



By: Richard Massman and
Tommy Tieche



Christ-Centered Workbook on Recovery And Coordinating Twelve-Step Meetings *Reaching Out to a Hurting World – Expanded Edition 2026*

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Recovery In Christ History

Recovery In Christ Ministries, Inc. (R.I.C.) began informally in 1985 when a handful of Christians who were attending traditional Twelve-Step groups met for coffee after a regular meeting. The Lord blessed that simple gathering with His presence in a special way. Genuine Christian fellowship and heartfelt prayer took place.



There was a shared desire to have a regular meeting where recovering people could freely talk about Jesus and discuss the Bible. Within a few weeks, the first meeting was scheduled. Only a couple of people attended — yet ministry and healing still took place. Since that humble beginning, hundreds of lives have been touched through 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 approved by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt ministry.

Mission Statement

Recovery In Christ Ministries exists to communicate the hope of recovery found in Jesus Christ, helping individuals break free from chemical dependency, codependency, other addictions, and the wounds of dysfunctional family systems.

We are committed to:

- **Leading people into a personal and saving relationship with Jesus Christ** and encouraging them to grow within a Christian church of their choice.
- **Equipping churches to establish Christ-centered recovery support groups** and fostering cooperation among recovery ministries.
- **Publishing and distributing biblical recovery materials** to individuals, leaders, and groups.
- **Providing Christ-centered, biblically based counseling** to those who are hurting.
- **Training lay Christians and ministry leaders** to effectively help those who are suffering.

Our mission is to be an instrument of God's healing, peace, and righteousness — offering hope, restoration, and freedom through the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

Please pray for this ministry — that the Lord directs all of its activities and uses it as an instrument of His healing, His peace, and His righteousness.

Core Values - These core values express the heart of our ministry and guide everything we do. They reflect our commitment to Christ, to truth, and to the healing of those who are hurting.

1. Christ at the Center - Jesus Christ is the foundation of all recovery. We believe true healing, freedom, and transformation come through a personal relationship with Him.

2. The Authority of Scripture - God's Word is our guide for life, recovery, and spiritual growth. Every principle we teach is rooted in Scripture.

3. Honesty and Transparency – Healing begins with truth. We value authenticity, confession, and the courage to face our struggles with humility and grace.

4. Love Without Judgment - We welcome all who are hurting. We offer acceptance, compassion, and encouragement — never condemnation.

5. Confidentiality and Safety - A safe environment is essential for recovery. What is shared in the group stays in the group. Every person deserves protection and respect.

6. Community and Accountability - We grow best together. Recovery is strengthened through fellowship, shared experience, and mutual support within the Body of Christ.

7. The Power of the Holy Spirit - We rely on the Holy Spirit to lead, convict, comfort, and transform. He is the true Counselor and the Leader of every meeting.

8. Service and Outreach - We freely share the hope we have received. Our mission is to reach the hurting, disciple believers, and equip churches to minister effectively.

9. Humility and Teachability - We remain open to correction, growth, and the ongoing work of God in our lives. No one has all the answers — we walk this journey together.

10. Integrity and Stewardship - We honor God by handling all ministry responsibilities with excellence, honesty, and accountability.

Vision Statement - *To see individuals, families, and churches transformed by the healing power of Jesus Christ as they embrace Christ-centered recovery, walk in truth, and grow into healthy, Spirit-led communities of faith.*

We envision:

- People set free from addiction, trauma, and life-controlling issues through the power of Christ
- Churches equipped to minister effectively to the still suffering
- Recovery groups rooted in Scripture, love, and the Holy Spirit
- A global network of believers reaching out to a broken world with hope, compassion, and truth
- Communities where transparency, accountability, and grace flourish
- A movement of disciples who carry the message of recovery into every sphere of life

Our vision is simple: **Jesus restores lives — and we want the world to know it.**

Introduction to Recovery In Christ Ministries

Recovery In Christ Ministries began with something simple — a few believers gathering after a Twelve Step meeting to talk about Jesus, pray together, and share their struggles with honesty and hope. There were no plans, no programs, and no expectations. Yet the Lord met them there. In that small circle of hurting people, Christ's presence brought comfort, healing, and the beginnings of a ministry that would reach far beyond anything they imagined.

From that humble beginning in 1985, Recovery In Christ Ministries has grown into a Christ-centered outreach dedicated to helping individuals, families, and churches experience the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We believe that recovery is not merely about breaking destructive patterns — it is about discovering the love of God, walking in truth, and becoming the people He created us to be. Healing happens where Christ is welcomed, where grace is practiced, and where broken people gather with open hearts.

These resources were created to support that sacred work. Whether you are reading this as someone seeking personal healing, as a leader guiding others, or as a believer wanting to grow in Christ, we welcome you. Each book in this series serves a unique purpose, yet all three share the same foundation: Jesus Christ at the center, Scripture as our guide, and the Holy Spirit as our Counselor.

The RIC Workbook (Reaching Out to a Hurting World) helps individuals explore biblical principles of recovery and apply them to daily life. **The Leadership Guide** equips leaders to shepherd Christ-centered recovery groups with wisdom, structure, and grace. **The Guide to Christ-Centered Traditions** strengthens the unity, safety, and spiritual health of groups by grounding them in principles that protect the heart of recovery.

Together, these resources form a unified pathway — a way for individuals and communities to grow in honesty, humility, accountability, and love. They are not meant to instruct from above, but to walk beside you. We write as fellow travelers, fellow strugglers, and fellow recipients of God's mercy.

Our prayer is simple: that through these pages, Jesus will draw you closer to Himself, restore what has been broken, deepen your fellowship with others, and lead you into the freedom only He can give. May the Lord bless your journey, strengthen your faith, and use your life as a testimony of His healing power.

Sincerely,

Recovery In Christ Ministries

How to Use These Resources Together

Recovery is a journey best walked with Christ at the center and with others by our side. The resources in this ministry series were created to work together as a unified pathway — supporting individuals, leaders, and groups as they grow in healing, truth, and spiritual maturity.

Each book serves a unique purpose, yet all three share the same foundation: Jesus Christ as our Healer, Scripture as our guide, and the Holy Spirit as our Counselor. Used together, they provide a balanced and comprehensive approach to Christ-centered recovery.

The ‘Reaching Out to a Hurting World’ (RIC Workbook) This book is designed for personal growth, group discussion, and ongoing spiritual formation. It explores key topics related to addiction, trauma, codependency, emotional health, and discipleship. Individuals can use it privately, and groups can use it as a weekly guide for reflection, sharing, and prayer.

The Leadership Guide This guide equips leaders, facilitators, and pastors to shepherd Christ-centered recovery groups with clarity, structure, and grace. It offers practical tools for leading meetings, supporting participants, and cultivating a safe, Spirit-led environment where healing can take place.

The Guide to Christ-Centered Traditions This devotional resource helps groups stay healthy, unified, and grounded in biblical principles. The Twelve Traditions provide a spiritual framework that protects the heart of recovery, strengthens community, and keeps Christ at the center of group life.

Using the Resources Together You may use these books individually or as a complete set. Many groups read from the Workbook during meetings, use the Leadership Guide for structure and support, and draw from the Traditions Guide to maintain unity and spiritual focus. Individuals may use the Workbook for personal growth while leaders use the other two resources to guide and strengthen their ministry.

However you choose to use them, our prayer is that these tools will help you grow in Christ, deepen your relationships with others, and experience the freedom and restoration that only Jesus can bring.

2026 Edition Preface

For Group Leaders, Facilitators, and Pastors

The 2026 edition of *Reaching Out to a Hurting World* represents the most comprehensive and prayerfully refined version of this resource to date. As Recovery In Christ Ministries continues to grow, so does our commitment to equip leaders with tools that are biblical, practical, and deeply rooted in the love of Jesus.

This expanded edition includes new topics, updated teachings, and clearer guidance for both newcomers and seasoned leaders. Every page has been shaped with one purpose: **to help you lead Christ-centered recovery meetings with confidence, compassion, and spiritual authority.**

To further support you in your ministry, we encourage all leaders to download two free companion resources available on our website:

1. Leadership Guide to Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery

A practical, easy-to-use guide that walks you through:

- How to lead meetings effectively
- How to maintain safety and structure
- How to handle difficult situations
- How to rely on the Holy Spirit as the true Leader

2. Christ-Centered Traditions

A deeper exploration of the Twelve Traditions from a biblical perspective, designed to help groups:

- Stay healthy
- Maintain unity
- Avoid common pitfalls
- Grow in love, humility, and purpose

Both resources are **free**, downloadable, and created to strengthen your ministry and support your calling.

As you lead, remember that you are not alone. The Holy Spirit is your guide, Jesus is your foundation, and this ministry stands with you. Thank you for your faithfulness, your compassion, and your willingness to reach out to a hurting world with the hope of Christ.

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,
over flowing 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!

Introduction to the 2026 Revision

Reaching Out to a Hurting World – Expanded Edition

This 2026 revision of *Reaching Out to a Hurting World* represents a significant step forward in the mission of Recovery In Christ Ministries. Over the years, countless lives have been touched, restored, and transformed through Christ-centered recovery. As the needs of hurting people continue to grow, so does our commitment to provide clear, biblical, practical tools that lead individuals into freedom through Jesus Christ.

This expanded edition reflects the fruit of prayer, collaboration, and a deep desire to strengthen the Body of Christ. Many new topics have been added, existing materials have been refined, and the overall structure has been strengthened to better serve support groups, leaders, churches, and individuals seeking healing. Every page has been shaped with one purpose in mind: to point people to the hope, truth, and transforming power of Jesus.

My prayer is that this updated workbook will continue to be a lifeline for those struggling with addiction, trauma, codependency, and the many wounds that life can bring. May it also be a resource that equips pastors, leaders, and lay servants to minister effectively to those in need.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this revision — through encouragement, feedback, prayer, and partnership. Together, we have created a tool that will help many find freedom, restoration, and a renewed walk with Christ.

Sincerely,

Tommy Tieche

Tommy Tieche

Director, Recovery In Christ Ministries, Inc.

Founder's Note - This book is intended to help establish and support Christ-centered recovery groups and to encourage Christians in the recovery process. The comments throughout these pages are written from the perspective of a fellow Christian in recovery. This is meant to be a plain-talking recovery tool — one that ministers to hurting people and equips pastors, ministers, and missionaries to help those in need.

Over four decades ago, I reached a point in my spiritual growth where I was finally able to totally surrender to the Lord. It was the end of a long road called “My Way.” In a powerful and decisive way, Jesus led me to become involved in Twelve-Step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

I was completely set free from alcohol and drugs the moment I fully yielded to the Lord. But that was only the beginning of my recovery, not the end. Addiction is often a symptom of deeper issues. My life was out of balance, out of order, and in desperate need of repair. I needed “a renewing of the mind.”

No price tag can be placed on the help I received through these Twelve-Step programs. Traditional religion and medical help had not worked for me, and a treatment program was not available when I entered recovery. I believed I was beyond hope and beyond help — and many others would have agreed.

I had tried nearly everything the world had to offer in my search for happiness and peace. Nothing worked, and suicide became an option. When pain is deep enough for long enough, a person will consider anything. I attempted to take my own life several times before entering recovery. In my eyes, there was no hope at all.

To my amazement, the recovery process worked. Simply being “OK” felt like a miracle. But I became more than OK — I began to feel good and enjoy life. I realized that if there was hope for me, there is hope for anyone.

I am deeply grateful to the regular Twelve-Step groups for the invaluable help they provided. The unconditional love and acceptance I received from the people in those meetings cannot be measured.

I am grateful for the Twelve Steps first introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous. These steps came from the Lord Himself, and millions have been healed through them because God is the power behind these spiritual principles.

Christ-centered recovery gives us the opportunity to fellowship with other believers who understand our faith. It also allows us to serve as a bridge — helping people in the church enter recovery and helping people in recovery find their place in the church.

I am thankful to every person who ever spoke in a meeting. I always hear the Lord speak through those 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 deep appreciation for Pastor Bob Adams, who has been a significant spiritual inspiration in my life. - **Richard Massman**

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Section One

Support Group Meetings



*How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion,
“Your God reigns!”. (Isaiah 52:7)*



A Place for Anyone Seeking Hope

Recovery In Christ Ministries is a fellowship open to anyone who is hurting, searching, or longing for freedom. You do not have to be a Christian to attend our meetings. Many who come are exploring faith, wrestling with questions, or simply looking for a “Higher Power” who can help them heal. If that is you, you are welcome here.

We believe that God is the One who draws people to Himself. Our role is not to pressure, convince, or argue — our role is to love, support, and walk with you. This is a safe place to be honest, to ask questions, and to grow at your own pace. We hold to Christ-centered recovery, and we openly share the experience, strength, and hope we have found in Jesus — yet we open our arms to anyone who desires healing and is willing to keep an open mind.

This spirit of welcome — without compromising the truth of Christ — is woven through everything we do.

Section One – Support Groups

Why We Gather - Recovery is not a journey we walk alone. God designed us for fellowship, healing, and accountability within the Body of Christ. When we gather, we create a safe place where honesty is welcomed, burdens are shared, and the love of Jesus is experienced in practical ways. Whether you are strong in faith, new to faith, or simply exploring, you belong in this circle of grace.

We meet to:

- Grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ
- Support one another through encouragement, prayer, and truth
- Apply biblical principles that lead to freedom and transformation
- Break isolation, denial, and shame through Christ-centered recovery
- Walk together toward healing, wholeness, and spiritual maturity

As we gather, we trust the Holy Spirit to guide our time, unify our hearts, and lead us into deeper recovery and deeper relationship with God.

What to Expect at a Meeting

Walking into a recovery meeting for the first time can feel intimidating. This page is here to help you know what to expect so you can relax, breathe, and simply be present.

- **You will not be pressured to speak.** You are welcome to share, but you are equally welcome to listen quietly until you feel comfortable.
- **You will not be judged.** Everyone in the room is recovering from something. We are all learning, growing, and depending on God's grace.
- **You will not be asked to share personal details.** You choose what you share and when you share it. Your story is yours to tell at your own pace.
- **You are free to grow at your own speed.** Recovery is a process. No one will rush you, push you, or expect instant change.
- **You will hear honesty and real-life experiences.** People share from their own struggles, victories, and ongoing journey with Christ.
- **You will experience confidentiality.** What is said in the meeting stays in the meeting. This is a safe place.
- **You will be encouraged to use "I" statements.** We speak from our own experience rather than giving advice or correcting others.
- **You will see that no one has all the answers.** We rely on the Holy Spirit as our Leader. Group facilitators simply guide the process.
- **You will be welcomed.** Whether you are hurting, hopeful, confused, or searching — you belong here.

Our Heart - We gather because Jesus restores lives. We meet because healing happens in community. We share because truth sets us free. We walk together because none of us recover alone. Everyone is welcome here — whether you are seeking, struggling, or standing strong, you belong in this community of grace.

Section One – Support Groups

Sharing in Small Groups - Small groups play a vital role in the body of Christ. Intimate fellowship is difficult to cultivate in large Bible studies or church gatherings. But small groups — whether formal or informal — create space for Christians to share and minister to one another. They offer a powerful opportunity for **body ministry**.

Small groups give people a place to be known, to be honest, and to discover that they are not alone in their struggles.

One definition of fellowship is *“a gathering of equals.”* It’s impossible for a few church leaders to meet all the deep needs of a congregation. But believers can minister to one another — if they are honest, open-minded, and willing to apply spiritual principles in their lives.

James 5:16 commands us:

“Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, and be healed.”

A small group provides the time and space for someone to honestly share what’s going on in their life. When we share the truth about ourselves, others get to know the real us. If we’re not transparent on a gut level, others can’t truly love us — they can only love the version we’re pretending to be.

A common problem in church-connected groups is the tendency to pretend everything is fine and live in denial. Another trap is to sit around discussing Scripture and spiritual principles without actually applying them. Real healing begins when we stop performing and allow others to see who we truly are.

It’s possible to have deep knowledge about the Bible and about Jesus — and not be saved. It’s also possible to know recovery principles intellectually and never apply them. We must **walk the talk**.

When we truly enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we don’t just talk differently — we *become* different. As we abide in Him, we manifest His life and bear the fruit of the Spirit (John 15:5).

At first, it’s hard to be honest with ourselves — and almost impossible to be honest with others. But in a confidential meeting, when someone begins to share truthfully, it becomes easier for others to follow.

We will remain in bondage if we don’t learn to be transparent and accountable to one another.

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” — John 8:32

God is truth. God is love. When we lovingly share the truth of our lives, we are actually imparting God to one another. As we listen to others, we break through denial by identifying with their struggles — and we gain hope from their victories.

The 12 Steps used in many recovery groups are biblical principles backed by Scripture. Working the steps is simply applying the Word of God. It’s a step-by-step process of moving out of self and into a God-centered life.

When Jesus is truly at the center of our lives — the foundation of everything we do — we walk in victory. The happiness, peace, and joy we’ve been searching for become **reality**.

Meeting Formats

(Suggested)

Please see: '**Leadership Guide for Christ-centered 12 Step Recovery**'
Available on our website.

- 1. Start and End on Time**
- 2. Introduce Yourself**
- 3. Open With Prayer**
- 4. Read Your 'Opening Group Remarks'** (couple of paragraphs)
- 5. Have Someone Read** (from the RIC Workbook or Handouts)
 - Ground Rules for Support Groups
 - The 12 Steps
 - The 12 Traditions
- 6. Group Introductions** (First name)
- 7. Devotional Reading** (Life Recovery Bible or similar)
- 8. Introduce the Topic** (Use the meeting templates in the **Leadership Guide**)
 - 9. Group Reading**
 - 10. Open the Floor for Sharing**
 - 11. Ten Minutes Before Closing** (The time for sharing has ended)
- 12. Seventh Tradition** (Every group should be self-supporting)
- 13. Recognize Recovery Anniversaries & Professions of Faith** (give out colored marbles)
- 14. Announcements** (church events, recovery events, etc.).
- 15. Prayer Requests**
- 16. Closing Prayer**
- 17. Fellowship**

Opening Group Remarks

(Suggested)

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

Recovery In Christ is a fellowship of Christians who share our experiences, strength, and hope with one another so that we may grow in Jesus Christ. **You do not have to be a Christian to attend our meetings. All we ask is that you have an open mind and a desire to recover. If you are looking for a “Higher Power,” then you are in the right place.**

We are committed to a Christ-centered approach to solving our common problems, and we believe the Twelve Steps are biblical principles that hold great value for 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 truly are by being transparent about our own lives. Please remember to use “I” messages instead of “you” messages whenever possible.

This needs to be a safe place. We are here 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 confront one another only when necessary — and we make every effort to do so lovingly and as the Lord leads.

Therefore, let us 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.

The Twelve Steps with Scripture

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

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." — Romans 7:18

2. We came to believe that Jesus Christ could restore us to sanity.

"He restores my soul." — Psalm 23:3

3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the Lord.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart... and He will direct your paths." — Proverbs 3:5–6

4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

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

5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." — James 5:16

6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." — Psalm 51:10

7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

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

8. We made a list of all people we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

"As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." — Romans 12:18

9. We made direct amends wherever possible, except when doing so would injure them or others.

"First be reconciled to your brother." — Matthew 5:24

10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

"So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall." — 1 Corinthians 10:12 / Psalm 139:23-24 — Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

11. We 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.

"Be still, and know that I am God." — Psalm 46:10

12. Having had a spiritual awakening... we tried to carry this message to others and practice these principles in all our affairs.

"Freely you have received; freely give." — Matthew 10:8

*Please see our separate guide on
'Christ-centered Traditions'.
Available on our website.*

The Twelve Traditions with Scripture

- 1. The welfare of the group is of primary importance, since personal recovery depends on group unity.** *"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." — Psalm 133:1*
- 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.** *"He is the head of the body, the church." — Colossians 1:18*
- 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.** *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink." — John 7:37*
- 4. Groups shall remain autonomous, except in matters affecting the ministry as a whole.** *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." — Philippians 2:4*
- 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.** *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." — Mark 16:15*
- 6. The groups should never endorse, finance, or lend their name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, prestige, or prosperity divert us from our primary purpose.** *"No one can serve two masters." — Matthew 6:24*
- 7. Groups should be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.** *"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart... for God loves a cheerful giver." — 2 Corinthians 9:7*
- 8. Groups should remain forever non-professional, although we may hire special workers.** *"Freely you have received; freely give." — Matthew 10:8*
- 9. Groups ought never to be organized, though we may create service boards responsible directly to those they serve.** *"The greatest among you will be your servant." — Matthew 23:11*
- 10. Groups have no opinions on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.** *"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life... mind your own affairs." — 1 Thessalonians 4:11*
- 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.** *"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." — Matthew 5:16*
- 12. Anonymity (unconditional love) is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.** *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." — Philippians 2:3*

Ground Rules for Support Groups

1. THE COVENANT OF CONFIDENTIALITY— Whatever is said in the group stays in the group.
2. ONLY TALK ABOUT THOSE PRESENT— We often think others are our problem, but we can only deal with those who are present when the group meets.
3. DON'T TAKE UP ANOTHER'S DEFENSE (OR OFFENSE)— We support and walk with one another through our struggles by God's grace, but we allow each person to speak for themselves.
4. DON'T DOMINATE— Time in small groups is precious. Many come with deep hurts and wounds. Be considerate and remember that none of us has all the answers.
5. DON'T COUNSEL OR GIVE ADVICE— Share only where you can identify with the same difficulty in your own life. Speak from your own experience, strength, and hope.
6. NO SPECTATORS— Everyone present participates in the process of getting healthy. If you come only to help others but cannot see any areas where *you* need help, you should excuse 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 and disrupts the safety of the group.
9. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE LEADER— The group leader does not have all the answers; he or she is simply the facilitator. We rely on the Holy Spirit to guide the meeting.

Prayers for Recovery

The 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, and 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 — Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892–1971)

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.**

The Prayer of Saint Francis

Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace— that where there is hatred, I may bring love; where there is wrong, forgiveness; where there is discord, harmony; where there is error, truth; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there are shadows, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Lord, grant that I may seek not so much to be comforted as to comfort, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.

For it is in self-forgetting that one finds, it is in forgiving that one is forgiven, and it is in dying that one awakens to eternal life. **Amen.**

Section One – Support Groups

Visiting AA and Other Meetings - Those who attend Alcoholics Anonymous, NA, CA, OA, SLAA, and other traditional Twelve-Step groups are encouraged to continue doing so. These meetings can be extremely helpful in recovery, especially where specific Christian programs are not available. We can let our light shine in these places.

Some Christians struggle with the idea of attending meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or Overeaters Anonymous. This concern is understandable in an age of heightened awareness about cults and false teachings. AA's use of the term "*higher power*" instead of *God* is often a point of alarm.

However, AA was born out of the evangelical Oxford Movement, which was active in several Christian denominations in the 1940s. Christians started these programs, and many believers still attend them today. At the same time, some people in these meetings are not Christians and may have been wounded by authority figures in the church. They need to come to a correct understanding of who Jesus is — and they must be reached at the point where they are right now.

Jesus Christ responds to those who genuinely seek truth and desire recovery. If someone has a distorted view of God, the Lord will reveal Himself when that person is open, willing, and searching.

When people who are not Christians first enter recovery, some would run out the door if Christianity were immediately forced on them. They must develop their own personal relationship with Christ in God's timing.

Those who are strong in their Christian faith have no reason to fear attending these meetings. Some individuals there may hold beliefs that seem strange to us, but they cannot talk us out of our salvation or our relationship with Christ.

When we attend non-Christian meetings, we can share our experience and faith without spiritual pride. Without arrogance, we can speak in ways that make it clear we are Christians. If we truly express God's love, others will often approach us after the meeting. This may open the door to invite them into Christian fellowship.

Christian Twelve-Step groups give us the opportunity to fellowship with other believers and freely talk about Jesus and the Bible. These groups can act as a bridge to disciple people into the church.

They can also serve as a bridge to help people already in the church enter recovery and to educate the Christian community about recovery opportunities. Attending other meetings gives us opportunities to reach out and witness to others.

The reality is that recovery is available to those who want it. Sometimes our reluctance to attend certain meetings is simply another form of denial — an excuse to avoid doing what is necessary to get better.

Wherever God places us, we have the privilege of carrying His love into hurting places and walking beside those who are seeking hope. Every meeting we attend becomes another opportunity for God to work in us and through us as instruments of His grace.

Section Two

About Addiction Recovery



*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)*

Section Two – About Recovery

Addiction - Addiction is more than a bad habit or a string of poor choices. At its core, it is a misplaced refuge — a false shelter we run to when the heart is hurting. A few people may come from balanced families and otherwise healthy lives, who simply got “hooked” 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.

But most addiction is symptomatic of a deeper, underlying cause. It is often born in the pain of rejection and escalates into isolation and self-centeredness. The addiction itself is just the tip of the iceberg. We were created for connection — with God and with others — so when that connection is wounded, the heart instinctively searches for something to fill the void.

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 pain that follows is excruciating. People 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 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 — at least as far as the pain and its consequences. A person’s feelings are not debatable; they do exist. What caused those feelings may be subject to much argument.

A rejected person will often withdraw from others, thinking, “They don’t want me around.” This withdrawal may not be physical — it may be emotional isolation, a 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.” In this condition, it’s difficult to be in right relationship with God or others. Trust becomes nearly impossible. They only trust themselves.

At this point, we may turn to “positive addictions” — work, money, power, prestige, adventure, doing good, or even religion. These can be pursued compulsively in an obsessive search to prove that we’re somebody. But anything we use to establish our worth apart from God eventually becomes a taskmaster instead of a comfort.

Or we may turn to negative things to fill the emptiness and medicate the pain: alcohol, drugs, illicit sex, dysfunctional relationships, lying, cheating, stealing — the list goes on. Almost any behavior can become an addiction. These are often called life-controlling problems. Some addictions look better than others. But they all end in destruction.

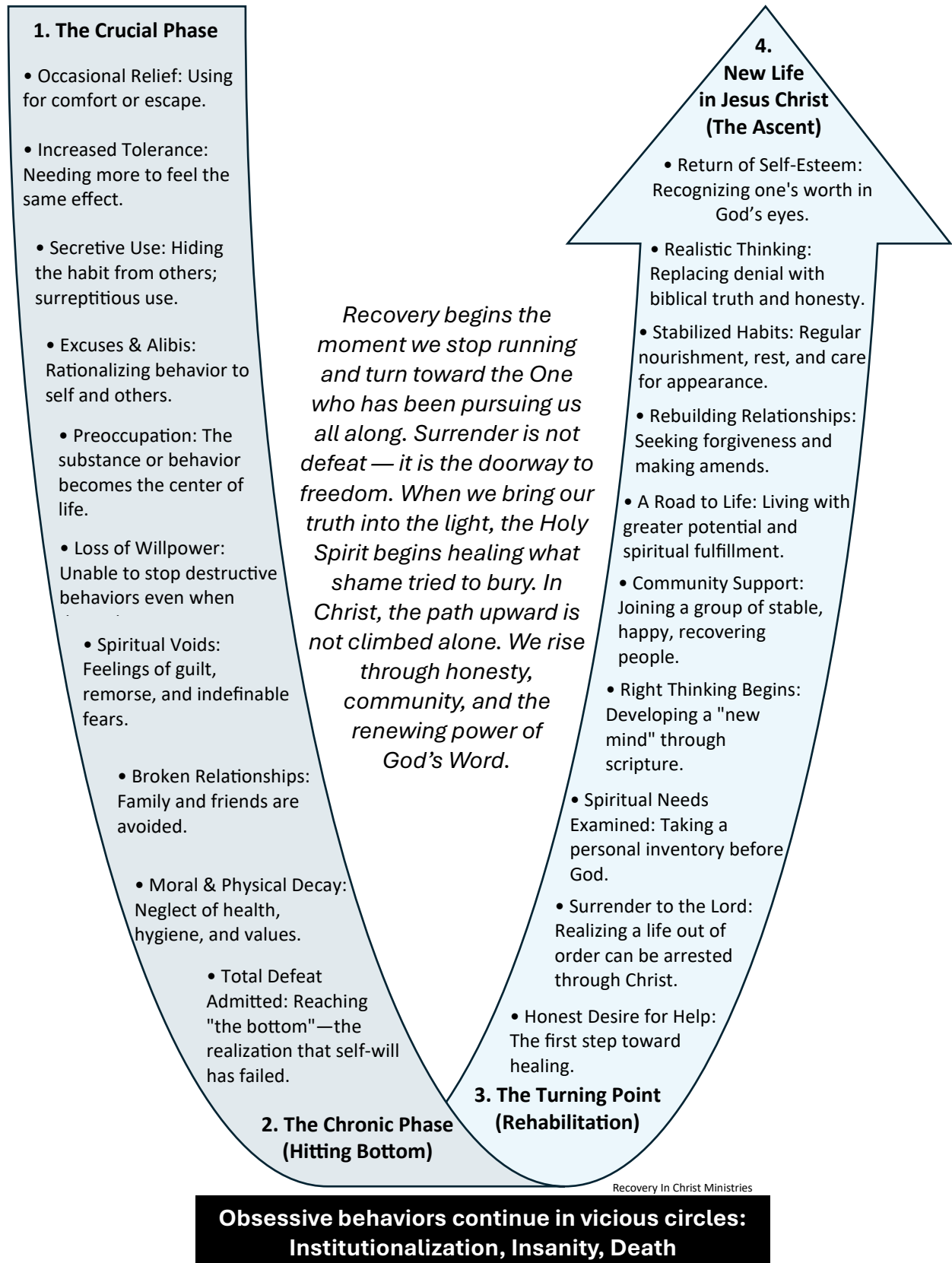
Yet even in the darkest isolation, God is not distant. Addiction may separate us from people, but it cannot separate us from His reach. When the bottom finally comes — if the person is alive when they hit it — restoration into a right relationship with God, others, and self is possible. Destruction is not the end of the story; it is often the place where God begins His work.

“Addiction is not the identity — it’s the symptom.”

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” — Psalm 147:3

Progression Chart

Progression of Social, Abusive, and Addictive Substances and Behaviors



Section Two – About Recovery

Codependency - Codependency is a term often heard in recovery circles. In other parts of society, people may ask, “What’s that?” Originally, codependency referred to the immediate family members of a chemically dependent person who were adversely affected by the dependency. Today, the definition is broader and continues to evolve. Anyone connected to a dysfunctional family is now suspected of being codependent. If one person’s life is out of order, it will 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. Scripture says, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19) Depending on another person to meet our needs instead of the Lord elevates that person to a wrong position in our life. It is technically idol worship. Codependency grows wherever identity is borrowed instead of received. When we don’t know who we are in Christ, we begin to define ourselves by how others respond to us — their approval, their need for us, or their dependence on us. This creates a cycle where our worth rises and falls on someone else’s behavior, leaving us exhausted, anxious, and spiritually empty.

Whether we are doing the controlling or being controlled — it’s really two sides of the same coin. When we control others, we are playing god in their life. When we allow others to control us, we let them become our god in an attempt to get them to do what we want in another area. But God would have us be led by the Spirit. In addition to controlling, “rescuing” and “care-taking” are also traits of the codependent. We tend to rescue others when they’re in crisis. In doing so, we program them to be unable to handle difficulty when it arises. Care-taking can mean doing ordinary things for someone that they should be doing for themselves. This may leave the cared-for person helpless and dependent on the caretaker. The payoff is that the caretaker or rescuer feels good — they feel “needed” and believe they’re doing something “important.”

One of the traps of codependency is that it often feels like love. We convince ourselves we’re helping, supporting, or being loyal, when in reality we’re enabling dysfunction and avoiding our own pain. True love doesn’t rescue people from consequences — it points them to Christ, who alone can heal and transform. Fear is often the silent force behind codependency — fear of rejection, abandonment, being alone, or not being enough. These fears push us to cling, fix, manage, or control. But fear never produces freedom; it only deepens the bondage. Perfect love — God’s love — is the only thing strong enough to drive out that fear.

When we look to Jesus as our true provider, we are free to love others unconditionally. He may use people to meet our needs, but He alone chooses 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 someone does something for another, a payback is expected. Everyone is on performance-based acceptance: “I will like you if you do what I want.” Like most recovery issues, self-centeredness is the underlying problem — and Christ-centeredness is the solution. Codependency is not love; it’s a distortion of love that Christ came to heal. The Lord wants to restore us to a right relationship with Himself and to healthy relationships with others.

Codependency Questionnaire

(Use as a Handout)

Check if your answer is “yes”:

- ☐ 1. My relationships often involve people who need my help or are somehow 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 or counseling others.
- ☐ 5. On several occasions, people have become angry when I try 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 affect 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 overcommit my time or overpromise myself.
- ☐ 14. It's hard for me to act silly, have fun, or 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 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 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 repeatedly.
- ☐ 26. My circle of friends seems to have diminished.
- ☐ 27. I am not aware of what I want. I ask others 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 checked “yes” to three or more of these statements, you may be struggling with codependency.

Section Two – About Recovery

Dysfunctional Families - One definition of a dysfunctional family could simply be “a family that is not functioning the way the Lord intended.”

God intended the family to be a loving, nurturing, affirming, and encouraging unit. Family was meant to be a place of safety and security in an unsure world — 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 discover their identity through affirmation and reflection from their parental role models. A father would affirm his son as an approved male child. He would model who Father God is and what the boy will become as an adult and perhaps as a husband. The same is true for the daughter. Mother is an example of who she is to grow into, and she will likely expect her future mate to operate the way her father did.

It’s easy to see how young people can gain a reasonably accurate picture of our loving Father in heaven from a healthy family. It is also clear that the family unit is a significant influence in learned behavior — for good or for harm.

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

The passive or non-existent father will likely leave the son confused. No matter how great a single parent performs, a mom cannot accurately reflect a male role model. Conversely, a dad cannot mirror a mom without substantial distortion.

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

If a woman comes from a home with a dominant mother, and her husband comes from a home with a dominant father, 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 drive a person toward 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 often become self-centered and manipulative, rather than expressing unconditional love toward one another. They are taught not to talk, not to feel, and not to 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 from one generation to another **can be broken**.

Section Two – About Recovery

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

Using an addictive agent to fill our emptiness or medicate emotional pain appears to work for a while. The addictive agent — whether alcohol, drugs, food, work, people, or even religion — becomes our friend. We feel good when we have “fellowship” with our friend, when we engage in our addiction. We tend to be loyal to our “addictive-agent friends.” Even when overwhelming evidence shows that our addiction is causing great harm, we will lie to others — and even to ourselves — insisting that there really isn't a problem.

Denial is powerful because it protects us from facing the truth we fear. Admitting the problem feels like admitting failure, weakness, or shame — so the mind creates a false sense of safety by minimizing, rationalizing, or blaming. But denial doesn't remove the problem; it only delays the healing God wants to bring

Enabling - Often, family or friends encourage a person to pursue their addiction without realizing they are enabling it. This can happen through making excuses, covering up, or rescuing. These actions keep the addicted person from experiencing the consequences of their behavior. Most enablers are not trying to cause harm; they are trying to avoid pain — their own or someone else's. They fear conflict, rejection, or watching someone suffer, so they step in to fix what isn't theirs to fix. But rescuing someone from consequences often rescues them from the very lessons that lead to repentance and change.

For example, if an alcoholic spends their food or auto-expense money on booze, giving them money for food or auto expenses is essentially the same as directly funding their addiction. We may want to assist someone who is actively pursuing recovery. However, we may need to say no when helping them would only support their path of destruction. Most addicted people can destroy their lives quickly enough without additional help.

If we are going to err in this area, it is probably best to err on the side of mercy — at least for our own conscience's sake. But when it becomes clear that a person is not willing to recover, refusing to help may be the most loving choice. People may become upset with us when we choose not to indulge their destructive behavior. However, when they do recover, they will thank the people who truly helped them. The enablers will not be remembered as heroes.

Hitting Bottom - Everyone has to hit their own bottom — their own point of hopelessness. For some, the bottom may be the gutter. For others, it may be embarrassing themselves at a high-society function. Whatever it takes. Sometimes, being confronted by the insanity of our behavior — even through public embarrassment — is enough for the light to come on. Some very stubborn people do not become willing to recover until the very bitter end.

The bottom is not a place of abandonment — it is often the place where God's mercy becomes unmistakable. When every false support collapses, the only thing left to stand on is truth. Many people discover that the bottom is where they finally look up, and where God meets them with grace instead of condemnation.

Section Two – About Recovery

Caretaking - Caretaking sounds like a wonderful term, and the person who engages in such an endeavor might seem like a candidate for the “Humanitarian of the Year Award.” Not so. That distinction belongs to the **Caregivers**. Caregivers give care to someone in need out of compassion, love, or even job responsibility. Their giving is based on the other person’s need — and their motive is healthy.

The **Caretaker**, however, gives out of their own need to feel good about themselves. It isn’t truly giving — it is taking. The person receiving the care may be needy and appreciative, and the world may applaud the outward good deeds of the Caretaker. But the motivation is rooted in the Caretaker’s emptiness, not the other person’s need. As a result, a Caretaker will often give when their help is not needed or even wanted. Sometimes a Caretaker will (often subconsciously) keep another person sick or dependent so their services will continue to be “needed.”

The internal thought process may sound like this: “I feel like I’m no good and not worth anything. If I do something good for someone else, I’ll feel better about myself and prove that I am somebody.” This is self-centeredness and performance-based acceptance. Scripture warns us about this trap: *“Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? ... If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”* (Galatians 1:10) When our worth depends on how others respond to us, we become performers instead of servants — and our giving becomes a way to fill our emptiness rather than an act of love.

Even Scripture reminds us that good deeds done from the wrong motive gain nothing: *“If I give all I possess to the poor... but have not love, I gain nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:3) Caretaking looks like love, but it is rooted in self-centeredness, not Christ-centered compassion. People who operate this way can only feel good when they are performing well.

It’s healthy to use helping others as a tool to get out of a self-centered mindset — but we must strive to make it an act of unconditional love. We must guard against doing for others based on what we hope to get out of it. If we continue helping from a wrong motive, we will eventually feel unappreciated, taken advantage of, and betrayed. When our actions are not rooted in true motivation, we cheat ourselves out of the spiritual blessings that come from serving with a pure heart. True caregiving reflects the heart of Christ: *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others... so that in all things God may be glorified.”* (1 Peter 4:10–11) When we help others as an act of love, love becomes its own reward — and everything beyond that is a bonus. God delights in giving bonus blessings to His children.

Reflection - Caretaking often feels like love, but it can quietly drain our hearts and distort our motives. Take a moment to consider: **Where am I helping from emptiness instead of love?** Ask the Lord to show you any place where you’ve been seeking approval, identity, or worth through what you do for others — and to lead you into the freedom of serving from a whole and surrendered heart.

Prayer - Lord Jesus, search my heart and reveal any place where I have been giving from the wrong motive. Heal the emptiness that drives me to perform, please others, or find my worth in what I do. Teach me to serve with a pure heart, led by Your Spirit and rooted in Your love. Free me from self-centered striving, and let my actions bring glory to You alone. Make my love genuine, my motives clean, and my service an overflow of Your grace in me. Amen.

Section Two – About Recovery

Rescuing - There is nothing quite like the adrenaline rush that comes from being a hero. But the Rescuer is not the genuine hero the world applauds. The Rescuer enjoys the good feelings that come from “saving” others. We Rescuers even like to save people who aren’t lost. What matters most is the emotional high we get from pulling someone out of a desperate situation. It becomes medication for our sick souls — a troublesome and intense addiction that feeds our already distorted egos.

Rescuing is a subtle attempt to step into a role that belongs only to God. The Lord says, *“I, even I, am the Lord, and besides Me there is no savior.”* (Isaiah 43:11) When we rush in to fix, save, or control, we are taking on a burden we were never meant to carry. We may feel powerful for a moment, but we are actually interfering with the work of the true Savior.

Rescuing and Caretaking are sophisticated forms of codependency. Codependency attempts to get our needs met by “using” another human being instead of depending on the Lord to supply all our needs. Both behaviors fall under people-controlling behavior: “I helped you, and I feel good because I’m a hero — and now you owe me because of what I did for you.” This mindset carries enormous potential for manipulating family, friends, and even strangers.

Scripture warns us about rescuing people from the consequences of their behavior: *“Rescue them, and you will have to do it again.”* (Proverbs 19:19) When we step in too quickly, we interrupt the very process God may be using to bring them to repentance. Pain is often the only teacher some people will listen to. When we shield them from consequences, we may be shielding them from the very truth that could set them free.

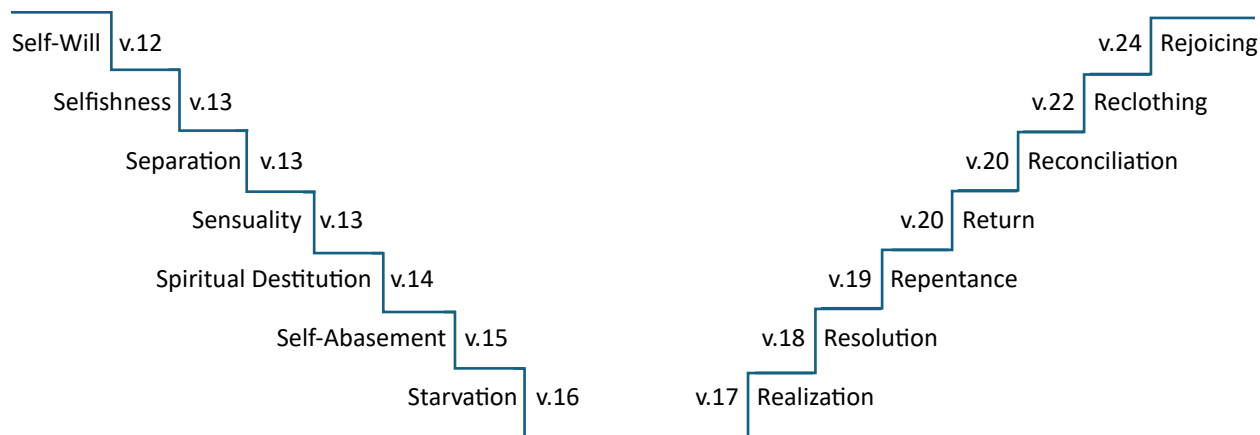
Anyone can become a Rescuer with little or no training. Many who use rescuing or caretaking as coping tools are drawn to the “helping professions.” This makes it harder to come out of denial: “It’s noble — I have to do it because it’s my job.” But rescuing or caretaking can harm others by keeping them from learning, growing, and doing the things they should be doing for themselves. Scripture reminds us, *“Each one should carry their own load.”* (Galatians 6:5) When we carry what God intended someone else to carry, we weaken them — and exhaust ourselves. When we go through the healing process, we become far more effective in helping others — because we are finally free to help from the right motive. We no longer act out of guilt or a need to feel better about ourselves. We can be led by the Spirit and love the people God places before us, all to the glory of Jesus Christ. Rescuing is replaced with surrender, and control gives way to trust. *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* (Psalm 46:10)

Reflection - Rescuing often feels noble, but it can quietly place us in God’s position. Consider this: **Where have I been trying to save someone instead of trusting God to work in their life?** Ask the Lord to show you any place where your helping has become controlling, and where your rescuing has replaced His role as Savior.

Prayer - Lord Jesus, I confess that I have tried to rescue others in ways that belong only to You. Forgive me for stepping into a role that is Yours alone. Teach me to trust Your timing, Your wisdom, and Your power in the lives of those I love. Free me from the need to fix, control, or save. Help me to love others without taking responsibility for their choices. Lead me by Your Spirit so that my help is truly helpful, and my actions bring glory to You. Amen.

The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-24

A complete Story of Ruin and Reconciliation



The Parable of the Lost Son (NIV)

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Peace and Hope (Romans 5:1-18)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Section Two – About Recovery

Intervention - An intervention will sometimes reach an otherwise unwilling person. An intervention occurs when the individual is confronted by significant people in their life. The likelihood of success increases when those involved have something meaningful to barter. Scripture shows us that God Himself intervenes in the lives of His people: *“I myself will search for my sheep and look after them... I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered.”* (Ezekiel 34:11–12) When someone is wandering into destruction, God often steps in — and He often uses **people** to do it. An employer may say to an employee, “Get help or you’re fired.” If the person values their addiction more than their job, this tactic won’t work. A spouse may say, “Get help or I am leaving you.” A parent may tell an adult child, “You can’t continue to live here.” People will often choose their addictions over family members or friends. But sometimes, loving confrontation is exactly what God uses to break through denial. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”* (Proverbs 27:6)

The more pressure brought to bear, the more likely the person is to become willing. An effective intervention may require every friend and associate confronting the individual in a well-organized, unified effort. This can prevent the person from thinking they can manipulate their way out of the situation. Sometimes the sheer number of people confronting them is enough to break through denial. Though one enabling “friend” can sabotage a good intervention. Scripture calls us to step in when someone is trapped: *“If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”* (Galatians 6:1) During an intervention, the addicted person will likely become angry and attempt to intimidate those trying to help. Firmness is essential, and any stated consequences for refusal to cooperate must be carried out. God’s interventions in Scripture were often firm as well — consider Nathan confronting King David (2 Samuel 12). God used a courageous friend to speak truth that David did not want to hear, but desperately needed.

Prayer and being led by the Spirit are essential. It is important to express love and concern, and for each person to clearly state their evidence of addictive behavior. Hopefully, the evidence will be enough to convict them in their own mind. Jude 23 describes this kind of spiritual rescue: *“Save others by snatching them from the fire.”* Sometimes God calls us to be the ones who reach into the flames. If no one in the group has experience with interventions, it may be wise to consult an expert from a Christian treatment program or a recovery professional. God often works through wise counsel and trained helpers. Ultimately, every intervention is an act of love — a human expression of the divine heart that reaches down to pull people out of deep waters (Psalm 18:16).

Reflection - Before stepping into an intervention, quiet your heart before the Lord. Ask Him to show you whether your motives are rooted in love and a desire for healing — not anger, fear, or control. Remember that God intervenes in the lives of His children and may be inviting you to join His work of rescue. Pray for unity, courage, and for the addicted person’s heart to be softened to the truth.

Prayer - Lord Jesus, we come to You seeking Your wisdom and Your heart. Guide us as we prepare to speak truth in love. Give us courage to say what needs to be said, compassion to say it with grace, and strength to follow through with the boundaries You lead us to set. Go before us, soften the heart of the one we love, and let this intervention be an instrument of Your mercy. Use us as Your vessels, and accomplish Your good purpose in this situation. Amen.

Defense Mechanisms - Defenses are ways individuals attempt to neutralize the impact of stressful situations that cause great anxiety. These mechanisms may offer temporary relief but often hinder emotional and spiritual growth. Below are common defense mechanisms:

- **Denial** – Refusing to admit the reality of a situation.
- **Delusion** – Holding false beliefs that do not reflect logical or objective reality. These beliefs may become so developed that the individual is completely out of touch with reality.
- **Projection** – Blaming others for one’s own feelings, attitudes, values, impulses, and thoughts.
- **Introjection** – Incorporating the feelings, values, and attitudes of another person as one’s own. This often involves idolizing someone as a hero.
- **Rationalization** – Offering excuses for one’s behavior, usually motivated by irrational impulses and drives.
- **Regression** – Reverting to an earlier stage of life when faced with difficulty — a time perceived as less demanding, less stressful, and less complex.
- **Withdrawal** – Removing oneself physically or psychologically from a situation.
- **Repression** – Forcing anxiety-producing situations into the subconscious. These may involve feelings, attitudes, impulses, and thoughts.
- **Controlling** – Attempting to control another person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions to compensate for one’s own inadequacy, insecurity, or powerlessness.
- **Compensation** – Emphasizing one’s strongest and most desirable traits to mask or cover up weaker or undesirable traits.
- **Acting Out** – Reducing anxiety and tension through negative behaviors that express previously rejected thoughts, impulses, and attitudes. Examples include alcohol abuse, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and vandalism.
- **Self-Aggression** – Turning hostile impulses toward oneself. This may result in depression, accident proneness, self-mutilation, or suicidal behavior.

Reflection - Take a moment to consider which defense mechanisms you’ve used to protect yourself from pain, fear, or rejection. Which ones have helped you survive — and which ones have kept you from healing?

Ask the Lord to reveal any patterns that are no longer serving His purpose in your life. Are there places where you’ve been hiding, blaming, or performing instead of trusting?

Write down one defense you recognize in yourself. Then ask: **“What would it look like to surrender this to Jesus?” “What truth does He want to speak into this place?”**

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” — John 8:32

Section Two – About Recovery

Surrender - Before entering recovery, most of us were stubborn and set in our ways. Many of us didn't trust another human being besides ourselves. What finally brought us into recovery was the realization that we couldn't even trust *ourselves* anymore.

We lived our lives with *us* in control — “the captain of our own soul,” as the saying goes. For some, this meant the lunacy of self-will run riot. For others, it meant allowing people whose lives were already operating on “self-will run riot” to run our lives as well.

Realizing that our plan isn't working — never has, and never will — brings us close to surrender. Recognizing that our plans, schemes, and devices cannot produce true happiness is coming to the end of ourselves.

Before we could even consider this “cowardly sounding” thing called surrender, we had to be thoroughly convinced that our way didn't work. The evidence was probably as overwhelming and obvious as an elephant sitting in the living room — obvious to everyone but us. Addictive people have powerful rationalizers and deniers. We have the capacity to pretend very big things aren't there. Many of us entered recovery with completely botched-up lives. Everything that could go wrong *did* go wrong. Every area of life seemed like a disaster, and we had nothing that would commend us to the world.

Then we were confronted with the idea of totally surrendering control of our lives to God — without knowing what He would do with it. Our response was often, “That really scares me.” Even if we believed God existed and believed He was loving, we imagined He would send us off to suffer in a Third-World country, surrounded by flies and garbage dumps. Some of us feared that God was inept — that He might bungle our lives worse than we already had. Others believed His plan would be impossible for people like us. All of these fears were based on a false assumption about who God is.

The truth is that God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows our capabilities, what would truly make us happy, and the real desires of our hearts. God told Jeremiah that He knew him before he was born and formed him in his mother's womb — and this spiritual principle applies to us as well. God made us, and He knows our desires and potential perfectly, unhindered by the painful experiences that distorted our own vision.

God not only made us — He made a plan that perfectly matches what He created us to be. We were harmed greatly when we followed our own plan or someone else's. But God's plan is for our benefit. He is committed to our welfare and stands ready to prove Himself faithful. You would be hard-pressed to find anyone who has fully surrendered to the Lord and regretted it in the long run. This doesn't mean the Lord will always do what feels best in the moment. We lived that way most of our lives, and it only brought trouble. God does what is best for us — even when it transcends our feelings.

“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 that His plan is not for our harm but to give our lives meaning and significance. Most of us felt insignificant when we entered recovery. Surrender is our decision — and only we can make it.

Why not do it now.

Total Surrender Contract

(Use as a Handout)

"This contract is a personal covenant between you and the Lord, expressing your willingness to surrender every area of your life to His loving authority."

Dear Lord, I surrender to You:

My will, my mind, and my 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, and 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 upon 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 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 once claimed the above items as mine. Now they all belong to You and are under Your control. You may 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 _____

Luke 9:23 • Romans 12:1 • Galatians 2:20

Section Two – About Recovery

Recovery - Some people are powerfully set free from a life-controlling problem immediately. Others may struggle for a long time before experiencing freedom. Either way, freedom from bondage to an addictive agent or behavior is only 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 journey of our minds being renewed as we yield our lives to the Lord (Romans 12:1–2). It's a process of moving from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness (Galatians 2:20). Recovery is the transformation into the image of Jesus Christ, to which we have been predestined (Romans 8:29).

Often, the roots of addiction run deep. If someone has been severely rejected, betrayed, or abused, those wounds may take time to heal. But it's not true that time heals all wounds. Unresolved issues will continue to affect us until we face them. Only by bringing our problems before God do we experience genuine victory.

Some issues may take years to resolve, even after we begin working on them. The Lord meets us and accepts us wherever we are in the process — if our heart is seeking Him. He will heal us and restore us into right relationship with Himself and with 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 operating in rebellion or denial — disguised as spiritual superiority.

Another cliché that sounds holy is, “I only need Jesus, I don't need any of that stuff.” But this may be another way of saying, “I'm going to keep doing it my way.” You can tell a tree by its fruit. If someone is truly yielding to the Lord, it will be evident in the outcome. We must be willing to use the tools the Lord places in our path, praying for guidance and discernment.

Each person's recovery program will be unique. We cannot dictate what someone else's journey must look like. But God is the same yesterday, today, and forever — and His Word is unchanging. The same spiritual principles apply to all of us.

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 so that we may be made whole.

We've suffered long enough. 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

True recovery is possible because God Himself empowers the process. What we cannot change by willpower, He transforms by His Spirit. As we yield to Him day by day, He breaks old patterns and forms new life within us. His strength accomplishes what our own efforts never could.

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.

Section Two – About Recovery

Switching Addictions - Many substances and behaviors can be addictive beyond alcohol and drugs. Abusing sex and food are often at the top of the list. Spending, work, reading, sleeping, entertainment, sports, and even religious activities can also become destructive when lived out in excess. It is possible to switch from one addiction to another.

We can totally abstain from alcohol and drugs. But God created many of these other things to be healthy parts 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 sense of emptiness. The real question is: **Why are we doing it?** What are our motives? If we're doing it for the wrong reasons, it will eventually lead to destruction. Balance is essential.

It's not uncommon for someone to abstain from alcohol or drugs for years and still be completely unmanageable in another area of life. A person may make great spiritual progress and even be a respected religious leader — and still have an “addiction” that has never been surrendered to the Lord.

We are cautioned not to judge others in this area. We have no way of knowing how the Lord may be dealing with them. God has an order and timing as He heals our character defects. While He works in one area, He may cover other areas with His grace and still allow us to walk closely with Him.

But there comes a point in our spiritual journey when the Lord says, *“Time is up. You have to deal with this now and turn it over to Me.”* He will not allow us to abuse His grace by refusing to deal with an issue if we are truly yielded to Him.

If we refuse to cooperate when God says it's time, we risk great danger. The Lord may withdraw His special protection and allow us to bear the full consequences of our behavior if we insist on being rebellious.

It takes very little effort to get off balance in some area of life. When we use anything as an excuse not to deal with reality, we erect it as an idol. We choose to embrace the addiction — the idol — instead of reality. **But God is Reality**, and anything we cling to in His place will eventually collapse under its own weight. Freedom begins when we stop hiding behind substitutes and allow God to confront the truth in us.

When we find these stumbling blocks in our walk with God, it's time to be transparent with Him and submit the matter to His care. 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 a problem in our lives as a “thorn in the flesh” to keep us dependent on Him. He may use it to deal with another area of our life. Sometimes His timing and order make no worldly sense at all — but His ways are higher than ours, and His grace is always working for our good.

True freedom comes when we stop switching addictions and start surrendering every part of our lives to the One who can truly heal us.

Section Two – About Recovery

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 are willing is like trying to push a rope — it simply doesn't work. Forcing help on someone before God's timing may even render us ineffective when they finally are ready.

The main thing we can do is share our experience with the person still caught in a destructive lifestyle. When they hear what we've been through, they can respond to the parts they identify with, knowing it is their idea and not the result of our manipulation.

Many addicted people are very independent and don't like being told what to do. Trying to intimidate someone into the healing process may send them in the opposite direction. Recovery has to be their idea. They must make the decision to recover. Without this determination, there is little hope for success.

When helping others, we don't take control of their lives or 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. We don't do for them what they should be doing for themselves. That's enabling, not helping, and it does more harm than good. We don't tell people what to do regarding major life decisions such as jobs or relationships.

Trying to change another human being is the most miserable occupation in the world. What we can do is share the spiritual principles that worked for us. This encourages them to become God-dependent rather than us-dependent. Some people in early recovery may elevate us to a wrong position in their lives and depend on us for things they should trust God to do. Just because they want us to do God's job doesn't mean we have to accept the position. It may be the right time to say, "No thank you — that position is already filled by Someone far more qualified."

We help others to the extent we are able and with the tools God has given us. We don't have to go on a guilt trip if there is something we don't have or something we can't do. Philippians 4:19 says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." If there is something we need in order to obey God in helping another, He will provide it. If we don't have it, we are not expected to give it. There is no need to feel guilty for not doing what God has not asked us to do.

We are not to become overburdened in helping others to the detriment of our own recovery and relationship with the Lord. When we are weighed down by doing good, we have probably picked up a load the Lord did not command us to carry. He 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 is to yield to the Lord so our assistance is not done in our own strength. This doesn't mean we sit around waiting for a loud voice from heaven. It means we surrender our lives to the Lord and, by faith, do the good He puts before us. We move forward believing He is empowering us and will redirect us if we begin to head the wrong way.

False Beliefs – God’s Solution

“Act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with your 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.	Fear of failure; Perfectionism Intensity about my own success; Withdrawal from risks; Manipulating others to help me succeed.	Because of justification , I am completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God. I no longer have to fear failure.	Freedom from the fear of failure; Intensity about the right things; Christ and His Kingdom; Growing love for God.
I must have the approval of others to feel good about myself.	Fear of rejection; Pleasing others at any cost; Oversensitivity to criticism; Withdrawal to avoid disapproval.	Because of reconciliation , I am totally accepted by God. I no longer have to fear rejection.	Freedom from the fear of rejection; Willingness to be open and vulnerable; Ability to relax around others; Willingness to receive criticism; Desire to please God no matter what others think.
Those who fail are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.	Fear of punishment; Punishing others; Blaming others when I fail; Dry, lifeless spiritual walk.	Because of propitiation , I am deeply loved by God. I no longer have to fear punishment or punish others.	Freedom from the fear of punishment; Patience and kindness toward others; Quickness to forgive; Deep love for Christ.
I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.	Feelings of inferiority; Destructive habits; Hopelessness and despair.	Because of regeneration , I have been made brand new, complete in Christ. I no longer have to live in the pain of shame.	Christ-centered confidence; Joy, courage, and peace; A growing 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 so that we might live 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 also ought to love one another.” — 1 John 4:9–11

I am fully pleasing.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have 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.

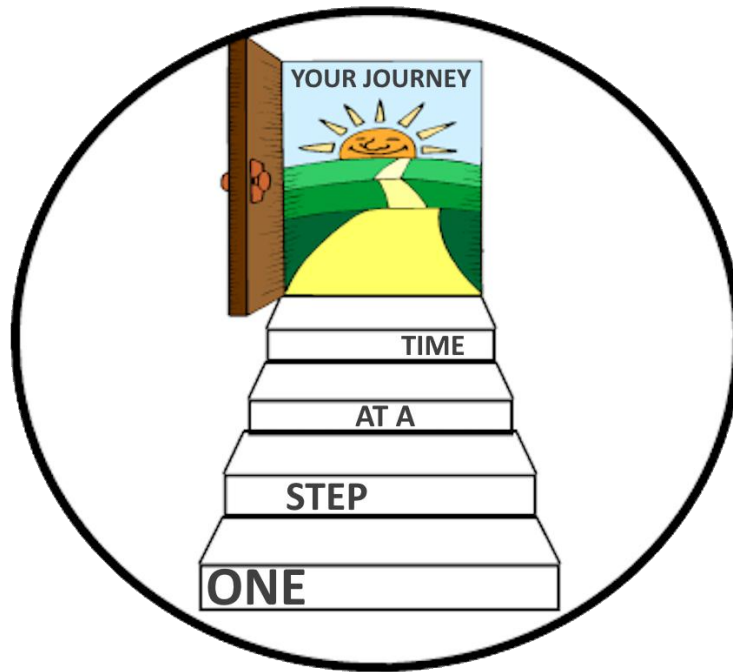
When my performance
reflects my new identity in Christ,
that reflection is dynamically unique.

There has never 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.

Section Three

Working The Steps



“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

Section Three – Working the Steps

About the Steps

Most of us found out the hard way that if we were truly going to get better, we had to work the steps. Some of us only worked part of the recovery program. Maybe we went to meetings, listened, and shared honestly about what was going on in our lives. This seemed to work miracles for a while—until the old negative feelings resurfaced.

What happened? We received partial and temporary benefit from a partial effort. If we want to become whole human beings, we'll likely need to work the whole program of recovery. If there's an area of the program we hesitate to engage with, we need to ask ourselves why.

Sometimes we offer spiritual-sounding reasons for avoiding thorough recovery: "I prayed and believe by faith that Jesus will take this problem away." It may feel sacrilegious to challenge someone taking this approach. They might accuse us of undermining their faith or lacking our own. But denial and refusal to do our part can carry a very "holy" tone.

The steps are simply New Testament principles. Christian recovery materials document the biblical foundation for each step, supported by Scripture. These steps weren't invented by humans. If they were, they wouldn't be worth much. The steps are God's Word concerning healing and spiritual growth, organized in a simple and understandable way. They work because the Lord is faithful to honor His Word—He never fails.

To refuse to work the steps is to refuse to apply these spiritual principles to our lives. We don't need to call them "steps" for them to work. They will work regardless of the name. Working the steps is simply a step-by-step process of moving from being self-centered to being Christ-centered.

If someone can devise a more efficient and effective way to organize these principles, who could argue? Until then, we use the approach that has helped millions. This method worked when medicine, science, and traditional religion failed to offer a workable solution for addiction and dysfunctional family issues.

When we say traditional religion didn't work, we don't mean God failed. We mean that we, as human beings, failed to interpret and apply His Word as He intended.

Criticism of the steps often comes from ignorance. People speak against what they don't understand. The unknown can be frightening. Even well-intentioned national TV preachers have told people they don't need a recovery program—only reinforcing denial.

Very few people are in recovery compared to the number who need it. The vast majority don't recover. They live in pain and misery, and their lives are shortened by addictive thinking and behavior.

The steps are also a process for removing character defects. As we work them, the Lord reveals what we need to surrender next. No one can be forced into recovery. It's a personal decision.

When we're sick and tired of being sick and tired, we become willing to go to any lengths to get better. Jesus will bless our lives as we apply these spiritual principles.

Section Three – Working the Steps

Desperation: The Step Before the Steps

Before anyone begins a journey of recovery, something sacred often happens beneath the surface — a moment of clarity that breaks through denial, pride, and self-reliance. Scripture gives us a vivid picture of this in Luke 15:16–17. The prodigal son, empty, hungry, and out of options, finally “*came to himself*.” It wasn’t just that his circumstances were bad; it was that he finally saw the truth. His way wasn’t working. His best thinking had led him to a place he never intended to be. And in that moment of desperation, the first spark of willingness was born.

This is the step before the Steps — the quiet turning point that opens the heart to God’s help. It doesn’t look the same for everyone. For some, it’s dramatic: an arrest, a crisis, a broken relationship, a medical emergency. For others, it’s subtle: running out of excuses, waking up tired of pretending, realizing you can’t keep living the way you’ve been living. There is no competition in “how bad it got.” Desperation is not measured by the size of the consequences but by the honesty of the heart.

What matters is this: at some point, each of us reaches a place where we can no longer defend the life we’ve been living. We stop blaming others. We stop minimizing. We stop trying to manage the unmanageable. And like the prodigal, we finally admit, “*I need to do something different*.” That admission — humble, painful, and freeing — is the doorway to recovery. Scripture is full of people who reached this same crossroads:

- **Moses** hit his moment in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt in shame (Exodus 2–3). Forty years of hiding his failure ended when he finally stopped running and listened to God’s call. His desperation became the doorway to purpose.
- **David**, after his sin with Bathsheba, reached a breaking point when the weight of his choices crushed him (Psalm 51). His confession — “Create in me a clean heart, O God” — wasn’t born from strength but from desperation. And God restored him.
- **Jonah**, swallowed by a great fish, prayed from the depths (Jonah 2). Only when he had nowhere left to run did he surrender to God’s will. His lowest moment became the turning point for an entire city.
- **Paul** was literally knocked to the ground on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Blinded, helpless, and confronted with the truth, he surrendered everything he thought he knew. His desperation became the birthplace of a new identity and mission.
- **Hannah**, weeping in the temple, poured out her anguish before the Lord (1 Samuel 1). Her desperation wasn’t a sign of weakness but of trust — and God met her there.

These stories remind us that desperation is not a failure; it is often the moment God finally has our full attention. Psalm 34:18 tells us, “*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit*.” When we reach the end of ourselves, we discover the beginning of grace. This moment doesn’t guarantee instant change, but it does open the heart to the possibility of change. It cracks the door just wide enough for hope to enter. And once hope enters, recovery becomes possible.

Reflection: In your own words, describe the moment — big or small — when you gained sight and knew something had to change. What was the point of desperation that opened the door to your recovery?

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step One

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

The first step is often the hardest. Everything in us pushes back against admitting we have a problem. Our pride and ego resist crying out for help. Many of us were taught from childhood to believe, “*I can handle it.*”

Step One brings us to the place where we finally admit that we **can’t** handle it. It tells us we are in trouble and that we need help. Powerlessness means we do not have the ability to heal ourselves or fix the problem in our own strength.

This step forces us to acknowledge that we have done a poor job managing our own lives. It also suggests that things are not likely to improve if we keep doing what we’ve always done.

The end of denial is the beginning of recovery. We must reach the point where we admit that life is no longer working for us—maybe it never truly did. We have to stop deceiving ourselves, pretending everything is fine while our lives continue to crumble.

Addictive people tend to rationalize their circumstances, even when the evidence clearly shows there is a “major problem in Paradise.” We can be stubborn and hold out until the very end. Most of us only admit the truth when we hit bottom and have no other choice.

Some people have “high bottoms.” Their thinking is clear enough to recognize what is happening before they completely crash. Others don’t need to endure long periods of excruciating pain before becoming willing to face their problems. Whatever it takes, we must come to the **end of self**.

A powerful biblical example of hitting bottom and admitting powerlessness is the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–31. The rebellious son demanded his share of the inheritance and left home to live however he pleased. He wasted everything on wild living and ended up broke, feeding pigs—and even envying their food.

The lesson is clear: when he lived under the father’s care, he lived in comfort as a beloved son. When he managed his own life, disaster followed. “*When he came to his senses,*” he realized even his father’s hired servants had more than he did. He returned home, where he was loved, forgiven, and restored.

Step One can be summed up in a simple confession: “**I have a problem, and I need help.**”

As we grow in recovery, our lives usually improve. Yet there may be specific areas that remain unmanageable. Often, the areas we struggle to admit are problems are the very areas we once considered our strengths. When we discover a specific issue that continues to cause trouble, that is the moment to apply Step One again and bring that matter into the recovery process.

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Two

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

The idea of being “restored to sanity” can feel uncomfortable. Even people who have been in recovery for a long time sometimes gulp at this step. Our first reaction is often defensive: *“I’m not insane.”* But if we cling too tightly to that posture, we may avoid this step and miss the blessings that come from working the steps thoroughly.

In the past, insanity was pictured as someone raving in a straightjacket. A few of us may have come close to that, but most of us see ourselves as fairly rational people who can recognize reality. Yet we often view life through the filter of our past wounds, fears, and distortions. These distortions cause us to misread situations, make poor decisions, and suffer the consequences.

We keep repeating the same patterns, our problems get worse, and we don’t understand why. One definition of insanity is doing the same things while expecting different results. Another is escaping reality through addictive substances or behaviors. This is the kind of insanity we refer to in recovery.

When we attend meetings and listen to others with similar backgrounds, we begin to recognize our own patterns. We identify with their struggles, and eventually we begin to believe there is hope for us too. We hear how others applied these spiritual principles and how their lives changed.

As we listen, we learn how God touched their minds and renewed their thinking. Their thoughts changed, their feelings changed, and their actions changed — and the results improved.

Step Two is about **hope**. It is coming to believe that the Lord will do for us what He has done for others. As we hear their stories, we realize many of them were as bad — or worse — than we were. If God helped them, we can trust He will help us.

It becomes impossible to hear testimony after testimony of God’s healing and transforming power and not begin to believe that this is real. God is real, and many people just like us are walking miracles — alive, restored, and joyful by the grace of God.

You can’t stay around recovery very long without seeing overwhelming evidence of the Lord’s redemptive love and healing power. Millions of otherwise hopeless lives have been transformed through applying these spiritual principles found in the Twelve Steps.

Apart from God’s healing grace, there is no program and no recovery. Step Two is about **acquiring faith**. A key part of this step is the willingness to listen to others — listening with expectancy, believing they have something important to say, and trusting that God can speak to us through anyone, even the least likely person.

Scripture tells us that few were healed in Jesus’ hometown because of their unbelief. Yet as He traveled, *“He healed them all.” “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!

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Three

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

This may be the most important step in the entire recovery process. When we get this one right, everything else flows from it. Step Three means we never have to be alone again. It means we don't have to work the remaining steps in our own strength, wisdom, or courage. As we yield to Him, the Lord Himself empowers us to do everything that follows.

This step requires a major decision. Other than the decision for salvation, it may be the most important choice we ever make. It is the choice to totally surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, who indwells us through the Holy Spirit. *"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices."* (Romans 12:1) Step Three is deciding to stop managing our own lives and to give up our rights — our right to decide what we will do, who we will do it with, and where we will go. It means Jesus becomes the One who directs our steps, our relationships, our activities, and our priorities. Turning our will over to Him means turning over our "chooser." Future choices are no longer ours alone. We now have a new Manager and Director.

Growing up in church or inviting Jesus into our lives does not mean we have taken this step. Jesus may have been *resident* but not *president*. Surrender has meaning only to the degree that it is sincere and complete. The Lord will not force us to submit to His loving plan.

We must take a step of faith and give Him the opportunity to prove Himself faithful. Many of us have made such a mess of our lives that it hardly feels like a risk to hand everything over to Him. When we give the Lord total control, He shows us what He can do. Most of us once thought of God as being "out there somewhere," a distant overseer of the world. Step Three reveals a deeper truth: the Lord has a specific plan for our lives. *"I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord."* (Jeremiah 29:11) We surrender our will so we can receive His.

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

If we have not seen evidence of God's care in the past, it may be because we resisted His control. We refused to yield to His plan. Yet Scripture reminds us: *"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 — and we are perfectly equipped for it. When He made us, He also made the plan, and the two fit together perfectly. His plan is always better than anything we could design for ourselves. Our plans lead to destruction; His plans lead to our highest and best good.

Making a decision means doing business with God. Thinking about surrender is not surrender. Talking about surrender is not surrender. We must actually do it. A simple prayer might be:

"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 yield to Your full control from this day forward. Relieve me from bondage to self and deal with my life as You see fit."

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Four

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Up to this point, most of our recovery work has taken place in our minds. Step Four is where recovery becomes action. This step requires writing down the story of our lives — the good and the bad.

The actual writing may only take a few hours, but the real challenge is often working up the courage to begin. That's why it is called a *fearless* moral inventory. It takes courage to put the painful, embarrassing, or shameful parts of our lives into writing.

Many obstacles can keep us from starting. Some fear having to share what they write later in the process. But Step Four should be taken as if no one else will ever see what we write. One step at a time.

Some of us worry that if we write down something illegal or deeply embarrassing, someone might find the paper. If necessary, we can write certain things in a personal code that only we understand.

This step is for **our** benefit. It is not busywork. As we yield to the Lord and begin writing, something powerful happens. Healing begins as the “junk” in our minds flows onto the page. Many people have said it felt like poison draining out of them.

As we write, things appear on the page that we didn't realize were inside us. The Lord prompts us, and we begin to see patterns for the first time. This alone can bring immediate relief.

Another fear is that writing about the past will stir up guilt or reopen old wounds. We may worry that remembering what others did to us will be too painful. But we cannot stir up what isn't already there. Time does **not** heal all wounds — Jesus does.

Keeping things buried is what caused much of our trouble. In recovery, we learn that the past continues to affect us negatively until we face it. We must own the truth and resolve the issues. When we do, we can finally put them behind us in a way that they no longer hurt or control us.

There is a saying in recovery: **“We are only as sick as our secrets.”** Bringing long-buried things into the light gives us room to breathe. We begin to relax and face the truth head-on. *“The truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32)

Some people get stuck because they don't know where to start. If this is a concern, writing events on 3×5 cards can help. Cards can be rearranged in chronological order later. Another advantage is that we can carry blank cards with us and write things down as they come to mind.

A simple suggestion: write about every significant event in your life. When writing about what went wrong, include how it affected you and what part you may have played. Don't overthink it.

Remember, God does not leave us to face our past alone. As Psalm 34:18 reminds us, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

JUST DO IT.

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Five

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

A major part of Step Five is taking an honest look at what we wrote in Step Four. Many of us have been hiding some of these things from ourselves our entire lives. Now we must gather the courage to face the truth as we look at our past. We need to be as objective as possible.

As we review what we wrote, we begin to see patterns and behaviors we never realized were part of our lives. This can be painful, because we are seeing our story from a new angle. We must be careful not to beat ourselves up.

Seeing our inventory in this new light can become an obstacle to continuing our recovery. We may think, *“This is ugly. I can’t share this with anyone. They’ll think terrible things about me.”* Sometimes the only thing that keeps us from finishing Step Four is our fear of Step Five. We may stall, trying to make our writing “perfect,” using it as an excuse to avoid moving forward. We must gather all the courage we can and press on — because this is the only way we get better.

Another trap is the familiar attitude: *“I don’t need to tell another person. I only need to confess to God.”* We don’t need to debate forgiveness — God forgives. But Step Five is about the **healing** that comes when we confess our sins to another human being. *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”* (James 5:16)

It is nearly impossible to feel accepted, forgiven, and loved by God when we have never experienced that acceptance from another person. People cannot love us if they do not know us. They can only love who they think we are — or who we pretend to be. Step Five calls us to **get real**.

This principle was not invented by people; it was ordained by God. When we are ready to take this step, the Lord will provide the right person to hear our story. We should pray about this, and He will lead us to the right individual.

We want to be courageous, but we also want to be wise. We should share our inventory with a responsible person — a pastor, priest, minister, counselor, trusted friend, or a recovery sponsor. A sponsor is someone with more experience in recovery who 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 finally release secrets we thought we would carry to the grave.

We take this step prayerfully, with another person, in the presence of God. It is a holy time and a healing time. It is a moment to receive God’s forgiveness and rest in His assurance.

We are only as sick as our secrets. After Step Five, we have fewer secrets — and less sickness. We are different, and we feel different. Some of us experience such overwhelming love, forgiveness, and freedom that we hardly know how to handle it. This can also be a vulnerable time, so it may help to schedule a quiet place afterward for communion, prayer, and meditation with the Lord.

Section Three – Working the Steps

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 only playing games. At first glance, it may seem like the easiest step — something that can be completed in a few moments. Not so. This step doesn't require us to take action yet, and we don't even have to make the actual decision described in Step Seven. We simply have to become **ready**.

We already surrendered our lives in a general way back in Step Three. Some major problems — like drunkenness or other destructive behaviors — may have already been lifted as a result of the work we've done so far. But now we have a list of specific things in our lives that are out of order, and we must decide what to do about them.

This list of character defects (or sins, if you prefer) represents the areas where we are still in control. In these areas, we act as our own gods. Step Six calls us to become willing to turn these things over to the Lord. The list may include pride, lust, laziness, greed, envy, gluttony, anger, and self-righteousness.

Our specific defects might include overworking, overeating, gambling, lying, manipulating, grandiosity, or other obsessions. God requires our ongoing cooperation — our willingness to let these things go.

This step requires faith. Why become willing to have our lives completely overhauled if nothing is going to happen? The answer is simple: God has proven Himself by transforming the lives of countless others. We are not so unique or so damaged that we are beyond His ability to change.

Another concern is the fear of losing our identity. Some of us lived in our defects so long that they became a big part of who we thought we were. Some of us even “reveled” in our badness. If we let these things go, what will be left? The answer: **the beautiful creation God intended us to be.**

Letting go of these defects can stir up grief. Even though they caused pain and destruction, they were familiar. Losing them can feel like losing a part of ourselves — even if it's a part that never should have been there.

That's the hard part. The good news is that this step is essential to discovering who we truly are. Many of us have asked, “*Who am I, and why am I here?*” Step Six is part of giving God permission to reveal the real us.

King David was a man after God's own heart, yet he struggled with serious defects — including adultery and murder. None of us have committed an offense greater than his. If there was hope for David, there is hope for us. He prayed:

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

God loved David and restored him. He loves us too — and He 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)

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Seven

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Now it is time to take action again. The key word in this step is **humility** — something most of us had very little of before entering recovery. Self-centered fear fueled our addictions and our shortcomings. Self-sufficiency and self-reliance lie at the root of the things that are out of order in our lives. Humility cuts right at those roots and moves us toward relying on the Lord instead of ourselves.

Our shortcomings are the character defects that keep us from being in a right relationship with God and with other people. They may have given us short-term pleasure, but always at the cost of long-term pain.

Now is the time to take the step of faith required to let them go — with the expectation that the Lord will remove them. Doing this step means moving out in faith to receive healing. Some people struggle with the idea of faith healing, but here we must be willing to believe. God's Word promises healing in response to 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 their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

We must also admit that we do not have the power to change our own lives. We must become willing to let God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This means actually letting go of control in the specific areas we identified in Step Six.

Even though giving these things up is like giving up poison that has harmed us, it still takes courage. It helps to remember that God is all-loving and His plan for our lives is for our highest and best good. He never takes anything away without giving something better in its place.

It is wise to plan a quiet place where we can be alone to take this step. We may want to pray beforehand, asking the Lord to guide us. Then we review our list of shortcomings.

This is a good time to get on our knees and pray with all the earnestness and faith we can muster. The exact words are not important — only the sincerity. A prayer might sound like this:

"Dear Lord, I come to You in the name of Jesus and admit that I have these faults. I know I cannot remove them myself or change my own life, but You are able to heal every problem and forgive every sin. Please forgive these sins and remove anything from my life that displeases You. Take away everything that keeps me from being in right relationship with You and others. Remove anything that hinders me from being an instrument of Your peace and righteousness. Deal with my life in whatever way is pleasing to You, 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 after taking this step. Praise the Lord.

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Eight

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

One helpful way to begin this step is to look back at our Step Four inventory — especially the list of people who harmed us. In many cases, we harmed them in return. Sometimes we even behaved in ways that contributed to the conflict in the first place.

Of course, some people were victims in situations such as rape or abuse. We are **not** suggesting that anyone should feel guilty or search for what they “did wrong.” That would only add more injury to someone who was innocent. The purpose of this step is not to create guilt — it is simply to make a list. This step is groundwork for the next one.

These steps could have been combined, but the emotional and spiritual weight involved is so great that it is healthier to separate them. Step Eight must be taken on its own so we do it thoroughly and honestly.

We do **not** need to worry yet about actually making amends. If we combine Steps Eight and Nine, we may leave important names off the list out of fear of facing those people. Step Eight is only about making the list and becoming willing.

The goal is to write down **everyone** we can think of whom we may have harmed in any way. This does not mean we will make amends to every person on the list. It does mean we must become willing. And we cannot become willing if we refuse to make a complete list.

Becoming willing does not mean rushing out to approach everyone immediately. It means we are open to making amends whenever and however the Lord leads and provides the opportunity.

One of the first temptations in this step is to rationalize our actions based on what others did to us. We may think, “*They hurt me worse — they should be making amends to me.*” But nowhere in the steps does it say that others must make amends to us. These steps are for **our** healing and spiritual growth. We cannot force others to accept these principles. We can only do what we need to do to get better. It is through these next steps that we enter a new freedom and begin to know peace.

As we become willing to make amends to all, we gain the ability to walk through life with our heads held high. We no longer fear running into someone unexpectedly. When we become willing, the battle is already won in our minds.

A major part of willingness is **forgiveness**. We must forgive those who harmed us. If we do not settle this issue, resentment will block us from cleaning out our own house. Forgiveness is a decision we make before God — choosing not to hold another person accountable for the harm they caused. Scripture commands this:

“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 6:37)

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Nine

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

This step requires courage. It often means facing people we would rather avoid for the rest of our lives — except that we are now committed to recovery. Step Nine is necessary for us to get better and move forward. It is the final major action step in putting our past behind us so we can fully live in the present and future.

We do not rush into this step without thought and prayer. Step Nine requires wisdom, discernment, and timing. Even with the best intentions, we can cause more harm if we approach this step carelessly. We do not want to end up making amends for the mistakes we made while trying to make amends.

Some amends can be made immediately as the Lord provides opportunity — especially financial debts. As money becomes available, we can repay what we owe without much risk of hurting someone's feelings.

However, if a financial debt involved illegal activity or a person who might harm us or someone else, we must approach the matter safely and prayerfully. If the situation involves a shady business deal that could implicate another person, we must check our motives and consider our approach carefully.

Some amends involve destructive relationships from our past. In these cases, we must consider the other person's welfare. A letter may be better than a personal visit. In some situations, **no contact at all** may be the right choice — especially if reaching out would cause problems with their current spouse, partner, or family.

If direct amends would cause harm, we can use an alternate method. We might write a letter and then destroy it after sincerely expressing our regrets. We can also use the “empty chair” method — picturing the person sitting in a chair and speaking the words needed for closure.

Some people we harmed may have passed away or moved to an unknown location. In those cases, alternate methods are the only option.

The main point is that we make amends **wherever possible** and that we remain **willing**. If we are willing but unable to make amends at this time, then it is not God's timing. The Lord does not lead us to do the impossible.

God will provide opportunities to make things right according to His perfect timing. As we surrender to Him and yield daily, He will order our steps in the amends process. *“God shall supply all of your needs.”* (Philippians 4:19)

Jesus made it clear that being right with Him requires being 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)

Section Three – Working the Steps

Step Ten

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

After completing the first nine steps, we enter a new level of freedom. We begin to experience happiness and peace in ways we may never have known before. Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve are called the *maintenance steps* — they help us hold onto what God has given us and continue building on that foundation.

Step Ten calls us to take an **ongoing personal inventory**. Now that the huge pile of rubbish has been cleared out of our lives, we want to keep it out. A daily inventory helps us keep short accounts so we don't accumulate new baggage and end up buried under another pile. If we are not vigilant, small things can add up quickly and steal our peace, joy, and newfound freedom. It takes no effort at all to slip back into old patterns. Negative thinking and unhealthy attitudes toward others can creep in without our noticing. We must make a deliberate effort to guard the serenity the Lord has given us by His grace.

It is suggested that we take this inventory daily. A good time is during evening prayer before going to sleep. Ending the day by thanking God for His blessings is a healthy rhythm — surrender in the morning, gratitude in the evening. This daily inventory becomes a **"garbage detector."** After thanking the Lord, we review the specific events of the day.

- Did we contribute to something going wrong?
- Did we get angry?
- Did we fail to love unconditionally the people God placed before us?
- Were we impatient or self-righteous?
- Did something cause us to lose our peace or joy?
- Did we fail to do what the Lord was leading us to do?

If the answer to any of these is yes, we ask for God's forgiveness and take whatever steps are needed to correct the situation. If we need to forgive someone who harmed us, we simply do it and move on.

If our inventory reveals that we harmed someone, we make it right at the earliest opportunity as the Lord leads. The benefit of frequent inventory is obvious — we don't carry negative feelings for long or suffer the prolonged discomfort that comes with unresolved issues.

The Lord will reveal the things in our lives that are out of order. The Holy Spirit will convict us during this quiet time if we were too busy to hear Him during the day. *"I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to 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 this inventory is our **conscious contact with the Lord**.

- Did we practice His presence today?
- Did we walk humbly with Him by faith, trusting that He was working in our circumstances?
- Did we believe He was giving us the wisdom, strength, and love needed for what He placed before us?

This is the heart of Step Ten — staying awake, staying honest, and staying close to God.

Section Three – Working the Steps

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 cannot live in the past — it is gone. We cannot live in the future — it is not here yet. We only have **today**. The Lord gives us a daily reprieve from a life of self-driven destruction as we yield to Him.

The first part of this step is prayer and meditation — establishing and improving our conscious connection with the Lord. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* This was meant to be a daily request and a daily dependence. God wants us to approach Him every day for what we need.

The Lord desires that we meet with Him in the morning and walk with Him throughout the day. Imagine going on a long trip without gathering food or supplies. That is what we do when we start our day without connecting to God, our true source. We don’t get far before we run out of strength and fall into trouble.

Prayer is speaking to God — bringing our needs, our gratitude, and our praise. **Meditation** is listening — giving God space to impress His thoughts on our hearts. He may want to guide us in a specific way today, but we will miss it if we never pause to listen.

Another part of the Lord’s Prayer speaks directly to this step: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.”* This step reminds us that God **does** have a plan for our lives. Our own plans only brought trouble. When Jesus tells us to pray for God’s will to be done, it is a strong hint that the safest, wisest thing we can do is give Him permission to carry out His plan today. This is not because God is waiting to punish us, but because He longs to protect us from harming ourselves.

Jesus said: *“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 coming to the end of our own plans and our own power. If we are going to follow Jesus and live a spiritual life, we must surrender daily. We must give up control and allow Jesus full authority if we expect Him to manifest His plan in our lives.

Taking up our cross means carrying out God’s plan for us. What an encouragement to know that God has an **individual** plan for each of us. His plan fits us perfectly. Because He loves us, His plan will not harm us. It is meaningful and for our highest good.

“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 hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

God wants daily fellowship with us — not just in the morning, but all day long. He wants to walk with us in everything we do. We need only to be willing to receive this precious gift.

Section Three – Working the Steps

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 a spiritual awakening means we have entered into a real relationship with the Lord. By working these steps, we have come to the end of ourselves — and God has responded by causing Jesus to indwell our lives through the Holy Spirit.

We have been given a new beginning and a new life. The God who was once “with us” is now **in us**. As we yield to Him, His power, wisdom, and love flow through us. We now 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 of our life-controlling problems. We now understand what works in helping people break free from bondage, because we have walked that path ourselves. Our past regrets have become assets as we reach out to others who suffer as we once did. Our biggest problems have become our greatest tools for offering understanding, love, and hope.

We no longer hang our heads in shame over the lives we once lived. We are not the same people anymore. We can even look at our worst sins and shortcomings and see how God now uses them for good in serving others.

We rejoice in God’s promise to “restore the years the cankerworm has eaten.” We now understand more clearly what Paul meant when he wrote: *“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)

Helping others is part of our recovery. It allows us to give away what we have received. When we do this with unconditional love, **we** are the ones who receive the greatest blessing.

Many of us once believed we were insignificant — that our lives had no purpose or meaning. Now we discover that we are equipped to help others in matters of 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 an eternal impact on the part of the world our lives touch. When people are in real trouble, they come to us for answers. Some of us who were once burdens to society have become assets to our communities.

As we continue helping others, we protect ourselves from slipping back into self-centered living. God places before us the very people we are perfectly equipped to help. Often, what we notice in their lives helps us recognize areas in our own lives that still need work.

To **practice these principles in all our affairs** means applying all the steps in every area of life. It means using these spiritual tools in our relationships, our decisions, and our daily walk — living in communion with the Lord, in partnership with Him, in everything we do.

Section Three – Working the Steps

Recovery Scripture Meditations

Step One — Powerlessness & Honesty

- Romans 7:18–20
- Psalm 38:1–9
- Psalm 31:9–10
- Psalm 72:12–13
- Matthew 9:36
- Isaiah 57:18
- 2 Corinthians 1:8–9

Step Two — Hope & Belief

- Mark 9:23–24
- Psalm 18:1–3
- John 12:46
- Acts 3:16
- Isaiah 40:29–31
- Jeremiah 17:14
- Romans 15:13

Step Three — Surrender & Trust

- Proverbs 3:5–6
- Matthew 11:28–30
- Psalm 23
- Psalm 91:1–4
- Jeremiah 29:11
- Romans 12:1
- Psalm 37:5

Step Four — Moral Inventory

- Psalm 139:23–24
- Galatians 6:3–5
- Proverbs 16:2–3
- Romans 13:11–14
- Luke 12:1–3
- Lamentations 3:40
- 1 John 1:6–7

Step Five — Confession & Freedom

- James 5:16
- 1 John 1:8–9
- Proverbs 28:13–14
- Hebrews 4:12–16
- Luke 5:31–32
- Psalm 32:1–5
- Acts 19:18

Step Six — Ready for Change

- Ephesians 4:22–24
- Colossians 3:5–8
- Romans 6:11–12
- 1 Peter 1:13–16
- Psalm 51:10
- Psalm 119:33–40
- Philippians 2:13

Step Seven — Humility & Asking God

- 1 Peter 5:6–7
- Psalm 32:6–8
- Psalm 37:23–24
- Matthew 18:4
- Acts 3:19
- Hebrews 12:5–11
- James 4:6–10

Step Eight — Willingness & Forgiveness

- Matthew 18:21–35
- Luke 6:37–38
- John 13:34–35
- 1 Corinthians 13
- Ephesians 4:31–32
- Colossians 3:12–14
- James 4:11–12

Step Nine — Making Amends

- Matthew 5:23–24
- Romans 12:18
- Philippians 1:9–11
- Colossians 4:5–6
- Philemon 8–17
- Proverbs 16:20–24
- Psalm 51:14–17

Step Ten — Daily Inventory

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17–22
- Psalm 139:23–24
- Romans 12:3
- Hebrews 2:1–3
- 1 Peter 2:11
- Psalm 85:8–9
- Psalm 103:8–18

Step Eleven — Prayer & Meditation

- Philippians 4:6–9
- Romans 8:26–28
- Galatians 2:20
- Psalm 84:5–12
- John 4:13–14
- Psalm 27:7–11
- Psalm 127:1–2

Step Twelve — Service & Awakening

- Mark 5:18–20
- 1 Corinthians 9:22–27
- 1 Timothy 1:12–16
- Matthew 5:14–16
- Romans 10:14–15
- Psalm 96:1–2
- Proverbs 31:26–31

Section Four

Recovery-Related Topics



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

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Anger - Anger is an area where we must exercise great caution in our recovery. Anger is a valid emotion, and it should not be stuffed. When anger is turned inward, it can lead to major depression and other serious problems. We must learn how to handle anger appropriately.

Even though we are trying to live right, that doesn't mean others won't do things that provoke anger. Life is full of people who will disappoint us, no matter what we do to prevent it. It's like owning a car: if we never take it out of the garage, we probably won't have an accident — but the car becomes useless. In the same way, our lives become small and ineffective if we hide from all potential hurt.

In life, people will “run into us” and dent us up a little (or a lot), giving us opportunities to feel anger. It is okay to experience anger. But when anger rises, we must be careful. It is a dangerous time when we are prone to act in ways we will regret. If we let anger control us instead of controlling it, we lose. We may say or do something harmful. Scripture says, *“Be angry and sin not. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.”* (Ephesians 4:26) Anger itself is not sin, but God clearly commands us to handle it with caution.

We are instructed not to hold on to anger too long. This is for our own good. Anger is an unpleasant emotion, and choosing to stay angry is choosing to inflict pain on ourselves. The pain we accumulate from holding onto anger can far outweigh the original injury.

Anger is intense and can be toxic by itself. It can trigger adrenaline and create a chemical “high.” If left unchecked, we can become addicted to our anger as it takes on a life of its own. It can also lead us back into other harmful behaviors or substances.

It is important to be honest with God and with ourselves about our anger. God does not expect us to cover it up with flowery prayers when our thoughts and feelings are far from that. We can speak plainly to Him about what happened and how we truly feel. God can handle the truth. He responds to honesty, embraces us with His love, and enables us to forgive and be set free.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or pretending the offense didn't happen. That is denial, and denial only leads to more trouble. Sometimes it may be necessary to confront the person who hurt us — but only after we have worked through the “heat” of anger. When we confront, we do not blame them for our emotions. Instead, we address their unacceptable behavior, especially when they have continued access to our lives. We let them know they do not have permission to abuse us.

Sometimes our anger is not caused by someone else's wrongdoing but by our own wrong expectations or incorrect perceptions. This is another reason to be cautious about confronting others while angry — our anger may be based on misunderstanding. We can save ourselves embarrassment by not launching an immediate, unrestrained counterattack.

As we progress in recovery, we learn how to handle situations that once overwhelmed us. Over time, things that used to anger us may not even bother us anymore. Learning to pause and reflect before responding is a key part of recovery. By bringing our anger to God in prayer and seeking His guidance, we can choose responses that honor Him rather than react impulsively. Over time, this transforms not only our anger but our character, shaping us into people who act with wisdom, patience, and love even in difficult circumstances. The Lord truly does change lives.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Attitude - Our attitude can make the difference between having a good day or a bad day. In fact, it can make the difference between a good life and a miserable one. In recovery, we are encouraged to have an “attitude of gratitude.” This means looking at things from the right perspective — seeing our circumstances as being ordered by God and arranged for our benefit.

We often view our circumstances as random events that just happen. Sometimes we fail to recognize the sovereignty of the Lord in the midst of them. It can feel like, “Woe is me, God must have fallen asleep and doesn’t see what’s going on.” But God is all-knowing, all-present, and all-powerful over every detail of our lives. Only what He allows can reach us.

We can be living in the best of circumstances — even in a garden paradise — and still be miserable because of a wrong attitude. Conversely, we can be in difficult, undesirable surroundings and still have joy and peace if our focus is on Him. A bad attitude isn’t caught like a virus floating through the air. Attitude is chosen. No one can control our minds or force us to see things their way. It is our choice.

We can either rejoice in our circumstances, as Scripture commands (Philippians 4:4), or we can start a pity party. The Lord never promised to keep us from tribulation. He promised to be with us in the middle of it — to 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) Attitude is revealed most clearly when things do not go our way. Anyone can be thankful when life is comfortable, but gratitude becomes a spiritual act when circumstances are painful or confusing. In those moments, choosing the right attitude is an act of trust — trusting that God sees what we cannot see and is working in ways we do not yet understand. This kind of attitude anchors us in faith rather than emotion.

Maintaining a healthy attitude also requires daily surrender. Left unchecked, our minds naturally drift toward complaint, comparison, and control. Recovery teaches us to pause, to take our thoughts captive, and to realign our perspective with truth. When we intentionally place our focus back on God — His character, His promises, and His faithfulness — our attitude begins to change, and with it, our experience of life changes as well.

If our focus is on Him who is light, we will not despair over the darkness. The problem is that we often focus on our problems and our own ability to fix them. That alone is enough to cause despair. Jesus said, *“Apart from Me, you can do nothing.”* (John 15:5)

When we choose to look by faith at everything that comes our way as a blessing from the Lord, we experience the hope that flows from that perspective. It also releases our faith to claim the promise: *“All things work together for good to 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 we must look at everything through the eyes of Jesus to see the lovely creation He has provided for us. When we choose to be self-centered, our eyes become blind to the good and open to the ugly — and life becomes an ugly experience. But when we are properly connected to God and Christ-centered, we see and experience His beautiful reality.

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus.” (Philippians 2:5)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Boundaries - Boundaries once meant something simple — where one state or city ended and another began, or where our property line stopped so we knew when we were finished mowing the lawn. Clear boundaries kept us from accidentally cutting too much of the neighbor's yard.

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

The boundaries we talk about in recovery are not as clearly defined. These boundaries govern our relationships and behavior toward one another, and they may or may not be physical. Boundaries between people are often like an imaginary line in the middle of a large body of water — no device exists to measure exactly where it is. We guess, and many times we guess wrong. Others guess wrong too.

People cannot know where our boundaries are unless we tell them. They have no chance of staying out of our territory if they don't know where it begins and ends. In the legal system, farmers must post notices on their land before they can prosecute someone for trespassing. Without posted signs, enforcement is impossible.

Most of us had people trespass into many areas of our lives before recovery — and it still happens. If someone knowingly violates the boundaries we have clearly communicated, they are guilty of trespassing. But if it happens because we failed to post “keep out” signs, then we bear responsibility.

We must also be careful not to build walls so high that no one can get in. Boundaries must be reasonable. Otherwise, we harm ourselves through isolation and harm our family, friends, and associates by denying them healthy access to our lives. That becomes self-centeredness disguised as recovery.

When we set boundaries, we communicate — lovingly — what kinds of behavior we consider hurtful or abusive. We seek cooperation, not control. Habits are habits, and they will continue unless there is a specific effort to break them. We cannot set boundaries and expect people to automatically change their behavior. We must be prepared to enforce those boundaries, and do so in a loving way.

For example, a friend may have used sarcastic humor to insult us for years without realizing how deeply it hurt. Setting a boundary might sound like: “You probably don't know it, but when you talk about me that way, it really bothers me. I'm asking you to make an effort to avoid it in the future.” They may be embarrassed and promise never to do it again, saying they would have stopped long ago if they had known. They honor the request for a while, but eventually slip back into old habits. At that moment, we must immediately remind them that they do not have permission to take such liberties with our emotions.

We do not need to wait until they have insulted us four or five times and we are ready to explode before enforcing the boundary. Many of us are “people pleasers,” and setting and enforcing boundaries will take discipline and will not come easily. But as we grow in this area, we will also become more mindful of the boundaries and concerns of others.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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 in our lives, we have no chance of Him being at the center of our lives. Many of us had to come almost to death's door before we were willing to “take a chance” and let Christ in. Others invited Jesus into their lives long before recovery. Some even had a personal relationship with Him from a childhood conversion.

We generally believe that if a person has Christ in their life, they are a Christian. But 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 but not president. He may be present, but not necessarily in control. It is like inviting the greatest pilot in the world into our airplane, then flying the plane ourselves on a dangerous mission. Jesus does not want to be our copilot. He wants to be our pilot — fully in control, fully trusted, and fully used, not playing a secondary or insignificant role.

Before Christ can be at the center of our lives, we must come to the point where we are ready to give up control. We must come to the end of ourselves, either through understanding or through brokenness. Most often it happens through brokenness — when we despair of life itself and finally give up doing things our own way. This is what Scripture calls “dying to self.” God’s Word calls us to die to self as both an initial experience and a daily one:

“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 9:23–24)

To take up our cross daily is to choose God’s plan for our lives each day. God created us to carry our individual cross, and He designed that cross to fit perfectly with how He made us. Unless we are living out the destiny for which we were uniquely created, we will not find true meaning. A sense of significance and purpose will escape us until we begin to live out God’s divine plan.

After Christ comes into our lives and we come to the end of ourselves, we become candidates for being Christ-centered. Like all spiritual principles, faith plays a major role. We must appropriate by faith what the Lord has already provided — the inheritance He wants us to experience now: Christ as our life. He is not only to be in our life; He is to be our life. God has already provided this blessing, 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)

Scripture makes it clear that Christ lives in us by faith. This is not a principle reserved for a few spiritual elites. It is a blessing God provided for all His children and intends us to walk in daily. Yielding to Christ and allowing Him to live through us is walking in the Spirit. Doing things in our own strength is walking in the flesh — and God’s Word says, “No good thing dwells in the flesh.”

We do not need a changed life. What we truly need is an exchanged life — where the very life of Christ flows through us and enables us to do what He calls us to do. This is not about performance. It is not primarily about doing; it is about being rightly related to Him. We do not perform for Him — we yield to Him so He can perform through us. And when that happens, it becomes clear to those who are spiritual that Jesus Himself is doing the work, and He is glorified through it all.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Confronting Others - Unconditional love does not mean we accept another person's unacceptable behavior. It does not mean we avoid confronting behavior that is damaging to them, to others, or to ourselves. Under the right conditions, we have both the right and the responsibility to confront inappropriate actions. We often refuse to confront someone under the excuse that we are being kind by not upsetting them. The truth is that we frequently avoid confrontation because doing so may have negative consequences for us. We like being kind to ourselves.

Our thinking may go something like this: "I'm not going to say anything because they'll get mad at me. They're helping me out in some ways, and if I confront them, I'll lose out." In that scenario, we are not concerned about the welfare of the person acting wrongly — we are concerned about our own interests. Refusing to confront when it is appropriate can be a form of people pleasing. It enables others to remain in denial about their behavior. In some cases, keeping quiet when we should speak is actually an attempt to manipulate the situation for our own benefit.

We may also avoid confrontation out of fear for our future: "I have to put up with this because if I don't, how am I going to live?" In that case, we are looking to the other person as the "supplier of our needs," elevating them to a place they do not belong. If we are unable to confront when necessary, we may need to examine possible codependent issues in our own lives. On the other hand, some of us used to love confronting others about anything and everything. We confronted with a heavy hand, anytime and anywhere we had the opportunity. Recovery teaches us that we must know when to confront and how to confront.

When confrontation is necessary, we must do it with the right attitude. We do not confront with anger or with a desire to punish. We do not approach others with a sense of superiority, as if we have been "chosen" to point out their flaws. Instead, we approach with humility, love, understanding, and compassion. Most importantly, we depend on the Lord to lead us — to guide our words, actions, and attitude. We need to be led by the Holy Spirit. Scripture says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." (Galatians 6:1)

We can handle confrontation in a spiritual way by depending on the Lord for each step. That does not mean there will be no negative consequences, at least in the short term. God has not called any of us into a full time "confronting ministry," and many of us have little experience doing it well. When confrontation is necessary, it may be wise to seek advice from a trusted friend or spiritual advisor. When sharing what someone has done wrong, we must be careful whom we talk to and avoid gossip. Those we confide in must be trustworthy.

Just because something is true about another person does not give us the right to damage them by spreading it around. Even prayer chains can be misused in ways that harm people — "Please pray for Suzie because she's in big trouble and such a bad person." That is gossip disguised as spirituality.

We should not confront someone in an area where God is covering them with His grace. Our goal in confrontation is never to harm, but to help — to express God's love and to restore, not to wound.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Control - Control is one of the hardest issues for us to face in recovery. Most of us spent years trying to manage, manipulate, or force life to go the way we wanted. We tried to control people, circumstances, outcomes, emotions, and even God Himself. We believed that if we could just hold everything together tightly enough, we would finally feel safe, secure, and satisfied. But the harder we tried to control life, the more out of control we became.

Control is rooted in fear. We fear being hurt again. We fear being abandoned. We fear being powerless. We fear the unknown. So we cling, grasp, push, demand, and manipulate — anything to avoid feeling vulnerable. But control is an illusion. It promises safety but delivers anxiety. It promises strength but produces exhaustion. It promises peace but creates chaos.

Scripture says, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”* (Proverbs 14:12) Our way — the way of self-will, self-protection, and self-management — always leads us into trouble. We tried to run our own lives, and we ran them straight into the ground. We tried to be our own gods, and it nearly destroyed us.

Recovery teaches us that control is the very thing we must surrender. We cannot heal while clinging to the steering wheel. We cannot grow while insisting on our own way. We cannot walk with God while trying to lead Him. The first step toward freedom is admitting that we are not in control — and never were.

Letting go of control does not mean becoming passive or irresponsible. It means acknowledging that God is God and we are not. It means trusting His wisdom more than our own. It means allowing Him to direct our steps instead of demanding our own path. It means releasing our grip on people, outcomes, and expectations and placing them in His hands.

Control also shows up in subtle ways. We try to control how others see us. We try to control conversations. We try to control relationships. We try to control our emotions by numbing them. We try to control our pain by avoiding it. We try to control our future by worrying about it. All of this keeps us from experiencing the freedom God offers.

Jesus invites us into a different way of living — a life of surrender, trust, and dependence. He says, *“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28) Rest comes when we stop trying to run the universe and let God be God.

Letting go of control is not a one-time event. It is a daily decision. Every morning we choose whether we will cling to our own understanding or trust the Lord with all our hearts. Every day we choose whether we will force life or yield to His leading. Every day we choose whether we will live in fear or walk in faith.

The miracle is that when we release control, we gain peace. When we surrender, we find strength. When we stop forcing outcomes, God begins to work in ways we never imagined. When we let go, He takes hold.

Control was killing us. Surrender is saving us. And as we walk with God, we discover that His way is not only better — it is the only way that leads to life.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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 — it was very much a part of our present. Our experience is that time does *not* heal all wounds. A problem will continue to deal with us until we deal with it. The good news is that Jesus *does* heal our wounds, and He may choose to do it through the recovery process.

We all entered recovery with some damage to our emotions. If we had been happy, joyous, and free, there would have been very little from which to recover. But most of us were beaten and bruised from head to toe by abusive relationships and adverse circumstances. Anger, depression, fear, guilt, and anxiety are often synonymous with addiction and dysfunctional families. We may also struggle with worry, doubt, inferiority, insecurity, or inadequacy — or all of the above. These things do not go away by ignoring them. It is neither smart nor brave to refuse to face and resolve these issues.

We may have been severely hurt by someone, and we may still be bitter and resentful. Years or even decades may have passed since the original incident, yet when we think about it, the pain feels almost as fresh as the day it happened. These lingering feelings are proof that the wound is still festering and has not been dealt with. When an issue is truly resolved, we no longer become emotionally distraught when we remember it. In addition to the direct pain of the memory, there may be emotional, mental, physical, and even spiritual side effects that stem from the original problem. A painful childhood incident can greatly influence how we act as adults. We may not even consciously understand why we do what we do — our past is controlling our present.

It is difficult to be led by the Spirit in areas where we remain in bondage to our past. The main thing that keeps 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.

As with any issue, the end of denial is the beginning of recovery. We must be willing to be honest about what is really going on in our lives. It is like discovering a spot of cancer. It is not pleasant to find it, but it is far better to know and remove it than to pretend it isn't there and allow it to spread. This is often what we do with emotional wounds — we refuse to treat them, and they spread like poison into every area of our lives.

We cannot heal ourselves and we cannot change ourselves — that is not what is being said here. But we *can* cooperate with what the Lord wants to do in us and through us. If we do not know the root cause of a problem, we can pray and ask Him to reveal it. James 1:5 tells us that God will give us wisdom if we ask in faith. When the Lord reveals an area that needs attention, we must address it and commit it into His hands. He does not reveal these things to condemn or punish us. We have already been punished enough by others — and often by ourselves. He reveals these things to bring healing and freedom. God is committed to our welfare.

God is a gentleman. He will not bulldoze His way through our lives. We must do our part. The first step is to be honest and admit the issue is there. Then, by faith, we turn the matter over to the Lord and follow His guidance. There is certainty of victory if we are willing to apply the spiritual principles of the steps to these areas of our lives. This will almost always include forgiving those who harmed us. Unforgiveness is usually the very vehicle that keeps the pain of our past alive in our present.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Depression - Depression was a major symptom of our addictive lives. We used many different coping mechanisms to deal with it and to feel “up” instead of down. Eventually, every technique we used to battle depression failed us — and that failure helped steer us toward recovery.

There was a television show called *Hee Haw* where they sang the same humorous song about depression each week: *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.* Although the refrain was meant to be funny, the words and intensity of the song reflected how we often felt.

Sometimes we were the life of the party, and to others we appeared happy-go-lucky. Many of us pretended to be happy because we knew people didn't like being around someone who was unhappy — and we didn't want to be alone. But inside, there was darkness that didn't match our outward appearance.

Some of us described our depression as a dark cloud that followed us everywhere. It kept us from seeing the light of life and the beauty of God's creation. It distorted our view of the world and robbed us of the joy we were meant to have.

Much of this depression came from trying to live life in our own power and resources, carrying out our own plans. God never intended us to operate that way. He intended for us to be yielded to Him so His love, power, and wisdom could flow through us and enable us to do what He puts before us. We were overburdened and overwhelmed because we were living in a way God never designed us to live.

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

We viewed life through a self-centered lens. We didn't know — or didn't 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)

The psalmist recognized his depression because he was focusing on his circumstances instead of focusing on the Lord. God is with us and fully capable of delivering us to victory regardless of what surrounds us.

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

Depression is a genuine emotion, and we should not deny its existence. There are truly sad circumstances where it is perfectly legitimate to be depressed for a time. For example, the death of a loved one brings grief and depression that must be faced honestly in order to heal.

However, to seize on a sad occurrence and linger in depression for a long time can become another expression of self-centeredness.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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 currently have anything to be afraid of, all we need to do is read the paper and we'll find enough material to keep us going for a while. Fear is an overwhelming sense that something bad is going to happen to us or to someone or something we care about. If it goes unchecked, it can become a disabling emotion.

There *is* an appropriate kind of fear — the kind that is really wisdom prompting us to exercise caution in dangerous circumstances. This kind of fear is our friend. It keeps us out of trouble or gets us ready to face danger we cannot avoid.

But 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 do for our own welfare. It can immobilize us and keep us from hearing and carrying out God's will for our lives. If we live in a dangerous neighborhood where violence is common, it is natural and healthy to be cautious about going out at night and to take proper safeguards. But 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, no one can say it isn't there. And if we are feeling fearful, our actions will eventually follow our feelings. If we have been hurt many times in relationships, we may feel betrayed and fear that the same thing will happen again. So we put up walls to protect ourselves from a repeat experience.

The problem with putting up walls to keep out the bad is that those same walls keep out the good. How do we begin to tear down these walls and live the balanced life the Lord wants for us? How is fear reversed? Scripture says, "*Perfect love casts out fear.*" (1 John 4:18) We know Jesus is perfect, and He is love. Therefore, we can safely understand this to mean that the Lord will remove fear from our lives. But we must do our part and receive what He wants to provide.

When we were carrying out our own plans in our own strength, we had good reason to fear — we were outside the covering of God's perfect will. Now, as we seek to let God be in control and draw close to Him, we can claim all the promises He gives His children. The closer we get to the Lord, the more understanding and faith we gain, and the more fear is dispelled. We need to snuggle up very close to Jesus.

We don't have to fear because the Lord has promised to supply all our needs (Philippians 4:19). We don't have to fear because nothing can reach us except what God has already determined is for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). We don't have to fear because nothing in heaven or earth — past, present, or future — can separate us from God's love. We don't have to fear because the Lord has a perfect plan for our lives and is providentially working out all our circumstances for our best welfare (Jeremiah 29:11).

From a spiritual perspective, it *is* frightening 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 states that He will never leave us or forsake us — He will be with us always.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Fellowship / Community - One of the greatest gifts God gives us in recovery is fellowship — real community with people who understand where we've been and where we're going. Many of us spent years isolated, hiding, pretending, or pushing people away. We were surrounded by others but deeply alone. Addiction thrives in isolation, but healing grows in connection. God never intended us to walk this journey by ourselves.

Scripture says, *“Two are better than one... if either of them falls, one can help the other up.”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10) Recovery teaches us the same truth: we need each other. We need people who will listen, encourage, challenge, and walk beside us. We need a safe place to be honest, a place where we can share our struggles without fear of judgment. Fellowship is not optional — it is essential.

Community also protects us. When we isolate, we drift. When we drift, we fall. But when we stay connected, we stay grounded. We hear truth when our minds lie to us. We receive strength when we feel weak. We find hope when we feel discouraged. God often speaks through His people, and He uses fellowship to keep us steady.

This is where our **Christ-centered Traditions** become so important. They give structure, safety, and spiritual direction to our fellowship. They remind us that Christ is the head of our meetings, that unity matters, that leadership serves rather than controls, and that our primary purpose is to carry the message of hope to others. The Traditions protect the group from becoming personality-driven, agenda-driven, or conflict-driven. They keep the focus on Jesus and the healing He brings.

If someone wants to go deeper into how these Traditions shape healthy community, they may want to download the supplemental guide on the Christ-centered Traditions — just saying.

Fellowship also teaches us humility. We learn to listen instead of dominate. We learn to receive instead of pretending we have it all together. We learn to let others speak into our lives. We learn that we are not the only ones who struggle — and not the only ones God is transforming. Community reminds us that we belong, that we matter, and that we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Recovery community is a place where we practice love, grace, honesty, and accountability. It is where we learn to trust again. It is where we discover that we don't have to hide anymore. It is where we see God working in real time — in real people — and it strengthens our faith that He can work in us too.

Most importantly, fellowship reflects the heart of Christ. Jesus never sent His disciples out alone. He formed a community, a family, a body. He designed His Church to be a place of healing, restoration, and shared life. When we gather in His name, He is present among us. When we walk together, we experience His love in tangible ways.

Fellowship is also where perseverance is formed. Showing up, even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient, becomes an act of faith and obedience. Over time, shared stories, shared prayers, and shared victories knit our hearts together in ways that strengthen our walk with God.

We cannot recover alone. We were not meant to. **In fellowship, we find strength. In community, we find healing. And in Christ, we find each other.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Forgiveness - One of the most important tools in recovery is being forgiven and forgiving others.

When we feel guilty about things in our past, bad feelings — and often wrong actions — flow out of that guilt. Then we feel even more guilt and end up doing something else wrong to medicate the pain. The sin-cycle rolls on unchecked. Receiving God’s forgiveness breaks this cycle.

There is nothing we have done that is beyond God’s ability or willingness to forgive. Moses, King David, and the Apostle Paul all had something in common besides 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 write many words about 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 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 — forgiveness is free to us, but God paid a great price in sending His only Son to suffer and die in our place. It is an affront to God not to receive the forgiveness He wants us to have for all we have done wrong. There are also people who have wronged us and caused damage that still affects our lives today. To the extent that we have not forgiven them, the wounds they inflicted continue to fester and hurt us. Forgiving them benefits *us* — it releases harmful resentments and begins the healing process. It allows us to let go of the excess baggage we have been carrying from the past.

Forgiveness is not forgetting or pretending something never happened. It does not necessarily mean saying something directly to the person who hurt us. They do not 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 is choosing to give up our “right” to retaliate. Forgiveness is letting go of anger, resentment, hostility, bitterness, hate, and rage. It is canceling the debt we feel another person owes us (Ephesians 4:32).

Forgiveness sets us free from viewing our present circumstances through the lens of past hurts. Forgiveness is not optional. It is required — both for our own forgiveness and for our own healing. Jesus Christ has freely forgiven us, and He clearly instructs us to forgive others. If we refuse to forgive, we are the ones who lose, because unforgiveness obstructs our relationship with the Lord and with other people. 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 He wants to give us. 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, even beyond time itself. Please take my hand and walk with me into my past where hurtful things occurred. Give me Your courage, comfort, and spiritual protection, and let the Holy Spirit guide me as I speak. When I was about ____ years old, _____ hurt me when they _____. By an act of my will, I choose to forgive _____. I release them from the harm they caused and cancel the debt. I place into Your hands whatever correction they may need. Set me free to love others without conditions. Do whatever is necessary to make this forgiveness real in my life and heal what was damaged. Forgive me for my bitterness and unforgiveness. I trust that You will accomplish all of this and make the benefits of forgiveness real in my heart. Amen.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Forgiving Yourself - One of the hardest parts of recovery is not forgiving others — it is forgiving ourselves. Many of us carried guilt, shame, and regret for years. We replayed our failures over and over again. We punished ourselves long after the damage was done. We believed that if we held on to the pain, somehow it would make up for what we did. But self-punishment never healed anything. It only kept us stuck.

Forgiving ourselves does not mean pretending the past didn't happen. It does not mean minimizing the harm we caused. It means accepting the truth that what is done is done — and that Jesus Christ has already paid the price for it. Scripture says, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 8:1) If God no longer condemns us, why do we continue to condemn ourselves?

Many of us believed that holding on to guilt made us more spiritual, more humble, or more responsible. But guilt that lingers after repentance is not holiness — it is unbelief. It is saying that Christ's sacrifice was not enough. It is clinging to a burden He already carried to the cross. It grieves the heart of God when we refuse to receive the forgiveness He freely offers.

Forgiving ourselves begins with accepting God's forgiveness. Learning to forgive ourselves takes time, and God is patient with us in that process. He does not rush our healing — He simply invites us to keep coming back to the truth of His grace. We cannot give ourselves what we have not received from Him. When we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Once God has forgiven us, the matter is settled in heaven. The only place it remains unsettled is in our own hearts.

Self-forgiveness also means letting go of the identity shaped by our past. We are not the sum of our mistakes. We are not defined by our worst moments. We are not the person we were when addiction ruled our lives. In Christ, we are new creations. The old has passed away. The new has come. When we refuse to forgive ourselves, we cling to an identity God has already replaced.

Forgiving ourselves does not erase consequences, but it does break the chains of shame. It frees us to grow, to heal, and to walk in the new life God is forming in us. It allows us to move forward instead of living in the shadow of yesterday. It opens the door to restoration — not because we deserve it, but because God delights in giving it.

Sometimes the hardest person to show grace to is the one in the mirror. But recovery teaches us that healing requires honesty, humility, and willingness. We must be willing to see ourselves the way God sees us — forgiven, loved, redeemed, and restored. We must be willing to let go of the self-hatred that kept us bound. We must be willing to accept the mercy that God has already poured out.

Forgiving ourselves is not an act of pride — it is an act of surrender. It is laying down our right to punish ourselves and trusting God's right to forgive us. It is choosing grace over guilt, truth over lies, and freedom over bondage.

We cannot change the past. But by God's grace, we do not have to live there. **When God forgives us, we are forgiven — and it is time we agree with Him.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Grandiosity - Grandiosity is a common problem in early recovery. Many of us came in with damaged emotions, low self-esteem, and a long history of failure — yet at the same time, we often carried an inflated view of ourselves. Grandiosity and insecurity are two sides of the same coin. When we felt small inside, we tried to feel big on the outside.

Grandiosity shows up in many ways. We may think we are smarter than others, more spiritual than others, or more “special” than the average person. We may believe the rules don’t apply to us. We may think we can skip steps in recovery or that we don’t need the same help others need. We may even believe that we can handle things on our own now that we’ve had a little success.

The truth is that grandiosity is just another form of self-centeredness. It keeps us from being honest about our weaknesses and prevents us from receiving the help God wants to give us. It blinds us to our need for others and for the Lord. Scripture says, *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.”* (Romans 12:3)

Grandiosity can also be a defense mechanism. We may have been hurt, rejected, or belittled so many times that we built a false sense of superiority to protect ourselves. But this false strength collapses quickly when life hits us hard. Recovery requires humility — not humiliation, but a sober, honest view of ourselves. Grandiosity is often rooted in fear — fear of being insignificant, exposed, or seen as weak. Many of us learned early in life that the only way to survive was to appear strong or superior. We built a version of ourselves that looked confident on the outside but was terrified on the inside. Recovery invites us to face those fears honestly. When we stop hiding behind a false image, we discover that God is not asking us to be impressive — He is asking us to be real. And in that honesty, fear begins to lose its power.

Grandiosity also isolates us. When we elevate ourselves above others, even subtly, we cut ourselves off from the very relationships God wants to use to heal us. We stop listening, learning, and receiving. But when we lay down our need to appear strong, something beautiful happens — we become approachable and teachable. We become part of the fellowship instead of standing above it. Humility opens the door to community, and community opens the door to growth. God often uses the people around us to shape us, sharpen us, and remind us who we really are. When we are grandiose, we are not teachable. We cannot grow. We cannot hear correction. We cannot receive guidance. We cannot admit when we are wrong. And we cannot surrender control to the Lord. Grandiosity keeps us stuck in the very patterns that brought us into recovery in the first place.

The antidote to grandiosity is humility — not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves rightly. Humility acknowledges our strengths and weaknesses honestly. It recognizes our need for God and for others. It allows us to learn, to grow, and to be transformed. Jesus said, *“Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”* (Matthew 23:12) When we humble ourselves before the Lord, He lifts us up in ways that are real, lasting, and life-giving. We no longer need to pretend to be more than we are. We can rest in who He is. Grandiosity fades as we walk in truth. As we surrender our lives to Christ, we begin to see ourselves through His eyes — loved, valued, forgiven, and in need of His grace every day. That is where real strength is found.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Gratitude - Gratitude is one of the most powerful spiritual tools we have in recovery. It is often the answer to many of our darker emotional moments. When we are grateful, it is almost impossible to be angry, resentful, fearful, or depressed at the same time. Gratitude lifts our eyes off our problems and places them on the goodness of God.

Many of us entered recovery with a long list of complaints. We focused on what we didn't have, what others had done to us, and how unfair life had been. We were experts at seeing the negative. Gratitude does not come naturally to the self-centered mind. It must be learned — and practiced.

Gratitude begins with recognizing that everything good in our lives comes from the Lord. Scripture says, *“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”* (James 1:17) When we start to see our blessings as gifts rather than entitlements, our hearts begin to soften. We realize that God has been far better to us than we deserve.

Gratitude also reminds us of who God is in our lives. It shifts our focus from our own efforts to His faithfulness, from our limitations to His abundance. When we pause to thank Him, we begin to see His fingerprints in places we once overlooked — in answered prayers, in unexpected provision, in moments of strength we didn't know we had. Gratitude opens our eyes to the quiet ways God has been caring for us all along, even when we were too distracted or discouraged to notice.

Gratitude also helps us see our circumstances through a different lens. Instead of focusing on what is wrong, we begin to notice what is right. Instead of dwelling on what we lack, we begin to appreciate what we have. Gratitude does not deny reality — it simply refuses to let the negative dominate our thinking.

In early recovery, gratitude can feel like a discipline rather than a feeling. We may not feel grateful at all. But gratitude is not based on emotion; it is a choice. When we choose to thank God — even for small things — our emotions eventually begin to follow. Gratitude grows as we practice it.

Gratitude also protects us from relapse. When we are grateful, we are less likely to fall into self-pity, resentment, or despair — the very emotions that often drove our addictive behavior. Gratitude keeps our hearts soft and our spirits open to God's leading.

We can cultivate gratitude by taking time each day to thank the Lord for specific blessings. We can thank Him for His forgiveness, His patience, His provision, His protection, and His presence. We can thank Him for the people He has placed in our lives and for the progress we have made. We can even thank Him for the trials that shape us and draw us closer to Him.

Scripture says, *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Gratitude is not optional — it is God's will. It is a spiritual posture that aligns our hearts with His.

As we grow in gratitude, we begin to see life differently. We become more aware of God's goodness, more sensitive to His blessings, and more confident in His care. Gratitude turns our focus from ourselves to the Lord — and that shift changes everything.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Gratitude (Expanded) - Gratitude is far more than a polite “thank you.” It is a spiritual posture, a way of seeing life, and a powerful tool God uses to transform our hearts. Many of us entered recovery with a mindset shaped by fear, resentment, disappointment, and loss. We focused on what went wrong, what we didn’t have, and what others failed to give us. Gratitude felt unnatural, even impossible. But recovery teaches us that gratitude is not something we feel — it is something we choose.

Gratitude begins when we recognize that every good thing in our lives comes from God. Gratitude grows when we slow down long enough to notice the quiet ways God has been caring for us all along. Scripture says, *“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”* (James 1:17) Gratitude shifts our attention from what is missing to what God has provided. It opens our eyes to blessings we once overlooked — the breath in our lungs, the people who care about us, the progress we’ve made, the grace that carried us, and the hope that keeps us moving forward.

Gratitude is not denial. It does not ignore pain, minimize hardship, or pretend everything is fine. Gratitude simply chooses to see God’s hand in the midst of it all. It acknowledges that even in difficulty, God is present, faithful, and working for our good. Gratitude does not erase suffering, but it keeps suffering from erasing our joy.

In recovery, gratitude becomes a spiritual discipline. We practice it even when we don’t feel it. We thank God for small victories, for lessons learned, for people who support us, and for the strength to take one more step. Over time, gratitude reshapes our hearts. It softens bitterness, loosens fear, and quiets the voice of self-pity. It reminds us that we are not alone and that God is still writing our story.

Gratitude also protects us. When we are grateful, we are less vulnerable to temptation, resentment, and despair. A grateful heart is harder for the enemy to infiltrate. It is difficult to relapse when we are actively thanking God for the freedom He is giving us. It is difficult to stay angry when we are counting blessings. It is difficult to feel hopeless when we are remembering God’s faithfulness.

Gratitude grows in community. When we hear others share what God has done in their lives, it stirs something inside us. It reminds us that God is at work all around us. Gratitude is contagious — it spreads through testimony, encouragement, and shared joy. When we practice gratitude together, we lift one another up and strengthen the entire group.

Most importantly, gratitude draws us closer to God. It turns our hearts toward Him. It opens us to His presence. It aligns us with His will. Scripture says, *“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) Gratitude is not just a good idea — it is God’s desire for us because He knows what it produces in our lives.

Gratitude does not change our past, but it transforms how we live in the present. It turns our focus from what we lost to what God is restoring. It shifts our attention from what we cannot control to the One who holds all things together. It reminds us that even in the smallest moments, God is good.

We may not always feel grateful, but we can always choose gratitude. **And when we do, God fills our hearts with a joy that no circumstance can take away.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Grief & Loss - Grief and loss are realities every one of us brings into recovery. Some of us lost relationships, opportunities, health, years of our lives, or the trust of people we cared about. Others lost innocence, safety, or a sense of who we were. Some losses were sudden and traumatic. Others were slow and silent. But all of them left a mark on our hearts.

Many of us tried to outrun our grief. We numbed it, denied it, buried it, or drowned it in addiction. We thought if we didn't look at it, it would eventually go away. But grief does not disappear when ignored. It waits. It settles deep inside us. And eventually it demands to be faced. Recovery brings us to a place where we can no longer hide from our losses. We must walk through them with honesty and courage.

Grief is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign that something mattered. It is the heart's way of acknowledging that something precious was lost. Scripture says, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* (Psalm 34:18) God does not shame us for grieving. He draws near to us in it. He meets us in the places where our hearts ache the most.

Loss comes in many forms. Some of us grieve the harm we caused others. Some grieve the harm done to us. Some grieve the years wasted in addiction. Some grieve the person we used to be — or the person we never became. Some grieve relationships that ended, or ones that never had a chance to begin. Whatever the loss, God invites us to bring it into His presence.

Grief reminds us that we were created for love, connection, and wholeness — and that something in our story fell short of what God intended. It awakens a longing in us for the restoration only He can bring. Grief also reveals the places where our hearts still need healing. It shows us the wounds we tried to ignore and the places where God wants to meet us with compassion, truth, and renewal.

Healing begins when we stop pretending we are fine and allow ourselves to feel what we have avoided for so long. It begins when we tell the truth about our pain — not to wallow in it, but to release it. Grief is not meant to trap us; it is meant to free us. When we grieve with God, He gently lifts the weight we were never meant to carry alone.

Grief also teaches us dependence. It reminds us that we cannot heal ourselves. We cannot fix the past. We cannot undo what has been done. But we can place our losses in the hands of the One who restores, redeems, and renews. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4) Comfort is not the absence of pain — it is the presence of God in the midst of it.

Recovery gives us a safe place to grieve. In the company of others who understand, we find permission to be honest. We discover that we are not alone. We learn that grief shared becomes grief lightened. And as we walk through our losses with God and with others, something unexpected happens — hope begins to grow.

Grief does not have the final word. Loss does not define our future. God is a God of resurrection. He brings beauty from ashes, strength from weakness, and life from places that once felt dead. Our losses may shape us, but they do not limit what God can do in us. We cannot change what we have lost. But by God's grace, we can heal from it. **And in His hands, even our grief becomes part of our redemption story.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Guilt - There are basically two kinds of guilt — real guilt that arises from sin, and imaginary guilt. Imaginary guilt is when we run around feeling guilty even though we’ve done nothing wrong.

Sometimes others have told us — directly or indirectly — that we are bad people. Maybe we feel like we don’t deserve to be breathing and carry guilt just for being alive. Someone we considered more important may have died, and we feel guilty that it wasn’t us. Something may have gone wrong in a relationship, and we assume it was our fault.

Dysfunctional family members and friends often use guilt — real or imaginary — for their own purposes. Guilt can be a very hurtful tool when used to manipulate us into behaving the way others want. And if we’re not careful, we can use it as a weapon against others too.

A common example of guilt manipulation might sound like: “You really hurt me by what you did, and you’re a bad person. If you do what I want, maybe you can redeem yourself — after you’ve paid a high-enough price.”

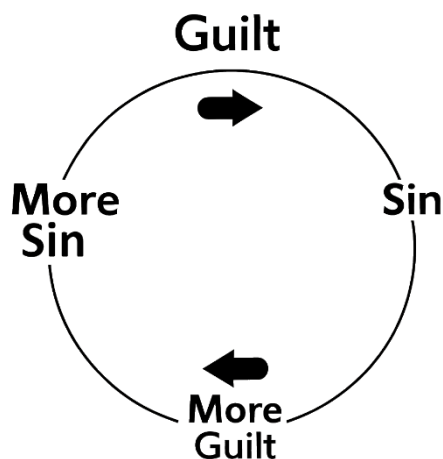
Spiritually, our conscience is the part of us that relates to God. When we do something wrong, the Holy Spirit convicts us through our conscience. If it’s working properly, there’s a “knowing” that we’ve stumbled. That awareness gives us the opportunity to choose what to do next. But if we ignore conviction long enough, our conscience becomes hardened and stops functioning. Why would God keep speaking to us through it if we refuse to respond?

Whether guilt is real or imaginary, it still feels the same. It’s a painful emotion that can control our lives in many different ways. If our lives are being controlled by guilt — or any other negative emotion — we are on dangerous ground, because we are being controlled by something other than God.

There is nothing holy about walking around feeling guilty all the time. There is no place in the New Testament that tells us to feel guilty. We don’t earn spiritual points by beating ourselves up or accepting guilt others try to heap on us.

Even if we did something wrong, the way to victory is not wallowing in guilt or punishing ourselves. That only pushes us to do something else wrong to feel temporarily better — which leads to more guilt, and more sin. The downward spiral continues.

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.” (Romans 8:1)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Honesty - Honesty is a cornerstone of recovery. Without it, there is no foundation to build on. Many of us spent years hiding, pretending, lying to others — and lying to ourselves. We became experts at denial, justification, and manipulation. But recovery begins where honesty begins.

Honesty doesn't just mean telling the truth to others. It means being truthful with ourselves and with God. It means facing reality — not as we wish it were, but as it actually is. Scripture says, *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8:32) Freedom begins with truth.

In early recovery, honesty can feel threatening. We may fear rejection, judgment, or consequences. We may worry that if people knew the real us, they wouldn't want anything to do with us. But the truth is, honesty is what opens the door to healing, connection, and grace.

Honesty also helps us see the patterns that kept us stuck for so long. Many of us lived on autopilot, reacting instead of reflecting, repeating the same behaviors without understanding why. When we begin to practice honesty, we start recognizing our motives, our triggers, and the lies we have believed about ourselves. This kind of self-awareness is not meant to shame us — it is meant to free us. God brings truth to the surface not to condemn us, but to transform us. As we allow Him to shine His light on the hidden places, we discover that truth is not our enemy; it is our pathway to freedom.

Honesty also creates the kind of community where real healing can happen. When we choose to be honest with others, we give them permission to be honest too. Walls begin to fall. Masks come off. Instead of pretending we have it all together, we begin to share our struggles, our victories, and our need for God's grace. This kind of honesty builds trust, deepens relationships, and strengthens the entire fellowship. In a world full of hiding and pretending, honest people shine like lights. And in recovery, those lights help guide others toward hope, healing, and wholeness.

When we are honest, we stop pretending. We stop performing. We stop trying to manage impressions. We begin to live in the light. And when we live in the light, we begin to experience the love of God and the support of others in a way we never could before.

Honesty also means admitting when we are wrong. It means taking responsibility for our actions. It means not blaming others or making excuses. It means being willing to say, "I was wrong," and "I need help." That kind of honesty is not weakness — it is strength.

Recovery is not about perfection. It is about progress. And progress requires truth. When we are honest about our struggles, we give God room to work. When we are honest about our pain, we invite healing. When we are honest about our failures, we open the door to growth.

Honesty is also essential in our relationship with the Lord. He already knows everything about us — but He wants us to come to Him openly. He wants us to speak plainly. He wants us to confess, to surrender, and to trust. *"Search me, O God, and know my heart... lead me in the way everlasting."* (Ps 139:23–24)

As we grow in honesty, we become more trustworthy. We become more authentic. We become more free. Honesty is not just a recovery principle — it is a spiritual discipline. It is a way of life that leads to peace, integrity, and intimacy with God and others.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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 assumed holiness was reserved only for those "churchy" people and that it would never 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 cannot 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. Grace is receiving the good we don't deserve, and mercy is not receiving the punishment we do deserve. God has an abundance of both. 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**, however, 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 reality in our lives. Our condition is that there are still many things wrong in our lives. Just as we are dependent on God for holiness in our position, we are also dependent on His grace for holiness in our condition. We discovered that we couldn't change ourselves — that's part of what led us into recovery. We found that the Lord could and would change us if we yielded to Him and cooperated with His work. First He accepts us as we are. Then He changes who we are. Then our behavior changes to reflect on the outside what He has done 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. But that is not holiness. It is self-effort, and it will only puff up self and produce a superficial work that will not last. Jesus said, *"Apart from Me you can do nothing."* (John 15:5) That means nothing of eternal significance. We can certainly do worldly things in our own flesh, but not anything that truly matters.

The thing about holiness — whether 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 cannot brag about ourselves. None of us can boast, because it is all a gift of God's 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 Thessalonians 5:23–24) This makes it clear that the Lord is the One who sanctifies us — He is the One who makes us holy.

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

*And our part is also to remember that He keeps us **blameless** at the same time He is making us holy — so we may have continued fellowship with Him.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Hope - Hope is one of the most powerful gifts God gives us in recovery. Many of us came into this process without any hope at all. We had tried and failed so many times that we stopped believing change was possible. We thought our story was already written, our future already ruined, and our lives beyond repair. But hope is the quiet assurance that God is not finished with us yet.

Hope is not wishful thinking or blind optimism. It is not pretending everything is fine when it isn't. Hope is the confident expectation that God will do what He promised. Scripture says, *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* (Hebrews 6:19) Hope anchors us when life feels unstable. It keeps us steady when our emotions swing, when circumstances shift, and when the past tries to pull us back.

Hope grows when we remember who God is. He is faithful. He is good. He is patient. He is merciful. He restores what was lost, heals what was broken, and redeems what was wasted. Hope is rooted not in our ability to change but in God's ability to transform us. Our confidence is not in ourselves — it is in Him.

Recovery teaches us that hope often starts small. Sometimes all we can muster is the hope that today will be different from yesterday. Sometimes hope looks like taking one step, saying one prayer, or making one honest choice. God takes that small seed of hope and breathes life into it. Over time, hope grows stronger as we see God working in ways we never expected.

Sometimes hope grows as we learn to trust God's timing. We often want instant change, instant relief, instant answers. But God works in seasons, not shortcuts. He knows when we are ready, when circumstances are aligned, and when our hearts can receive what He wants to give. Hope teaches us to wait with expectation rather than frustration — to believe that delays are not denials, and that God is working behind the scenes even when we cannot see it.

Hope also grows when we anchor ourselves in God's promises. His Word is filled with reminders that He is with us, for us, and working all things together for good. When we meditate on His promises, hope rises. When we speak His truth over our fears, hope strengthens. When we choose to believe what God says instead of what our circumstances say, hope becomes a steady light that guides us through the darkest places.

Hope also reminds us that setbacks are not the end of the story. We may stumble, but we are not defeated. We may fall, but we are not abandoned. God does not give up on His children. He walks with us through every valley, every struggle, and every moment of weakness. When we lose hope, He holds it for us until we can take it back again.

Hope is strengthened in community. When we hear the stories of others who have been where we are and have found freedom, something awakens in us. We begin to believe that if God did it for them, He can do it for us. Hope is contagious. It spreads through encouragement, honesty, and shared victories.

Most of all, hope is centered in Jesus Christ. He is the One who brings life out of death, light out of darkness, and beauty out of ashes. He is the One who restores what the enemy tried to destroy. He is the One who promises, *"I am making all things new."* (Revelation 21:5) Hope is not a feeling — it is a Person. And when our hope is in Him, it cannot be shaken. We may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know who holds tomorrow. **And because of Him, we have hope — real, lasting, unshakable hope.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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 find real meaning in life by 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, physical ability, or good looks are enough to produce significance in life.” We approach humility when we place **no confidence in the flesh**. This means understanding that apart from the Lord doing a work through us, we cannot do anything that has 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 doing real good on our own. Yes, we can produce works that “look good” in the eyes of the world, but our best effort in the flesh — without depending on God’s strength — counts for zero when measured by the Lord’s standard of eternal value.

Some flesh looks better than others. We may have gained the applause of the world by amassing money, power, or prestige. But we cannot fool God or our own spirit, which remains empty if our efforts are not “born of the Spirit.” *“For the word of God is sharper than a double-edged sword... 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 accomplishes nothing of real worth. It may make us feel good or puffed up temporarily, but in the end it leaves us empty because the flesh cannot produce 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... I can’t do anything on my own... I’m just depending on God.” This attitude may simply be calling attention to self or trying to say the “right” thing for the applause of other Christians. We need to look at our motive.

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

Doing things for others is not necessarily proof of humility. We may be trying to impress others, impress ourselves, or even impress God with our “good works.” What we call humility can become just another form of performance-based acceptance — and it will leave us empty.

The question is: **Are we helping others for their benefit or for our own?** When we help people for our own gain, we miss the blessings that come from humble service. The man in the Bible who prayed to be seen by others got his reward by being seen — but he missed the reward of answered prayer that would have come with a right motive.

Walking in humility is fragile and holy. It means being ever conscious of God’s presence and being yielded to Him. It means 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, strength, and resources are incapable of accomplishing anything of lasting worth or satisfaction. Humility is being continually sensitive to the leading of the Spirit.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Identity in Christ - One of the greatest struggles we face in recovery is not simply breaking old habits, but discovering who we really are. Most of us entered recovery with a damaged sense of identity. We believed the lies spoken over us, the labels placed on us, and the conclusions we drew from our own failures. We thought we *were* our addictions, our mistakes, our wounds, or our past. We lived out of an identity shaped by shame instead of truth.

But our true identity does not come from what we have done or what has been done to us. It does not come from our feelings, our failures, or our history. Our identity comes from **who God created us to be** and **who we become in Jesus Christ**.

Scripture says, *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) This is not poetic language. It is a spiritual reality. When we come to Christ, He does not simply clean us up — He makes us new. He gives us a new heart, a new spirit, a new direction, and a new identity.

The problem is that many of us continue to live as if we are still the person we used to be. We cling to old labels: “addict,” “failure,” “worthless,” “broken,” “unlovable.” These labels may describe our past, but they do not define our identity. God never called us by those names. He calls us “beloved,” “chosen,” “redeemed,” “forgiven,” and “His children.”

Identity in Christ means we stop defining ourselves by our worst moments and start defining ourselves by God’s truth. It means we stop listening to the voices of shame and start listening to the voice of our Shepherd. It means we stop living out of who we were and start living out of who we are becoming.

This does not happen overnight. Recovery is a process of unlearning lies and embracing truth. It is a journey of letting God peel away the false identities we have worn for years. It is learning to see ourselves the way He sees us — not through the lens of sin, but through the lens of grace.

Identity in Christ also means we no longer have to earn our worth. Our value is not based on performance, perfection, or productivity. It is based on the fact that God created us, Christ redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit lives within us. Our identity is secure because it rests in Him, not in us.

As we grow in recovery, we begin to notice something: the more we understand who we are in Christ, the less power our addictions have over us. When we believe we are worthless, we act like we are worthless. But when we believe we are loved, chosen, and accepted by God, we begin to live differently. Our behavior starts to align with our true identity.

Identity in Christ is not a reward for good behavior — it is the foundation for transformation. We do not become new by trying harder. We become new by belonging to Him. And as we walk with Him, He teaches us who we really are.

We are not defined by our past. We are not defined by our addiction. We are not defined by our wounds.

We are defined by Christ — and in Him, we are made new.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Judging - Most of us spent many years being judged by other people. Instead of receiving understanding and acceptance, we were met with criticism and rejection. There was never a shortage of people who wanted to play God in our lives, quick to point out what we were doing wrong. Their condemning corrections only pushed us further into the ground. Condemnation didn't feel any better when it was dressed up as sarcastic humor.

Unfortunately, we listened to these negative messages, and our opinions of ourselves and our actions were shaped by them. Few things are more hurtful than being insulted in a judging way. The damage done to our thinking, emotions, and behavior through the condemnation of others cannot be measured. Yet being hurt by others does not always keep us from judging our fellows.

Sometimes we see ourselves as the pointer-out of other people's faults. Jesus did not say, "This new command I give you: judge one another." He said, "Love one another." In Romans 2:1, the Lord speaks through the Apostle Paul: *"Judge not, lest you be judged, for at the point you judge another, you stand condemned, for you do the very same things."* Recovery circles express the same 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, it often means we have a problem in the same area. We may not be acting it out, but the root issue is in our heart. "If you see it, put your name on it — it belongs to you."

This spiritual principle can actually work to our advantage and become a powerful tool in recovery. All we need to do is pay attention to the things about others that bother us the most. The thing that upsets us most in someone else is probably the next character defect we need to address in our own lives. This helps break through denial and speeds our recovery if we are serious about getting better.

Does this mean that once we are healed in a particular area we will no longer see that problem in others? No. It means that when we are set free, we can see defects in others with understanding and compassion instead of judgment.

Hearing what someone else complains about often reveals what is going on deep inside them. The Lord would have us use this insight to understand and minister to others — not to use the information against them.

If we look for the negative in people, we will certainly find something to dwell on. But doing so only punishes us with unkind thoughts. And if we look at others with a critical spirit, they will eventually sense it — through our attitude, our body language, or our words. They may respond in kind, and we will reap the negativity we have sown.

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

Loving others unconditionally allows us to experience the good that flows from seeing people through this perspective. And when others sense they are being loved rather than judged, we receive the added blessing that rebounds back to us.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Obedience - Many of us spent most of our lives doing things our own way. “I did it my way,” the old song says. For some of us, obedience to other people was a foreign concept. Except for a codependent kind of obedience, we lived in rebellion toward 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 we are to obey the rules and the people in our present circumstances. Those of us who struggle to trust others need to see God as sovereign over all our circumstances. People in authority over us cannot tell us anything except what God allows. In a sense, this means we are all working directly for God.

The key is that we are first and always obedient to the Lord. We assume that obeying the people, rules, and laws He places over us is His will — unless He directs us otherwise. His direction may come through Scripture or through another way He chooses to speak. There are times when people in authority will instruct us contrary to God’s will. Jesus’ disciples were commanded not to speak or teach in His name. They responded, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God.” (Acts 4:19)

Someone may ask us to lie, cheat, steal, or do something immoral. It is easy to discern that such things are contrary to what the Lord would have us do. But sometimes we may be asked to do a “good” thing when the Lord is leading us in another direction. Who are we to obey? There are also people who have no real authority over us who may attempt to give us instruction that goes against God’s will. We want to cooperate with others, but not at the expense of violating God’s direction. We do not want to control others, and we should not enable others in their codependent attempts to control us.

No matter how good something looks, if it is different from what the Lord would have us do, it is sin. No matter how kind, loving, helpful, generous, or compassionate it appears, if it is contrary to His leading, it is still wrong. This does not mean we sit around doing nothing for fear of sinning. We do the good before us — unless the Lord leads us elsewhere. The bottom line (and the top line) is that we are called to be obedient to the person of Jesus Christ. Eventually, even in religious circles, we will encounter leaders, ministers, doctrines, theologies, or even our own interpretations of Scripture that will fail us. God does not want us to place obedience to these things or people above obedience to Him.

God will never fail, and His Word will never fail. But 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 help us in our relationship with the Lord and in living the victorious Christian life. But we are not called to worship tools or systems. We are called to focus on and obey Jesus Himself.

He calls us to walk humbly, surrendered, yielded, abiding, and depending on Him each step we take. But 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 — enabling us to carry out His perfect plan — is the easier and softer way. “To love God is to obey His commands, and His commands are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Open-mindedness - Open-mindedness is not something many of us brought into recovery. Most of us came in with fixed ideas, rigid thinking, and a lifetime of doing things our own way. We were convinced we already knew how life worked — even though our best thinking had led us into chaos, addiction, and brokenness. Open-mindedness begins where self-certainty ends. It begins when we finally admit that our way hasn't worked and that we need something — and Someone — greater than ourselves.

Being closed-minded often meant we dismissed anything that didn't fit our old patterns. We resisted new ideas, new perspectives, and especially new ways of living. We clung to familiar thinking even when it was hurting us. But recovery requires a willingness to consider that we might not know everything — and that God may want to teach us something new. Sometimes the very thing we resist the most is the thing God intends to use to set us free.

Open-mindedness does not mean believing everything we hear. It means being willing to listen. It means being willing to learn. It means being willing to let the Lord show us a different way. Scripture says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5) Leaning on our own understanding is the opposite of open-mindedness. Trusting God means accepting that His wisdom is higher than ours, even when it challenges our assumptions.

When we are open-minded, we allow God to challenge our old beliefs, our old habits, and our old ways of coping. We become teachable. We become reachable. We become able to grow. Closed-mindedness keeps us stuck; open-mindedness opens the door for transformation. It creates space for the Holy Spirit to renew our minds and reshape our thinking so we can walk in freedom instead of fear.

Open-mindedness also means being willing to hear truth from others. God often speaks through people — through their experience, their wisdom, and their counsel. When we shut people out, we may be shutting out the very help God is sending. When we listen with humility, we give the Lord room to guide us through the voices He places in our lives. Recovery teaches us that we don't grow in isolation — we grow in community.

Being open-minded does not mean abandoning discernment. It means being willing to test what we hear against God's Word and His Spirit. It means being willing to say, "Lord, if this is from You, help me receive it. If it is not, help me release it." Open-mindedness is not gullibility — it is surrender. It is the willingness to let God filter truth from error and to trust Him with the process.

As we grow spiritually, we discover that God's ways are often different from ours. His solutions may surprise us. His timing may stretch us. His methods may challenge us. But open-mindedness allows us to follow Him even when we don't fully understand. It allows us to say, "Lord, Your will, not mine." It allows us to walk by faith instead of sight, trusting that God sees what we cannot.

Open-mindedness is a posture of the heart. It is the willingness to let God be God. It is the willingness to let Him teach us, lead us, correct us, and reshape us. It is the willingness to believe that His way is better than ours — and that His truth will set us free. When we stay open to Him, we stay open to growth, healing, and the new life He is forming within us.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Pain - Those of us in recovery are familiar with pain. It's one of the foundations that led us into addiction in the first place. Something was going on that was too painful to endure, and we escaped through some coping mechanism. That's understandable.

The problem is that our childhood coping mechanisms often become our adult addictions or other life-controlling problems. We experienced so much pain that we reached our limit — and began living in a way bent on avoiding pain.

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

When we've taken a wrong path, increased pain can save us from serious disaster. In that sense, pain is our friend — an indicator that keeps us from greater harm. The pain from an ulcer may be telling us something is out of order — that we need to approach life differently. Without pain to warn us, the damage would continue unchecked.

There is also the pain that comes from loss — the death or separation from a loved one, the death of a vision, hope, or dream, or even the loss of a possession. Loss is painful, and maybe the only thing worse is never having anything to lose. When we leave this world to be with Jesus forever, we will leave everything behind. Only what was done in the Spirit will live on into eternity. The pain of loss is clearly part of life, because Scripture says, "It is appointed once for every man to die."

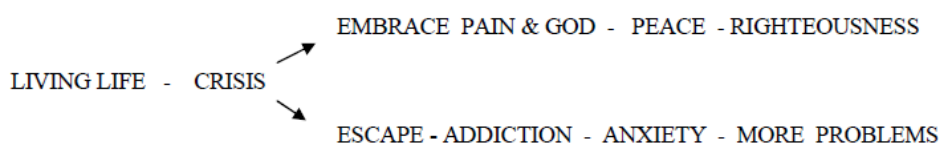
Then there is the kind of pain that seems senseless — pain that comes from others without provocation. The pain of being a victim. This kind of pain feels unfair and without meaning, yet it often breaks our hearts with tenderness and compassion and equips us for ministry to those who suffer.

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." When others rub us the wrong way and inflict pain, God uses it to mold us into the people He wants us to become. Romans 8:28 assures us that "All things work together for good for those who love God."

Pain will make our life better or worse depending on how we respond. We can avoid pain, escape into addiction, and reap the destruction that follows. Resisting pain causes more pain. Escaping into addictive behavior doesn't solve the 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 circumstances rather than run away. We even learn how to deal with the painful past — be healed, and put it truly behind us.



Section Four – Recovery Topics

Patience / Waiting on God - Patience is one of the hardest virtues to learn in recovery. Most of us spent years wanting everything instantly — instant relief, instant comfort, instant escape, instant answers. We lived in a world of quick fixes and immediate gratification. Waiting was never our strength. But recovery teaches us that real healing takes time, and spiritual growth cannot be rushed. God does some of His best work in the seasons when we are waiting.

Waiting on God is not passive. It is not sitting around doing nothing. It is an active trust — a posture of surrender that says, *“Lord, I am willing to move when You say move, and I am willing to stay when You say stay.”* Scripture says, *“Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength.”* (Isaiah 40:31) Waiting is not wasted time. It is strengthening time.

Patience grows when we accept that God’s timing is different from ours. We want answers now. We want healing now. We want restoration now. But God sees the whole picture. He knows what we are ready for and what we are not. He knows what needs to be healed first, what needs to be removed, and what needs to be rebuilt. His timing is not slow — it is perfect.

Waiting on God also exposes our self-will. We discover how much we still want to control outcomes, people, and circumstances. We discover how quickly we become anxious when things don’t go our way. We discover how easily we slip back into old patterns when God doesn’t move on our schedule. But patience teaches us to release our grip and trust His wisdom instead of our own.

Sometimes waiting feels like nothing is happening. But God often works beneath the surface, preparing us for what He has prepared for us. Just because we don’t see progress doesn’t mean God is absent. He is shaping our character, deepening our faith, and teaching us to depend on Him. Waiting is one of God’s classrooms, and patience is one of His greatest tools.

Patience also protects us. Many of our worst decisions were made in haste. We rushed into relationships, rushed into commitments, rushed into escapes, rushed into sin. When we wait on God, we avoid the traps that once destroyed us. We learn to pause, pray, and listen before acting. We learn to let God lead instead of running ahead of Him.

Waiting on God is not easy, but it is worth it. When we wait, we grow. When we wait, we learn. When we wait, we become more like Christ. And when God finally opens the door, we are ready to walk through it with wisdom, humility, and strength.

Patience is not something we produce on our own. It is the fruit of the Spirit. It grows as we walk with God, surrender to Him, and trust His timing. Recovery teaches us that we cannot rush healing — but we can rest in the One who heals.

We may not understand the waiting, but we can trust the One we are waiting for. **And in His time, God makes all things beautiful.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Peace - It was beyond our hope that we would ever reach a place of 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 foreign concept. We could be in the most beautiful surroundings — perfectly suited for stillness and reflection — and peace would still elude us. Our minds raced, analyzed, and searched for something that was missing.

We wondered how other people could just sit and enjoy each other's company or the solitude of being alone. We couldn't enjoy anything, and we were half convinced that others were just pretending.

If we happened to be alone, we often felt lonely and rejected. We had a nagging sense that we were missing out on something and needed to hurry up and find that person, place, or thing that would make us feel better. Life became a compulsive and obsessive search to fill the emptiness.

Even in a crowd, we felt disconnected and alone. We felt different — like we didn't fit in. It seemed we were always in the wrong place, searching for where we truly belonged.

It was us against the world. We couldn't let our guard down for a moment. We were always performing, pretending to be normal, and never quite feeling like we were. We lived under constant pressure to perform, fearing that if we didn't, others would discover who we really were — and reject us.

As we progressed in recovery, we stopped trying to control our own lives — or letting others control them. We learned to trust God and surrender to His control. As we began to understand who God is and how wonderful His plan is 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 missing out on some great opportunity that would unlock happiness, because we had found the key to happiness.

Peace is knowing that God's plan is for our highest good. Peace is accepting that everything the Lord places before us each day will work out for our benefit. Peace is resting in the comfort that He is coordinating all the circumstances in our lives to reach an expected goal — a goal that includes reigning and ruling with Him and being 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 that He will not withhold anything 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 fully capable of turning the worst nightmare into a beautiful dream. That is His heart's desire toward us, His children.

Peace is not a commodity the Lord hands us like a 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.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Perfectionism - We would probably look for a very good doctor if we were about to undergo a complicated and dangerous operation. We would want someone with a reputation for precision surgery — and rightly so. There are some things that must be done right and exact. But when we talk about perfectionism in the context of recovery, we are not speaking about a healthy striving for excellence. We are talking about a compulsive drive that steals our peace and joy.

If we grew up in a system that withheld approval, demanded that we do better, and punished us for not measuring up, we probably lean toward perfectionism. After years of this kind of conditioning, it is no longer necessary for others to pressure us — we pressure ourselves. We become driven to be perfect.

As perfectionists, when we fall short of a goal or project (and we always do), we beat ourselves up for not doing better. We withhold approval from ourselves and replay our performance in our minds, anxiously thinking about what we could have said or done differently.

In this mode, we are never satisfied and never at peace. We are always plotting and planning how to do better. The perfectionist loses sleep thinking about what could have been done better or how the next project can be executed flawlessly. We are never able to rest. Even when our bodies rest, our minds churn with thoughts of how to be more perfect. Self becomes the focus.

Perfectionists are not pleasant people to be around. When we operate in a perfectionist mode, we are miserable — and we tend to make others miserable as well. We become critical and demanding of those around us. We look for the flaws in them that we look for in ourselves, nitpicking everything and everyone that crosses our path.

Perfectionists are wrapped pretty tight, and there is always a tension in wondering when we will unravel. We 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 is the drivenness to be perfect or perform perfectly. The second is giving up. This happens when we reach the point of exasperation and say, “I have to admit that I really can’t measure up. So I might as well not even try.” Then we 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) In other words, do not be so demanding that they give up. Somewhere along the line, we began exasperating ourselves.

Maybe we need to adopt a slogan in at least some areas of our lives: **DARE TO BE MEDIOCRE**. There will always be things we cannot do perfectly. There will also be many things we cannot do very well — yet we still must accomplish them as part of God’s plan for our lives.

It is not God’s will that we be overburdened by excessive 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) And again in Hebrews 4:11, God commands us to enter His rest. We need to rest from beating ourselves up and demanding too much. We are playing God when 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.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Perseverance - Perseverance is one of the most important qualities we develop in recovery. It is the decision to keep going when everything in us wants to quit. It is the quiet determination that says, *“I may not be where I want to be yet, but I’m not going back to where I was.”* Perseverance is not dramatic. It is not loud. It is the daily choice to take the next right step, even when the path feels long, slow, or difficult.

Most of us were not good at perseverance before recovery. We gave up easily. We ran when things got hard. We escaped when life became uncomfortable. We quit relationships, jobs, commitments, and responsibilities. We wanted instant results, and when we didn’t get them, we bailed. But recovery teaches us a different way — a way of endurance, patience, and steady faithfulness.

Scripture says, *“Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* (Galatians 6:9) Perseverance is trusting that God is working even when we cannot see it. It is believing that the seeds we plant today will bear fruit tomorrow. It is holding on to hope when progress feels slow and change feels impossible.

Perseverance does not mean we never stumble. It means we get back up. It means we refuse to let failure have the final word. It means we learn from our mistakes instead of being defined by them. Every time we rise again, we grow stronger. Every time we choose to keep going, we break the power of the old life a little more.

Perseverance also requires humility. We must admit that we cannot do this in our own strength. We need God’s power, God’s grace, and God’s presence. We need the support of others. We need accountability, encouragement, and community. Perseverance is not a solo effort — it is a shared journey. When we feel weak, others lift us up. When others feel weak, we lift them. Together, we keep moving forward.

There will be seasons when perseverance feels costly. Times when emotions run high, when temptations flare, when circumstances overwhelm us, or when God seems silent. These are the moments when perseverance becomes an act of faith. We choose to trust God’s character even when we cannot trace His hand. We choose to believe His promises even when our feelings tell us otherwise.

The good news is that perseverance produces something beautiful in us. Scripture says, *“Perseverance produces character, and character produces hope.”* (Romans 5:4) As we endure, God shapes us. He strengthens our faith, deepens our roots, and forms Christ’s character within us. Perseverance is not just about surviving — it is about becoming.

Recovery is not about perfection. It is about progress. It is about showing up, staying honest, staying connected, and staying surrendered. It is about trusting that God is faithful to finish the work He started in us. Perseverance is our “yes” to God, repeated day after day, step after step. We may not always feel strong, but God is strong in us. We may not always feel motivated, but God sustains us. We may not always see the results, but God is working behind the scenes.

Perseverance is simply refusing to quit — because the One who called us is faithful. **And if we keep walking with Him, we will finish the race He set before us.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Pride - Pride is the main root of all that is 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 God had forbidden. Humanity was not satisfied with depending on God for wisdom, but wanted independent knowledge in an attempt to be important apart from God — to be our own god.

This didn't begin when Eve, and then Adam, sinned in the garden. Satan would not have been there if his own pride had not already gotten out of hand. He wanted to be "like God" and opposed God in pursuing that ambition. Harboring prideful thoughts was the first sin; carrying them out was the second.

When Satan embraced pride, he fell and was cast down — separated from God — and so were all the angels who followed him. Adam and Eve also fell when they embraced pride, and they too were separated from a right relationship with God. As their descendants, the rest of mankind is born fallen and in need of restoration.

Therefore, we all came into this world messed up. Some think it is unfair that we must pay the price for what Adam and Eve did, but that thinking itself is pride — assuming we are better than they were and would have acted more nobly. God was not surprised by the fall. He knew it would happen and provided a path of redemption that allows each of us to enter into a personal relationship with Him.

However, God does not force us into relationship or compel us to love Him. And isn't it pride that keeps us from falling on our knees, worshiping Him, and fully submitting to His Lordship? As addictive and dysfunctional people, we usually have an enormous problem in this area. We often think of ourselves more highly than we ought. It has 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 move away from total dependence on God and close fellowship with Him. The moment we 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 convinces us we have some independent formula for successful recovery is also dangerous. 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 become too confident in some area, it is like challenging God and putting up a wall between Him and us. God often touches that very area of pride to restore us to a right relationship with Him.

Pride about looks, health, speaking, relationships, religion, or anything else can exalt itself against our relationship with God. If we place our confidence in our own ability to perform well in our job, we will likely have problems in our career. God wants a close relationship with Him to be the basis of meaning in our lives.

This does not mean we should walk around feeling like a piece of junk and telling everyone how worthless we are. That can be a perverse form of pride because it is still centered on self. God simply wants our confidence to be in Him — for us to humbly walk with Him and depend on Him in everything we do.

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

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Problems - Some of us had the idea that once we entered recovery and became Christians, trouble would disappear. We imagined a storybook life — 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 major difference is that we are not alone in our problems. Jesus walks with us in our difficulties through the person of the Holy Spirit.

Another big difference is that the Lord turns our problems to 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, He will turn every negative that enters our lives into a positive. Almost too good to believe — but true. This means 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 for our benefit. He will use them to shape us more into the image of His Son and draw us closer to Himself.

When we look at our troubles from God’s perspective, we can see that He only allows good into our lives — though some of that good is heavily disguised. The very circumstances we complain about are designed by the Lord to bring about His plan for our improvement. Looking at problems from this angle, we must admit that we have often grumbled about the vehicles God provided to transport us to a better place. The problem is that we treat the vehicle as a permanent dwelling place instead of a stepping stone. A car, plane, or train is not as comfortable as our living room, but they get us where we need to go.

The circumstances the Lord providentially works out in our lives also get us where we need to go. The issue is that they don’t take us where we want to be or where we want to go. Then again, our best plans got most of us into trouble — and it may be time to try another approach. Problems will either make us bitter or better depending on how we respond. In recovery, we learn that we don’t have to make a god out of our circumstances. Our circumstances don’t have to control what we think, feel, or do. If our car breaks down, we don’t have to break down. We don’t have to get upset, angry, or 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 the car does break down. There are things we will have to do to get it fixed. God will provide a way where there seems to be no way. We can focus on God’s promise of provision and be content — or 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 — either 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 whether we can be OK when things around us are not. “I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.” (2 Corinthians 7:4)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Purpose - Most of us came into recovery feeling lost, empty, and without direction. We had no real sense of purpose. Life felt like a series of random events, disappointments, and survival strategies. We drifted from one thing to another, hoping something — or someone — would finally give us meaning. Deep down, we wondered why we were even here.

When we don't know our purpose, we tend to create our own. We chase after people, possessions, achievements, or addictions to fill the void. We try to manufacture significance through performance, approval, or control. But none of these things can give us the purpose our hearts were created for.

The truth is that purpose does not begin with us. It begins with God. He is the One who created us, redeemed us, and called us. Scripture says, *“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) Our purpose is not something we invent — it is something we discover as we walk with Him.

In recovery, we learn that our purpose is not about being impressive, successful, or important in the world's eyes. Our purpose is to know God, love God, and allow Him to live His life through us. Everything else flows from that relationship. When we yield to Him, He begins to reveal the unique ways He wants to use our lives.

Purpose also grows out of our pain. The very things we thought disqualified us are often the things God uses most powerfully. Our struggles, failures, and wounds become tools in His hands to help others. What once brought shame becomes a testimony of His grace. God never wastes a hurt.

Purpose is not always dramatic. It is often found in simple obedience — doing the next right thing, loving the next person in front of us, taking the next step the Lord puts on our path. Purpose is not a destination; it is a daily walk with Jesus. As we follow Him, He orders our steps and aligns our lives with His will.

Many of us spent years trying to figure out the “big plan” for our lives. But God rarely shows us the whole picture at once. He leads us one step at a time so that our dependence stays on Him, not on our own understanding. *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”* (Proverbs 3:6)

Purpose is not about what we accomplish — it is about who we become. God's purpose is to shape us into the image of His Son, to transform our character, and to draw us into deeper fellowship with Him. As we grow spiritually, our purpose becomes clearer, and our lives begin to bear fruit that lasts.

We don't have to fear missing our purpose. If we are surrendered to the Lord, we are exactly where we need to be. He is fully capable of guiding us, correcting us, and placing us where He wants us. Our part is to stay yielded, teachable, and willing.

Purpose is not something we chase. It is something we receive. It is the natural outflow of a life surrendered to Jesus Christ — the One who gives our lives meaning, direction, and eternal significance.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Rejection - Rejection is a killer. It is hard to find anything more painful in the emotional arena.

Rejection is the perception — through someone's words or actions — that says, *"You're no good, you don't measure up, and you're not wanted."*

If we hear these messages enough from family, friends, society, school, or even church, we eventually believe them. We begin repeating the same messages to ourselves. At that point, we become self-destructive. That destruction may be direct, as in suicide, or more subtle, like escaping into addiction to numb the pain of rejection.

There are a couple of kinds of rejection. **Direct (overt) rejection** is obvious. We come home from school and find our bags packed on the porch with a note saying, "You don't live here anymore." Or someone tells us, "You're no good," or "I don't love you anymore." These wounds are severe — but at least we know what happened and where it came from.

Covert rejection is far more subtle, and we may not even realize we've been rejected on a conscious level. But whether we recognize it or not, it still does its damage. Mom and dad may divorce. Children don't think, *"They couldn't get along, so dad had to leave."* The perception is often, *"Dad left me. I must not be important or lovable enough to make him stay."* The reality may be that dad loves us deeply — but the pain of rejection is shaped more by what we **perceive** than by what is actually true.

In the category of covert rejection, **over-protection** and **lack of discipline** can be insidious and damaging. Over-protection looks kind on the surface — others doing for us what we should be learning to do ourselves. But over-protection rejects us as capable human beings. It leaves us unable to accept life on life's terms. Being waited on hand and foot may feel good for a season, but when we are on our own and unable to handle everyday tasks or struck with fear over simple responsibilities, the damage becomes clear.

Even animals teach their young what they need to survive. A lion teaches its cub to hunt so it can grow independent. Over-protection keeps us dependent — and that may even be the underlying motive of the one doing it.

Another subtle form of rejection is **lack of discipline**. This says, "Do whatever you want — nobody will stop you." At first, this feels like freedom. But eventually we wonder, *"Maybe they let me do whatever I want because they're too busy to care."* If authority figures never took the time to teach us discipline, we likely grew rebellious toward authority and lacked self-discipline. We ended up doing what *felt* good instead of what *was* good. This kind of rejection still leaves us feeling worthless and unable to fit in — and feeling worthless eventually leads 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. *"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."* (John 1:12)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Relationships - We also need to learn how to get along with others after we enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. It was difficult for most of us to humble ourselves, surrender, and come into a right relationship with the Lord. If our pride and ego get in the way of our relationship with God Himself, how much more will they become stumbling blocks in our relationships with our equals? One of the hardest things we must 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 often struggle out of envy to take someone else's place. Picture ten people in a room with ten chairs numbered one through ten. Imagine the chaos if everyone insisted on sitting in the same chair. God's Word says there is "unity in Christ." This means that if we are doing things God's way and in God's timing, there will be no conflict — because God is not divided or confused. He has not fallen asleep and forgotten to provide a place for us.

The conflict began with Adam and Eve. They fell from a right relationship with God and with one another and became their own gods. When confronted, Adam blamed God and Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. This was a far cry from the perfect harmony they once enjoyed before the Lord.

Adam and Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel in their fallen condition. Cain killed Abel out of jealousy. In this tarnished state, people have been hurting one another ever since. Self-centeredness is the problem — everyone doing their own thing.

There would be no hope of getting along with others if God had left things this way. But He 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 enters our lives, we tend to see the similarities and focus on what we have in common. As the relationship progresses, we begin to see the differences. After a while, we may see those differences as faults — and eventually see ourselves as the one "chosen" to correct those 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 one of the most difficult things we learn in recovery. It requires unconditional love. It means accepting others as they are and not trying to twist them into some mold we have created.

Getting along with others requires keeping "short accounts" and remembering they are human beings — prone to mistakes just like we are. It means being slow to take offense, quick to forgive, and willing to confront unacceptable behavior in a loving way.

Wouldn't the world be a boring place if everyone were just like us? We need to learn how to appreciate and celebrate the differences in others. We need to identify with God's interests in them, 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.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Religion Doesn't Work - Some preachers use the catchy phrase, “We are not here to play church.”

In this context, we say that religion alone doesn't work in solving our lifelong problems. This is not meant to insult the local church or any denomination. What we mean is that simply showing up and participating in religious activity is a far cry from what the Lord expects. Going through the motions on the outside does not set us free from bondage or bring healing and victory into our lives.

Many of us were exposed to church activities in childhood or even as adults. Going to church and doing what we were told may have been pleasant, but it did not heal our wounds or reverse a destructive lifestyle. What may have been missing was a **personal relationship with God**. Some churches are alive with the presence of the Lord — and almost everyone who participates can sense it. Others can be so spiritually dead that you might wonder if anyone there, including the pastor, has a real relationship with the Lord.

The same is true for us as individuals. Just because we go through the motions does not mean we are in true communion with the Lord. That work begins on the inside and moves outward. It is possible to read books about a famous person and still not know them personally. The same is true with religious activities — even reading the Bible. Someone can be a Bible scholar and still not know God. A person can graduate from seminary and not truly be in a saving relationship with Jesus.

A news reporter once held captive for years said after his release, “I read the Bible over fifty times, and the stories were a great comfort to me. But I didn't have an other-world experience.” He spent thousands of hours reading about the Lord — but he never met Jesus personally. How sad.

Religion doesn't save, heal, change, or deliver — **God does**. Pretending through religious activity may offer temporary comfort or warm feelings, but it will not bring new life, healing, or anything of eternal significance.

Jesus said, *“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 confronts people who pay great attention to the written Word while ignoring Him — the Living Word.

The same thing happens today. We forget God Himself as we rush around doing many “good works.” But many of these should be called “works that look good.” True good works are those born of the Spirit — things we do **with** God, not things we do **for** God. We are called to yield to the Lord so that He may live through us. If we get this backward and try to perform for His acceptance, it will likely do more harm than good.

It is both a responsibility and a blessing to be involved in a local church. What joy and encouragement come from fellowship with other believers. It is also a great blessing to be used by the Lord in ministering to others. This is a major part of God's eternal plan for us — a plan that begins 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.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

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

However, it's an understatement to say that addictive people overdo a good thing. Extracting more pleasure out of life than we are entitled to is at the core of what's wrong with us. Maybe we feel the world hasn't been very good to us, so we become overly 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 within a marriage relationship and that sexual relations outside of God's design are destructive and dangerous. But not acting out with others does not mean we are walking in victory. Many people in recovery struggle with lust, obsession, fantasy, pornography, and masturbation, convincing ourselves it harms nobody while denying how much time we spend pursuing these things.

Pornography can be disguised as an innocent TV program, a magazine, or even a passerby who triggers obsessive thoughts. Lust may be disguised as romantic fantasies we entertain for hours. These things can control our lives without our conscious awareness. Sexuality can influence where we drive, play, shop, which aisle we walk down in the grocery store, and even what pew we sit in at church. The wrongful pursuit of vicarious pleasure drains us of energy and time.

It's easy to slip into sexual addiction. We are being sexual when we consciously or subconsciously pursue sexual matters — flipping channels for a toxic image, driving around looking for that “special somebody,” or arranging our activities to be near someone we are obsessing over. Being sexual may also mean being directly addicted to pornography or masturbation, always looking for an opportunity to release the buildup of sexual pressure. But release never comes. The more these activities are engaged in, the more desire there is to do more. At some point, we must admit that we are not just doing these things — they are controlling us.

Some people think sexual pressure builds up from not having sex. That is a distortion. Sexual pressure builds up from being sexual. Abstinence from sex is not the same as abstinence from sexual stimulation.

Some Christians argue that masturbation is not a sin. It definitely is if it is controlling our lives, interfering with our relationship with the Lord, or involving 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 before He ministers through us. He covers what is out of order with His grace as long as we are walking toward Him and trusting Him to bring deliverance and healing. This problem will not go away by itself. It must be specifically addressed in recovery.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Sexual Identity and God's Healing - Sexual identity is one of the most confusing and emotionally charged areas of human experience. Many of us enter recovery carrying deep wounds, unanswered questions, and painful histories connected to our sexuality. Some have struggled with desires we didn't ask for, labels we didn't choose, or experiences that shaped us long before we understood what was happening. Others have carried shame, secrecy, or fear of rejection for most of our lives. The Christian community has not always handled this area well. Too often, people who are hurting have been met with judgment instead of compassion, condemnation instead of understanding, and criticism instead of practical spiritual help. Many have heard what is "wrong" with them, but few have been shown the path to healing, hope, and transformation through Jesus Christ.

One of the biggest challenges is that we often confuse what we feel, what we do, and who we are. We assume our desires define us, that our temptations reveal our identity, and that our struggles tell the whole story of who we are. But Scripture teaches something very different. Our identity is not rooted in our desires, temptations, or past — it is rooted in who God created us to be and who we become in Christ. Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, every one of us has been born into a broken world with a broken nature. We all come into this life damaged in different ways. Some wounds are visible; others are hidden. Some struggles are socially acceptable; others are not. But Scripture is clear: "There is no one righteous, not even one." We all need the same Savior, the same grace, the same healing.

Sexual struggles — whatever form they take — do not make someone uniquely sinful or hopeless. They simply reveal another place where the human heart needs the touch of God. The answer is not to pretend, perform, or hide. It is not to shame ourselves into change or "fix" the outside while ignoring the inside. The answer is to come to Jesus exactly as we are and allow Him to do what only He can do. Healing begins with relationship — not religion, willpower, or behavior modification. Jesus invites us to bring Him our confusion, desires, wounds, temptations, and fears. He covers what is out of order with His grace while He works in us from the inside out. He changes our hearts before He changes our habits. He restores our identity before He reshapes our behavior. He teaches us who we are in Him long before He teaches us how to walk in victory.

For some, sexual struggles may be rooted in trauma, rejection, abandonment, or early experiences that shaped their sense of self. For others, the roots may be emotional, relational, or spiritual. Some may never fully understand why they feel what they feel. But the cause is not the key — Christ is. Whatever has pushed us in a harmful direction, God can redeem. Whatever has wounded us, He can heal. Whatever has bound us, He can break. A spiritual program of recovery is not about condemning people — it is about offering the hope of transformation through Jesus Christ. People do not need more shame; they need more grace. They do not need louder criticism; they need clearer truth spoken in love. They do not need to be told how bad they are; they need to be shown how good God is.

We don't get good and go to God. We go to God, and He makes us whole. Our part is willingness — His part is changing us. There is no struggle beyond His reach, no identity beyond His redemption, no wound beyond His healing, and no bondage beyond His deliverance. Sexual identity is not the final word on who we are. Jesus Christ is. And in Him, we are loved, accepted, forgiven, redeemed, and made new.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Shame - Shame leans more toward thoughts and feelings about **who we are**, as opposed to guilt, which is feeling bad about **what we did**. Many point to shame as a root cause in the addictive process. Whether or not it is the primary cause, it is certainly a powerful factor.

Shame can be created by life-controlling negative messages — through circumstances or through what others say or do. Suppose little Johnny is caught lying and his parents say, “You lied, and we are not going to tolerate lying around here.” Johnny feels bad about what he did and resolves not to repeat it.

But imagine a different message: “You lied, and that makes you a liar. We are not going to tolerate liars around here.” This is very different. Johnny is not being corrected for what he did — he is being told **who he is**. The message he hears may be one familiar to many of us in addiction: *“You are no good, and you are not wanted.”*

If enough negative messages are reinforced in our lives, we eventually believe them as if they were true. Our thoughts, feelings, and actions begin to line up with what we believe about ourselves — and the results are disastrous. Shame is often followed by rejection from others, which leads to rejecting ourselves and becoming self-destructive. When we reject ourselves, we make poor choices — knowingly or unknowingly — and those choices reinforce the shame cycle.

We can alleviate guilt by changing what we do. But how do we change who we are — or who we **think** we are? Shame is often based not on truth, but on false beliefs formed through painful experiences. Suppose mom and dad split up and the child thinks, *“Dad left because of me. He doesn’t love me. I’m not worthy of being loved.”* What is needed 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 we need is to replace the lies with God’s truth about who we really are as His children in Christ. The Lord changes **who we are**, and then He changes **what we do**.

The beginning of healing shame is getting in touch with the pain — being willing to look at some ugly and hurtful things from the past and work through them. Healing begins with honesty: facing what happened, what was said, and how it affected us. Healing continues when we begin to distinguish between false perceptions and the truth — between what we believed about ourselves and what is actually real. It is difficult to embrace the truth without first admitting what is not true.

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

More healing takes place when we forgive those who harmed us — through what they said, did, or failed to do. We must be willing to let go of bitterness from the past. If we don’t let go, our past will not remain in the past — it will continue to trouble us in the present. We need to receive God’s love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness if we are to experience the fullness of His healing in the area of shame. It is not holy to punish ourselves for what God has already forgiven. It grieves His heart when we refuse to be forgiven and restored to fellowship with Him. He created us as worthy objects of His love.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Spiritual Warfare - Spiritual warfare is a reality many of us never understood until we entered recovery. We thought our battles were only emotional, physical, or relational. We believed our struggles came from our past, our wounds, or our circumstances. But Scripture teaches that there is another dimension to the fight — a spiritual one. Addiction is not only a matter of behavior or brokenness. It is also a battleground where the forces of darkness try to keep us bound and far from God.

The Bible says, *“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* (Ephesians 6:12) This does not mean we blame everything on the devil or see demons behind every problem. But it does mean we recognize that we have an enemy who wants to destroy our lives, distort our identity, and keep us trapped in shame and bondage.

Spiritual warfare is not something to fear. It is something to understand. The enemy works through lies, deception, temptation, and accusation. He whispers that we are worthless, hopeless, and beyond God’s reach. He reminds us of our past and tells us we will never change. He tries to lure us back into old patterns and convince us that God has given up on us. But Jesus said the devil is “a liar and the father of lies.” Every lie he speaks is meant to pull us away from the truth of who we are in Christ.

The good news is that we do not fight this battle alone. Jesus Christ has already won the victory. Scripture says, *“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”* (1 John 3:8) When we belong to Christ, the enemy has no rightful claim on us. We fight from victory, not for victory. Our job is not to defeat the enemy — Jesus already did that. Our job is to stand firm in the truth.

God has given us spiritual weapons for this battle. His Word is our sword. His promises are our shield. Prayer is our lifeline. Worship lifts our eyes from our struggles to His strength. Fellowship surrounds us with people who remind us of the truth when we forget it. The Holy Spirit empowers us to resist temptation and walk in freedom. We are not helpless. We are equipped.

Spiritual warfare often intensifies when we begin to heal. The enemy hates to lose ground. He hates to see us walk in freedom. He hates to see us surrender to God. But we do not need to be intimidated. Scripture says, *“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”* (1 John 4:4) The power of God within us is far greater than anything that comes against us.

Recovery teaches us to recognize the enemy’s tactics. When we feel overwhelmed, discouraged, tempted, or condemned, we learn to pause and ask, “Is this from God?” God convicts, but He never condemns. God corrects, but He never shames. God leads, but He never pushes with fear. Anything that drives us away from God is not from Him.

Spiritual warfare is not about fighting harder — it is about standing closer to Jesus. It is about staying in His Word, staying in prayer, staying connected to His people, and staying surrendered to His Spirit. As we walk with Him, He teaches us how to resist the enemy and live in the freedom He purchased for us.

We are not victims in this battle. We are children of God, clothed in His armor, filled with His Spirit, and protected by His love. **And in Christ, the victory is already ours.**

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Temptation - Temptation is one of the most intense battles we face in recovery. Even after we surrender our lives to Christ, the pull of our old nature does not disappear. Our flesh remembers what once numbed us, comforted us, or distracted us. Temptation is not a sign that we are weak or failing — it is a sign that we are human. Every believer faces temptation, and every person in recovery must learn how to walk through it with honesty and dependence on God.

One of the biggest lies we tell ourselves when we are tempted is, “I’m not thinking about it,” or “I don’t want to do that anymore.” But deep down, everything in us may be screaming for the very thing we know will destroy us. Temptation often shows up as obsessive thoughts — looping, nagging, relentless. We feel torn inside, wanting two opposite things at the same time. This is the Romans 7 struggle: *“What I want to do, I do not do... but what I hate, I do.”* It is the battle between the flesh and the Spirit, between who we were and who we are becoming.

Depending on where our addictions have taken us, temptation will come in different forms. But it will always come in a familiar package. It often looks like an old friend — something comforting, predictable, and easy to return to. The enemy knows exactly which memories to stir up, which feelings to trigger, and which lies to whisper. But temptation itself is not sin. Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet without sin. Temptation becomes dangerous only when we hide it, deny it, or try to fight it alone.

Scripture promises that God will always provide a way out. “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man... and God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) Temptation tests our trust, not our worth. It reveals where we still need healing and where we must lean more fully on Christ.

Temptation usually follows a predictable pattern: a thought, a desire, a rationalization, and then an action. Recovery teaches us to interrupt the cycle early — to bring the temptation into the light before it grows. When we talk honestly with God and with others, temptation loses much of its power. When we hide it, it grows stronger. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to resist, but He also gives us wisdom to reach out, change our environment, avoid triggers, and replace old habits with new ones.

Temptation is not something to fear. It is something to face with honesty and humility. Every time we choose truth over escape, we grow stronger. Every time we turn to Christ instead of our old ways, our faith deepens. And even if we stumble, God does not abandon us. Romans 8:1 declares, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* God restores, forgives, and teaches us how to walk again.

The pull of our past is real, but the power of Christ in us is greater. As we walk with Him one day at a time, temptation loses its grip, and freedom becomes our new way of life. You are not alone in this battle — and in Christ, you are not powerless.

Reflection - When temptation hits, what thoughts, feelings, or lies usually pull you toward your old behaviors — and what would it look like to bring that truth into the light instead of hiding it? What familiar “old friend” does temptation most often use to draw you back — and how can you respond differently the next time it appears?

Section Four – Recovery Topics



Times of Temptation (A Prayer)

Lord Jesus, I come to You in this moment of weakness. You see the battle inside me — the thoughts I don't want to think, the desires I wish I didn't feel, and the pull of the old life calling me back. I confess the truth to You: part of me wants what I know will destroy me. I don't hide it, and I don't pretend. I bring it into Your light.

Strengthen me, Lord. My flesh is loud, but You are stronger. My cravings are real, but so is Your Spirit living in me. I cannot win this battle on my own. I need Your power, Your presence, and Your deliverance right now.

Break the lies that tell me I need this. Silence the voice that says I can't change. Remind me that I am Yours — forgiven, redeemed, and no longer a slave to sin. Help me take the way out that You promise to provide. Give me the courage to reach out, to be honest, and to choose truth over escape.

Lord, I surrender this temptation to You. I choose You over my old life. I choose freedom over bondage. I choose truth over deception. Fill me with Your peace, guard my mind, and hold my heart steady until this wave passes.

Thank You that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Thank You that even in this struggle, You love me, You fight for me, and You will carry me through. I trust You, Lord. Be my strength in this moment.

Amen.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Trust - Those of us who come from a background of abuse often have a hard time trusting other people. We tend to see our present circumstances through the hurts of our past, and we struggle to be intimate with others.

The intimacy we are talking about here is not sexual or physical. It is a transparent, vulnerable, close, and personal relationship. Yet those of us who have difficulty trusting often show it in our body language — keeping both physical and emotional distance.

It almost goes without saying that if we don't trust the people we *can* see, it will be difficult to trust God, whom we *cannot* see. We also tend to form our view of God based on how we were treated by parents and other authority figures. If we were abused, abandoned, or rejected, we may see God as punishing, rejecting, or unreliable. This creates what feels like an impossible situation: we don't trust God because we don't trust people, and we can't learn to trust people because we don't trust God.

It takes a special measure of unconditional love to help an untrusting person take the risk of trusting again. We must be consistently present for them without violating their boundaries or scaring them off. We need to help them at their point of need without crowding them. It takes time to earn trust, and it will take time for us to learn how to trust. But we must begin. The alternative is to live in isolation and loneliness, hiding behind walls that keep others out — and that leads to a very empty life.

First, we need to trust that people will be human and stop placing unrealistic expectations on them. Putting people on a pedestal only sets us up for disappointment when reality prevails.

We also need to stop playing the victim and inviting others to betray us. Then we feel mortally wounded when they do and gain a strange satisfaction from dwelling in that betrayal. We no longer need to walk around with **VICTIM** written across our foreheads in bold letters. This means setting reasonable boundaries — limits that say, "You can go this far, but I do not give you permission to abuse me." We must set and enforce these boundaries with love.

It is difficult to trust the unknown. We can learn to trust the Lord by reading His Word and dispelling the myths we learned through distorted teaching. More importantly, we need to let the Lord reveal Himself to us directly — to allow the Holy Spirit to 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 betrayed. We only need to be willing to understand what He is eager to show us.

Many of us were involved in exploiting relationships with friends and family before entering recovery. It is understandable that we struggle to trust others now.

Being part of a loving support group can go a long way toward learning how to trust people and beginning to trust God. In such a group, we receive what our families or friends were unable or unwilling to provide. When we experience people who are truly committed to our welfare — not to what they can get from us — healing begins. Through listening and observing, we start to believe that God will do for us the good He has done for others.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5)

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Unconditional Love - The concept of unconditional love was foreign to most of us when we first entered recovery. We were far more familiar with the other kind — *conditional love*. Conditional love says, “I will do something for you if you do something for me.”

This is a distorted perspective of love. It isn't love at all. It's trading. It's bartering. Nothing is free. It's a fee-for-service system. Many of us found ourselves in relationships where people didn't love us simply because we were worthy of being loved, but because of what they thought they could get out of us.

When people treated us this way, we felt victimized — sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. We felt used and betrayed. Addictive and dysfunctional people often use one another. And some of us were not innocent victims. We did our share of using others for our own purposes. Some of us treated people like broken toys — and when we were done with them, we threw them away. And the same was done to us.

The addictive life is a self-centered life. Addictive people use others to get their needs met just as they use drugs, alcohol, or other coping mechanisms. This does not make for healthy or lasting relationships. Genuine unconditional love was something we simply did not understand. Not experiencing sincere love from family, friends, or associates — the people we *could* see — made it difficult to understand the love God talks about in Scripture. The word *love* didn't even compute in our minds.

In recovery, we found people who wanted to help us — or at least said they did. We had a hard time accepting their help for many reasons. Pride, ego, and fear of intimacy all played a part. We wondered, “What's the catch? What do they want from me? There must be a hook in it somewhere.” The idea that someone wanted to help us without demanding something in return was hard to swallow. We were afraid we would be obligated — that a high price would eventually be demanded. That's how it had always worked in the past, so why expect anything different now?

But we *could* expect different results, because most of the people we encountered in recovery were different. They were trying to live by a different set of principles. They wanted to do things *for* us, not take things *from* us. They wanted to get better — and part of that meant helping others get better, without expecting payment of any kind.

It all seemed too good to be true. We took a chance and shared some of the bad things we had done. We fully expected them to be turned off and want nothing to do with us. But 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 — and that was met with understanding, compassion, and others admitting the same things.

We finally had to admit that these people really loved us — and their love was not based on our behavior or on what they could get out of the deal. They were on our side. We discovered that this is what God's unconditional love is like. 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 is not based on what He can get from us. It is based on who He is — and on His choice to make us objects of His love because of what He wants to *give* to us.

His love can only be received as a free gift. In recovery, we began to get a glimpse of what this love really is — and we came to believe that it could be a wonderful thing. This thing called love has great potential.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Where Does It Come From? - People are always asking where addiction or alcoholism comes from. There is no single “addiction gene,” but many agree that heredity can increase vulnerability. If one or both parents struggle with addiction, it is more likely that the children will face similar challenges. What we grow up around — emotionally, spiritually, and culturally — influences us for better or worse.

Addiction is often described as having physical, emotional, and spiritual components. One definition of disease is “to not be at ease,” and addiction certainly fits that description. Some Christians argue that addiction is simply sin. But if it were only sin, the problem would disappear the moment a person stopped drinking or using. That is not the case. **Abstinence is not sobriety.** Removing the behavior does not heal the underlying pain.

Addiction is a symptom of something deeper. When we take away the symptom — the active addiction — the emotional and spiritual wounds underneath remain. These unresolved hurts often drive the addictive cycle.

Most believers agree that drunkenness is a sin. Scripture is clear about that. But the emotional pain and mental anguish that push a person toward addiction may be better understood with compassion — as an affliction, a wound, or a place in need of healing. When we talk about the addictions of others, it is far more Christ-like to see them as people with hurts in need of restoration rather than “bad people who need to get good.” That approach has never helped anyone.

The Bible teaches that the consequences of sin can affect “the third and fourth generation.” Some believe this helps explain why patterns like addiction can appear in families — not as a curse, but as a spiritual and relational pattern passed down through brokenness. Since Adam and Eve, we have all been born into a fallen condition. Some of us may have been more damaged than others before we ever took our first breath. But it does no good to play the blame game. Maybe others helped create the mess we found ourselves in — but if we stay in that mess, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. Continuing to blame others is simply unforgiveness in disguise.

God addresses this directly in Ezekiel 18:2: *“The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”* The Lord declares that this proverb no longer applies. Through Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for us to be set free from generational patterns — including addiction.

We know addiction is a spiritual problem because the solution is spiritual. At the root of addiction is self-centeredness — the attempt to control our own lives. Recovery comes through applying spiritual principles and becoming more God-centered.

It has been said that there are no right answers to wrong questions. Asking, “Who is to blame?” or “Is it sin or disease?” may not be the most helpful questions. The real question is: **“How do we get rid of this garbage?”**

The truth is, we do not need to fully understand the technical or spiritual dynamics of how we became addictive people in order to recover. What we need is to apply the spiritual principles found in Scripture and use the tools of recovery the Lord places before us. As we do, He sets us free and changes us into His image.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Willingness - Willingness is the doorway through which God does His greatest work in our lives. Many of us came into recovery exhausted, defeated, and out of options. We had tried everything else. We had run out of our own ideas. We were finally willing to consider that maybe — just maybe — God had a better plan than the one we had been living.

Willingness is not the same as enthusiasm. It is not the same as confidence. It is not even the same as understanding. Willingness simply means we are open to taking the next step God puts in front of us, even if we don't fully understand it, don't fully like it, or don't fully believe we can do it. It is the humble posture that says, *"Lord, I don't know how, but I am willing."*

Scripture says, *"If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land."* (Isaiah 1:19) God does not demand perfection — He asks for willingness. He asks for a heart that is open, teachable, and surrendered. Willingness is the soil in which obedience grows.

Most of us resisted God for years. We resisted help. We resisted truth. We resisted change. We resisted anything that threatened our illusion of control. But willingness begins where self-will ends. It begins when we stop fighting God and start yielding to Him. It begins when we say, *"Not my will, but Yours be done."*

Willingness is also practical. It means being willing to show up. Willing to listen. Willing to take suggestions. Willing to admit we don't know everything. Willing to let others speak into our lives. Willing to let God rearrange our priorities. Willing to let Him touch the areas we have kept hidden. Willing to let Him heal what we have tried to manage on our own.

Willingness does not mean we feel ready. It means we are willing to be made ready. It does not mean we feel strong. It means we are willing to let God be our strength. It does not mean we have the power to change ourselves. It means we are willing to let God change us from the inside out.

Many of us discovered that willingness often starts small. We were willing to attend one meeting. Willing to pray one simple prayer. Willing to tell one truth. Willing to take one step. And God met us there. He took our tiny seed of willingness and grew it into something far greater than we imagined.

Willingness also means being willing to let go — letting go of old ideas, old habits, old resentments, old identities, and old ways of coping. Jesus said, *"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* (Matthew 16:25) Willingness is the act of loosening our grip so God can place something better in our hands.

Willingness is not a one-time event. It is a daily posture. Every day we choose whether we will cling to our own understanding or surrender to God's. Every day we choose whether we will follow our old patterns or walk in the new life He offers. Every day we choose whether we will resist or yield.

Willingness is the "yes" that allows God to do what only He can do. It is the open door through which His grace, power, and healing flow. When we are willing, God is able — and He is always willing.

Section Four – Recovery Topics

Will of God - We hear a lot about doing God's will now that we are in recovery and trying to live according to spiritual principles. We discovered long ago that our own will didn't work anymore. Even when it seemed to work, it only brought trouble. Eventually we came to believe that God's will was probably better than our own. Even if we weren't fully convinced, we didn't have much to lose by giving it a try.

That leads to the big question: **What is God's will, and how do we find it on a continuous basis?**

Is God going to speak in a loud, booming voice and give us detailed instructions? Probably not. He cares about the smallest details of our lives, and He is certainly capable of speaking loudly if He chooses. But that is not how He normally leads His children. He doesn't guide us today with pillars of cloud by day or fire by night. His leading is usually quieter, gentler, and more relational.

Sometimes we imagine God hiding His will from us, making it difficult to discover. But that is far from the truth. What loving parent would refuse to tell their child what is expected? Very few parents would make their children guess what to do and then punish them for guessing wrong. God is not like that. He wants us to know His will. He longs for us to walk with Him and carry out His perfect plan for our lives. He is on our side and goes to great lengths to communicate with us.

Much of God's will has already been revealed through His Word — the Holy Scriptures, which originated from God Himself. The Bible does not give us every specific instruction for every moment, but it gives us the general direction for how to live. Scripture is like a letter from God, filled with guidance, warnings, and encouragement. These are not rules meant to keep us from enjoying life. They are more like a treasure map, pointing us toward the highest way of living and showing us where the dangerous detours lie.

The most important part of knowing God's will is having a **willingness** to do it. If we are sincere about wanting His will, He will lead us by His Spirit. Sometimes He may speak to us in a still, small voice — not an audible sound, but a thought accompanied by a deep inner knowing that it did not come from us.

God usually leads His people gently. He is a gentleman. He does not jerk His children around or force His will on those who refuse to cooperate. When we insist on our own way, He often allows us to experience the consequences of our choices. But that does not mean we can thwart His ultimate plans or that He abandons us. If our hearts are turned toward Him, He can even work our disobedience for our eventual good.

Another key to knowing God's will is our relationship with Him. Most of the time, God's will is simply what happens in the life of someone who is rightly related to Him. He does not always reveal His will far in advance. He knows we have short memories. Instead, He often guides us moment by moment by arranging the circumstances of our lives. He wants us to walk with Him and trust Him.

If we are holding His hand and walking closely with 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)

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