior. In some cases keeping quiet when we should speak is an attempt to manipulate them for our own benefit.

We can refuse to confront an associate or loved one out of fear of our future. "I have to put up with this because if I don't, how am I going to live?" In this case we are looking to the other person as the "supplier-of-our-needs" and elevating them to a wrong position in our lives. If we are unable to confront when necessary, we need to look at some possible codependent issues in our own lives.

However, some of us loved to confront others about anything and everything. We would confront with a heavy hand, anyplace and anytime we got the opportunity. We need to know when to confront and how to confront.

In confronting, we need to do it with a right attitude. We don't need to confront with an angry attitude - that we are going to get them and punish them. An attitude that we perfect ones have been "chosen" to point out their imperfections won't help either. Rather, we need to approach them in humility, love, understanding and compassion.

Most important, we need to approach others in a sense of depending on the Lord to lead us and direct our words, actions and attitude. We really need to be led by the Holy Spirit. ***"Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."*** (Galatians 6:1)

We can handle the matter in a spiritual way by depending on the Lord for each step we take. But, that doesn't mean that there won't be some negative consequences, maybe only on a short-term basis. God probably hasn't called any of us into a full-time confronting ministry and we may not have much experience.

When it's necessary to confront another, it might be a good idea to get some advice from a trusted friend or spiritual advisor. When we share about what somebody did wrong, we need to be careful whom we share it with and that we don't do it in a gossiping manner. The people that we talk to need to be trustworthy in this area.

Just because something is the truth about another, that doesn't give us the right to damage them by spreading it around in a malicious way. Prayer chains can even be used wrongly in a way that actually harms people and spreads information in a gossiping manner - "Please pray for Suzie because she's in big trouble and is such a bad person."

We shouldn't be confronting someone in an area that God is covering with His grace. In confronting people, our goal is not to harm but to help them and express God's love to them.

DAMAGED EMOTIONS - Even though none of us like to dig up the painful past, we found that we had to because our past didn't go away and that it was very much a part of our present. Our experience is that time does not heal all wounds and that a problem will continue to deal with us until we deal with it. The good news is that Jesus does heal our wounds and that He may very well choose to do it through the recovery process.

We all entered recovery with some damage to our emotions. If we were happy, joyous and free, there would have been very little from which to recover. However, most of us were beaten and bruised from head to toe from being involved in abusive relationships and adverse circumstances.

Anger, depression, fear, guilt and anxiety seem to be synonymous with addiction and dysfunctional families. We may also have worry, doubts, inferiority, insecurity or inadequacy - or all the above. These things don't go away by ignoring them. It isn't either smart or brave to refuse to face these issues and resolve them.

We may have been severely hurt by another in some way and we are still bitter and resentful about it. Maybe years or decades have passed since the original incident. When we think of the painful incident, it hurts almost as much as when it first happened. These bad feelings are proof that the wound is still festering and the issue has not been dealt with.

When an issue is really resolved, we will no longer become emotionally distraught at its remembrance. In addition to the direct pain from the memory, there may be other emotional, mental, physical and even spiritual side effects that stem from the original problem. An adverse childhood incident can very much influence how we act as adults. We may not even consciously know why we do the things we do and that our past is controlling our present.

It's difficult to be led by the Spirit in those areas in which we are in bondage to our past. The main thing that will keep us from experiencing victory, and being used effectively by the Lord, is our unwillingness to clean house. Jesus cleared out the Temple and then ministry took place.

Just like any other issue, the end of denial is the beginning of recovery. We have to be willing to be honest about what is really going on in our lives. It's like having a spot of cancer. It's not nice to find that out but it is better to know and cut it out than to make believe it's not there and to allow it to spread. This is often what we do with our emotional wounds - we refuse to treat them and they spread like poison affecting every aspect of our lives.

We can't heal ourselves and we can't change ourselves and that is not what is being said here. However, what we can do is cooperate with what the Lord wants to do for us and through us. If we don't know the root cause of some problem we can pray and ask Him to reveal it. It says in James 1:5 that God will give us wisdom if we ask in faith.

When the Lord does reveal an area, we need to address it and commit it to His hands. He is not doing so to bring us under condemnation and punish us. We've been punished enough by others and probably have been punished mostly by ourselves. He reveals these things in our lives to bring healing and freedom for our benefit. God is committed to our welfare.

God is a gentleman and He won't bulldoze His way through our lives. We have to do our part. The first step is to be honest and admit that it is there. Then, by faith we need to turn the matter over to the Lord and follow His guidance.

There is the certainty of victory if we are willing to apply the spiritual principles of the steps to these areas of our life. This will most assuredly include forgiveness of those who harmed us. Unforgiveness is usually the vehicle that keeps the pain of our past a part of our present.

DEPRESSION - Depression was a major symptom of our addictive lives. We used different coping mechanisms to deal with the depression and to feel up instead of down. Eventually, all the techniques we used to battle depression failed us and that helped steer us toward recovery.

There was a television show named Hee Haw where they weekly sang the same song about depression. It went something like:

Gloom, despair and agony on me.
Deep dark depression, excessive misery.
If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all.
Gloom, despair and agony on me.

Of course this refrain was intended to invoke some humor. However, some of the words and intensity of the song reflected the feelings we had, all too often.

Sometimes we were the life of the party, and as far as others were concerned we were happy-go lucky people. Many of us just pretended to be happy knowing that others didn't like being around unhappy people and we didn't want to be alone. However, our insides had much darkness and didn't match with our outsides.

Some of us described our depression as being like a dark cloud that followed us wherever we went. It kept us from seeing the light of life and the beauty of God's creation around us. It distorted our view of our surroundings and robbed us of the joy we were supposed to have.

Some of this depression came from trying to live life in our own power and recourses and carrying out our own plan. God never intended us to operate that way. He intended that we should be yielded to Him so His love, power and wisdom were flowing through us and enabling us to do all he put before us. We were overburdened and overwhelmed because we operated in a way God never intended us to operate.

God also wants us to look at our circumstance through an eternal perspective. Instead, we looked at what needed to be done to survive and be a success and saw that it was an impossible task based on what we knew and could see. Our mistake was that we failed to take into account that the Lord was working for us in ways that we could not see.

We saw things and we lived out our lives on a self-centered way of operating. We didn't know or have the faith to believe that the Lord provides a way where there is no way. No wonder we were depressed.

"Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Place your hope in God." (Psalm 42:11) This psalmist knew that he was depressed (downcast) because he was focusing on His circumstances instead of focusing on the Lord. The Lord is with us and is quite capable of delivering us to victory regardless of our circumstances.

We can be in the middle of beautiful and joyful surroundings and be depressed if we have a poor attitude. We will see the negative if we focus on the negative and the pitfalls. Instead, we need to look at the possibilities and God's divine ability to meet our every need.

Depression is a genuine emotion and we shouldn't deny its existence. There are truly sad circumstances where it is perfectly legitimate to be depressed for an appropriate time. For example, the death of a loved one will cause some grief and depression and that needs to be experienced and faced head-on to resolve the matter. However, to seize on a sad occurrence to linger in depression for a long time can be just another endeavor in being self-centered.

FEAR - There are a thousand kinds of fears and probably new ones being invented all the time. There is no shortage of things to worry about. The addictive personality is fueled by self-centered fear.

If we don't have anything we are currently fearful about, we need only to read the paper and we are sure to come up with enough material to hold us over for a while. Fear is an overwhelming sense that something bad is going to happen to us or somebody or something we are concerned about. It can be a disabling emotion if it goes unchecked.

There is an appropriate kind of fear that is really wisdom prodding us to exercise caution in dangerous circumstances. This kind of fear is our friend and it keeps us out of trouble or gets us pumped up to face the danger we can't avoid.

The fear we are talking about here is not our friend. It is the kind that keeps us from making healthy choices as we face life's circumstances. It can keep us from doing even the simple things we need to be doing to promote our best welfare. It can be immobilizing and keep us from hearing and carrying out God's will for our lives.

If we live in a dangerous neighborhood where there has been much violence, it would be natural and healthy to be cautious about going out at night without exercising safeguards. It is not healthy to stay in hiding and refuse to go out under any circumstances.

Fear is a genuine feeling and if it exists there isn't anybody who can say it's not there. And, if we are feeling fearful, our actions will probably eventually follow suit to line up with our feelings. Maybe we have been hurt many times in relationships with significant others. We will feel betrayed and have fear that the same thing is going to happen again. So, we put our walls up to protect us from a recurrence.

The problem with putting up walls as a mechanism to protect us from the bad, is that those same walls also keep the good out as well. How can we begin to tear down these walls and begin to lead the balanced life the Lord would have us lead? How is this fear thing reversed? Scripture says that, "***Perfect love casts out fear.***" (1 John 4:18) We know that Jesus is perfect and He is love. Therefore, it would be safe to translate this to mean that the Lord will remove all fear from our lives. We need to do our part and receive what He wants to provide.

When we were carrying out our own plan for our lives and in our own strength, we had good reason to fear because we were outside the covering of God's perfect will. Now, we are seeking to let God be in control of our lives and draw close to Him. We are able to invoke all the promises afforded to us as His children. The closer we get to the Lord, the more understanding and faith we have and more fear is dispelled. We need to snuggle up very close to Jesus.

We don't have to fear because the Lord made it clear that He will supply all of our needs. (Philippians 4:19) We don't have to fear because nothing can get through to us except what the Lord has already determined is for our ultimate good. (Romans 8:28)

We don't have to fear because nothing in heaven, earth, the past, the present or the future will be able to separate us from God's love. We don't have to fear because the Lord has a perfect plan for our lives and He is providentially working out all of our circumstances for our best welfare. (Jeremiah 29:11)

From a spiritual perspective, it is scary to be apart from God, But, He is with us! We don't have to fear because the Lord Loves us with an "everlasting love." His Word clearly and securely states that He will never leave us or forsake us - He will be with us always!

FORGIVENESS - One of the most important tools in recovery is being forgiven and forgiving others. If we are feeling guilty about things in our past - bad feelings and probably wrong actions will flow from the guilt. Then, we have more guilt and end up doing something wrong to medicate pain from guilt as the sin cycle continues to roll unchecked. Receiving God's forgiveness breaks this cycle.

There is nothing that we have done that is beyond God's ability and willingness to forgive. There is one thing that Moses, King David and Apostle Paul had in common other than being used greatly by the Lord. All three were murderers. If God can forgive them He can forgive us.

After King David committed adultery and murder, the Lord used him to pen many words of His forgiveness. Psalm 32:1 says, "Blessed is he whose sin is covered whose iniquity the Lord holds against him no more."

Jesus Christ has already fully paid the price for all of our sins when he was stretched out on Calvary's cross long ago. We can only accept that forgiveness as a free gift. This does not make light of sin, because even though forgiveness is free to us God paid a great price in sending His only Son to suffer and die in our place. It's an affront to God not to receive the forgiveness He wants us to have for all that we did wrong.

Also, there are people who have wronged us and did damage that affects our lives even today. To the extent we haven't forgiven others, the wounds they inflicted are still festering and hurting us. Forgiving them also benefits us by letting go of harmful resentments and begins the healing process. It allows us to let go of the excess baggage we have been carrying around from the past.

Forgiveness is not forgetting or making believe something never happened. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean saying something directly to the person who hurt us. People don't even have to be alive for us to forgive them.

Forgiveness is a decision, an act of the will, done before God, choosing not to hold others accountable for the harm they have done. It's a decision to give up our "right" to retaliate and get back at them. Forgiveness is letting go of anger, resentment, hostility, bitterness, hate and rage. Forgiveness is canceling the debt we feel another owes us. (Ephesians 4:32)

Forgiveness means being set free from looking at our present circumstances through our past hurts.

Forgiveness is not an option. It is a requirement for ourselves being forgiven and for our own healing. Jesus Christ has so freely forgiven us and He clearly instructs us to forgive others. If we don't forgive, we are the losers because it will obstruct a right relationship with the Lord and other people. The following prayer may be used as a guide to pray through forgiveness:

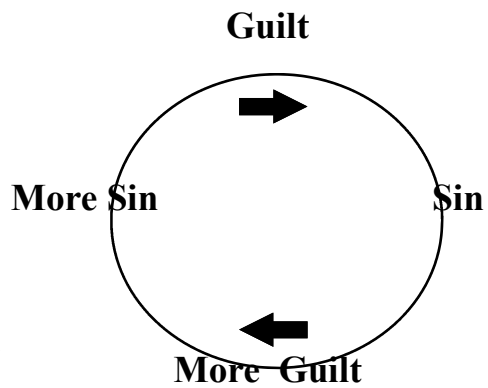
Dear Lord Jesus you can do all things and you are in all places and you even transcend time. Right now I ask you to hold me by the hand and go with me into my past where some hurtful things happened in my life. I pray for your courage, comfort and spiritual protection as we do this and pray the Holy Spirit will guide me even as I now speak.

When I was about ____ years old ____ who did it ____ hurt me when they ____ what they did ____ . Right now by an act of my will, I choose to forgive ____ name ____ . I choose to not hold them accountable to me for the harm they did and hereby cancel the debt. I commit into your hands whatever correction others need for their actions. Please set me free to love others unconditionally.

I ask you dear Lord to do whatever is necessary to make this forgiveness real in my life and heal what was damaged by these incidents. Please forgive me for my bitterness and Unforgiveness toward this person. I trust by faith that you will accomplish all of this and make the benefits of forgiveness experiential in my life. AMEN! Let us also remember to pray and ask the Lord to forgive us for the wrongs we have committed toward others. Then let us begin to receive the fullness of the blessings the Lord wants to give us.

GUILT - There are basically two kinds of guilt - real guilt that arises from sin and imaginary guilt. Imaginary guilt is when we just run around feeling guilty even though we have done nothing wrong.

Others may have told us through direct or indirect communications that we are bad people. Maybe we feel that we don't deserve to be breathing and we feel guilty just for being alive. Someone we consider more important than us may have died and we feel guilty that it wasn't us. Something may have gone wrong with friends or family relationships and we assumed that it was our fault.



Dysfunctional family members and friends are prone to use this imaginary guilt (or real guilt for that matter) for their own purposes. Guilt can be a very hurtful tool when used to manipulate us to behave the way others want us to behave. We can also be cruel in using this weapon against others if we are not watchful.

An example of the way this guilt manipulation can work could be: "You really hurt me by what you did and you are a bad person. If you do what I want you to do, then maybe you can redeem yourself and become a good person again, after you have paid a high-enough price."

Part of the spiritual area of our lives that relate to God is our conscience. When we do something wrong, the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin through what we call our conscience. If our conscience is working properly, there is a "knowing" that we have stumbled in some way.

Knowing that we have done something wrong gives us the opportunity to choose what to do with this information. If we refuse to make an adjustment when we are convicted of wrong, eventually our conscience becomes hardened and fails to function. Why should God continue to speak to us through our conscience if we steadfastly refuse to respond?

Whether our guilt is real or imaginary won't make much difference as far as our feelings are concerned. This thing called guilt can be a painful emotion and control our lives in many different ways. If our lives are being controlled by guilt or some other negative emotion, we are on dangerous ground because our lives are controlled by something other than God.

There isn't anything holy about running around feeling guilty all the time. There isn't anyplace in the entire New Testament that says we should feel guilty. We don't get any stars on our forehead by beating ourselves up through self-imposed guilt or receiving guilt others are trying to heap on us.

Even if we did something wrong, the way to victory in the matter is not wallowing in guilt or physically whipping ourselves, as used to be the case in some religious orders. If we hold on to guilt for what we did wrong, that will only serve to push us to doing something else wrong to make us temporarily feel better. Then we feel even more guilty and do something else wrong to feel better. The downward spiral goes on and on.

God's grace and forgiveness breaks the guilt-sin cycle. Accepting His forgiveness and love right where we are sets us free from the bad feelings that lead to acting out and causing more problems.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Roman 8:1)

HOLINESS - This thing called holiness was beyond our ability to look at, much less comprehend. Coming into recovery, we thought it was miracle enough that we weren't doing some of the worse things we used to do. We thought this holiness was reserved only for those "churchy" people and that there was no way it would ever apply to us. Wrong!

We can look at holiness in two categories. The first is our position, which is the way God sees us. He sees us holy and blameless before Him because Jesus died on the cross for all our sins. Our sin debt has been marked "Paid In Full" and the Lord does not hold these things against us. It is on this basis that the Bible says we can boldly approach His throne of grace.

We can't approach God based on our performance because none of us is perfect and each day we fall short of the Glory of God. He provided this thing called grace so he could fellowship with us. God is love and He created us to be objects of His love. It is God's heart to be in union with us.

Our sin aborted that union and God's grace and mercy provided for restoration of fellowship. Grace is receiving the good that we don't deserve and mercy is not receiving the punishment we do deserve. God has an abundance of grace and mercy. He never runs out, but He will withhold them if we abuse them and think we are getting away with something.

God doesn't give us a thing called holiness. He gives us Jesus Christ who is our holiness. God sees the very life of Christ in us and He counts us as holy. That is our POSITION. Our CONDITION may be a far cry from our position especially when we first enter into a real relationship with the Lord and His presence becomes a fact in our lives.

Our condition is that there are still many things wrong in our lives. Just as were dependent on God for our holiness regarding our position, we are also dependent on His grace for holiness in our condition. We found out that we couldn't change ourselves. That's part of what lead us into a program of recovery. We found that the Lord could and would change us if we yielded to Him and cooperated with the work. First He accepts us the way we are. Then He changes who we are; then our behavior changes to produce on the outside what we have become on the inside.

If we muster up all our best effort to produce goodness on our own, the world may applaud us and we may even pat ourselves on the back. However, that is not holiness. It is self-effort and it is certain to puff up self and only be a superficial work that will not last. Jesus says "***apart from me you can do nothing.***" (John 15:5) This means that we can't do anything that has eternal significance to it. We certainly can do some worldly things in our own flesh (our own effort).

The thing about holiness, whether it is positional or conditional, is that we are absolutely and totally dependent on God to produce either one. If we happen to have a little of it, we can't run about and brag on ourselves. None of us can boast because it is all a gift of God' grace.

"May God Himself sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of the Lord. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it." (1 Thess 5:23-4) This makes it clear that the Lord is the one who sanctifies us - that it is He who makes us holy.

There is, of course, a part that we play in this whole process and that is one of willingness, cooperation and yieldedness. We need to be willing that the Lord would reveal the areas of our lives that are out of order. Our part is also to cooperate with Him and yield these areas to His total control and for Him to deal with as He sees fit.

Our part is also to remember that He keeps us "blameless" at the same time that He is making us holy, so we may have continued fellowship with Him.

HUMILITY - Most of us know what ego, pride, arrogance and self-reliance are. We can begin to understand humility as the absence of these things. The beginning of humility is the end of thinking that we can be a success or get some real meaning out of life operating in our own abilities and strength.

Being “unhumble” is thinking "I can do it alone, I don't need any help" or "My intelligence, determination or physical ability or good looks are capable of producing some significance in life."

We approach humility when we place "No confidence in the flesh." Placing no confidence in the flesh is having an understanding that apart from the Lord doing a work through us, we can't do anything that means anything with respect to eternal significance.

On our own, we can only produce sin. That is a strong statement and it attacks every vestige of pride in us to admit that we are incapable of really doing good on our own. Yes, we can produce some works that "look good" in the eyes of the world. Our best effort in the flesh (without depending on God's strength) counts for zero when measured with the Lord's standard of eternal value.

Some flesh looks better than others. We may have gotten the applause of the world by amassing money, power or prestige. We can't fool God or our own spirit that will remain empty if our efforts are not "born of the Spirit." ***"For the word of God is sharper than a double-edged sword, it separates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*** (Hebrews 4:12)

The lack of humility in our lives is pride in one form or another and pride doesn't really accomplish anything of real worth. It may make us feel good and puffed-up on a temporary basis. In the end it leaves us feeling empty because the flesh is incapable of producing life.

False humility doesn't produce life either. False humility is running around acting humble or speaking in humble terms. "Oh I'm just a no good bum and I can't do anything on my own and I'm just depending on God." This attitude may be just calling attention to self and trying to say the right thing for the applause of other Christians. We need to look at our motive.

Is our motive intended to glorify Jesus or self? Are we honestly sharing the truth of our lives or are we using the opportunity to get others to pay attention to us?

When we do things for others this is not necessarily proof of humility. We may be trying to impress others, ourselves or even trying to impress God with our "good works." What we call humility can be just another form of performance-based-acceptance and it will leave us empty. The question is are we helping them for their benefit or for our own?

When we help people for our own gain, we miss the blessings that come from humble service to others. The man in the Bible who was praying to be seen by others got his reward by being seen. He missed the reward that comes in the form of answered prayer that he would have received if he prayed with a right motive.

Walking in humility is very fragile and Holy. It means being ever conscious of God's presence and being yielded to Him. It is having the faith that the Lord is providentially working out His desires through, to and around our lives, according to His will.

Humility is knowing that our own wisdom, our own strength and other resources are incapable of accomplishing anything of lasting worth or satisfaction. Humility is being continually sensitive to the leading of the Spirit.

JUDGING - Most of us spent many years being judged by other people. Instead of getting understanding and acceptance, we were treated to criticism and rejection.

There was never a shortage of people who wanted to play God in our lives and be all too quick to tell us what we were doing wrong. The condemning corrections of others only served to smash us a little further into the ground. Condemnation didn't feel much better if it was dressed up as sarcastic humor.

Unfortunately we listened to these negative messages and our opinions of ourselves and our actions were influenced by them. There are few things more hurtful than being insulted by another in a judging way. The damage done to our thinking, emotions and actions from being condemned by others, can't be measured. However, being hurt by others doesn't always keep us from judging our fellows on occasion.

We sometimes see ourselves as the pointer-out of other people's faults. Jesus did not say "This new command I give to you to judge one another." He said to "love one another."

In Romans 2:1 the Lord speaks through Apostle Paul and says: ***"Judge not least you be judged, for at the point you judge another you stand condemned, for you do the very same things."*** There is a saying in "recovery circles" that reveals the same spiritual principle, "When we have one finger pointed at someone else, we have three fingers pointed back at ourselves."

When we see something out of order in another's life in a judging way, that means that we have a problem in the same area. We may not be actually acting it out, but the root problem is in our heart. "If you see it, put your name on it because it belongs to you."

This spiritual principle could work to our advantage and can really be used as great tool in our recovery. That's all we have to do is be aware of the things about others that bug us the most. The thing that upsets us most about other people, is probably the next defect in character we need to address in our own lives. This can help get us through denial in a particular area and speed our recovery process, if we are serious about getting better.

Does this mean that when we are healed and set free in a particular area we will no longer be able to see that problem in others? No, it doesn't mean that. It means that when we are set free, we are able to see defects in others with understanding and compassion instead of judgment.

Hearing what somebody else is complaining about, shows us what is going on with them deep down inside. The Lord would have us use this insight to understand others and to minister to them as opposed to using the information "against" them.

If we look for the negative in people around us, we will probably find something negative to dwell on. If we do this, we are only punishing ourselves by experiencing unkind thoughts. Moreover, if we look at others with a critical view, they will eventually know it through our attitude or subconscious body language if not by our direct words or actions. Then, they may respond to us in kind and we will reap the negative that we sow.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:3, ***"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brothers eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"***

Loving others unconditionally allows us to experience the good feeling that flows through viewing people through this perspective. If we do this, we will also receive the added bonus that rebounds to us when they know they are being loved and not judged.

OBEDIENCE - Many of us have spent most of our lives doing things our own way. "I did it my way," the old song goes. To some of us obedience to other people is a foreign concept. Except for a codependent kind of obedience, we lived in rebellion to any kind of authority.

God's word calls us to submit to every authority because all authority is established by Him. (Romans 13:1) This means that we are to obey the rules and people in our present circumstances. Those of us who have trouble trusting others need to see God as sovereign over all our circumstances. People in authority over us can't tell us anything to do except that which God allows them. In a sense this means that we are all working directly for God.

The key is that we are first and always obedient to the Lord. We need to assume that obeying people, rules and laws He puts over us is His will unless He directs us otherwise. His direction may come through Scripture or through speaking to us in another way.

There are times when people in authority over us will instruct contrary to God's will. Jesus' disciples were commanded not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. They responded, "***Judge for yourself whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.***" (Acts 4:19)

Somebody may ask us to lie, cheat, steal or do something else that's immoral. It's easy to discern that this is contrary to what the Lord would have us do. However, we may be asked to do a "good" thing when the Lord is leading us to do another thing. Who are we to obey?

There are people who have no real authority over us who may attempt to give us instruction against God's will. We want to cooperate with others, but not at the expense of violating God's will. We don't want to control others and we shouldn't enable others in their codependent attempts to control us.

No matter how good some activity looks, if it is different from what the Lord would have us do at the moment - it is sin. No matter how kind, loving, helpful, generous or compassionate, if it is contrary to what the Lord is leading us to do, it is still wrong. That doesn't mean that we sit around and do nothing for fear that it is sin. We do the good that is before us unless the Lord leads us in another direction.

The bottom line (and the top line for that matter) is that we are called to be obedient to the person of Jesus Christ. Eventually, even in religious circles we will face some leader, minister, doctrine, theology or even our own interpretation of Scripture that will fail us. God doesn't want us to place our obedience to these things or people above our obedience to Him.

God will never fail and His word will never fail. However, even the most spiritual Christian leader is subject to error in understanding the things of God. "***Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.***" (Proverbs 3:5-6)

There are many systems and tools that we use to help us in our relationship with the Lord and live the victorious Christian life. We are not called to worship tools and systems. Rather, we are called to focus and be obedient to Jesus Himself.

He calls us to walk humbly, surrendered, yielded, abiding and depending on Him for each step we take. This seems like an impossible task. The truth is that trying to achieve happiness by carrying out our own plan and in our own strength proved to be an impossible burden.

Yielding to the Lord and allowing His love and strength to flow through us and enable us to carry out His perfect plan for our lives is the easier and softer way. "***To love God is to obey His commands and His commands are not burdensome.***" (1 John 5:3)

PAIN - Those of us in recovery are familiar with pain. It is one of the foundations that got us into our addictions in the beginning. There was something that was going on that was too painful to endure and we escaped the pain through some coping mechanism. That's understandable.

The problem is that our childhood coping mechanisms usually become our adult addictions or other life controlling problems. We experienced so much pain that we reached our limit and at that point began a way of living that was bent on avoiding pain.

Life is not meant to be without pain. Maybe it was before the fall in the garden. However, it clearly became a part of the life of every human being after the fall. Pain has an appropriate place in our lives and we shouldn't be so quick to avoid or medicate pain without asking "What is this pain intending to teach me"?

When we have taken a wrong path in our life, increased pain as a result of going in that direction could save us from serious disaster. In this sense pain is our friend. It can be an indicator that keeps us from greater harm.

The pain from an ulcer may be indicating there is something out of order and that we need to consider approaching life from a different angle. If there was no pain to indicate that there was something wrong, the thing that is wrong would continue to do its damage without our being warned.

There is also the kind of pain that comes from loss. It may be the death or some other kind of separation from a loved one or family member. It may be the death of some vision, hope or dream. It could even be the loss of some important material possession. Loss is painful and maybe the only thing worse is never having anything to lose.

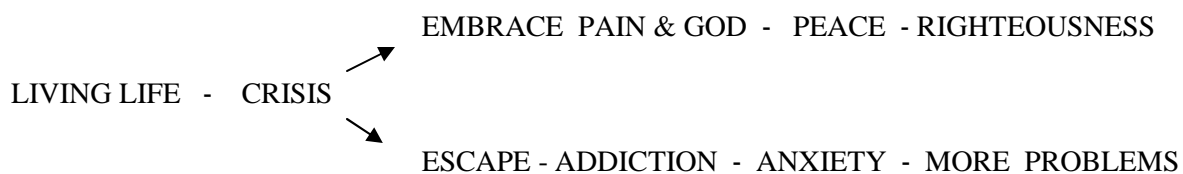
When we leave this world to go home to be with Jesus forever, we will leave it all behind. It will all be lost except for those things that were done in the Spirit that will somehow live on into eternity. The pain of loss is obviously a part of life because as Scripture puts it, "It is appointed once for every man to die."

Then there is the kind of pain that seems senseless that comes from others into our lives from no seeming provocation. The kind of pain that comes from being a victim. This kind of pain seems unfair and unjust and of no apparent sense. However it is mostly this kind of pain that seems to break our hearts with tenderness and compassion toward others and equips us for ministry to others who experience disappointment and pain.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "***As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.***" This is really a promise of God. When other people rub us the wrong way and inflict pain on our lives, He is going to use it to mold us into the people he would have us become. His promise in Romans 8:28 is abundantly clear that, "All things work together for good of those who love God."

Pain will make our life better or worse depending how we respond. We can avoid the pain, escape into some kind of addiction and reap the destruction from such a choice. Resisting pain causes more pain. Escaping into some kind of addictive behavior doesn't solve a problem - it creates more problems

We can choose to embrace the pain and depend on the Lord to give us strength to endure and use it for positive discipline. "***No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on however, it produces a harvest of peace and righteousness for those who have been trained by it.***" (Hebrews 12:11) In recovery, we learn to embrace the pain of present circumstance rather than run away. We even learn how to deal with the painful past - be healed and put it truly behind us.



PEACE - It was beyond our hope that we would someday come to the point where we would achieve freedom from anxiety and enter into a state of well being. Most of our lives were spent in one form of chaos or another.

Sitting in a park and enjoying the beauty of God's creation was a concept foreign to our lives. We could be in the most beautiful circumstances conducive to spending a still and reflective moment and peace would always elude us. We weren't able to enjoy these times as our minds raced, analyzed and searched for that something that was missing in our lives.

We wondered how other people could just sit around and do nothing more than enjoy each other's company or enjoy the solitude of being alone. We weren't able to enjoy anything and we were half convinced that others were just pretending.

If we did happen to be alone, we would probably feel lonely and feel rejected. We would often have this feeling that we were missing out on something and we needed to hurry up and search for that somebody or something that was missing. Life was a compulsive and obsessive search to fill the emptiness and to find that person, place or thing that would make us feel better.

When we were around other people, even in a large crowd, we felt we were disconnected and still alone. We felt different and we didn't fit in with the others. We felt like we were in the wrong place wherever we went and we were eager to find the place where we truly belonged.

It was us against the world. We couldn't let our guard down for a minute and relax. We were always putting on an act and pretending to be normal and never quite feeling like we were. It seemed we were always under pressure to perform. We feared that if we didn't perform well, others might find out who we really were and wouldn't like us.

As we progressed in recovery, we quit controlling our own lives or letting other people be in control. We learned how to trust God and surrender to His control. As we began to get a grasp of who God was and how wonderful His plan was for our lives, we were able to breathe easier.

We came to believe that if we were yielded to the Lord, we were doing the best and most significant thing we could be doing - that He was "ordering our steps." We no longer had to fear or be anxious that we would miss out on some great opportunity that would give us the key to happiness because we found the key to happiness.

Peace is knowing that God's plan is for our highest good. Peace is accepting that everything the Lord puts before us on a daily basis will work out for our benefit. Peace is resting in the comfort that the Lord is coordinating all the circumstances in our lives to reach an expected goal. A part of that goal is to reign and rule with Him and be with Him forever in heaven.

Peace is knowing that the Lord is all loving, all present, all powerful and has unlimited resources and that He is on our side. Peace is knowing the Lord won't spare anything that is needed to accomplish His purpose in our lives. Peace is surrendering control and entering into His rest.

Peace is knowing that even in the midst of tragedy and adversity the Lord is sovereign over all circumstances. He is quite capable of turning the worst nightmare into a beautiful dream. That is His heart's desire toward us, His children.

Peace is not some commodity the Lord hands us to possess like some piece of property. Peace is more than a feeling, it is experiencing the very person of Jesus Christ. Peace is the presence and life of the Lord doing His work in us and through us. The Lord desires us to have the "***peace that passes all understanding.***" (Philippians 4:7) God doesn't give us a "thing" called peace. He gives us Jesus Christ who is our peace.

PERFECTIONISM - We would probably be looking for a very good doctor if we were about to have a complicated and dangerous operation. We would look for a doctor who had a reputation for precision surgery. And, rightly so. There are some things that must be done right and exact.

When we talk about perfectionism in the context of recovery, we are not speaking about a healthy striving for excellence. Rather, we are talking about a compulsive drive that steals our peace and joy.

If we became victims of a system that always withheld approval, demanded that we do better and punished us for not measuring up, we probably lean toward perfectionism. After many years of this kind of conditioning, it isn't necessary for others to put pressure on us to be perfect.

We end up being programmed to put pressure on ourselves. We are driven to be perfect.

As perfectionists, when we fall short of the goal or some project, (and we always do) we beat ourselves up for not doing better. We withhold approval from ourselves and maybe we mull our performance over in our mind, anxiously thinking what we could have said or done a little better.

In this mode, we are never satisfied and never at peace. We are always plotting and planning how to do better. The perfectionist will lose sleep thinking about what could have been done better or how the next project can be perfectly executed. We are never able to rest. When we do physically rest, our minds are probably churning as how to be more perfect. Self is the focus.

Perfectionists are not pleasant people to be around. When we are operating in a perfectionist mode, we are miserable and tend to make others miserable as well. We tend to be critical and demanding of those we encounter. We look for the flaws in them that we look for in ourselves, knit-picking everything and everybody that crosses our path.

Perfectionists are wrapped pretty tight and there is always a tension in wondering when we are going to unravel. Perfectionists are intense and rigid people. Those around us can feel and even see our tension in our body language.

This perfection problem often takes two tracks. The first, as mentioned above is a drivenness to be perfect or perform perfectly. The second track is just giving up. This happens at the point of exasperation and it goes something like, "I have to admit that I really can't measure up. So, I might as well not even try." Then we simply refuse to do things we should be doing for our own good because we can't do them "perfectly."

The Bible cautions parents "***do not exasperate your children.***" (Ephesians 6:4) That is do not be too demanding as to cause them to give up. The problem is that we started to be too demanding on ourselves somewhere along the line.

Maybe we need to adopt a slogan in at least some areas of our lives "DARE TO BE MEDIUM." There will always be things that we can't do perfectly. There will also be many things that we can't do very well that we will still have to accomplish as a part of God's plan for our lives.

It is not God's will for us that we be overburdened through excess demands from others or from ourselves. "***All ye who are burdened and heavy laden, come unto me and I will give you rest.***" (Matthew 11:28) Again in Hebrews 4:11, God commands us to enter into His rest.

We need to rest from beating ourselves up and demanding too much. We are playing God if we expect more from ourselves than He does. God is more concerned about our relationship with Him than our performance. If we totally yield to Him, He will perform through us. That performance may look substandard to the world, but God will perfectly accomplish his purposes.

PRIDE - Pride is the main root of all that's wrong with mankind and probably with us as individuals. Original sin in the garden of Eden had its root in pride when Satan tempted Eve with the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that God had forbidden. Man wasn't satisfied with depending on God for wisdom, but wanted to have independent knowledge in an attempt to be important apart from God and to be their own god.

This didn't start when Eve, and subsequently Adam, sinned in the garden of Eden. Satan wouldn't have been there if his own pride hadn't previously gotten out of hand. He wanted to be "like God" and opposed God in carrying out his ambition. Satan thought of himself higher than he ought. Harboring prideful thoughts was the first sin and carrying out those thoughts was the second.

When Satan bought into pride, he fell and was cast down and apart from God and so were all of Satan's followers, referred to as "fallen angels." Adam and Eve also fell when they embraced pride and they were separated from a right relationship with God. The rest of mankind are descendents of Adam and born fallen and in need of restoration.

Therefore, we all came into this world messed up. Some think it's unfair that we have to pay the price for what Adam and Eve did in the garden. That thinking in itself is pride, thinking that we are better than they were and somehow we would have acted more nobly. God wasn't surprised by all of this falling. He knew in advance that it was going to happen and He provided a path of redemption that allows all of us to individually enter into a personal relationship with Him.

However, God doesn't force us to enter into relationship and to love Him. Isn't it pride that keeps us from falling on our knees to worship Him and totally submit to His Lordship?

As addictive and dysfunctional people, we usually have an enormous problem in this pride area and often think of ourselves more highly than we ought. It's been said that addictive people are "egomaniacs with an inferiority problem." Arrogance, ego and pride get us into big trouble when they are in control of our lives.

As soon as we start to get prideful, we commence to move away from totally depending on God and begin to move away from closeness of fellowship with Him. At the point we get puffed-up and think "I'm really great," "I can handle this" or "I'm pretty good at this," we are in trouble. The kind of pride that allows us to think that we have some independent formula of successful recovery is also dangerous and will also cause problems. "Pride goes before a fall."

We are being our own gods to the extent that we are being prideful. Scripture says "place no confidence in the flesh." If we get too confident in some area, it's like challenging God and putting up a wall between Him and us. It persuades God to touch that very area of pride to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

If we are really placing our confidence in our own ability to perform well in our job, we will probably have problems in our career. God wants a close relationship with Him as the basis of meaning in our life. Pride about looks, health, speaking, relationships, religion or just about anything can exalt itself against our relationship with God.

This doesn't mean that we should be walking around feeling like a piece of junk and telling everybody how worthless we are all the time. This could be pride of a perverse kind because it is still centered on self. God simply wants our confidence to be in Him and for us to humbly walk with Him and depend on Him in everything that we do.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) This is not an arrogant statement by Apostle Paul - it places confidence in Jesus where it belongs, not self.

PROBLEMS - Some of us had the idea that there wouldn't be any more trouble after getting into recovery and becoming a Christian. It was to be just like a story book - smooth sailing down the green highway of life, or galloping off into the sunset if you prefer a Western. Wrong! *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."* (1 Peter 4:12)

Jesus said "In the world there will be tribulation." The Lord makes it clear that there will be problems and we should not be surprised when they come. Most of us have experienced many problems in recovery. So, where is the difference? One big difference is that we are not alone in our problems. Jesus is walking with us in our difficulty through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another big difference is that the Lord turns our problems into our advantage. *"All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28) If God's Word is true this means that He is going to turn every negative that comes into our lives into a positive. Almost too good to believe!

This means that we don't have to be discouraged when problems come. We can rejoice in every problem, trial, trouble and affliction, because God promises to turn these things around to our benefit. He will use them to change us even more into the image of His Son and bring us closer to Him. Praise the Lord!

When we look at our troubles from God's perspective, we can see that He only allows good into our lives. However, some of that good is heavily disguised. The very circumstances that we complain about are designed by the Lord to bring about His plan for our improvement.

Looking at problems from this angle, we have to admit that we have often grumbled about the vehicles God provided to transport us to a better place. The problem is that we look at the vehicle as a permanent dwelling place instead of a stepping stone. An auto, plane or train is not as comfortable as our living room, but they get us to where we need to go.

The circumstances that the Lord providentially works out in our lives also get us where we need to go. The problem is that they don't have us where we want to be or get us where we want to go. Then again our best plans got most of us into much trouble and it may be time to try another approach. Problems will either make us bitter or better depending how we respond.

We learn in recovery that we don't have to make a god out of our circumstances. Our circumstances don't have to control what we think, what we feel or how we act. If our car breaks down, we don't have to break down. We don't have to get all upset, angry and depressed. We can but we don't have to. We can choose to focus on God and consider the good He is capable of producing. Then, we can rejoice in our circumstances when trouble comes.

Let's say that the car does break down. There are certain things we are going to have to do to get it fixed. God will even provide a way where there is no way. We can focus on God's promise of provision and be happy. We can be miserable by focusing on our problems and our own ability to solve them.

We may be surprised when adverse circumstances come. God is not surprised. He sees the end from the beginning. He has already provided a way for this to be transformed into the good He intended by allowing it or by ordering it into our lives in the first place.

It doesn't take much spiritual maturity or character to rejoice when everything is great. The real test is if we are able to be OK when things around us are not. *"I am greatly encouraged; in all of our troubles my joy knows no bounds."* (2 Corinthians 7:4)

REJECTION - Rejection is a killer! We are hard pressed to find something more painful than rejection in the emotional arena. Rejection is the perception of somebody saying to us in word or deed, "You're no good, you don't measure up, and you're not wanted."

If we hear these messages enough coming from family, friends, society, school or even church, we will eventually believe them. We will even start telling the same messages to ourselves. It is at this point that we become self destructive. That self destruction may be very direct as suicide or it may be more subtle like escaping into some addiction to escape the pain of rejection.

There are a couple kinds of rejection. There is direct or overt rejection which is pretty obvious. We come home from school and our bags are packed on the front porch with a note from mom and dad saying, "You don't live here any more." Or, we may be insulted and told that we are "no good" or I don't like (love) you anymore." These are very hurtful and causes a serious problem. In these cases, we at least know what the problem is and where it comes from.

Covert rejection is much more subtle and we may not know we have suffered rejection on a conscious level. Whether we are conscious of the rejection doesn't make much difference. It still does its damage. Mom and dad may get a divorce. The children don't reason, "They weren't able to get along therefore dad had to leave." The perception may be more like, "Dad left me. I must not be important or lovable enough to make him stay." The reality may be that dad loves us very much. However, the pain of rejection and subsequent damage in our lives will be probably measured by what we sense or perceive as opposed to what is really true.

In the category of covert rejection, over-protection and lack of discipline can be both insidious and damaging. Over-protection is where others are being excessively kind to us and doing things for us that we should be doing for ourselves. The insidious part is that we don't know that we have been rejected because the overprotection looks so kind. Overprotection rejects us as human beings and leaves us unable to do things for ourselves that we should have learned to do. We are unable to accept life on life's terms.

If we went through life with somebody waiting on us hand and foot, we might be happy about that at the time. However, when we are on our own and are unable to accomplish everyday tasks or struck by fear over doing the simplest of things, it is a different story.

Even animals teach their young what they need to know to get along in life. A lion will teach the cub to hunt. The cub will grow to be independent and take care of itself. Over-protection, keeps us dependent, and that may be the underlying motive for the person who does it.

Another form of subtle rejection is lack of discipline. This says that you can do what ever you want to do and don't worry, nobody will say anything to you - "do your own thing." At first glance this seems wonderful and provides much so called freedom. After a while one might wonder, "The reason they let me do my thing is because they are so busy doing their thing and they have no time for me."

If authority figures in our lives didn't spend the time necessary to teach us discipline, then we will probably be rebellious toward authority and know very little self discipline. We will end up doing what feels good instead of what is good for us. This kind of rejection may be subtle but like other forms of rejection, it still leaves us feeling worthless and unable to fit in. Feeling worthless will eventually lead to hopelessness, despair, addiction, and the end of the road.

Rejection > Pain > Isolation > Self-centeredness > Addiction > Reject Others

Praise the Lord that being accepted as a child of God in Christ, heals the wounds of a lifetime of rejection by mere human beings! God calls us His children (John 1:12).

RELATIONSHIPS - We also need to learn how to get along with others after we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. It was very difficult for most of us to humble ourselves, surrender and get into a right relationship with the Lord.

Our pride and ego get in the way of our relationship with very God Himself. How much more will they be stumbling blocks in our relationships with our equals? One of the most difficult things we need to learn is how to get along with our Father's other children.

The Lord has provided an exact place for each one of us, but we struggle out of envy to take another's place. Picture a group of ten people in a room with ten chairs numbered one through ten. Imagine the chaos that would follow if everybody insisted on sitting in the same chair. God's word says there is "unity in Christ." This means that if we are doing things in God's way and in God's time, there won't be a conflict because God is not divided or confused. He has not fallen asleep and forgotten to provide a place for us to be.

The conflict started with Adam and Eve. They fell from a right relationship with God and one another and became their own gods. When confronted by God, Adam blamed God and Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. This was a far cry from them walking together in perfect harmony before the Lord.

Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain and Able in their fallen condition. Cain killed Able over sibling jealousy. In this tarnished state, people have been hurting one another ever since. Being self-centered is the problem - everybody doing their own thing.

There would have been no hope in getting along with others if God let things stay this way. However, God provided a way for us to be redeemed back into a right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. As we yield to Him, the very life of Christ flows through us and enables us to get along with others.

When a new friend or associate comes into our lives we tend to see the similarities and focus on the things we have in common. As the relationship progresses, we see the differences. After a while we see the differences as faults, and we eventually see ourselves as being the one "chosen" to correct their faults. This is a very dangerous stage in any relationship.

Similarities > Differences > Faults > Corrector of Faults > Celebrate Differences

Relationships are out of order when we try to shape others into what we think they should be. Getting along with others may be the most difficult thing we have to learn in recovery. It takes a measure of unconditional love. It means accepting others the way they are and not trying to twist them into some mold that we have created.

Getting along with others requires keeping "short accounts" and remembering they are human beings. They are also prone to mistakes. It means being slow to take offense and being quick to forgive and to learn how to confront unacceptable behavior in a loving way.

Wouldn't the world be a boring place if everybody was just like us? We need to learn how to appreciate and celebrate the differences in other people. We need to identify with God's interests in them and not our own ideas. If we are totally surrendered to Jesus we are more than able to get along, we are able to "*love one another*" (John 15:12) as He commanded us to do.

RELIGION DOESN'T WORK - Some preachers use the catchy phrase these days that, "We are not here to play church." In this context, we say that religion alone doesn't work in solving our life-long problems. This is not meant in any way to insult the local church or any denomination.

What is clearly meant is that just showing up and being involved in some religious activity, is a far cry from what the Lord expects. Just going through the motions on the outside doesn't set us free from bondage and bring healing and victory to our lives.

Many of us were exposed to church activities in our childhood or even as adults. Going to church and doing the things we were told to do may have been a pleasant experience. However, this alone did not heal our wounds or reverse what was a destructive life style.

The thing that may have been missing for us was a personal relationship with God. Some individual churches are alive with the presence of the Lord. That is obvious to almost all who participate. Others could be so dead that it might cause you to wonder if any of the people there, including the pastor, had a real personal relationship with the Lord.

The same is true with us as individuals. Just because we are going through the motions, that doesn't mean that we are in true communion with the Lord. That's a job that starts on the inside and moves outward.

It is possible to read books about a famous person and not know that person personally. The same is true with religious activities, including reading the Bible. It is possible to be a Bible scholar and not really know God. Someone could graduate from a Christian seminary and not truly be in a saving relationship with Jesus.

A news reporter was held captive for many years by terrorists in another country. When he was released a couple of years ago he said something like, "I read the Bible over fifty times and the stories were a great comfort to me. However, I didn't have an other-world-experience." This guy spent thousands of hours reading about the Lord. He never met Jesus personally. How sad!

Religion doesn't save, heal, change or bring deliverance - God does! If we are only pretending as we engage in religious activities, that may be of some comfort and give us the warm fuzzies. But, it won't bring new life, healing, or have any eternal significance.

Jesus is speaking and says, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40) Here Jesus is accusing people of paying great attention to the literal word while they ignore Him - the Living Word.

This same thing is going on today. We forget God himself as we scurry around and busy ourselves with many "good works." Rather, they should be called "works that look good." True good works are those that are born of the Spirit. They are those things that we do with God, not those things we do for God. We are called to yield to the Lord that He may live through us. If we get this backward and try to perform for His acceptance, it will probably do more harm than good.

It's a responsibility and a blessing for us to be involved with a local church. What a joy and encouragement it is to have fellowship with other believers. It is also a great blessing to be used by the Lord in ministering to others. That is a big part of God's eternal plan for us that starts right now - He wants us to participate with Him in what he is doing. His plan is that we reign and rule with Him forever, and the present is the beginning of forever. Helping others or tending to our own healing must be born of faith if we expect real victory!

SEXUAL ADDICTION - Other than our instinct to survive and our need for love, the sexual area is probably the most intense and powerful drive in our lives. It is also an area where we tend to be out of balance as addictive people.

If it's true that as addictive people we are in danger of forming a habit of anything that makes us feel good or keeps us from feeling bad, then sex must be an issue of special caution. Sex is about the most fun that we can have in the pleasure department. This is something that the Lord meant for us to enjoy in its proper place.

However, it's an understatement to say addictive people over-do a good thing. Extracting more pleasure out of life than we are entitled to is at the very core of what's wrong with us. Maybe we feel the world isn't very good to us so we will be very accommodating to ourselves.

If we are serious about our recovery as Christians, it doesn't take long before we are convicted that acting out sexually with others is wrong. We learn that sex was designed to be enjoyed in a marriage relationship. We come to understand that sex relations outside of God's design, is destructive and downright dangerous.

However, not acting out with others does not mean that we are walking in victory in this area. Many people in recovery struggle with being sexual in the area of lust, obsession, fantasy, pornography and masturbation. We deceive ourselves that it is harming nobody. We tend to be in denial about how much time we spend at pursuing these areas.

Pornography can be disguised as a seemingly innocent TV program or magazine or a passerby that causes us to obsess about being "with" the people we see. Our lust may be disguised as romantic designs about others that we spend endless hours plotting in the back of our minds.

These things can control our lives without our conscious awareness. Sexuality can influence where we drive, play, shop and what aisle we walk down in the grocery store and what pew we sit in during church service. It can influence almost every area of our lives. The wrongful pursuit of vicarious pleasure can drain us of an abundance of energy as well as time.

It's easy to slip into sexual addiction. We are being sexual when we are consciously or sub-consciously spending time or energy pursuing sexual matters. This could mean something as simple as endlessly changing TV channels looking for that toxic image to "just look" at awhile. It could mean endless hours driving around looking for that special somebody or going to great lengths to arrange our social activities to be near a special somebody.

Being sexual may mean being directly addicted to pornography or masturbation and always looking for an opportunity to find a release for the build up of sexual pressure. Release doesn't come. The more these activities are engaged in, the more desire there is to do more. At some point we have to admit that we aren't just doing these things - they are controlling us.

Some people think that sexual pressure builds up from not having sex. That is a distortion. Sexual pressure builds up from being sexual. Abstinence from having sex is not necessarily victory or abstinence from being sexual.

Some Christians argue that masturbation is not a sin. It definitely is if it is controlling our lives and interfering with our relationship with the Lord or if it involves lust or pornography.

God does love us exactly as we are but He wants to change us. We don't become perfect before He loves us or even before He ministers through us. He covers with His grace what is out of order as long as we are walking toward Him and trusting Him to bring deliverance and healing. This problem probably will not go away by itself. It must be specifically addressed in recovery.

SEX - HOMOSEXUALITY - This area of sexuality is grossly misunderstood. The Christian community has woefully failed to address this area in an effective manner and minister to those who have problems with homosexuality.

Unfortunately, the approach to those caught up in homosexuality has been one of judgment and condemnation. We have failed to adequately deliver the pure Gospel to the "Gay and Lesbian" community in a language they can understand.

Often the person caught up in homosexuality hears an abundance of criticism with no offer of practical spiritual help or explanation of how to change. Gays don't really need to hear how bad they are, they have lived with the concept of being condemned for who they are most of their lives.

Like other people, Gays don't delineate who they are from what they do. The thought process may go something like, "I have those feelings, therefore I must be gay. Others hate me because I am gay and I don't even like myself. In addition, I can't stand the deceit of pretending to be something I am not. I might as well be honest about who I am. I am accepted by the gay culture and rejected by straight society. I might as well embrace the gay community because they accept me."

We fail to make a distinction between what we do, what we feel, and who we really are. God didn't make Adam and Jimmy. He created Adam and Eve. If there is something wrong with our lives, we tend to accept that for being what or who we are. The truth is that we all come into this world as damaged people and different from the way God truly created us.

Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, we have all been born into sin and in need of the Savior. Some lives look better than others from the viewpoint of the world. However, not one of us is perfect and able to enter into eternal life except for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. He paid the price for us all. "There is no one righteous, not even one." (Romans 3:10)

We can sit around and argue whose sin is more socially acceptable than another. Apart from God's grace and mercy, the smallest problem would be enough to buy any of us a ticket to eternal darkness. On the basis of our best performance, on our best day, not one of us is capable of saving or changing ourselves. If we were, that could only produce self-righteousness, which the Bible calls "filthy rags." God is the one who does the healing, changing and saving. The key to victory in the area of homosexuality is not simply to stop acting out sexually. That is the way the world responds to sin, and that is a shallow and temporal victory. This method just takes care of the outside.

The Lord has provided a way for our healing and that is to enter into a personal relationship with Him and totally yield to His control. That means we come to Him exactly the way we are. He then covers with His grace those things that are out of order and will enable us to have true fellowship with Him. Then, He changes us into the people we would like to become. He may first change our desires to coincide with His desires.

A spiritual program of recovery has proven to be effective recovery from homosexuality, but that doesn't start by bombarding the gay community with how bad they are. They have probably heard enough of that already, and that approach hasn't worked. It hasn't worked in approaching any other addictions either.

Homosexuality may have been imposed in a person's life through molestation or some other form of victimization. The Bible also talks about generational sin: "Children are afflicted to the third and fourth generation as a result of the sins of their forefathers." There may have been social pressures to push a person in this direction. Whatever pushes us in a harmful direction, may or may not be understood. Like alcohol or drugs -- we eventually yield to it and it becomes a willing part of our lives.

Individuals in the gay community need to hear the depth and breadth of God's love available to each and every one. Jesus Christ will embrace us with His love - Just the way we are. We don't get good and go to God. We go just the way we are, and with the willingness for Him to deal with our lives as He sees fit. The willingness is our part. The changing is His part. There is no problem that is beyond God's ability to fix and no affliction beyond His healing - No bondage or sin beyond His deliverance and forgiveness.

.SHAME - Shame leans more toward thoughts and feelings about who we are as opposed to guilt that is feeling bad about what we did. Shame is pointed to by many as a root cause in the addictive process. It may or may not be the very cause but it is a strong factor.

Shame can be created by life controlling negative messages through circumstances or by what another person says or does. Let's say that little Johnny is caught lying and is confronted by mom and dad with, "You lied and we are not going to tolerate lying around here." Johnny feels bad about what he did and resolves not to repeat his actions.

Let's say that mom and dad use a different message like "You lied and that makes you a liar and we are not going to tolerate liars around here." This is much different because Johnny is being told who he is instead of being rebuked for what he did. Maybe the message he hears is one that is a familiar life controlling message for us addictive people, "You are no good and you are not wanted."

If there is enough reinforcement of negative messages in our lives, we will eventually believe them as if they were true. Moreover, our thoughts, feeling and actions will probably line up with what we believe is true about us and the results are disastrous. Shame is often followed by being rejected by others and ends in us rejecting ourselves and becoming self-destructive. We knowingly or unknowingly make poor choices for our lives when we reject ourselves. These poor choices serve to reinforce the shame cycle.

We can alleviate our guilt by changing what we do. How do we change who we are or our perception of who we are? Shame may not be based on fact but on false beliefs about us through people or circumstances. Let's say mom and dad split up and the child thinks, "Dad left because of me and he doesn't love me and I'm not worthy of being loved." What is needed here is to replace the wrong ideas with the truth.

Maybe our own actions have convinced us that we are no good and we act out who we think we are instead of who God created us to be. What is needed is to replace the lies with God's truth of who we really are as children of God in Christ. The Lord changes who we are, then what we do.

The beginning of healing shame is getting in touch with the pain - being willing to take a look at some ugly and hurtful things in the past and work through them. Healing begins by being honest with ourselves and facing the reality of what happened, what was said and how it affected us.

Healing begins when we start to make a distinction between false perceptions of what happened, about who we are and what really is the truth. It is very difficult to embrace the truth without first admitting what is not true.

Breaking through denial and becoming willing to be honest with ourselves about a matter does not mean that we are somehow expected to heal and change ourselves. That would be just more self-centeredness. Healing continues when we turn the matter over to the Lord and His loving care, with a sense of faith that He can and will handle it.

More healing takes place when we are able to forgive the people who harmed us through what they said, did or failed to do. We need to be willing to let go of our bitterness from the past. If we don't let go, our past will not be our past - it will still bother us in the present.

We need to receive God's love, grace, mercy and forgiveness if we are to receive the fullness of God's healing in this area of shame. It is not somehow holy to punish ourselves for what God has already forgiven. It grieves the heart of God for us to refuse to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with Him. He created us worthy objects of His love.

TRUST - Those of us who came from a background of abuse will have a hard time trusting other people. We tend to see our present circumstances through the hurts of our past. And, we have a difficult time being intimate with people.

The intimacy we are talking about in this context means a transparent, vulnerable, close and personal relationship. It does not necessarily mean sexual or physical contact of any kind. However, those of us who have difficulty trusting, will often reflect that in our body language by keeping our physical distance as well as emotional distance.

It almost goes without saying that if we don't trust people that we do see, it will be difficult to trust God who we don't physically see. Also, we tend to view God and form our opinion about Him based on how we were treated by our parents and other authority figures.

If we were abused, abandoned or rejected by our parents, God may be seen as punishing, rejecting or unreliable. Now we are seemingly in an impossible situation. We don't trust God because we don't trust people and we can't change and trust people because we don't trust God.

It takes a special measure of unconditional love to get untrusting people to take the risk and trust again. We have to consistently be there for them without violating their territory and scaring them off. We need to be helpful at their point of need without crowding them.

It takes time to earn the trust of others. It's going to take some time for us to learn how to trust. However, we must start. The alternative is to live our lives in isolation and loneliness as we continue to put up walls between ourselves and others. That perpetuates a rather empty life.

First we need to trust that people will be human and not place unreal expectations on them. To put people up on a pedestal is to set ourselves up for disappointment when reality prevails.

We also need to quit playing the victim and inviting others to betray us. Then, we feel mortally wounded when they do and get some vicarious satisfaction out of dwelling in that betrayal. We no longer need to walk around with VICTIM written across our foreheads in large bold letters.

This means setting up reasonable boundaries in our lives. Bounds that say that you can go so far but I do not give you permission to abuse me. We need to set and enforce those boundaries with love.

It is difficult to trust the unknown. We can learn to trust the Lord by reading His word more to dispel the myths we learned through distorted teaching.

Mostly, we need to let the Lord reveal Himself to us directly and have the Holy Spirit teach us the truth and allow Jesus to embrace us with His love. God goes to extraordinary lengths to prove His unconditional love to people who have been abused or otherwise betrayed. We only need to be willing to understand what the Lord is eager to explain and prove.

Many of us were involved in exploiting relationships with friend and family before entering recovery. Therefore, it's somewhat normal for us to not trust others.

Being involved in a loving support group can go a long way toward learning how to trust other people and beginning to trust God. We get from the group what our family or friends were unable or unwilling to provide. When we experience the reality of others who are truly committed to our welfare and not what they can get from us, healing takes place. Through listening and observing, we begin to believe that God will do the good for us that He did for other people. ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*** (Proverbs 3:5)

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE - The concept of unconditional love was foreign to most of us when we first entered recovery. We were more used to the other kind - "conditional love." Conditional love is, "I will do something for you if you do something for me."

This is a distorted perspective of love. It's really not love at all. It's called trading or bartering. There isn't anything free here. It is a fee-for-service system. Many of us found ourselves in the kind of relationships where people didn't love us simply because we were worthy of being loved. Rather, it was for what they thought they could get out of it.

When people treated us this way, we felt a little victimized or maybe a lot. We felt we were being used and betrayed by those around us. Addictive and dysfunctional people have a tendency to use one another.

Some of us were not innocent victims. We did our share of using other people for our own purposes as well. A few of us treated other people like broken toys. When we were done with them, we threw them away as if they were no longer of any use. The same was done to us.

The addictive life is a self-centered life. Addictive people use other people to get their needs met like using drugs, alcohol, or other coping mechanisms. This doesn't make for very healthy or lasting relationships. And, the concept of genuine unconditional love eluded us.

Not experiencing sincere love in our interpersonal relationships with family, friends and associates that we do see, makes it difficult to understand the love that God talks about in the Bible. The word love doesn't even compute in our minds.

In recovery we find people around us who want to help us or at least they say they do. We have a hard time accepting their help for a number of reasons. We have our pride, ego and fear of intimacy to think about. We also wonder, "What's the catch? What do they want from me? There must be a hook in it some place."

The idea that somebody wants to help us without demanding something in return was pretty hard to swallow. We were afraid that we would be obligated and that a very high price would be demanded for the help we received. It seems that's the way it has always worked in the past and why shouldn't we expect the same results now?

We could now expect different results because most of the people we encounter in recovery were different. They were trying to live their lives according to a different set of principles. They wanted to do things for us, not take something from us. They wanted to get better and part of that meant helping others to get better and doing it without expecting payment of any kind.

This was all too good to be true. We took a chance and shared some of the bad things we did in our past. We fully expected that they would be turned off and want nothing to do with us. They didn't use the information against us. They loved us all the more. Then we tried to shock them with the really nasty stuff. That was only met with understanding, compassion and others admitting the same things. We finally had to admit that these people really loved us and it was not based on our behavior or what they could get out of the deal. They were on our side!

We found that's the way God's unconditional love is. His love is not based on our behavior or performance. Even when we do wrong He is on our side working things out for our best interest. His love for us is not based on what He can get from us. It is based on who He is and that He chose to make us objects of His love because of what He wants to give to us. His love could only be received as a free gift. We began to get a glimpse of what this love stuff was and came to believe that it could be a wonderful thing. This thing called love has great potential!

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM? - People are always asking where addiction or alcoholism comes from. There has never been any scientific proof that it is hereditary in the sense that it is passed on genetically from parents to children.

However, if one or more parents is alcoholic, it is likely that the children will have problems along this same line. What we are exposed to culturally does influence us, for better or worse.

Alcoholism is said to be a spiritual problem in addition to the emotional and physical aspects of the disease. One of the definitions of disease is to, "not be at ease."

Alcoholism easily fits the dictionary definition for disease. Many Christians are ready to argue that it is simply sin. If it were only sin, there would be no more problem if a person simply quit drinking or using whatever. This is not the case. Abstinence is not sobriety.

Addiction is a symptom of a greater underlying cause. Therefore if we take away the symptom, which is in this case is the active addiction, we still have the underlying emotional pain that is at the foundation of the problem.

One thing that we should be able to agree on is that drunkenness is a sin. There seems to be very little debate about that. The emotional pain and mental anguish that often encourages a person toward addiction might be defined more compassionately in other terms of disease or affliction.

When referring to the addictions of others, it may be more of grace and mercy to approach them on the basis of people with hurts in need of healing. Referring to addictive people as being bad people and sinners in need of getting good doesn't accomplish much.

The Bible says in many places that children are afflicted to the third and fourth generation as a result of the sins of their forefathers. Many believe that this is the Biblical explanation for how the propensity for addiction is passed on spiritually from one generation to another.

We know that since Adam and Eve we were all born into a fallen condition. Maybe some of us were more damaged than others as a result of what happened before we got here. However, it doesn't do any good to play the "blame game." Maybe others did help to get us messed up. If we stay messed up, we have nobody to blame except ourselves. If we continue to blame others, that is just unforgiveness by another name.

It says in Ezekiel 18:2 "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge'?" The time has come when we can no longer blame others. God has provided a way for us to be set free from these generational problems or any other kind of problem through Jesus Christ.

We know that addiction is a spiritual problem because it is a spiritual solution that promises a remedy. Being self-centered or in control of our own life is at the root of addiction. Recovery comes through applying spiritual principles and becoming more God-centered.

It's been said that there are no right answers to wrong questions. Dwelling on who is to blame, where does it come from, is it sin or is it disease, are not even the right questions. The real question is "How do we get rid of this GARBAGE?"

The truth is we don't have to understand the technical dynamics or the spiritual theory of how we became addictive people to recover from this problem of whatever name we happen to give it. We need simply to apply the spiritual principles as mandated by Scripture. We need to use the tools of recovery the Lord puts before us to help us toward the goal of being set free and changed into His image.

WILL OF GOD - We hear much about doing God's will now that we are in recovery and trying to live our lives according to spiritual principles. We found out some time ago that our will didn't work at all any more and it got us nothing but trouble when it appeared to work.

We came to believe that God's will was probably better than our own. Even if we weren't sure about this we didn't have much to lose and became willing to take a "chance" and try it out. Then the big question is, "What is God's will and how do we find it out on a continuous basis?"

Is God going to speak in a loud, booming and clear voice and give us detailed instructions on what to do. Probably not. He does care about even the tiniest details of our lives and He is quite capable of speaking in a loud voice. This does not seem to be how He leads His children on a regular basis. God doesn't do much leading of His people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night these days either.

We sometimes think of God as working and scheming to hide His will from us and making it as difficult as possible for us to find out what it is. This is far from the truth of course. What earthly father would withhold telling his child what was expected in general and specifically. Very few parents would make their children guess at what to do and smack them if they happened to guess wrong.

God wants us to know what His will is. He longs for us to walk with Him and carry out His perfect plan for our lives. He is on our side in this matter and goes to great lengths to communicate to us, His children. He has communicated much of His will for us through His Word, the Holy Scriptures, which did not come from man but originated from God Himself.

They do not give us all the specific day-to-day instruction we need. However, the Bible does give us much in general instruction how we are to live our lives. The Bible is like a letter from God to us. It goes to great lengths to tell us what to do and not to do. These are not rules and regulations to keep us from having fun. These instructions are more like a treasure map guiding us to the highest way of living. They show us where the detours are to keep us from falling into the ditch where we would crash and burn.

The most important thing in knowing God's will is having a willingness to do it. If we are sincere about doing God's will, He will lead us by His Spirit. Sometimes He may speak to us in a still small voice. This probably won't be an audible voice. It will most likely be a thought that is accompanied by a knowing that that thought was not our own and probably came from God.

God most often leads His people in gentle ways. He's a gentleman and doesn't jerk His kids around and force His will. He especially doesn't force His will on those who refuse to cooperate with it. When we refuse to cooperate, He leaves us to our own devices and allows us to reap the consequences of our own self will. This doesn't mean that He will allow us to thwart His plans or that He will utterly abandon us. He will even work out our disobedience for our eventual good if our hearts are toward Him.

Another important item in knowing God's will is our relationship with Him. Mostly, God's will is what happens to those who are rightly related to Him. He doesn't always tell us what His will is through direct or indirect communication a long time in advance. He knows we have short memories. Usually He communicates His will to us on an immediate basis by providentially working out the circumstances of our lives. He wants us to walk with Him and trust Him.

If we are holding His hand and walking close to Him we will not only know His will, we will BE His will. *"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)