



The Sobriety Book

Michael Blunk

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Be Sober Today!

Remain Sober Tomorrow!

Second Edition

Michael Blunk

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About *The Sobriety Book*

While employed as both a staff writer and chaplain by a large urban homeless shelter, it was suggested I pen a new addiction, recovery, and relapse prevention manual to replace the agency's existing program. By using an "inhouse" program, the mission could sidestep the current program's substantial licensing and royalty fees. I had scarcely launched this new writing project when the CEO announced he had reached favorable terms with the publisher. There would be no need for me to continue writing a replacement program for the agency.

Thumbing through our existing program manual, I noted a number of inaccuracies, logical fallacies, and examples of ambiguous writing. Thinking I could do better, I continued on my own time working on an addiction, recovery, and relapse prevention manual that would be easy to read, easy to understand, and easy to apply—a volume that did not parrot Alcoholics Anonymous' so-called *Big Book*, but a fresh approach based on proven principles that work—a program that did not require participants to check their brains in at the gate; on the contrary, readers would engage in critical thinking exercises to enhance their reasoning skills. As I was already engaged in a critical thinking project with a local university, I was eager to introduce addicts and alcoholics to better ways of thinking.

As I neared the completion of this volume, a large men's prison asked me to lead a Wednesday evening Alcoholics Anonymous class for thirty or so inmates. I eagerly accepted the assignment, but rather than teaching from AA materials, much of which I find incongruous, I introduced the participants to my own materials. In almost no time at all, the class tripled in size. Am I such a gifted speaker? A charismatic teacher? Hardly. The inmates were drawn to the lesson plans because of the program's emphasis on critical thinking skills.

Eventually, the prison administration allowed me to drop the AA pretense, and I taught both drug and alcohol recovery classes as well as life skills studies. I enjoyed a four-year

teaching stint at the Kentucky State Reformatory, and, to this day, I remain in contact with some of my former students.

Every book is written for a specific audience, so exactly who can benefit from this volume? How can this book offer meaningful answers to questions and problems surrounding addiction, recovery, and relapse prevention issues?

- Not everyone is willing to attend meetings. No problem. Through this volume, those who are struggling with addiction can find ready answers and encouragement in the privacy of their own homes.
- Those who are sober and wish to remain sober may benefit from the ongoing support and edification found in this work.
- This book is for anyone who cares about someone trapped in the dark world of addiction. Learn to be supportive without enabling your friend or loved one's destructive behavior.
- Are you called to help those bound by addiction? With its easy to follow lesson plans, nearly anyone can lead a weekly support group that engages its participants with stimulating concepts and creative talking points.
- As this is a free resource with no licensing or royalty fees, even small churches and parachurch ministries operating on shoestring budgets can launch their own weekly support meetings.

Are you ready to get started? I hope so, for sobriety has its rewards.

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“ . . . if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant to the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” –C.S. Lewis

Introduction

Alcoholism is defined as a *chronic* condition. Chronic denotes a problem that is progressive and incurable. This sounds grim and, indeed, alcoholism is a debilitating disorder that ravages both mind and body, yet there is hope. While alcoholism is progressive and incurable, alcoholism is also controllable. Millions of alcoholics from every nation, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic background are living normal, productive, sober lives. Our mission, at least in part, is to lead alcoholics and drug addicts, all created in the image of God, to freedom from the ravages of addiction.

Among proponents of the abstinence based Twelve Step journey to sobriety, there is a growing chasm between those who take a more secular approach to recovery versus others who are quite at ease in sharing their faith. It has been argued that a heavy-handed approach that crams religion down the parched throats of skittish alcoholics and drug addicts is counterproductive. It has also been argued that a recovery program that deemphasizes God is spiritually anemic and is, therefore, inherently ineffective. It is, of course, possible to achieve a balanced approach to recovery that does not frighten cynical addicts when introducing them to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have been created for joy. Endless joy. Boundless joy. Abiding joy. The church has exceeded its quota of tightly wound, sour-faced, dull-eyed, humorless, frostbitten Christians who appear as if they have been spit out of an open grave. If this is your idea of Christianity, please do us a favor and become a Buddhist.

Let us begin by setting aside the three r's of religion: rites, rules, and rituals. In truth, Christianity is more than mere religion—Christianity is a close and intimate relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ. God did not send us a religion—He sent His Son. He came to seek and save the lost. That's us. And He loves us. He loves us more than we

will ever know. And He longs to enter into a one-on-one relationship with you and me. Religion offers none of this.

And so we are back to the question: How do we approach skeptics as to God's role in recovery? The Pew Foundation reports that only twelve percent of Americans are atheists or agnostics. While others may identify themselves as non-religious, the number of our neighbors who flatly and dogmatically deny the existence of God is fewer than we may have realized. This would indicate that those seeking freedom from the chains and fetters of drugs and alcohol are open to an encounter with God if we will avoid subjecting them to the narrowness of our favored denominational persuasions. In other words, the majority of drug addicts and alcoholics will not run in fear when we speak of God as long as we do not weary them with counter-productive denominational bickering.

We are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We are not called to make Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Catholics, or Presbyterians. By adhering to our divine calling instead of an *allegiance at all costs* to a particular creed, synod, sect, or convention, the non-religious alcoholics and drug addicts approaching us for help will not be repelled by our faith in God. And as our Lord Jesus Christ is the One who can deliver our stricken friends from the ills of addiction, we are in a singular position of making *sober* disciples.

This program is not about cramming religion down the throats of our substance abusing neighbors. This manual is dedicated to *loving* our neighbors. We will love them into sobriety. We will love them into Christ's kingdom. We will love them at all costs.

Just as no one navigates the complexities of quantum physics without an understanding of basic math, the journey to sobriety is traveled step by step, or, if you will, by way of a methodical regimen of precept built upon precept. This program is comprised of a series of simple, logical, reachable short term goals that transform the long term goal of lifelong sobriety into an achievable reality. As order is not produced through chaos, this manual lays out a series of sequential steps, precepts, lessons, and goals that will guide those in our care from the starting gate to the finish line.

While this manuscript can benefit individual readers in the comfort and confines of their own homes, this is also an effective resource for group meetings. If this program is used as a group study guide, the leader should not do all of the talking. Participants are encouraged to be just that—participants! Participants ask questions. Participants answer questions. Participants raise objections. Participants contribute to the flow of information. Participants enhance the overall health of the community. Participants edify fellow participants. Participants reprove and admonish fellow participants. Participants are active. Participants see to it that the group leader is not saddled with all of the work. Any group session that becomes a “one man show” has failed in achieving its rightful purpose.

Effective sessions will be hallmarked by punctuality, mutual respect, civility, order, and focus. The following is a short list of meeting do’s and don’ts:

- Although this book is divided into twenty-four sessions, do not feel obligated to complete any of these sessions in a single sitting. In other words, there’s no reason to rush. As King Solomon said, the race does not belong to the swift. Unable to finish a session in the allotted time? Carry the remainder over until the next session.
- Let everyone take turns reading the text.
- Allow plenty of time for questions, comments, and discussions.
- Group leaders need not be authorities in substance abuse, but effective leadership comes from mature Christian believers who understand God’s word, prepare themselves before each session, and rely upon the power of prayer as well as the Holy Spirit of God.
- Meetings will open with prayer and close with prayer.
- Meetings will start on time and end on time.
- Participants will not wander in and out of meeting areas.
- The privacy of all participants must be respected.
- Cell phones will be silenced—better yet, cell phones will be turned off.
- Meeting areas will be free from outside noise or other forms of annoying distraction.

- Group session leaders will keep meetings focused and on track.
- No one person will be allowed to monopolize conversations.
- Participants with disagreements will agree to disagree agreeably.
- Whenever possible, session leaders will pose open-ended questions that encourage thought-provoking dialogue rather than merely asking questions that require nothing more than “yes” or “no” answers.
- Rude behavior is never tolerated.
- The goal or purpose of each meeting should be clearly defined by the session leader and fully understood by each group participant.
- Group leaders should carefully monitor the body-language of each participant—slumping in seats, folded arms, cryptic comments, and lack of eye contact indicate disinterest or defiance—diligent leaders will not allow an occasional disgruntled individual to shipwreck a group session.
- Group leaders are to ensure that every participant feels loved and welcomed—if we love them, they will come back.

Fostering an atmosphere of encouragement, mutual respect, honest discussion, and clearly defined purpose is vital if group sessions are to be effective and meaningful. It should also be remembered that enthusiasm is highly contagious. Fun is contagious, too. Have fun. We are not conducting funerals. Laugh. Laughter is therapeutic. Be imaginative. See that no one feels like an outsider. Group leaders who approach their sessions with compassion, humor, and unbridled enthusiasm will be rewarded by participants who are exceedingly more engaged in the learning process. The formula for orchestrating successful meetings is really quite simple: leaders who have the courage to lead will attract participants who are willing to participate. Do this and your attendees will be back for more.

Critical Thinking as an Aid in Recovery

Writer, educator, and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis stated that corruption of the human intellect leads to corruption of the human will. A homeless drunk seldom finds himself in the gutter by accident—in most cases, years of faulty thinking and woeful decision making brought him there. Likewise, the eager young graduate receiving a college diploma did not arrive at the commencement ceremony by accident. Years of planning, study, and hard work brought her there. Good thinking leads to good results; bad thinking leads to bad results. This concept can be supported by Proverbs 23: 7a which reads, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...” We must avoid underestimating the importance of clear, rational, logical thinking.

Throughout this program, group session participants will be encouraged to think about the quality of their thinking. Everyone thinks, but far too many people are careless thinkers. Injudicious thinking is clouded by faulty assumptions, unexamined prejudices, and unsubstantiated conclusions. On the other hand, critical thinkers are disciplined thinkers who apply clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, and equity to their thinking. Just as sloppy, unexamined thinking yields disastrous results, critical thinking directs us to truth and the truth shall set us free.

Unlike the irrational beasts that rely upon instinct for survival, we are rational beings capable of exercising logic and reason that enhances our understanding of vital life issues and complex personal and social problems; as such, we owe it to ourselves and to our Creator to apply sound principles to our thinking. Additionally, as guides to the promised land of restoration and recovery, we must challenge women and men bound by addiction to give careful thought to their thinking. To ignore this is to do those in our care a great injustice.

Quoting from Michael Scriven and Richard Paul at the Eighth Annual International Conference On Critical Thinking and Education Reform, “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying,

analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.”

If this sounds a bit too theoretical, do not lose heart: the principles of critical thinking are, in reality, quite simple and straightforward. Basically, critical thinkers think about their thinking for the purpose of improving their thinking. And with an eye on improving our clients’ thinking skills, we will challenge our participants to

- formulate vital questions with clarity and precision
- gather, access, and interpret relevant data
- come to well-reasoned conclusions
- think fairly, equitably, and open-mindedly
- carefully evaluate assumptions, implications, and consequences
- communicate effectively as a means of solving complex problems

Once again, as corruption of the human intellect leads to corruption of the human volition, we can hasten our participants’ restoration and recovery through frequent exercises in critical thinking. By challenging outmoded thinking, faulty assumptions, unsubstantiated prejudices, and poorly formulated conclusions based upon questionable data, we can arouse a hunger for intellectual honesty that will inspire the women and men in our care to examine their choices in a new light. This enlightenment will enhance their understanding of alcoholism and substance abuse in a manner that will provide direction and encouragement along the way while steering them away from the dangers of regression and relapse.

Discovery Session 1

Author's notes: While alcoholism is only one of many addictions we will consider in this volume, we will begin our journey by exploring alcoholism. At present, alcohol related deaths exceed deaths caused by other lethal substances.

Points of Inquiry

- Alcoholism is a chronic condition
- Common misconceptions of alcoholics
- AMA definition of alcoholism
- Physical cravings for alcohol
- Mental obsession with alcohol
- The intoxicated brain
- Alcoholism as an allergy
- How much is too much?

Alcoholism: Lack of Will Power or Chronic Disease?

If you were to randomly ask individuals on the street about the nature of alcoholism, you might hear answers such as:

- Alcoholics are weak-willed people who do not know when enough is enough.
- Alcoholics are people who, deep down, do not want to give up the pleasures they derive from drinking.
- Alcoholics are lazy people who find that yielding to their cravings is far easier than resisting the desire to drink.
- Alcoholics are people who have a secret desire to self-destruct.
- Alcoholics are people who could achieve sobriety if only they would grow a backbone and stand up to the temptation to drink.

For those who do not understand the true nature of alcoholism, these assumptions may appear perfectly valid. Images of an obnoxious drunk behaving foolishly at a wedding

reception or a tattered street person reeking of cheap wine or publicly urinating on a fire hydrant do not evoke much sympathy. Indeed, such people may appear to be lazy, selfish, weak-willed, and lacking in sound moral judgment.

We must remember faulty assumptions lead to faulty conclusions; to understand the truth about alcoholism, we may find it necessary to challenge our assumptions. Let us be critical thinkers by refusing to allow baseless ideas, prejudices, and long held assumptions regarding alcoholism to go unchallenged. Upon closer examination, we will discover that many alcoholics are

- strong-willed and resourceful personalities
- desperately eager to break the bonds of addiction
- remorseful for the pain and injury they have caused
- abundantly blessed with a keen intellect

As the facts of alcoholism dispel the myths of alcoholism, we may reasonably assume the primary problem with alcoholics runs deeper than mere slothfulness of character.

Alcoholism is a debilitating condition. As to the prudence or morality of social drinking, this writer has nothing to say, but the majority of people who consume alcoholic beverages do so in moderation; their drinking habits do not lead to drunkenness, ruined health, job loss, and addiction. They consume alcoholic beverages, not routinely, but occasionally. These social drinkers are often content with one or two drinks. But this is not so with an alcoholic. For the textbook alcoholic, each drink intensifies the craving for the next drink. The more an alcoholic drinks, the more he wants to drink.

At one time or another, many of us with robust appetites have been guilty of over-indulging at an all-you-can-eat pizza buffet. If you will recall, the first slice or two tastes heavenly. After three or four slices, the temptation brought on by flavor and aroma begins giving way to feelings of stuffiness. After the fifth or sixth slice, the diner's appetite has been more than satisfied. Keep eating, and the pizza that tasted so delicious a few slices ago quickly loses its appeal.

This may serve to illustrate what is commonly called the Law of Diminishing Returns; this is the point where *more satisfies less*. Rather than easing the alcoholic's physical cravings, each drink intensifies the alcoholic's need for yet another drink. The more an alcoholic consumes, the more the alcoholic *wants* to consume. Having a drink to satisfy the alcoholic's craving is much like using gasoline to douse a fire. Understanding this truth explains why alcoholics typically drink until the supply of alcohol runs dry or until the alcoholic loses consciousness.

People drink, quite simply, because they enjoy how alcohol makes them feel. For the social drinker who consumes alcohol in moderation, the physical sensations of a drink or two are short-lived and of no lasting consequence, but for the alcoholic, the urge to drink and drink excessively is over-powering. Dr. Silkwood, a pioneer in the medical study of alcoholism wrote, "Men and women drink essentially because they like the affect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable, and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks--drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many people do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery."

Among men and women of faith, there is a long-running debate as to the moral implications of alcohol consumption; indeed, there are sincere people of faith who believe alcohol consumption, even in moderation, is a sinful act. Other sincere people of faith have no moral qualms with a moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages. Once again, this study has nothing to say about the moral implications of moderate or occasional alcohol consumption; rather, this study focuses on the restoration of those who are alcoholics.

Once we understand that alcoholism is a debilitating condition and there are physiological reasons that contribute to an alcoholic's propensity to drink excessively, we can better help the women and men who wish to break the chains and fetters of addiction.

Alcoholism: Understanding the Nature of the Condition

To understand the nature of alcoholism, it is necessary to separate fact from myth. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* gives us a concise definition that lay persons can easily understand.

The Definition of Alcoholism

Robert M. Morse, MD; Daniel K. Flavin, MD

To establish a more precise use of the term *alcoholism*, a 23-member multidisciplinary committee of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the American Society of Addiction Medicine conducted a 2-year study of the definition of alcoholism in the light of current concepts. The goals of the committee were to create by consensus a revised definition that is (1) scientifically valid, (2) clinically useful, and (3) understandable by the general public. Therefore, the committee agreed to define alcoholism as a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial. Each of these symptoms may be continuous or periodic.

For the sake of clarity and understanding, let us break down the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* definition of alcoholism:

- What is a *chronic disorder*? A chronic disorder is a long-lasting condition that can be controlled but not cured. Thankfully, alcoholism can be controlled. Left

uncontrolled, alcoholism can lead to death. For the record, alcoholism is the third largest cause of preventable deaths in the United States.

- What does the term *genetic factor* imply? This supposes an individual's genetic makeup may be predisposed to a particular illness or disease. There are people who are predisposed to alcoholism just as others may be more susceptible to cancer, diabetes, or heart disease.
- What does the term *psychosocial* mean? Psychosocial has to do with one's psychological development as it relates to one's social environment.
- What are *environmental factors* relating to alcoholism? According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, children growing up in homes where alcohol consumption is common may incur future drinking problems unless the parents are careful in educating their children as to the risks and dangers of alcohol. In homes where parents drink excessively, the children face increased risks of becoming alcoholics.
- What is a *progressive disorder*? As the term implies, a progressive disorder is an illness that will, if left uncontrolled, worsen in severity over time. On the average, alcoholism, a progressive malady, reduces one's life expectancy by ten to twelve years.

Alcohol addiction stunts the spiritual, emotional and mental growth of a person. For the alcoholic, they literally stop wanting to learn or advance themselves on any level other than the one they are already on. This is why many alcoholics are emotionally stunted and are unable to contain their emotions. Many alcoholics believe that once they are sober for a few months they are cured. Nothing could be further from the truth. An alcoholic is not cured just because they stopped drinking. Remember, "the drinking" for the alcoholic is only a symptom of an underlying problem within him or her. Total sobriety takes more than abstinence--it takes a spiritual and mental awareness through healing and growth. I have never yet read about, or heard of a case where an alcoholic stopped drinking, but then years later they were able to drink one or two drinks and stop.

--Angie Lewis

Alcoholism is a chronic disorder that, if left unchecked, worsens over time and leads to premature death. Medical science offers no cure for alcoholism, but the addiction can be controlled. One's genetic factors, psychological development, and environmental

upbringing can greatly influence one's predisposition to becoming an alcoholic; in other words, some people, due to physical, psychological, and environmental factors, are more likely to fall victim to drink than others.

For Discussion

- What are some of the common misconceptions or stereotypical attitudes people have about alcoholics?
- Describe how each drink fuels the alcoholic's desire for another drink.
- Describe a chronic disorder?
- Children growing up in homes where drinking is common are more likely to become alcoholics. Discuss how reckless drinking is, in some cases, a learned behavior.
- Alcoholism is incurable, but controllable. What does this mean?
- Alcoholism is a progressive disorder. What does this mean?
- On average, how does the disorder affect the alcoholic's life expectancy?

The Intoxicated Brain: How Alcohol Adversely Affects the Brain

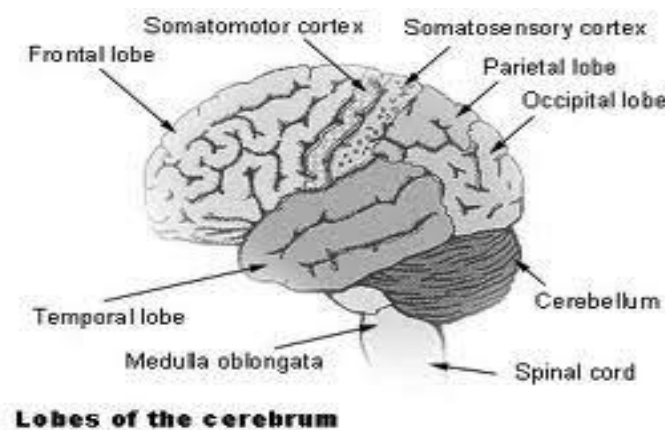
Most body organs are vulnerable to injury or damage from excessive alcohol consumption; the brain is no exception. Of the twenty million alcoholics in America, roughly half suffer from neuropsychological problems that range from mild to severe. Furthermore, ten percent or two million alcoholics in this nation will develop brain injuries of such severity that custodial care will be required for the remainder of their lives. Alcohol-induced damage to the brain hinders the alcoholic's language, memory, and problem-solving abilities. Other conditions, such as malnutrition, liver damage, head injury, depression, anxiety, mental illness, and substance abuse can further aggravate alcohol-induced brain damage. Thankfully, the ill-effects of excessive alcohol consumption can be reversed, at least partially, after an extended period of abstinence. This good news offers the alcoholic another reason to quit drinking.

One of the most important facts to remember about alcoholism is its progression. Alcoholism begins in an early stage that looks nothing at all like a life-threatening disease, proceeds into a middle stage where problems begin to appear and intensify, and gradually advances into the late, degenerative stages of obvious physiological dependence, physical and psychological deterioration, and loss of control.

--William F. Asbury

Excessive alcohol consumption prematurely ages the brain. The brains of alcoholics resemble the brains of elderly non-alcoholics. Again, the alcoholic's language, memory, and reasoning abilities are at risk. While all alcoholics face serious risks, some medical experts believe the adverse problems caused by excessive alcohol consumption are disproportionately higher among older alcoholics. Additionally, as alcoholism tends to run in families, children of alcoholics are more vulnerable to the risks of alcohol-induced brain deterioration. Clearly, excessive alcohol consumption presents a number of cognitive risks that increase in severity over time.

Alcohol shrinks brain tissue while subduing the central nervous system. Furthermore, alcohol destroys brain cells which, unlike other cells in the human body, do not regenerate. As alcohol adversely interacts with the receptors of certain brain cells, drinking interferes with the communication between brain cells. When alcohol is introduced to the brain, the enhanced effects of the inhibitory neurotransmitter render the drinker lethargic. Over time, excessive alcohol consumption takes its toll on the drinker's cognition and memory skills.



The digestive system, the muscular system, and the respiratory system are controlled by the brain. The control of these bodily functions is set into motion by electrical, chemical, and physical signals. Chemical signals between cells are known as neurotransmitters. Alcohol inhibits normal neurotransmission. As the brain controls bodily functions, an alcohol-impaired brain hinders normal bodily functions. This explains why problem drinkers typically experience

- slurred speech patterns
- impaired vision
- reduced physical coordination
- impaired cognitive abilities that lead to bad decision making and poor judgment
- reduced inhibition that promotes talkativeness and misguided confidence
- a higher threshold of pain that can increase the risk of physical injury
- heightened states of emotion
- increased sexual desire offset by diminished sexual performance
- changes in the heart rate, body temperature, and breathing patterns
- feelings of sluggishness
- increased urine production
- in extreme cases, unconsciousness and even death

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream from the stomach. Each cell in the body is given a “taste” of the alcohol; however, the central nervous system is particularly impaired by the alcohol and the drinker’s judgment and reasoning are soon affected. Coordination and reflexes are also hindered. As the consumption of alcohol increases, pulmonary and cardiovascular activities are impaired. At a 0.4 percent blood alcohol level, the drinker’s life is in jeopardy. Over a period of time, heavy drinkers risk brain damage. As previously discussed, alcohol destroys brain cells and prolonged drinking shrinks brain tissue. Thankfully, alcohol-induced brain damage among heavy drinkers can, to varying degrees, be reversed after extended periods of abstinence. Sobriety has its rewards.

For Discussion

- Bodily functions are controlled by the brain. How does alcohol prevent the brain from properly doing its job?
- Describe how alcohol adversely affects the drinker's speech patterns, decision making abilities, emotional state, and physical coordination.

Alcohol Abuse: How Much Is Too Much?

Alcoholism is a chronic condition that worsens over time and often leads to premature death. While alcoholism is incurable, the disorder can be controlled. Millions of Americans are able to consume light to moderate amounts of alcohol with seemingly little or no ill-effects, yet for the roughly twenty million alcoholics in this country, their lives are marked by alcohol-induced physical and mental health woes coupled with relational problems, work-related difficulties, and legal issues. Until the individual seeks help, the alcoholic will continue reckless drinking habits despite the overwhelming evidence that alcohol is destroying his or her life.

As an alcoholic, you will violate your standards quicker than you can lower them.
--Robin Williams

So how is alcohol abuse defined? When does the drinker step over the line? How much is too much? Alcohol abuse is illustrated by those who have experienced one or more of the following situations within the last twelve months:

- A failure to meet an important obligation relating to one's employment, education, or family due to excessive alcohol consumption
- Consuming alcohol in situations that are particularly hazardous such as drinking and driving, drinking on the job, or drinking while operating sensitive equipment or dangerous machinery

- Experiencing alcohol-related legal problems such as a DUI or charges of domestic violence incurred while under the influence of alcohol
- A refusal to stop drinking despite relational problems aggravated by excessive alcohol consumption

One key symptom of alcoholism is that the individual comes to need a drink for every mood—one to calm down, one to perk up, one to celebrate, one to deal with disappointment, and so on.

--Phyllis A. Balch

Alcoholism affects men and women regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status. Neither education, position, wealth, nor social standing is a safeguard against the addiction. Statistically, children of heavy drinkers are more likely to become alcoholics. Men are more likely to become alcohol-dependent than women; however, alcohol-related health problems are more severe among women. Drinkers between eighteen and twenty-nine years of age are more likely to fall prey to alcoholism. Men and women sixty-five years or older are least likely to be plagued by alcoholism, but this may reflect alcoholics' shorter lifespans. Those who take up drinking early in life are more likely to become alcoholics. Additionally, genetic factors, psychological development, and environmental upbringing can substantially increase an individual's predisposition to becoming an alcoholic. Additional signs of problem drinking include:

- a preoccupation with alcohol
- avoiding friends who abstain from drinking
- avoiding social functions that do not include drinking
- drinking early in the day
- drinking to feel "normal"
- a susceptibility to injuries and accidents
- repeated failed attempts at controlling excessive drinking
- "blacking out" (memory loss) after prolonged bouts of drinking
- continued drinking despite mounting alcohol-related problems

- altered personality traits such as a heightened susceptibility to anger and violence after excessive drinking
- a need for increased quantities of alcohol
- “chugging” alcoholic beverages to hasten the effects of alcohol
- drinking prior to an event in which alcohol is served
- dishonesty or resistance when questioned about drinking habits

According to the Center for Disease Control, 38 million American adults engage in binge drinking four times a month. Typically, women who consume four or more drinks in a short time span are considered binge drinkers; men become binge drinkers after consuming five or more successive drinks. Although binge drinkers are not necessarily alcoholics, binge drinking is a leading cause of preventable death in America. Binge drinking is popular among young drinkers and older drinkers alike. Binge drinking has replaced baseball as the national pastime. Clearly, one in six Americans drinks too much.

Alcohol and Physical Cravings

As long as an adequate quantity of alcohol is consumed daily, the alcoholic will avoid the unpleasant sensations of physical withdrawal because his or her blood alcohol level will be high enough to eliminate the gnawing pangs of physical craving. If hospitalized, alcoholics are generally medicated to prevent serious and even dangerous withdrawal symptoms. Reminders, called cues, may evoke physical cravings for alcohol. Nuclear medicine imaging (PET scans) reveals that heightened brain activity occurs when sober alcoholics are exposed to images relating to alcoholic beverages. Sober alcoholics subjected to these alcohol-related images reported the arousal of strong physical cravings.

Alcohol and the Mental Obsession to Drink

How can it be that an intelligent person who shares our common desires for happiness, freedom, love, purpose, and security would seemingly prefer groveling about as a slave to alcohol over a meaningful life hallmarked by success, accomplishment, and personal

fulfillment? At a risk of overly simplifying the problem, alcoholism may be explained as a subtle mental obsession that produces an almost irresistible physical compulsion to drink. The mental obsession, often compared to a song repeatedly playing in one's mind, compels the alcoholic to drink and to continue drinking. To further aggravate the problem, consuming alcohol further increases the alcoholic's cravings for drink. Consider this: an individual eager for lunch may become preoccupied with food, but once this person begins eating, the appetite subsides and the mental obsession with food diminishes. After the diner has had his or her fill, the preoccupation with food is gone. This is not so with an alcoholic's obsession and desire for drink. Surrendering to the longing for alcohol serves only to *increase* the drinker's physical cravings. In the end, the alcoholic faces physical cravings coupled with a mental obsession that coerces him or her to drink.

A man who drinks too much on occasion is still the same man as he was sober. An alcoholic, a real alcoholic, is not the same man at all. You can't predict anything about him for sure except that he will be someone you never met before.

--Raymond Chandler

Alcoholism as an Allergy

Dr. Silkwood, an early pioneer in the medical study of alcoholism, described the addiction as a type of allergy. An alcoholic's body does not process alcohol in the manner of a casual drinker. Introducing alcohol into an alcoholic's system produces an abnormal allergic reaction that is not common among "normal drinkers." This idea merits consideration. Dr. Silkwood wrote, "We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker. These allergic types can never safely use alcohol in any form at all; and once having formed the habit and found they cannot break it, once having lost their self-confidence, their reliance upon things human, their problems pile up on them and become astonishingly difficult to solve."

Alcoholism is a condition that affects both mind and body. The desire to drink causes its victims to behave in ways that derail interpersonal relationships, educational opportunities, vocational advancement, and personal growth. Alcoholism snuffs out ambition, drive, and self-esteem; alcoholism fosters selfishness, narcissism, dishonesty, and denial. To compound the seriousness of the matter, excessive drinking ushers in a host of health-related issues including brain damage, heart disease, an increased susceptibility to cancer, sexual dysfunction, nutritional deficiencies, and a shortened life expectancy. Alcoholism is both a condition of the mind and body. There is no cure for alcoholism, but the compulsion to drink can be controlled.

Alcoholism is a devastating, potentially fatal disease. The primary symptom of having it is telling everyone--including yourself--that you are not an alcoholic.

--Herbert L. Gravitz & Julie D. Bowden

For Discussion

- What are cues? How can the alcoholic's memory trigger a strong desire for drink?
- What is a mental obsession? How does an alcoholic's mental obsession with alcohol make quitting extraordinarily difficult?
- Describe the many ways alcohol damages the drinker's physical health.
- Discuss Dr. Silkwood's comparison of alcoholism to an allergy.
- Describe how the desire for alcohol becomes more important than one's family, friends, and personal ambitions.

Discovery Session 2

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding alcohol as a drug
- How alcohol adversely affects normal bodily functions
- How alcohol adversely affects behavior and decision-making
- Health risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption
- Tell-tale signs of alcohol dependency
- How an incurable disease can be controlled
- The trouble with current AA teachings
- A brief history of the Oxford Group

Alcoholism: No Cure, But Not Without Hope

Alcohol is a drug. It is commonly believed that alcohol is a stimulant, but alcohol is a depressant that slows vital bodily functions. As a drug, alcohol prevents the brain from doing its job. Excessive alcohol consumption is usually evidenced by slurred speech, reduced coordination, flawed judgment, and irrational behavior. Due to the toxicity of alcohol, heavy consumption may be followed by an inability to feel pain, vomiting, and unconsciousness. In extreme cases of alcohol poisoning, coma and even death may result. Ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, is the kind of alcohol found in intoxicating beverages. The fermentation of grains and fruits produces ethanol. Acting with yeast, fermentation is the chemical process that produces alcohol. The following list reveals the average alcohol content found in intoxicating beverages:

- Beer 2–6% alcohol
- Cider 4–8% alcohol
- Wine 8–20% alcohol
- Tequila 40% alcohol

- Rum 40% or more alcohol
- Brandy 40% or more alcohol
- Gin 40–47% alcohol
- Whiskey 40–50% alcohol
- Vodka 40–50% alcohol
- Liqueurs 15–60% alcohol

For Discussion

- Why might alcoholics who prefer beer to hard liquor deny the severity of their addiction?
- Discuss the saying, “If you drink a lot of beer, you drink a lot.”
- Alcohol is a depressant. How does a depressant affect normal brain functions?

Alcoholism: A Malady of the Mind and Body

During our previous discussion, we discovered that alcoholism is a condition that affects both mind and body. The compulsion to drink causes its victims to behave in ways that damage interpersonal relationships, educational opportunities, vocational advancement, and personal growth. Alcoholism dampens one’s ambition, drive, and self-esteem; alcoholism is a breeding ground for selfishness, narcissism, dishonesty, and denial. As if all of this were not enough, excessive drinking gives way to a host of health-related issues including brain damage, heart disease, increased susceptibility to cancer, sexual dysfunction, nutritional deficiencies, and a shortened life expectancy. Alcoholism is a disorder that attacks both mind and body. There is no cure for alcoholism, but the addiction can be controlled.

As we reviewed the *Journal of the American Medical Association’s* definition of alcoholism during our prior session, we learned the following facts about alcoholism:

- Alcoholism is a *chronic disorder*. A chronic disorder is a long-lasting illness that can be controlled but not cured. Unchecked, alcoholism can lead to death.

- According to the individual's genetic makeup, there are those who are predisposed to alcoholism just as there are individuals who are predisposed to cancer, diabetes, or heart disease.
- According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, children growing up in homes where alcohol consumption is common may fall prey to drinking problems unless the parents are mindful in educating their children as to the risks and dangers of alcohol. In homes where parents drink excessively, the children face a greater likelihood of becoming alcoholics.
- Alcoholism is a *progressive disorder*. A progressive disorder is an illness that worsens in severity over time. On the average, alcoholism reduces one's life expectancy by ten to twelve years.

Because alcohol is encouraged by our culture, we get the idea that it isn't dangerous. However, alcohol is the most potent and most toxic of the legal psychoactive drugs.

--Beverly A. Potter & Sebastian Orfali

Excessive alcohol consumption inflicts great harm on body organs; the brain appears to be particularly vulnerable to alcohol-induced damage. Because alcohol shrinks and destroys brain tissue, the brains of alcoholics resemble the brains of elderly non-alcoholics. The alcoholic's language, memory, and reasoning abilities are at risk. Clearly, excessive alcohol consumption presents a number of hazards that increase in severity over time.

The digestive system, the muscular system, and the respiratory system are controlled by the brain. As the brain controls bodily functions, an alcohol-impaired brain hampers normal bodily functions. This explains why problem drinkers typically experience

- slurred speech patterns
- impaired vision
- reduced physical coordination
- impaired cognitive abilities that lead to bad decision making and poor judgment

- reduced inhibition that promotes talkativeness and misguided confidence
- a higher threshold of pain that can increase the risk of physical injury
- heightened states of emotion
- increased sexual desire offset by diminished sexual performance
- changes in heart rate, body temperature, and breathing patterns
- feelings of sluggishness
- increased urine production
- in extreme cases, unconsciousness and even death

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream from the stomach. Each cell in the body is given a “taste” of the alcohol; however, the central nervous system is particularly impaired by excessive alcohol consumption and the drinker’s judgment and reasoning are soon clouded. Coordination and reflexes are also hindered. As the consumption of alcohol increases, pulmonary and cardiovascular activities suffer. Over a period of time, heavy drinkers risk severe brain damage. Alcohol destroys brain cells and prolonged drinking shrinks brain tissue. Thankfully, alcohol-induced brain damage is often reversed after extended periods of abstinence. Again, sobriety has its rewards.

The majority of people who consume alcoholic beverages do so only occasionally and in moderation; their drinking habits do not lead to drunkenness, ruined health, job loss, and addiction. These social drinkers are often content with one, two, or three drinks, but this is not so with an alcoholic. For the alcoholic, each drink intensifies the craving for the next drink. Rather than satisfying the physical cravings for alcohol, each successive drink increases the alcoholic’s urge to drink.

For Discussion

- How does alcohol enter the blood stream?
- How does an alcoholic’s mental obsession with drink differ from the occasional drinker’s feelings and attitudes toward alcohol?

- Unlike the social drinker who stops after two or three drinks, how are the physical cravings for alcohol intensified when an alcoholic begins drinking? Why does an alcoholic seldom stop at one drink?



“Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”

--Michael Scriven and Richard Paul

As critical thinkers, we must examine the matter of addiction through the lens of factual evidence. In doing so, we may discover that many of our previously held opinions about substance abusers were riddled with error.

Identifying Alcohol Addiction

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, “Alcohol dependence is a condition characterized by impaired control over drinking, compulsive drinking, preoccupation with drinking, tolerance to alcohol, and/or withdrawal symptoms.” Additionally, the NIAAA refers to alcohol abuse as being “characterized by failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school or home, interpersonal social and legal problems, and/or drinking in hazardous situations.” Alcohol abuse, if untreated, can lead to alcohol dependence (alcoholism) that is marked by a physical dependency on alcohol that cannot be controlled despite the perilous consequences associated with addiction. Once alcoholics begin drinking, the amount of alcohol consumed appears to be out of their control. Drink becomes the focal point in the alcoholic’s life. Symptoms of alcoholism include

- ever increasing amounts of alcohol consumed due to higher tolerance levels
- severe hangovers
- a cavalier attitude toward personal responsibilities and duties
- withdrawal symptoms when alcohol is unavailable for consumption
- an inability to stop drinking

- physical and mental problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption

Without proper medical supervision, alcoholics attempting to quit cold turkey are likely to experience

- convulsions, tremors, and shaking
- feelings of extreme anxiety or agitation
- nausea or vomiting
- sleeplessness
- seizures
- hallucinations
- acute sweating

For Discussion

- Describe the symptoms of a hangover to someone who does not drink.
- How does the alcoholic's mental obsession with alcohol override his or her personal responsibilities?
- Why should alcoholics seek medical supervision upon reaching a decision to stop drinking?

A Brief History of Alcoholics Anonymous

According to Dick B., Alcoholics Anonymous' most prolific *unofficial* historian, there is no complete history of the movement, but by examining the writings of its founders, we can know the story of AA's origins as well as its early leadership's convictions, teachings, and beliefs. With a goal of providing an honest portrayal of the movement and its founders, prayerful care has been taken in presenting a brief but accurate history of AA.



In the early summer of 1935, Alcoholics Anonymous was established in Akron, Ohio. The movement's two principal founders, Robert C. Smith, M.D. and William G. Wilson, are credited with having made distinct but harmonious contributions to the early methods and teachings of Alcoholics Anonymous. Honored by Wilson as the "Prince of all Twelve Steppers," Dr. Robert Smith is said to be the architect of this step by step abstinence-based recovery program. In keeping with the spirit of anonymity promoted by Alcoholics Anonymous, William Wilson will from henceforth be referred to as Bill W. and Robert C. Smith, M.D. will be known as Dr. Bob.

Three years after AA's initial founding, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. sent his agent, Frank Amos, to Akron for the purpose of investigating the recovery program developed by Dr. Bob and Bill W. In reporting back to his illustrious employer, Amos explained the five essential elements of spiritual recovery as taught by AA's founders were as follows:

- Abstinence
- Reliance on God

- Submission to God's will and eliminating sinful habits
- Spiritual growth through Bible study and prayer
- Coming to the aid of other alcoholics struggling with their addictions

What follows is a simple timeline of Alcoholics Anonymous' origins. Although we should be more concerned with methods than in personalities, knowing the history of the movement helps in understanding how the Twelve Steps came to be.

- In the early 1930s, a wealthy American suffering from alcoholism, Rowland H., sought the help of the celebrated Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Understanding that Rowland H.'s drinking problems were beyond the capabilities of medical science, Jung referred his patient to a group of Christian believers known as the Oxford Group. A brief history of the Oxford Group follows.
- A short time later, Rowland H. introduced a fellow alcoholic, Ebby T., to the teachings of the Oxford Group. By following the principles of the Oxford Group, both men stopped drinking.
- After returning to the United States, Ebby T. approached his old friend and former drinking buddy, Bill W., who resided in Brooklyn. Bill W. had been a successful stock broker until the ravages of alcoholism took an exacting toll on his life and career. Ebby T.'s enthusiasm for the teachings of the Oxford Group was initially greeted with skepticism by Bill W.
- In December, 1934, Bill W., who was undergoing treatment at Towns Hospital, had a profound spiritual awakening. No longer cynical of Ebby T.'s journey to sobriety, Bill W. quickly embraced the teachings of the Oxford Group.
- In 1935, Bill W. met Dr. Bob in Akron, Ohio. Dr. Bob, a prominent surgeon, was also a disciple of the Oxford Group. Shortly after meeting Bill W., Dr. Bob resumed drinking, but his relapse, thankfully, was short-lived. On June 10, 1935, Dr. Bob took his last drink and Alcoholics Anonymous was born.
- Eager to share their message of hope and recovery with others bound by addiction, Bill W. and Dr. Bob met with Bill D., an attorney who was being treated for chronic

alcoholism at the Akron City Hospital. Bill D. became the third member of Alcoholics Anonymous.

- Shortly thereafter, Bill W. returned to Brooklyn where he and his wife Lois hosted weekly meetings at their home on Clinton Street. Likewise, Dr. Bob and his wife Anne continued their practice of meeting with recovering alcoholics in their Akron home.
- This writer believes, over the years, Alcoholics Anonymous has become increasingly secular and has abandoned its Christian roots.

The first step toward recovery from alcoholism is the recognition that a problem exists. Once the problem drinker breaks through denial and admits to having a problem, a range of treatment options become available.

--Jeffrey S. Nevid

The Oxford Group

Founded in 1929 by Dr. Frank Buchman, an American Christian Missionary, the Oxford Group is credited as having a profound impact on AA founders Dr. Bob and Bill W. The Oxford Group claimed to be an organism rather than an organization whose direction and decisions were guided by God's Holy Spirit. Its goal was in establishing a world in which all people, great and small, lived in accordance to God's will. Such a world, reasoned its founder, would not be shadowed by conflict and war. In various speeches, Dr. Buchman stated that the goals and beliefs of the Oxford Group were as follows:

- Adherents were to live out their faith according to the New Testament scriptures.
- Through the transforming power of God, world problems such as racial tension, economic woes, and international disputes could be resolved.
- Adherents were to submit their personal will to the care of God. Godly leaders would produce godly nations.

- In an insane world, only those whose lives are controlled by God are truly sane.

As a means of understanding God's will, the Oxford Group taught the Four Absolutes, a set of spiritual guidelines, that first appeared in *The Principles of Jesus* by Robert Speer.

- Absolute honesty
- Absolute purity
- Absolute unselfishness
- Absolute love

The Oxford Group believed the Four Absolutes, absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love were too lofty to fully attain, yet an adherence to these moral guidelines would lead one to a life of holy submission. Furthermore, the Oxford Group believed sin to be "as contagious as any bodily disease" and that the human soul "needs cleaning."

In practice, the Oxford Group proclaimed that

- members were to share the burdens of their sins and temptations with other like-minded followers
- adherents were to surrender their past, present, and future lives to God's control
- followers were to make restitution to those whom they had directly or indirectly wronged
- members were to seek out the will of God for their lives and then live out their lives in submissive obedience to His direction and purpose

In seeking God's guidance, the group's adherents were instructed to

- devote early morning hours to quiet time
- read the Bible and other spiritual literature
- search for God's perspective on the issues and problems facing the individual
- record one's thoughts and ideas with pen and paper

- determine if these thoughts measured up to the group's standards of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love
- check these thoughts for authenticity through conversation with other like-minded individuals

The Oxford Group believed God and God alone could bring about true and lasting transformation. This process of transformation was known as the Five C's:

- Confidence
- Confession
- Conviction
- Conversion
- Continuance

As to the Oxford Group, Carl Jung, famed psychiatrist, psychotherapist, and founder of analytical psychology wrote, "My attitude to these matters is that, as long as a patient is really a member of a church, he ought to be serious. He ought to be really and sincerely a member of that church, and he should not go to a doctor to get his conflicts settled when he believes that he should do it with God."

For Discussion

- Discuss the value of the Oxford Group's *Four Absolutes*: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love.
- Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935. Since then, medical science has made many amazing advances and discoveries, yet there is still no medical cure for alcoholism. Discuss why the biblically-based Twelve Steps as first introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous are as important today as they were generations ago.
- It is the author's belief that, over the years, Alcoholics Anonymous has distanced itself from biblical Christianity for the sake of appealing to a secular audience. If

God is at the center of recovery, why is the “watering down” of the Gospel message both regrettable and counter-productive? Should life-altering truths be hushed for the sake of not offending those who question or deny the existence of God?

Discovery Session 3

Points of Inquiry

- Traits and characteristics of an unmanaged life
- Alcohol in the home, workplace, classroom, and the highway
- Understanding the high functioning alcoholic
- Functioning alcoholics and the dangers of denial

Instant Chaos: Just Add Alcohol

Late one evening, twenty-four year old Michael Gagnon, who had spent the evening drinking shots at a bar, borrowed his brother's pickup truck and made his way to Taco Bell. After leaving the restaurant's drive-through window, he drove the borrowed pickup truck northward on the southbound lanes of an interstate highway. Earlier that evening, Gagnon had blacked out at the bar; now behind the wheel of a fast moving vehicle, he was speeding in the wrong direction along a busy interstate highway.

"The next thing I remember I woke up and I was inside my truck and I had a paramedic over the top of me," Gagnon said. "My first initial reaction was, where's my brother? I knew at the time I must have been in an accident, but it didn't occur to me I was driving."

Gagnon's cell phone rang. A state trooper took the phone and told the caller that Gagnon "had just killed a whole family." Gagnon's initial reaction was anger and disbelief. Because of his excessive drinking, he did not know that he had been driving. After being admitted to the hospital, those who were attending to him appeared angry and bitter. Gagnon asked a nurse if what the state trooper had said about him was true. Had he killed an entire family? "She didn't have to say anything. She just started crying," Gagnon explained. "That's when I lost all control and that's when I felt like hell came crashing down on me. Everything that was ever going to happen in my life or was happening, I

knew was over. The whole reality was I had just killed four children under the age of 10 and a mother.” Owing to Gagnon’s reckless behavior, five lives were destroyed: Bethany Griffin, 36; Jordan Griffin and Haley Burkman, both 10; Lacie Burkman, 7, and eight week old Vadie Griffin.

Michael Gagnon was sentenced to a forty-three year prison term. He entered prison at the age of twenty-four. His term will end upon reaching the age of sixty-seven.

Thankfully, most alcoholics and drug addicts who hit rock bottom will not fall so hard that five innocent lives are lost and the sixth, his or her own life, will be spent in the confines of a cramped prison cell, but the time will come, soon or late, when the alcoholic or addict will discover that life has become unmanageable. The unmanageability is inevitable, but the admission of defeat is quite another matter. Human beings are not always honest. Admitting defeat strips away the last semblance of personal dignity. Waving the white flag of unconditional surrender is a humiliating experience. No one wants to admit defeat, but a continued denial of that which is clearly evident to everyone else represents an insurmountable obstacle to the personal freedom that comes with sobriety.

We begin our journey with a simple fifteen-word confession: “We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.” Unmanageability implies chaos. Since the dawning of our addiction, our lives had become hopelessly and ever-increasingly chaotic. It was as if alcohol and drugs took on lives of their own and transformed themselves into the looming masters that ruled over us; no longer in control, we became as sniveling, cowering, brow-beaten slaves. Life had become a never-ending, out of control roller coaster ride where the hills became steeper, and the drops grew deadlier. The affairs of our lives, major and minor, were now in the death grip of our addiction. The wheel had been stripped from our hands. The bottle, the needle, the pipe, and the pill had swelled into threatening giants—Goliaths, if you will, and we were like David, but without a slingshot for defense. The chaotic, uncontrolled, unmanageable life had granted alcohol and drugs the title deed to our souls.

Spinning Plates

During the 1960s, a popular television variety show featured a quick-handed juggler whose act consisted of maintaining a series of precariously balanced spinning plates. For those unfamiliar with this kind of balancing act, it was the entertainer's job to keep several plates spinning atop vertical poles that looked like billiard cues. The gyroscopic effect kept the spinning plates secure, but as the rotation slowed, the plates became wobbly. The constant threat of a falling plate kept the juggler on his toes. It was all in good fun, of course, and the manic pace of the nimble juggler never failed to delight the audience. Even today, the venerable plate spinning act is seen at circus and acrobatic performances.



In a way, plate spinning symbolizes the hectic complexities of modern life. Even the most organized among us often feel overwhelmed by the mounting demands of day to day living. There are schedules to keep, children to raise, jobs to perform, classes to attend, bills to pay, and obligations to meet. Like the plate spinning juggler, many of us find ourselves darting from problem to problem, task to task, and obligation to obligation at a breakneck pace. Life has its own set of wobbly plates. Managing the complexities that we all face is no easy matter, but most people learn to cope with the demands and obligations expected of them.

Many suffering from alcohol abuse refer to themselves as *functioning alcoholics*. Functioning alcoholics hold jobs, attend classes, pay bills, have spouses, and raise children, but the balancing act of meeting deadlines and obligations becomes increasingly difficult as the addiction worsens. Life is sufficiently difficult, but when alcohol comes into play, the routine complexities of work, school, and family become harder to manage. Alcoholics have a higher rate of absenteeism in the workplace; additionally, alcohol impairs judgment and decision-making, so employees who drink excessively cannot be as efficient or reliable as non-drinking employees. In the classroom, students who abuse alcohol are more likely to experience attendance problems and, generally speaking, are unable to academically compete with non-drinking students. At home, spouses and children of alcoholics are often the tragic victims of abuse, violence, and neglect.

Alcoholics require ever-increasing amounts of alcohol as their tolerance levels climb. As discussed in the first two discovery sessions, runaway drinking plays havoc with the alcoholic's physical health, mental health, career prospects, educational opportunities, and family relationships. Furthermore, alcohol abuse often leads to costly legal and financial woes that bleed the individual or family's resources. Over time, the spinning plates become wobbly, and the alcoholic is soon knee-deep in broken shards of porcelain. This is life unmanaged.

Alcoholism in the Workplace

Responding to alcoholics who insist their problem harms no one but themselves, it is worth noting that alcoholism is having a disastrously profound effect on safety and productivity in the workplace. With more than sixty percent of heavy drinkers holding full-time jobs, the problems of alcoholism are well entrenched in the workplace. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management reports that alcohol-related problems cost businesses as much as \$60 billion or more annually. As financial losses incurred by businesses are ultimately passed on to consumers, everyone pays a price for the damages caused by employees who abuse alcohol.

Absenteeism among problem drinkers and alcoholics is four to eight times higher than with those who abstain from alcohol or drink in strict moderation. Additionally, one in five employees has reported injuries, exposure to perilous working conditions, or increased workloads due to coworkers with drinking problems. Alcoholics do more than harm themselves; alcoholics affect the well-being of those who work with them.



Functioning alcoholics hold jobs, attend classes, pay bills, have spouses, and raise children. Their ability to function defies the popular image of an alcoholic as a grizzled old soul sleeping on a park bench or guzzling cheap wine from a bottle concealed inside a brown paper bag. As critical thinkers, how can we replace this often inaccurate pictorial image of a “down and out” with a more accurate understanding of the literally millions of women and men who suffer from the ravages of alcoholism?

Alcoholism and the Breakup of Marriages

Responding to alcoholics who insist their disorder harms no one but themselves, psychologists Alison Clarke-Stewart of the University of California Irvine and Cornelia Brentano of Chapman University report that alcoholism is a leading cause of divorce in America. Simply stated, people who drink excessively are far more likely to see their marriages ending in divorce. Furthermore, divorced persons are more likely to drink excessively than married persons.

Alcoholics are four times as likely to find themselves separated or in divorce court. Among problem drinkers under thirty, alcohol is cited as the number one reason for divorce. Interestingly, the eight countries with the highest rates of alcohol consumption also have the highest divorce rates. Researchers Alison Clark-Stewart and Cornelia Brentano also report that alcohol abuse is a leading factor in domestic violence, loss of employment, financial woes, legal problems, and sexual dysfunction. Alcoholics do more than harm themselves; alcoholics bring much misery to their spouses and children.

Alcoholism and the Bloodbath on American Highways

Responding to alcoholics who insist their condition harms no one but themselves, alcohol-impaired drivers are responsible for one death every forty-eight minutes. There are about thirty traffic fatalities every day. Alcohol will claim over ten thousand lives on American highways this year. One third of all traffic fatalities result from alcohol-impaired drivers. Many accident victims are children.

The problem is epidemic: some 1.4 million motorists will be arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol this year. Many more intoxicated drivers will escape the attention of law enforcement officials. Marijuana and other drugs are a factor in about one in five alcohol-related traffic fatalities. Alcoholics do more than harm themselves; alcoholics are directly responsible for ten thousand deaths on American roadways.

In the course of history, many more people have died for their drink and their dope than have died for their religion or their country.

--Aldous Huxley

Alcoholism and Child Abuse

Responding to alcoholics who insist their addiction harms no one but themselves, innocent children are all too often the tragic victims of alcoholism. According to research conducted by Cathy Spatz Widom, PH.D. and Susanne Hiller-Sturmhofel, PH.D, and funded, in part, by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, incidents of child abuse are often the results of parental alcohol abuse.

The various forms of child abuse include physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional or psychological abuse. Physical child abuse is defined as the unreasonable inflicting of corporeal mistreatment upon a young victim that may be of such severity that medical attention becomes necessary. In extreme cases, death is the tragic outcome of child abuse. Sexual abuse ranges from inappropriate touching or fondling to sodomy and

rape. Child neglect may be defined as an improper lack of parental or adult supervision in which the victims are inadequately fed, clothed, housed, educated, or treated. Emotional or psychological abuse can have a long-term impact on the development and well-being of its young victims; additionally, such abuse makes these children more susceptible to becoming alcoholics as they grow into adulthood. Alcoholics do more than harm themselves; legions of helpless children have mercilessly suffered at the hands of alcoholic adults.

Alcoholism and Post-Secondary Education

While drinking is considered a rite of passage among myriads of college students, alcohol abuse has taken an exacting toll on the students who binge and the schools they attend. Young drinkers may suffer from blackouts, injuries, accidents, reckless behavior that results in sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies, criminal records, and failing grades. Furthermore, students who abuse alcohol risk permanent damage to their physical health, mental health, and social development.

A sizable percentage of college administrators also report disturbing incidents of vandalism and property damage caused by students who abuse alcohol. Due to criminal mischief inflicted at the hands of student drinkers, tensions and strained relations between a community and the local college often exist. A higher dropout rate or lowered academic standards caused by alcohol abuse can sully a school's reputation. Alcohol abuse among students creates a number of needless headaches that further complicate the lives of overworked faculty and administrators. In the end, runaway drinking on college campuses does great harm to both students and the schools they attend.

Understanding High Functioning Alcoholics

Critical thinkers who rely upon logic and reason avoid stereotyping individuals based strictly upon race, education, gender, age, or ethnicity. Labeling a person due to a single

trait or attribute seldom provides an accurate portrayal of that individual. According to Sarah Allen Benton, M.S., L.M.H.C., LPC, a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and author of *Understanding the High-Functioning Alcoholic: Professional Views and Personal Insights*, we must avoid the careless stereotyping of alcoholics. By her own admission, Ms. Benton is a recovering alcoholic who achieved admirable academic and professional goals while drinking. She describes a high functioning alcoholic as “an alcoholic who is able to maintain his or her outside life, such as a job, home, family, and friendships, all while drinking alcoholically. High functioning alcoholics have the same disease as the stereotypical ‘skid-row’ alcoholic, but it manifests or progresses differently.” Because high functioning alcoholics live seemingly normal lives and, in some cases, have accomplished a host of remarkable personal achievements, family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers are less likely to view these seemingly successful individuals as alcoholics.

As high functioning alcoholics do not fit the stereotypical image of a skid-row drunk, they, too, are deceived by their own accomplishments and successes; in other words, high functioning alcoholics are often plagued by feelings of false security and attitudes of self-denial. Because they maintain outwardly normal lives, high functioning alcoholics are less likely to seek help or treatment. And while this chronic disease takes its exacting physical and mental tolls, high functioning alcoholics live in a fool’s paradise where everything is okay.

Denial is among the high functioning alcoholic’s greatest enemies, for one who is ignorant of his or her desperate situation will seldom seek help or treatment. After all, high functioning alcoholics may enjoy remarkable measures of success in the office, in the classroom, and in the home. And it is precisely because the high functioning alcoholic does not fit the stereotypical picture of a grizzled old drunk asleep on a park bench that this seemingly successful individual fails to see the looming perils of this dangerous condition. Because the high functioning alcoholic has not hit rock bottom—at least, not yet, the drinker will not be convinced that alcohol is a very real and dangerous threat.

High functioning alcoholics are plagued by the same physical cravings and mental obsessions that haunt skid-row drunks; additionally, high functioning alcoholics view alcohol as a balm for easing stress or as a reward for their hard work and accomplishments. High functioning alcoholics live “double-lives” that outwardly point to personal success and achievement but are inwardly troubled with bouts of ill-behavior and moral lapses triggered by excessive drinking. Again, because the high functioning alcoholic sleeps in a bed rather than on a park bench, he or she may be unwilling to believe that alcohol has become a dangerous and deadly foe.

Sara Allen Benton explained, “My image of the alcoholic was always an individual who could not hold his or her life together, and I certainly did not fit that description. The denial that I experienced was so deeply rooted and was reinforced not only from my loved ones but from society as a whole. Alcoholism is a chronic, progressive and lifelong disease that needs to be treated whether the alcoholic is a lawyer or a homeless person. The face of the alcoholic needs to be changed and the walls of denial must be broken down in order that alcoholics everywhere can receive proper diagnosis and treatment.”

For Discussion

- In what ways do highly functioning alcoholics differ from alcoholics who are unemployed, penniless, and homeless? How are they alike?
- What are the dangers of denial?

Confessions of a “Happy Drunk”

On an online discussion board, a high functioning alcoholic wrote: “Yes, I admit to being a high-functioning alcoholic. I maintain ‘caps’ on my drinking. I drink alcoholically, yet I never drink during the morning or daytime—I live a normal life—and I stop drinking long before I black out or sow the seeds of a hangover. Also, I never combine drinking (even a sip) with driving. Despite these sanity checks, I know that I’m dependent on alcohol. I drink to reward myself for good times or relieve the stress of bad times. I can’t go for very long without alcohol. I don’t want to change. I’ve made a compromise with my addiction,

and I'm happy with the balance. So, what's the big deal? I'm not hurting myself, and I don't hurt my loved ones. I'm a happy drunk. Why should I worry?"

For Discussion

- Despite his seemingly “under control” drinking, how is alcohol affecting the “happy drunk’s” health?
- As alcoholism is a progressive disease, that is, a disease that worsens over time, how can this “happy drunk” be certain that he will be able to continue living this so-called normal life?
- This high functioning alcoholic stated that neither he nor his loved ones are hurt by his drinking. In what ways might his drinking be harming himself as well as those whom he loves?

No one is immune from addiction; it afflicts people of all ages, races, classes, and professions.
Patrick J. Kennedy

Diary of a Wife of a High Functioning Alcoholic

The following letter appeared on an online message board. Read the letter and then respond to the questions and comments that follow.

“After twenty-four years of marriage and two children, I have just recently accepted the fact that I'm married to an alcoholic, a high functioning alcoholic, but an alcoholic none the less. It was as if a light bulb went off when I finally realized that the numerous problems we were experiencing were due to his drinking. It's really only been in the last five years that the problems have escalated to a point where I began to wonder what was going on. When I would ask him how much he had to drink, he would always lie and say two or three. Then I found his hiding techniques and started counting and I realized that this has been going on a long time. And when I started watching his behavior I realized he is obsessing over alcohol, when he can drink without me noticing, where he can hide it to

avoid detection, how he slams down a six pack before noon and then sleeps it off and why he goes on in the evening to finish another six pack and he's 'so tired' he has to go to bed early. He also minimizes his drinking and surrounds himself with very heavy drinkers. He's experiencing health problems that he thinks are totally unrelated—a groin pull that isn't getting better. But when you drink as much as he does, his joints are dehydrated, he falls and is not steady and over time it just takes its toll. His body is too busy metabolizing alcohol to heal properly. At least this is my suspicion. He's also too checked out to go to the doctor when he should and follow the doctor's orders. Why should he when he can drink his pain away?

"He is very deceptive and I guess I had an incentive to look the other way or just not pay much attention to what was going on around me. He is the primary bread winner, now the sole money earner and insurance provider in our family. He is very smart, able to fix anything, flips houses and makes lots of money doing it, flies airplanes, can do anything he wants or sets his mind to. He is also an excellent money manager and someone who I rely on for lots of things.

"The problems arose when I realized what this was doing to my older daughter and now our two year old. He would have these mood swings and act funny. Either mad at the world and his job loss or mad at me a lot. We would get in huge fights. He would feel sorry for himself or would be overly jovial and act very annoying. I seriously thought he was losing his mind or that there was something wrong with me. He had had a few violent outbursts over the years but nothing like hitting me. He threw a chair at the dinner table once in front of my daughter but for the most part he is a 'sleepy drunk.' This made the problem even more difficult to diagnose because there wasn't any ongoing violence, but when added all up it all made sense. Both of our families have noticed the change in him recently and have made comments like what's wrong with him, which, I guess, is the effect of the progression of the disease. He tries to pick fights with me when he's drunk and he recently had a problem at work where he almost lost his job. He slowed his drinking down a lot after that but then it gradually picked back up.

“There is also a huge emotional toll on me and our family. He's checked out most of the time—unwilling or unable to participate in family outings or too ‘depressed’ or too ‘tired’ to go anywhere and mostly sits in his chair. We have grown so far apart I'm afraid we may never get back to a normal family life again. I'm losing sleep over this and have a hard time concentrating on anything but this problem at the moment. It's making me depressed and I feel very lonely.”

For Discussion

- The wife states that her husband is the sole income earner; up until now, he has provided for his family's financial needs. Recently, however, he nearly lost his job because of drinking. Discuss his wife's concerns for the well-being of the family as his drinking escalates.
- She believes that her husband obsesses over alcohol; he attempts to drink without detection and surrounds himself with friends who, too, are heavy drinkers. He also lies about the amount of alcohol that he consumes. Discuss his mental obsession with alcohol.
- As his drinking escalates, his violent outbursts and unpredictable mood swings are becoming more frequent. How is this negative behavior affecting his wife? How does his unstable behavior affect the couple's children?
- According to his wife, he is a clever man who can pilot an airplane and make profitable real estate investments. He is a good provider who has met his family's financial needs. How might these outward successes and achievements cause him to deny the true seriousness of his situation?
- His wife concludes this letter by saying that her husband has become sullen, withdrawn, and unwilling to participate in family outings. She states, “It's making me depressed and I feel very lonely.” Unless he seeks treatment, how might his runaway alcoholism lead to the breakup of this increasingly dysfunctional family?

Discovery Session 4

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step One
- Defining the unmanageable life
- Life plus uncontrolled drinking and/or drugging equals chaos
- How denial stands in the way of recovery
- Restoration follows humility and obedience

Introduction to Step One:

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

Perhaps the “down and outer”—the alcoholic who is friendless, homeless, and penniless, finds accepting the truth of his or her situation easier than the highly functioning alcoholic who is deceived by a façade of success. Alcoholics who have hit rock bottom can no longer deny that alcohol rules their lives while their highly functioning counterparts may point to their careers, families, and finances as proof positive that they, not alcohol, are in charge of their lives. The highly functioning alcoholic has much more in common with the drunk sleeping on a park bench than he or she would care to admit, for both are bound by the chains of addiction. The only difference between the two is that one is held by chains of iron while the other is fettered with chains forged with gold plating. Both are slaves who grovel to alcohol. A life ruled by alcohol is unmanageable.

As previously discussed, high functioning alcoholics do not fit the stereotypical image of a “down and outer” living on skid row. Many high functioning alcoholics are married, raise children, hold good paying jobs, live in comfortable homes, drive new automobiles, and

seemingly enjoy all of the rights, privileges, and benefits of success. Because of their notable achievements, many high functioning alcoholics are deceived by their own accomplishments; in other words, high functioning alcoholics are often lulled into a false sense of security that leads to continual, ongoing self-denial. As these functioning alcoholics maintain outwardly normal lives, they are less likely to seek help or treatment. And while this debilitating disease takes a grave toll on the physical and mental well-being of its victims, many functioning alcoholics vehemently deny their lives are riddled with chaos.

Denial is among the high functioning alcoholic's greatest enemies, for he who is ignorant of his desperate situation is hardly likely to seek treatment. Because the high functioning alcoholic has not yet hit rock bottom, the out of control drinker may flatly deny that alcohol is the sworn enemy.

**Honesty is of God and dishonesty of the devil; the devil was a liar from the beginning.
--Joseph B. Wirthlin**

High functioning alcoholics are plagued by the same physical cravings and mental obsessions that preoccupy skid-row drunks; additionally, high functioning alcoholics regard alcohol as a cure for easing stress or as a reward for their hard work and successes. High functioning alcoholics live "double-lives" that outwardly point to personal success and achievement but are inwardly troubled with bouts of ill-behavior and moral lapses triggered by excessive drinking. Again, because the high functioning alcoholic lives in a home rather than a homeless shelter, he refuses to believe that the bottle has become a Goliath who dares to be tamed.

This much is certain: a life ruled by alcohol is unmanageable. This truth applies to the skid-row drunk as well as to the high functioning alcoholic. Healing begins with an admission that alcohol has taken charge of one's will and, as a result, life has become unmanageable.

For Discussion:

- Discuss what an unmanaged life looks like.
- Why must an alcoholic or addict admit to his or her powerlessness over alcohol or drugs as the first step to a life of sobriety?
- How can a false sense of pride stand in the way of one's recovery?

If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.

--C.S. Lewis

Anne's Story

"I have been married for almost 33 years and the last few years have been mostly a nightmare. My husband is a full blown alcoholic but refuses to admit it. He has never physically abused me, but the verbal abuse is so bad that I feel as though I want to give up and he makes me feel worthless. He calls me vile names, accuses me of all sorts of things and blames me for everything. He tries to hide his alcoholism from friends and does a pretty good job of it, so they don't know what he is like behind closed doors. They would be shocked if they really knew what is going on.

"I am 68 years old and we are both retired, he spends most of his days getting drunk, either setting in the garage or in his 'man cave' drinking. He has let himself go physically, and mentally he is full of hate for everyone and everything. We have no intimacy because of his drinking. He is impotent and shows no affection for me whatsoever.

“I cannot get him to get help, and he will not discuss his problem. He just tells me to leave him alone. He refuses to admit he is an alcoholic. I feel defeated and worthless. I have no money to go out on my own and no car or job, and am a diabetic, depressed and ready to just give up.”

There is a freedom that comes with admitting defeat and there is a joy that comes with accepting one’s powerlessness over alcohol. Living a lie is wearisome. Pretending all is well when all is not well is burdensome. Coming clean, so to speak, and removing the mask of deception is liberating. Those who have convinced themselves that all is right in their world falsely assume they have no reason to seek help. Those who wrongly think they are healthy erroneously believe they have no occasion to see a physician. And herein we discover one of the great human tragedies, for without proper help, legions of addicts and alcoholics will continue to die well before their time.

Honesty is more than not lying. It is truth telling, truth speaking, truth living, and truth loving.
--James E. Faust

Dare we hope for healing and restoration by simply admitting our vulnerability? In truth, humility alone is not the cure, but humility is the pathway that can lead us to God. Has life become unmanageable? Are you a slave bound and fettered by some looming evil? All is not lost, for God is still in the business of mending broken lives, and restoration begins with a simple declaration: “We admitted we were powerless over our addiction--that our lives had become unmanageable.”

Recovery becomes a matter of choice—a choice that involves admitting defeat to a powerful enemy followed by a reliance upon an even more powerful friend, Jesus Christ. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices,

all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.”



None So Blind As Those Who Will Not See A Study in John 9

Statistically, alcoholics who never seek treatment may shorten their lives by fifteen or more years. Female alcoholics appear at greater risk than their male counterparts. In a recent medical study based on 158 alcohol-related deaths, not a single alcoholic had lived to his or her full life expectancy. According to Bruce Goldman, director of substance abuse services at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y., "...alcohol dependence is

a chronic and sometimes fatal disease. There is evidence that the impact of alcohol can be more devastating in women than men...Get help, or you may be literally drinking away years of your life." Tragically, legions of diseased victims who deny their powerlessness over alcohol are digging their own graves by ignoring treatment.

The following study, taken from the ninth chapter of John, tells of a blind man who was miraculously healed by the power of God. While the story of the blind man's restoration is truly remarkable, we will be introduced to a curious group of others who enjoyed 20/20 vision, yet when faced with undeniable facts and indisputable evidence as to their own brand of infirmity, they were blinded by skepticism and unbelief.

As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors, and those who previously saw him as a beggar, were saying, "Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?" Others were saying, "This is he," still others were saying, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the one." So they were saying to him, "How then were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man who is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went away and washed, and I received sight." They said to him, "Where is He?" He said, "I do not know (John 9: 1-12 NASB)."

Upon meeting the blind man, Jesus' disciples demonstrated more interest in determining the reason for his blindness than in providing a fellow human with tangible help. Some

of the disciples believed the man was blind because of an evil sin he had committed. Others reasoned his parents must have acted wickedly. Regardless, the disciples of Jesus were convinced that the man's blindness was brought about by God's judgment. In truth, neither side was correct in their understanding.

While the disciples mindlessly debated whose guilt had rendered the poor man blind, Jesus looked upon the beggar with compassion. May this lesson not be lost on you and me. After anointing the blind man's eyes with clay, He told the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. Miraculously, the blind man's eyes were restored. Jesus is still in the business of restoring broken lives.

While onlookers marveled at this great miracle, a group of mocking skeptics refused to believe that the man with the newly restored vision was the same sightless beggar who had scrounged for coins earlier that day. Do not miss this point: before these hardboiled skeptics stood the formerly blind beggar testifying that Jesus had indeed healed him, but because of the callousness of their hearts, they steadfastly refused to believe. It has been said that none are so blind as those who refuse to see. Even today, skeptics and critics seek to find naturalistic explanations to counter the testimonies of those who, by the power of God, have been delivered from the chains and fetters of addiction.

They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, "He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, "This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath." But others were saying, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And there was a division among them. So they said to the blind man again, "What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?" And he said, "He is a prophet (John 9: 13-17 NASB)."

The Pharisees were religious leaders whose preoccupation with empty tradition blinded them to God's truths. According to their customs, Jesus violated God's law by healing this blind man on the Jewish Sabbath. In truth, the rules governing their observance of the Sabbath did not forbid the faithful from doing good. Blinded by the rites, rules, and rituals of mere religion, these muddle-minded Pharisees accused Jesus, who had given this poor beggar the precious gift of sight, of doing evil.

When asked about Jesus, the one who was blind and could now see answered, "He is a prophet." To call Jesus a prophet is a somewhat simplistic answer, for there have been many prophets and Jesus is more than just a prophet, but the man approached Jesus with what little understanding he had. When we approach God "as we understand Him," it is important to realize that *God is who He is and not necessarily who we believe Him to be*. We may approach Him with little understanding based on personal ignorance and a lack of familiarity with Scripture, but through systematic Bible study and fervent prayer, we will come to a greater and more accurate knowledge of Him over time. As it is possible to be sincere, but sincerely wrong, do not fall into a trap by thinking your sincere beliefs about the Person and Nature of God are necessarily true. God will meet you in your lack of understanding, but He does not want you forever pitching your tent in a land of spiritual ignorance.

The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, and questioned them, saying, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is of age; ask him (John 9: 18-23 NASB)."

The Pharisees *chose* not to believe. Despite overwhelming evidence and the irrefutable testimony of the beggar and his parents, these religious leaders refused to believe. Ignorance is not bliss.

Men and women addicted to drink or drugs but who doggedly refuse to admit their powerlessness over alcohol or narcotics despite the chaos evidenced by their unmanageable lives are, like the Pharisees, as blind fools.

So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" They reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?" So they put him out (John 9: 24-34 NASB).

The formerly blind man had neither attended seminary nor did he have the title *Reverend* preceding his name, but he knew more than the arrogant religious leaders who were blinded by their own disbelief.

Countless alcoholics and addicts who have enjoyed many long years of sobriety freely give God the praise, honor, and glory for their recovery, yet there are the so-called

enlightened ones who, through the hardness of their hearts, would purge the Lord Jesus from the biblically-based Twelve Steps. Let no one be deceived as there can be no genuine spiritual awakening for those who deny the Savior.

Foolish is the man whose life is in shambles while pretending that he, not the bottle, the needle, the pipe, nor the pill is the master of his fate and the captain of his destiny. Perhaps one reason that many alcoholics are reticent in admitting the real source of that which plagues them is the social stigma that comes with being labeled an alcoholic or an addict. These are ugly labels laden with ugly connotations. Through the repeated denial of addicts' power over their lives, they hope to avoid the shame that comes from an admission of utter defeat. While shame leaves a bitter taste, we are encouraged to drain the cup despite its unpleasantness, for shame can be an elixir that produces a particular clarity of mind that allows one to wave the white flag of surrender to the one and only God who is mighty to save.

The formerly blind man was excommunicated by the religious leaders for his testimony, but if God be for us, who can stand against us?

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains (John 9: 35-41 NASB).

By referring to Himself as the Son of Man, Jesus proclaimed Himself as fully God and fully man. In the previous chapter of John, the religious leaders threatened Jesus, who had claimed divinity within their presence, with death. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S.

Lewis wrote, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on a level with the man who says that he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The formerly blind man placed his faith in Christ Jesus. He worshipped and believed. Two thousand years later, broken men and women continue flocking to Him for forgiveness, healing, and restoration.

The Pharisees, hardened by unbelief and steeped in their own vain traditions, were blind to God’s truths. Stubbornness, pride, rebellion, and cynicism are as scales that can prevent us from recognizing God’s truths; blinded by these opaque scales, skeptics and cynics are unable to see the feast spread upon God’s banquet table. We may dine on the goodness of God, or we may choose to forever starve. Incredulously, these haughty, hard-bitten religious zealots, bolstered by their worthless religious credentials, turned to Jesus asking, “Do you suppose that we are blind, too?” Jesus’ response proved that the Pharisees stood condemned by their own words.

Until we die to self, we cannot fully live.

The deadliest, most devastating lie is the lie we tell ourselves, and until we are ready to come clean by admitting we are powerless over alcohol and drugs, the disease that plagues us will go from bad to worse. The Pharisees, proud as peacocks, strutted about the streets of Jerusalem adorned with the finest religious education, credentials, and titles, but inwardly, they were corrupt. Jesus compared these religious phonies to fancy

tombs—ornate, impressive, and lovely to behold—but beneath the ornamentation lay dead men’s bones. And we see this in the highly functioning alcoholics who point to their homes, cars, careers, and bank accounts—outwardly successful, but beneath the thin veneer of respectability is utter chaos. Not only do they bring destruction to themselves, they inflict great harm on those closest to them.

For Discussion

- The beggar, blind from birth, could not see. The Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in ancient Israel, were *spiritually* blind. Describe this spiritual blindness.
- The Pharisees were blind by choice. They closed their eyes to the saving power of Christ Jesus by preferring their empty religious traditions to a right relationship with God. In what way was their blindness more debilitating than the physical blindness of the beggar?
- How is an alcoholic or addict who, in faith, reaches out to Jesus like the beggar in our story? In what way is an alcoholic or addict who denies the chaotic condition of his or her life like the Pharisees who turned away from the One who brings hope and restoration to the lost, the hurt, and the dying?
- Discuss the humility of the blind beggar. Discuss the pride of the Pharisees.

Discovery Session 5

Points of Inquiry

- Delving deeper into Step One
- Drinking, substance abuse, and feelings of euphoria
- Dr. Silkwood on alcoholism
- How pride blocks the pathway of recovery

Exploring Step One:

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

It is said that one drink is too many and a thousand drinks are never enough. This maxim is certainly true, for unlike the average social drinker, an alcoholic cannot stop at one drink. With each drink, the desire for the next drink intensifies. Rather than satisfying the physical cravings for alcohol, giving in to the urge to drink only *increases* the alcoholic's desire for alcohol. Having a drink in order to quench the craving is tantamount to using gasoline to extinguish a raging fire. Alcoholics will drink until they pass out or until there is nothing left to drink. They may say they can stop after one or two drinks, but this is a lie. Once the alcoholic takes that first drink, the bottle has won the battle.

People drink alcohol, pop pills, or mainline heroin because they like the way these drugs make them feel. After a few drinks or a needle in a vein, mounting feelings of euphoria overcome any negative feelings of loneliness, brokenness, melancholy, resentment, or depression. Initially, the substance abuser feels revived, revitalized, renewed, rejuvenated, recharged, regenerated, and ready for anything. Of course, these euphoric feelings are short-lived and, in time, the user's drug of choice takes an exacting toll on its victim's physical health, mental health, and overall well-being. In far too many cases, the rollercoaster ride of addiction ends in the cemetery.

No drug can make a problem go away. No drink can cure loneliness, anger, resentment, disappointment, or depression. Drugs only mask the hurt. Once the drug-induced high begins to fade, the negative feelings return. As a balm, alcohol and drugs offer only short term relief with long term and often fatal side effects. As the alcoholic's body builds a tolerance to drink, more alcohol is required to satisfy the cravings. Increased consumption equals increased health risks. In truth, as the alcoholic or the substance abuser's addiction worsens, so do the problems. To the addict's dismay, the so-called cure he or she had hoped would drive away the problems only made the problems worse—and more numerable.

In the strictest sense, the alcoholic is powerless over alcohol, and when the bottle is calling the shots, chaos is the expected result. A chaotic life is a life that is no longer manageable. What does such a life look like? One alcoholic described her unmanaged life as follows:

- I couldn't manage to feed my kid
- I couldn't manage to get to work on time
- I couldn't manage to deal with my emotions
- I couldn't manage to get out of bed
- I couldn't manage my rage and anger
- I couldn't manage my relationships
- I couldn't manage to say no
- I couldn't manage to think about others

As discussed in a prior session, high functioning alcoholics are more likely to resist an admission to defeat because of their ability to maintain a career, a home, a family, and a superficial resemblance of outward normalcy. As high functioning alcoholics do not fit the stereotypical image of a skid-row drunk, they, too, are deceived by their own accomplishments and successes; high functioning alcoholics are often plagued by feelings of false security and attitudes of self-denial. Because they maintain seemingly normal lives, high functioning alcoholics are less likely to pursue help. And while this

chronic disease takes its exacting physical and mental tolls, high functioning alcoholics live in a land of make-believe where everything appears to be okay.

I spent all my pay on alcohol—I couldn't wait to get paid! I would run out of money and steal from my family or do whatever I could to get a drink. I knew that I should not drink, but I lived for it. I did not care where I lived or slept or even if I ate. I could not say no to alcohol. If I could go back in time, I would not have taken that first drink. I pray that no one will take that first drink and end up like me.

--James, a fifty-nine year old inmate

Denial may be the functioning alcoholic's greatest enemy, for those who are ignorant of the true nature of their condition are unlikely to seek treatment. A high functioning alcoholic may enjoy success in the office or the classroom—and herein we find the deadliest peril. Because the high functioning alcoholic has not hit rock bottom—at least, not yet, he or she steadfastly resists the belief that alcohol is a very real and dangerous threat.

High functioning alcoholics are plagued by the same physical cravings and mental obsessions that haunt skid-row drunks; additionally, high functioning alcoholics view alcohol as an elixir for easing stress or as a reward for their hard work and successes. High functioning alcoholics live “double-lives” that outwardly point to personal success and achievement but are inwardly troubled with bouts of ill-behavior and moral lapses triggered by excessive drinking. Again, because high functioning alcoholics sleep under roofs rather than overpasses, they are more likely to resist the truth about their disease than skid-row drunks who know beyond doubt they have hit rock bottom.

For Discussion

- Alcoholics and substance abusers like the way their particular drugs of choice make them feel. Discuss the short-lived feelings of euphoria that only temporarily masks negative feelings of disappointment, anxiety, loneliness, and depression.
- Why are high functioning alcoholics often resistant to admitting to their powerlessness over drink?
- What are the symptoms of a life that has become unmanageable?

I did not understand the real meaning of being “powerlessness over our addictions” until I came to prison. I had abandoned my family and loved ones for drugs. I had chosen drugs over everything and sacrificed all that I had just to get high. My unmanageable life meant having no job and stealing from others. I once lived in an abandoned house that had no electricity and no water. It was winter and there was a hole in the roof. You can only change if you choose to change. The only person able to make that choice is you when you know you’ve finally had enough!

--Ken, a thirty year old inmate

Alcoholism as a Manifestation of Allergy

Affectionately known as “the little doctor who loved drunks,” Dr. William Silkworth was an early pioneer in the study and treatment of alcoholism. During the 1930s, Dr. Silkwood was director of the Charles B. Towns Hospital for Drug and Alcohol Addictions in New York City. Insisting that alcoholism was more than just a moral weakness, he believed that alcoholism was a disease. The following excerpts from his paper, *Alcoholism as a Manifestation of Allergy*, have been edited for the sake of brevity. The underlined sections are that of the author of this manual.

Alcoholism is considered by many physicians a chronic condition that gradually unfolds itself to a dismal end. They feel that it is a state of mind and advise these patients that it is up to them to discontinue their accustomed drug, which it is assumed they can do by merely making up their minds to do so. Proper attention is

not given to the psychological problem as well as the physical condition of these people...

A heavy responsibility, therefore, rests upon the physician. No other condition has attained such general and widespread proportions. No other disease entails such far-reaching suffering and disaster to families and friends, nor is there any other with which the physician has been less able to cope with reasonable assurance of at least minimizing its ravages. The reason for this lies not only in the influences we have noted already, but in the fact that heretofore alcoholism has been considered a vice within the control of the relatively few individuals concerned and not as a disease entity in its more subtle and damaging aspects; and all that has been expected of the physician has been the administration of sedatives, purges and emetics to control acute stages.

It is our purpose to show that there is a type of alcoholism characterized by a definite symptomatology and a fixed diagnosis indicative of a constant and specific pathology; in short, that true alcoholism is a manifestation of allergy. If the arguments adduced appear to upset traditional ideas on the subject, it is because the major points of diagnostic importance as well as the fundamental basis of the physical and mental alterations that occur in the victims, have not heretofore been correlated or analyzed with the same interest that attaches to other conditions that are no more serious but elicit more sympathy. As the result of observations of numerous cases at Towns Hospital, New York City, over a period of years, clinical constants have been derived and data have been accumulated which indicate that the subject must be considered from the constitutional and serological point of view.

...The majority of people who drink alcohol apparently do so with impunity. Prohibition revealed, among other things, how much people desire to use alcohol on all sorts of occasions, and that this desire, and intention, are not limited to chronic alcoholics. The judge, the senator, the preacher, all want their alcohol on occasion. The merchant or the broker closes transactions over a highball and frequently indulges several times daily for many years. The clubman and the society matron, the daily laborer, the high and the low alike may drink daily more or less liberally of

any and all sorts of liquor during much of their life time. They may, and do, become intoxicated; but note that in the majority of such cases alcohol exhibits only the immediate effects of the drug, and recovery is prompt and uncomplicated...

Such people drink from choice and not from necessity. They find in alcohol a pleasant stimulation, a relief from anxieties, an increased warmth of conviviality. It is not a dominant factor in their lives. They are normal people, mentally and physically, to all intents and purposes...

This, we believe, is a fair view of the general drinking public, and constitutes a familiar background against which to contrast a very different picture. These people are not true alcoholics, but they may become so; and it is from among them that the real alcoholics are derived.

Let us now contrast with this kind of drinker an entirely different type. He is, as we have noted, a development of the class we have just described, his history may be quite like that of the average. But sooner or later there comes a time when he manifests changes that place him in a classification characterized by symptoms that were entirely lacking before, and unequivocally set him apart from the average drinker. Whereas he formerly drank for pleasure, he now has to drink from necessity in order to keep going. He cannot take his liquor or leave it, as he used to do. Yet, even if he is more or less soaked with it all day, his mind at first functions fairly well, he transacts his business with fair efficiency and keeps up with his obligations to his associates and the community. But he discovers that a change has occurred in him. He finds that he has to have a drink in the morning. Then he finds, after a little more time, that his hand shakes; when he signs his name, for example. Later, irritability and lack of concentration supervene. He is not the man temperamentally that he used to be. In order to meet these changes and increasing symptoms, he is compelled to increase the amount he consumes, and a prolonged spree replaces a short intoxication.

The spree is characterized by certain definite physical symptoms in all such cases. The phenomenon of craving is prominent; there are complete loss of appetite,

insomnia, dry skin and hypermotor activity. He has a feeling of anxiety which amounts to a nameless terror...It is not at all unusual, in fact it is the rule, for such a person to say, for example: "I drank for twenty years but it never affected me this way before." It is to be noted here that it does not take twenty years to form a habit. One case epitomized the whole clinical picture in these words: "I can make more money in a day than you can in a year. I can, and do, handle big things. I carry on transactions that keep two or three telephones on my desk busy all day. But I can't take a drink any more. What is the difference between you and me? A psychiatrist tells me it is in here (indicating his head); that I can't face reality." That particular person does nothing else. He lives in and faces reality all day.

These changes mark the early stages of true alcoholism, and the beginning of a chain of symptoms that show a remarkable constancy. They occur in comparatively rapid sequence during a period of from four to six months in the course of what had been ordinary drinking habits for perhaps many years previously. At this point, even during periods of partial or complete sobriety, he develops a state of anxiety amounting to a vague fear, then depression and lack of concentration, with gradually growing indifference or complete apathy toward his former interests. Unreliability, changes in personality, loss of appetite, insomnia and tachycardia follow. He is under such tension in the effort to control himself that he has to have a drink in order to hold himself together. At the same time, and we have observed few exceptions to this, these individuals will tell you that they not only have no liking for liquor but dread to take it; and, to anyone who has watched such a person, it is obvious that this is true. But he believes he must have it, even though he realizes that, in his particular case, a single drink will plunge him into such a condition that a prolonged spree will be the inevitable result. After the first drink, and only then, does he experience the physical phenomenon of craving.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the point that this man does not go on a spree from pure deviltry or desire. He often has important engagements or appointments or decisions to make the following day, to which he has given serious consideration. The situation cannot be duplicated in what we may call the "normal" or nonalcoholic

drinker, who is accustomed to his few drinks a day, year in and year out, and never goes on a spree.

When a man gets into this state, it is a remarkable and noteworthy fact that he needs only a comparatively small amount to keep him more or less interested in affairs. All he wants, and must have, is a drink every so often. It is as if these small pushes were enough, in contrast to the ordinary “drunk” who finishes the bottle at one sitting, becomes intoxicated and goes on his way again, apparently none the worse, after the drug has been eliminated. These small pushes that propel the true alcoholic through his day, are one phase of a vicious cycle, apparently, culminating in complete debauch, after which the cycle begins again.

The inevitable conclusion is that true alcoholism is an allergic state, the result of gradually increasing sensitization by alcohol over a more or less extended period of time. The constancy of the symptoms and progress is too fixed to permit any other explanation. Some are allergic from birth, but the condition usually develops later in life. The development and course of these cases are quite comparable with the history of hay fever patients in many respects. One may enjoy absolute freedom for many years from any susceptibility to pollen. Year after year, however, there gradually develops a sensitivity to it in certain individuals, culminating at last in paroxysms of hay fever that persist indefinitely when the condition is fully established.

It is noteworthy also, that such patients may be deprived of liquor altogether for a long period, a year or longer for example, and become apparently normal. They are still allergic, however, and a single drink will develop the full symptomatology again...

For Discussion:

- Referring to the “normal drinker,” Dr. Silkwood said alcohol is a choice and not a necessity. How does the alcoholic differ in this respect?
- Discuss Dr. Silkwood’s comparison of alcoholism to an allergy.

- According to Dr. Silkwood, long term abstinence will not “cure” an alcoholic. Even after years of sobriety, a single drink will trigger the symptomatology of alcoholism again. Discuss how this relates to the maxim “One drink is too many and a thousand drinks are never enough.”

Captain Naaman Takes His First Step

A study in II Kings 5: 1-14

Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper (II Kings 5: 1 NASB).

Meet Captain Naaman--a man of honor and valor--a man of reputation. Even the great and mighty king of Aram, now known as modern day Syria, looked upon Captain Naaman with a royal measure of awe and respect. Captain Naaman was a national hero--a brave, highly regarded, battle-proven warrior who had led his troops to many legendary victories. By anyone's standards, Captain Naaman had risen to the lofty heights of fame and success that only a favored few will experience.

But Captain Naaman was also a man stricken by leprosy. Perhaps no other disease common in the ancient world caused such panic and dread. Leprosy begins with horrible lesions upon the skin and as the disease progresses, fingers, toes, and limbs wither in grotesque deformity. In ancient times, leprosy was a death sentence that no king could commute. As leprosy was thought to be highly contagious, lepers were often driven from their homes and families to the grim and lonely isolation of leper colonies. In isolation they lived and in isolation they died.

Captain Naaman was a hero--a warrior whose reputation had risen higher than his peers, but beneath the uniform and the medals was a body marred by decaying flesh. Leprosy

was an incurable disease more deadly than any enemy combatant Naaman had encountered on the battlefield.

Most of us have never made the acquaintance of a leper, for leprosy has largely been eradicated in our modern world, yet many of us know of someone who has achieved wealth or position or prestige, but who is, deep down, marred and ravaged by runaway addiction.

Today, medical science can cure a leper, but medical science cannot cure alcoholism. And so the high functioning alcoholic with a college degree and a suburban home and a luxury sports sedan and a corner office is much like Captain Naaman—a withered heap of a person hiding behind an immaculately tailored suit.

Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy (II Kings 5: 2, 3 NASB)."

Who was this little slave girl? Who was this Hebrew child taken prisoner by a superior enemy army? To her captor, she was mere booty--nothing more than the spoils of war. Most likely, Captain Naaman had presented this frightened little girl to his wife after plundering her village. She was property. Chattel. Just another household slave. Even her name has been withheld from recorded history. Unlike Captain Naaman, this little maiden was of no great reputation.

And yet this Hebrew slave girl had an enormous capacity for kindness and compassion; she knew a prophet named Elisha--a man of God who could heal the warrior who had stolen her from her family and home. Because of her compassion, she longed to see her master make the acquaintance of this notable prophet. This is remarkable, for rather than wishing the worst upon the man who had taken her from her home, she desired to see him healed. What manner of child was this?

Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel (II Kings 5: 4 NASB)."

Even though she was only a household slave, Captain Naaman believed the child's story about the prophet who could heal. He trusted her words. He considered her credible. This, too, is remarkable, for many people occupying exalted positions of authority and power are usually slow to hear those in lowly circumstances. Perhaps the child had gained his trust by her hard work and truthfulness. Maybe she had endeared herself to Captain Naaman by an unwavering attentiveness to her duties. This much we may know with absolute certainty: based on the word of this humble servant girl, Captain Naaman stood before the Syrian king with news that a prophet who lived in Israel had the power to cleanse him of this dreaded leprosy.

Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes (II King 5: 5 NASB).

The Syrian king believed in the servant girl's word, too, and he backed his faith in her testimony by sending his favored warrior to Israel with a fortune in gold, silver, and costly raiment. Both the king and the captain believed this prophet of God could bring about a miraculous healing and they were willing to back this belief with a princely sum from the king's royal coffers. Faith without works is dead, but genuine faith is backed by more than idle talk. Captain Naaman was ready to apply shoe leather to his faith.

Rather than approaching the prophet directly, the Syrian king sent his request to the king of Israel. Perhaps the Syrian king suspected that the prophet of God would not act without approval from his own king. During this time, there were ongoing tensions between Syria and Israel. By all rights, Captain Naaman considered the Hebrews enemies of Syria, yet a man in a desperate situation will often seek help wherever help may be found.

He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his

clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me (II Kings 5: 6, 7)."

Men and horses and chariots were at the king's royal command, but only the prophet Elisha could stand before Almighty God. The king of Israel was utterly powerless over Captain Naaman's leprosy, but he feared the Syrian monarch might mistake his inability to help as a *refusal* to help. Such an insult could have launched a bloody war between the powerful Syrians and an inferior Israeli army.

Are you depending upon an earthly leader for salvation? Do you hope to find deliverance through the power of mere mortal man? If so, prepare to be disappointed. In contrast, those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior have the right to stand boldly before the Throne of Almighty God in the manner of an Elisha. God will not turn His back upon His sons and daughters.

We do well if we place our reliance upon God. Call a politician if you need trash picked up or a pothole repaired, but in life or death situations, call upon God.

God's word says those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ are sons and daughters of the King--and the King's children should never grovel about as dirty-faced beggars.

It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent word to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel (II Kings 5: 8 NASB)."

Note the boldness of Elisha's words: "Now let Captain Naaman come to me, and he shall know there is a prophet in Israel." When men and women enjoy a right relationship with God, they should not be shaken by doubt or troubled by fear, for their confidence in Him should bring about an abundance of courage when courage is in short supply. Has not

history proven that God cannot fail? Does not Scripture teach that God knows nothing of defeat? What is leprosy, or for that matter, alcoholism or addiction to the One who spoke the entire universe into existence? It only stands to reason that He who made us can also heal us according to His divine will.

So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean (II Kings 5: 9, 10 NASB)."

Here we have a foreign army assembled right at Elisha's door--what an impressive sight this must have been! Did I say *impressive*? Apparently, the prophet Elisha was not impressed. The pomp and pageantry of this foreign assemblage meant nothing to him. Instead of greeting Captain Naaman personally, he sent a servant in his place.

The reason behind the sparseness of Elisha's hospitality is unclear, but the message itself was perfectly clear. "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean."

But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage (II Kings 5: 11, 12 NASB).

Let us call him *Naaman the Proud*, for when a proud man is scorned, he becomes angry. Feeling the sting of insult, the Syrian warrior was practically foaming at the mouth. Had not the prophet Elisha heard the sound of the thundering hooves of Captain Naaman's approaching horsemen? Did not the prophet Elisha know of Captain Naaman's heroism on the battlefield? No doubt, Elisha was familiar with the tales of Captain Naaman's

bravery, but when a man has been awed by the swelling greatness of God, he will not be swayed by the presence of any mere mortal. Elisha was neither moved nor impressed by Captain Naaman's legendary reputation.

"He will surely come out to me..." cried Captain Naaman. But Elisha did not come out to him. You might say Elisha snubbed Captain Naaman. Pride has a way of distorting a man's opinion of himself. Here is a case in point, for beneath the rich finery of this mighty warrior was a body of rotting, decaying flesh, yet he fully expected others to bow and scrape in his presence.

It is this same brand of inflated pride that prevents many drunks and addicts from accepting the fact that they are desperately ill and in dire need of help.

Captain Naaman's complaints did not end with Elisha's lack of hospitality. Why wash in the River Jordan? Were there not better rivers in his native land? Such a complaint may sound foolish to us, for the cure to his leprosy was so incredibly simple, but even today, legions of hurting men and women are repelled by the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they insist there must be other ways of salvation. The exclusivity of Christ's claims is entirely offensive to those who stubbornly insist there must be multiple pathways to God. In truth, we should rejoice that God has made a way for us to live eternally with Him. Rather than giving thanks for the gift of eternal life (Ephesians 2:8, 9), these mercenary hearts curse the true and living Savior who freely offers forgiveness from all transgressions and life everlasting. As Solomon declared there is nothing new under the sun, the haughty spirit of *Naaman the Proud* is alive and well even today--but it is a spirit that reeks of smoke and sulfur.

Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean' (II Kings 5: 13 NASB)?"

In this narrative, we have servants who show more sensibility than those who rule over them. How often we find those in humbler circumstances more receptive to the Gospel than those cloaked in power and prestige. Pride is a strong shield that can repel even God's eternal truths. Captain Naaman had a life or death decision to make: he could either bow in humble submission to the word of God or continue basking in his inflated pride. Of course, clinging to his pride also meant returning to Syria as a leprous man. Do not be deceived, for the sin of pride comes at a terrible and exacting price. Nothing will ever cost a man or woman as much as pride. Pride is the gilded pathway that leads to the portals of damnation.

St. John Chrysostom said, "Humility is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all virtue." It stands to reason, then, that pride is the root, mother, nurse, foundation, and bond of all evil.



So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean (II Kings 5: 14 NASB).

Setting aside the many years' accumulation of deadly pride, the stricken man finally confessed his utter lack of power over the ravages of leprosy while admitting that his life had become wholly unmanageable. Say, if you think this first step in Naaman's healing parallels the first steps taken by countless alcoholics and addicts as they travel the road to recovery, you are absolutely correct.

In a moment, *Naaman the Proud* became *Naaman the Humble*. Pride is just another name for insanity, but humility has a marvelous way of bringing one to his or her senses. Realizing the disease was besting him on all fronts, Naaman climbed from his mount, stripped bare, and immersed his lesion-riddled body into the waters of the Jordan.

How many drunks and addicts have gone to their graves insisting they had control over the addictions that were ravaging their lives? And how many more must die because of the unbridled pride that hallmarks this present generation?

Dare we hope for healing and restoration by simply admitting our vulnerability? Humility alone is not the cure, but humility is the pathway that can lead us to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who alone possesses abundant power over all that plagues us.

Has life become unmanageable? Are you a slave bound and fettered by some looming evil? There is good news! Jesus is mighty to save!

For Discussion

- The little Hebrew slave girl pointed Naaman to the care of God's prophet. Who in your life played a similar role by directing you to the care of a godly pastor or a trusted addiction counsellor?

- Pride caused Captain Naaman to bristle with anger when Elisha refused to meet him. How can an addict's pride stand in the way of restoration and healing? Relate an incident when you were guilty of behaving like a Naaman?
- Compare Captain Naaman's battle with leprosy with your own battle against alcoholism or substance abuse.

Applying Critical Thought: Erikson's Story



Name: Erikson S

Age: 37

Martian Status: Single

Occupation: Master Chef

Education: Graduate Mot Juste
Culinary Arts Institute

Author's notes: Read the following narrative along with the applicable quotes, then, singularly or in a group setting, discuss the questions that follow.

Erikson is the head chef of Toulouse Bistro, an upscale restaurant that has become a popular dining establishment with the city's young professionals. Recently, a local food critic posted an article touting Erikson as a rising star in the world of culinary arts. You might say his is a rags to riches story, for Erikson was raised by his grandmother in a poor, rundown housing project. As there never seemed to be enough money to meet their needs, he vowed to get an education to ensure his future financial success. His youthful ambition turned his boyhood dreams into reality and, today, Erikson's income

allows him to live the good life in a fashionable neighborhood; a late model luxury automobile sits proudly in the drive and he has a modest but growing investment portfolio. Erikson appears to be a portrait of success.

But not all is well. Erikson's employer believes that his head chef has a drinking problem. As a reward for his hard work, the restaurant's owner had considered sending Erikson to study under a celebrated Parisian chef, but he is having second thoughts about the European sabbatical. While some chefs are known to be temperamental, Erikson's mood swings appear to be fueled by alcohol. Recently, he cursed a server for a minor lapse in judgment; although the server had indeed made a mistake, his reaction to the server's error was harsh and excessive. When the owner asked Erikson about the unfortunate incident, he noted alcohol on Erikson's breath.

Just a week earlier, Erikson was rushed to the hospital after cutting three fingers. The cuts required stitches. The attending physician suggested that Erikson had been drinking and alcohol had contributed to the accident.

Although Erikson enjoys a reputation as a highly creative chef, he has become something of a terror to those who work with him. When he drinks--and he drinks on the job, his mood changes from one of congeniality to that of a hostile tyrant. Few dare to cross him once he has downed three or four drinks.

More than once, Erikson's girlfriend Ramona felt compelled to take away his car keys after long nights of heavy drinking. She fears he is going to kill himself and others while driving intoxicated.

When friends approach Erikson about his drinking, he laughs off their concerns. "I will not deny that I drink a bit too much from time to time," he insists, "but I can handle my liquor! Don't worry about me—worry about those poor drunken bums who sleep on park benches!"

Join the discussion:

“Erikson is a talented chef, but I’ve noticed a change in him. He often arrives for work looking as though he spent the night in jail. When I first hired Erikson, he was a stickler for neatness, but he has allowed his appearance to go downhill. I think he drinks too much!”—Erikson’s employer

“An alcoholic lives in a homeless shelter and begs money from passer byers. I live in a posh neighborhood. I drive a nice car, too. Does an alcoholic have a stockbroker? I do. Please don’t mistake me for one of those people. I am not an alcoholic.”—Erikson

“Erikson won’t go into the kitchen without a bottle. Every night is the same. He cooks and he drinks and he cooks and he drinks and by closing time, he and his bottle are finished!”
—Coworker #1

“When you catch him sober, Erikson is a pretty decent sort of fellow, but once he begins drinking, he behaves like a dictator. One of these days, he’s going to mouth off to the wrong person and end up in the hospital with a broken jaw. And he’ll have had it coming, too!”—Coworker #2

“I had considered sending Erikson to study under a well-known French chef, but instead of sending him to Europe, I may have no choice but to send him to a treatment center. What should I do? When I mention his drinking, he becomes defensive. I fear that I may lose a truly promising chef to alcohol.”—Erikson’s employer

“My father was an alcoholic. Because of his drinking, he died before his time. I see a lot of my father’s behavior in Erikson. This frightens me. When I bring up the matter of his drinking, he gets angry with me, so I tend to keep my mouth shut. What can I do?”—
Erikson’s girlfriend Ramona

“A good chef is really an artist. Like all artists, I thrive on creativity. Alcohol keeps me loose in the kitchen. Alcohol allows the creativity to flow. Don’t bother me about my drinking—I know what I am doing!”—Erikson

“You heard about Chef Erikson’s accident, right? While drinking, he cut his fingers with a knife, but you probably haven’t heard about the three or four other accidents and kitchen mishaps that have occurred while he was drinking. The day will come when he sets the entire kitchen ablaze through his drunken carelessness.” –Coworker #1

“I grew up a poor kid in a squalid neighborhood. Today, I am a success. I am not going to put everything I have worked for at risk. If the day comes when my drinking is out of control, then I will seek help, but for now, I don’t need others meddling into my personal affairs.”—Erikson

For Discussion

- According to your understanding, is it possible that Erikson is an alcoholic? If so, what clues would you cite as evidence?
- Erikson insists that alcoholics live in homeless shelters and sleep on park benches. He points to his house, car, career, and bank account as evidence that he is not an alcoholic. Is Erikson’s understanding of alcoholism accurate?
- Erikson has had a number of job-related accidents. These accidents were most likely caused by alcohol. Unless he comes to terms with his drinking, are similar mishaps and injuries likely to occur?
- On more than one occasion, Erikson’s girlfriend Ramona prevented him from driving while intoxicated. She also said that Erikson becomes upset when she mentions his drinking. How might she help him without being an enabler?
- The restaurant’s owner is obviously fond of Erikson and appreciates his chef’s culinary skills, yet he believes that Erikson’s drinking is excessive and dangerous. Even so, Erikson is doing his job and the restaurant’s customers keep coming back. Should the owner approach Erikson about his drinking or should he say nothing until the situation worsens?

- Erikson's coworkers complain about his ill-mannered temper that surfaces when he drinks. How should these coworkers approach Erikson? Should these coworkers bring their concerns to the restaurant's owner?
- Erikson becomes defiant when others mention his drinking. In your opinion, who is more likely to admit to powerlessness over alcohol: a so-called skid row bum or a highly functioning alcohol abuser such as Erikson?

Discovery Session 7

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Two
- Defining insanity
- Understanding the burden of addiction
- Being “yoked” to Jesus
- Deliverance from the insanity of addiction

Introduction to Step Two: Came to believe that God could restore us to sanity

What is insanity? If it is a clinical definition you seek, a psychiatrist might define insanity as a persistent mental condition or a severely disordered state of mind. Insanity has also been defined as doing the same thing again and again while hoping for different results. This is a good layperson’s definition of insanity. In our battle against alcoholism and substance abuse, insanity is believing that one more drink, one more pill, or one more hit will not cause any harm—in fact, one more might actually be beneficial. Insanity is watching one’s world crumble into ruins while denying that addiction is the culprit. Insanity is believing that one has power over the bottle, the needle, the pipe, or the pill when all evidence points to a life of chaos and unmanageability. Insanity is arguing that until one sleeps on park benches or begs for coins from passer-byers, he or she cannot possibly be an alcoholic or an addict. Insanity is telling a frightened child, a heart-broken spouse, a well-meaning friend, or a disgruntled employer, “I really don’t have a problem, but if it will make you feel better, I promise to seek help if my situation gets out of hand!”

One recovering alcoholic explained that insanity is being in a state of mind that makes refusing a drink impossible. He went on to tell how a runaway addiction drove a wedge between himself and his close, personal friends, encouraged him to routinely drive a

motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, made keeping important deadlines and appointments impossible, and clouded his thinking to the point that he repeatedly made a public fool of himself. But the real insanity, he reasoned, occurred the next day when "...deciding another drink was a good idea. Over and over again. Regardless of the consequences. Regardless of becoming more and more socially isolated. Regardless of interactions with law enforcement and the judicial system."

Another recovering alcoholic rhetorically asked, "How do you explain insanity to someone? How do you explain to someone who loves you that despite your best intentions, you are making decisions that are digging yourself an early grave? It is incomprehensible. Normal people do not do what we do. They don't throw their life away over a lousy chemical in a can. It is difficult to explain the inexplicable to them."

Over time, this brand of insanity becomes wearisome. It is like walking up a downward elevator or trudging along a perpetual, never-ending treadmill. The disorder takes an exacting toll on every facet of the alcoholic's life. Alcoholism attacks the physical and mental well-being of its victims. This abnormal condition is not easily contained, for the alcoholic's family, friends, finances, and career are continually jeopardized by rampant, raging, runaway drinking. As the disorder progresses, life loses its meaning. Each day brings the same dreary tedium. Each hour is marked by frustration and futility.

Of this insanity, Dr. Silkwood, the "little doctor who loved drunks" wrote, "Men and women drink essentially because they like the affect produced by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot after a time differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks--drinks which they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many people do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through the well-known stages of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated

over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change there is very little hope of his recovery.”

In a previous session, we compared the life of an alcoholic or an addict to the quick-handed juggler who keeps a dozen wobbly plates spinning on their poles. Because of the disorder, the alcoholic must deal with an unending series of alcohol-induced problems that occur at home, in the classroom, in the office, or in a social setting. He oversleeps after a night of excessive drinking. She fails to get her child on the school bus. He arrives at the office late wearing yesterday’s shirt. She lies to her husband. He makes excuses to his children. She begs the forgiveness of her friends. He misleads his employer. She apologizes to her colleagues. He conceals the truth from his customers. It is all very tiresome. It is all very insane.

For Discussion

- According to Dr. Silkwood, why do people drink alcohol?
- To those bound by addiction, what is insanity? Describe the insane thinking of addicts and alcoholics who justify drinking and drugging despite the obvious damage that chemical addiction has brought upon their lives.

“My Yoke is Easy and My Burden is Light”

It has been said that religion is man’s search for God while Christianity is God’s search for man. Few passages in Scripture demonstrate this amazing truth with more grace and eloquence than the following invitation offered by the Lord Jesus:

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11: 28-30 NKJV).”

In this marvelous passage, the first four words, “Come to me, all...” represent an invitation to everyone—not just to respectable folk who are sober, live in fine homes, and pay their bills on time. “Come to me, all...” Includes alcoholics and addicts—even the hardcore cases. All means all. All is everyone. If you fall into the “all” category, Jesus is reaching out to you. Nothing you have done will compel Him to draw away from you. Nothing in your past will cause Him to look down upon you in horror and disgust. He came to save the lost and, according to the teachings of Scripture, He seems particularly drawn to those who, in the eyes of the world, have exhausted all hope and are outside the reaches of help.

To those who are weary and burdened by addiction, Jesus says, “I will give you rest.” Living a lie is wearisome. Pretending all is well when all is not well is burdensome. A goodly number of women and men bound by addiction hold jobs, maintain homes, have spouses, and raise children, but the balancing act of meeting work, family, and social obligations becomes increasingly difficult over time. Life is not without its complexities, but when alcohol and drugs come into play, the routine difficulties of work, school, and family become harder to manage. In the end, a runaway addiction drains every drop of the lifeblood from the veins of its wearied victims, but to those who answer His call, He says, “I will give you rest.”

Words which do not give the light of Christ increase the darkness.
--Mother Teresa

The Good Shepherd says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me...” Before the advent of modern machinery, two oxen joined by a wooden yoke pulled the farmer’s plow. When breaking in a new animal, a farmer teamed an inexperienced beast to an experienced ox. The older ox carried the brunt of the burden while the younger animal became accustomed to the plow. In a like manner, Jesus promises to carry the brunt of

the burden for those who are yoked to Him. And to those yoked to Him, He says, “Learn from Me.”

Today, a great many substance abusers are being schooled by addiction counselors who do not know the ways of God. Far too many Twelve Step programs appear to blush with embarrassment at even the faintest mentioning of God. It seems as though modern secularists go to great lengths to keep from offending anyone except, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ and those who follow Him. They have no problem snubbing Jesus and His disciples, but we will do well remembering the Twelve Steps are based on biblical truths.

We can dare to hope, for Jesus is approachable. We need not despair, for He turns no one away. He is gentle and lowly in heart. If He were proud and haughty, He would not stoop down to woo society’s forgotten outcasts. If He were proud, He would accept only those who come to Him with pure, unselfish motives. He is a friend of the addict and the alcoholic. If He were distant and aloof, He would surely seek a more refined sphere of friends and followers, but He seems to take an exceptional delight in associating with those who have hit rock bottom.

His yoke is easy. His burden is light. We are not saved by our deeds and efforts. Eternal life is not a cosmic paycheck for a life well lived and a job well done. What we do for Him has no bearing on our salvation; what He does for us is that which truly matters. We are saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is a gift. A gift cannot be earned. Salvation cannot be earned (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We simply hold out our hands in faith to receive. Being good is never good enough—being forgiven is, and because He paid the ultimate price for our redemption, He can truly say that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Who is this who can restore us to sanity? Christ Jesus alone can truly deliver us from the insanity of addiction. He is the ultimate. He is supreme. There are not enough superlatives in our language to properly describe Him. He is our unequaled, unbeatable, unstoppable, unrelenting, unparalleled, unmatched, undefeatable, unimaginable,

undeniable Highest Power. He gives rest to the weary and restores the sanity of those who have suffered through the chaotic agonies of addiction. And to those who trust Him as Savior, He adopts them into His family as sons and daughters. The son of the King is a prince. The daughter of the King is a princess. It is not His desire that any of us should grovel about as a dirty-faced orphan. We are to carry ourselves as the King's children—loved by the One whose love matters most.

For Discussion

- Discuss the burdens of living with rampant addiction.
- How can freedom from addiction bring physical and mental “rest” to those wearied by the insane chaos of an unmanageable life?
- To whom did Jesus say, “Come to Me...”?
- In what way does Jesus demonstrate His humility?

If You Don't Have A Higher Power, Borrow Mine!

My friend, if you are struggling through life, hanging on by a thread, and do not have a Higher Power, that's okay, for I am willing to share my Higher Power with you. I'm not selfish; besides, the more of Him I share, the more of Him I have. It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you my Higher Power. Did I say Higher Power? Let me rephrase that: His name is Jesus and He is the *Highest Power*.

In the far reaches of this vast universe, none compares to Him. He alone gives new meaning to broken lives. He alone soothes and restores those beleaguered and wearied by alcoholism and substance abuse. He alone can help you make sense out of a life steeped in the insanity of addiction.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1: 1 NASB).

Who is this Word? His name is Jesus. He has always existed and there was never a time when He did not exist. Before the sun and moon and earth and stars came to be, there was Jesus. He made all things. He is Creator. He was, He is, and He will always be. Jesus has no beginning and He has no end. Jesus is God. And unless the God of your understanding is Jesus, you are relying on a false god. A false god cannot restore you to sanity, but Jesus can. And He will.

Who is He? He is the Power who can restore the drunk and the addict to sanity. You need not forever languish in the ghetto of addiction, for the One who can deliver you from the chaotic insanity of addiction says, "Come to Me..."

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28: 18 NASB).

The Highest Power bows to no one. The Highest Power answers to no one. The Highest Power cowers to no one. He commands absolute authority over the heavens and the earth. And if He holds the universe in the palm of His hand, delivering alcoholics and addicts from the chains and fetters of addiction is well within His abilities. Is He your Highest Power?

...Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2: 2, 3 NASB).

He possesses all knowledge. The wisdom of the ages belongs to Him. No knowledge or understanding is hidden from Him. Nothing confounds Him. Nothing confuses Him. Nothing befuddles Him. He is the Author of all truth. Surely such a Savior is worthy of our trust and our devotion. Will you make my Highest Power your Highest Power?

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst (Matthew 18: 20 NASB)."

Of what good would this Highest Power be if He were distant? Aloof? Unapproachable? Uncaring? Out of reach? Disinterested in our problems? Unconcerned about our well-being? But this is not who He is. Jesus meets us where we are. He longs to be with us. He stoops down to woo even the lowliest among us. My God loves me. May I share Him with you?

And the Word (Jesus) became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1: 14 NASB).

He is the Savior who longs to fellowship with you and me. Though He was and is eternal God who dwelled in perfect, splendid glory, He humbled Himself by leaving the glories of Heaven to pitch His tent on this dusty little planet while clothing Himself in human flesh. Simply stated, God became one of us. He became human. He became like you and me. And as one of us, He understands us—He knows how we feel—He knows what it is like being human. He felt the gnawing pangs of hunger. He experienced the stark emptiness of abandonment. He lived through the agonies of betrayal. He experienced wrenching physical pain. I have a God who understands the sufferings we endure. He alone can give meaning to a life steeped in the insensibilities of an unmanageable life.

"For the Son of Man (Jesus) has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19: 10 NASB)."

In His own gracious words, Jesus proclaimed that His mission was to seek out and save the lost sinners who inhabit this suffering planet. We may think we are searching for God, but it is God who searches us out; His is a mission of mercy--to save the powerless. As we have come to realize, the alcoholic and the addict are powerless in delivering themselves from their helpless state of being. Thankfully, the God who spoke the universe into existence is on a mission to transform tattered, dirty-faced addicts marred by insanity into radiant sons and daughters of the King.

It is by grace through faith that Jesus delivers lost addicts and alcoholics from the ravages of sin and disease. Salvation is a free gift—all that is required is that we hold out our hands in faith to receive. My Highest Power wants to be your Highest Power. Will you answer His call?

"The thief (Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10: 10 NASB)."

Addiction. Divorce. Abandonment. Unemployment. Poverty. Loneliness. Bitterness. Anger. Despair. Insanity. Most of us bear the scars of deeply inflicted wounds--wounds from the hands of others, wounds from the hand of Satan, and wounds inflicted by our own hands. We have trudged about this reeling planet looking for meaning in a meaningless existence. We have been battered, bloodied, bruised, and bludgeoned by Satan. We know first-hand of the misery he inflicts upon us and we have experienced the despair as he slowly drained the lifeblood from our very souls, but for those of us who have repented and have become Christ followers, we have experienced the renewal of life that transformed us into His beloved sons and daughters--children of the King. The devil takes away our joy. Jesus takes away our sin. The devil steals life. Jesus gives us new life. Satan is a taker. Jesus is a giver. He has come to give each of us life--abundant life--not as lowly servants--but as children adopted into His royal family. Jesus is my Highest Power. Why should you and I grovel about as ragged waifs when He longs to make us princes and princesses?

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3: 7, 8 NASB).

Are you troubled that wealthy drug lords live sumptuously while their victims die in gutters? Satan rules this world and the evidence of his evil-doings is everywhere, but the day will come when paradise is once again restored and the earth will be free of the misery inflicted by addiction. How will this come about? Who is able to defeat the evil one? The great day shall come when Jesus will take this broken planet and make everything right. He alone has the power to restore earth to its original state of paradise. As for the devil, King Jesus will destroy him and his evil workers once for all.

But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves (Luke 23:34 NASB).

Just as our Lord Jesus offered forgiveness to those who drove iron spikes into His feet and hands, He stands ready to forgive you and me. No one is beyond His reach. Thankfully, my Highest Power does not hold grudges. He is slow to anger and is easy to appease. My Highest Power should be your Highest Power, too.

In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar (Mark 8: 1-3 NKJV).”

If you have labored under a belief that Jesus is cold and uncaring, think again: Jesus is gentle, attentive, kind, and compassionate. He wants the best for you and me. His best includes sobriety. He has the authority to free us from the chains of addiction. He has the power to deliver you and me from the bonds of despair. He gives meaning to a meaningless life. He restores sanity to those whose minds have been twisted by the excesses of drugs and alcohol.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11 NKJV).

His name is exalted above all names. Jesus is greater than Buddha. Jesus is greater than Muhammad. Jesus is greater than Joseph Smith. Jesus is greater than Mary Baker Eddy. Jesus is greater than Charles Taze Russell. And unless you are trusting in Jesus as your deliverer, your supposed higher power is nothing but a third rate wannabe.

With a word, Jesus raised the dead. With a touch, He restored sight to the blind and He mended the withered limbs of the infirmed. He calmed the stormy seas and He fed the hungry masses. And in the end, He will destroy Satan and his legions with a single command. The power of Christ Jesus is unlimited and His strength is without equal, yet He reaches out in love to all who are in need with an assuring promise that He is gentle and humble of heart. What does this mean to you and me? This means He is approachable. Come to Him with your hurt. Bring Him your brokenness. You need not fear His rejection, for He will not turn you away. With so much at stake, should you trust just any so-called higher power?

I can speak of His goodness. I can prove He gives meaning to life. I can testify He is mighty to save. I was once lost—helpless, hopeless, hapless—but that was then and this now. Today, sanity has been restored and I live in confidence of everlasting peace throughout the endless ages to come. This is what my Highest Power has done for me; and He can do all this for you, too, because...

He is God

He is all powerful

He is all-knowing

He is all-mighty

He is the Creator of all
He is self-existing
He became one of us
He gives life
He forgives the lost
He adopts us into His royal family
He is the Ancient of Days
He shall return as the conquering hero
He is the fulfillment of prophecy
He is our advocate
He is our comforter
He is the Anointed of the Father
He is the friend of the sinner
He is the Author and Finisher of our Salvation
He is the Father of Eternity
He is the Alpha and the Omega--the beginning and the end
He is the bread of life
He is the bridegroom
He is the cornerstone and foundation of our hope
He is the Good Shepherd
He is the fountain of living waters
He is our deliverer
He is the commander of Heaven's armies
He is the pathway to life
He is the light of the world
He is preeminent above all creation
He is the firstborn of the dead
He is the resurrection
He is the morning star
He is the hope of the nations
He is King

He is the consolation of Israel
He is faithful and true
He is truth
He is our wonderful counselor
He is the Son of man
He is the seed of King David
He is ruler of the kings of the earth
He is salvation
He is the righteous judge
He is the Prince of Peace
He is the Prince of Life
He is the Mighty One
He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords
He is judge of the living and the dead
He is the hope of glory
He is the head of the body of all true believers
He is God with us
He is our great high priest
He is the delight of His Heavenly Father
He is majestic
He is approachable
He is a friend who is closer than a brother
He is our Redeemer
He is not just another “higher power”
He is not just one of many paths to God
And He is reaching out to you at this very moment!

For Discussion

- How is the Lord Jesus superior to any other *higher power*?
- How can we be assured that Jesus will not turn away from us when we turn to Him for help?

- How can Jesus give meaning to a meaningless life? How can Jesus restore us to sanity?
- Many support groups profess trusting in a “god” conjured from their own imaginations. Why is such thinking flawed and illogical?

Discovery Session 8

Points of Inquiry

- The destructive nature of insane thinking
- How pride thwarts the pathway to recovery
- Humility as a means of restoring one's sanity

Exploring Step Two: Came to believe that God could restore us to sanity

In our previous session, we demonstrated that insanity is believing that one more drink, one more pill, or one more hit will not do us any harm; in fact, another round might prove beneficial despite the mountain of evidence indicating this runaway addiction has brought us to the very brink of destruction. Insanity is excusing and even condoning behavior that is detrimental, damaging, and deadly. Alcohol, cocaine, and heroin are masters of twisting their victims' thinking into mental pretzels.

During my interview with a young woman who had been jailed on a third DUI conviction, this alcoholic mother admitted to having had her three young children in the car at the time of her arrest. As this was her third DUI charge, she received a rather stiff sentence, but was later released into the custody of a treatment facility where I was employed.

This alcoholic mother was not an evil monster. She was, in fact, a noticeably bright young woman who possessed a keen mind, an engaging personality, and a pleasant disposition. Most importantly, she loved her children. It cannot be denied that she had placed her

three little ones in a very dangerous situation and, indeed, were it not for the grace of God, the outcome could have been tragic—even fatal. When sober, this young mother was caring and attentive, but when she drank, something terrible happened to her thinking. Logic and reason gave way to irrational thinking. Prudence took a backseat to insane behavior. Common sense was reduced to a pitiable state of alcohol-induced muddle-mindedness. After a morning of hard drinking, this alcoholic mom came to believe that she could safely transport her three children in a fast-moving automobile despite her blurred vision and impaired reflexes. This is a textbook example of insane thinking.

Wisdom is seeing people, events, and circumstances through God's eyes. Insanity is seeing people, events, and circumstances through bloodshot eyes. The addict who truly desires sanity must take on the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5 NKJV)." Wisdom is ours for the asking. Do not waste your time asking God for sacks of money or exotic sports cars, for He does not make a practice of honoring mercenary requests, but the Bible promises that God will give you all the wisdom you need—and, in the long run, wisdom is far more beneficial than a Lamborghini.

No one possessing the "mind of Christ" will drink to his or her destruction, for Jesus is the Author of Sane Thinking. He is the Power who can deliver us from the insanity of addiction. Alone, we are powerless against the ravages of alcoholism and substance abuse, but through Him, who or what can stand in our way? Phillips Brooks, the hymn writer who gave us *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, said, "We never become truly spiritual by sitting down and wishing to become so. You must undertake something so great that you cannot accomplish it unaided." Long term sobriety and the full restoration of one's sanity is such an undertaking. Left on our own, there is little we can do in achieving this lofty goal, but Jesus is the One who can deliver us from the pit of destruction. He is the Power who can restore us to sanity.



Who Is that Hairy Man on All Fours Eating Grass?

A Study in Daniel 4

My name is King Nebuchadnezzar. I must admit that Nebuchadnezzar is something of a mouthful, so please call me *Nebby*. Had anyone dared to call me Nebby back when I sat on the Babylonian throne, I would have had that person boiled in oil or hung from the highest gallows, but that was then, and this is now. I am no longer an arrogant, hot-tempered monarch steeped in human pride. God humbled me. Believe me when I say that God humbled me! Would you like to hear my story?

Unless you made a habit of napping during history class, you probably learned something about ancient Babylon. Babylon was the first of the great world empires. The crown was placed upon my head about six centuries before the birth of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Modern archeologists have unearthed a mountain of evidence revealing that ancient Babylon was indeed the most glorious city in its day--you might say it was like a New York, London, and Paris all in one—and I was Babylon's proud ruler!

Babylon was the capitol of ancient Babylonia in southern Mesopotamia. Today, you know the area as Iraq. It was not long ago that American military forces ousted a petty little third-rate dictator named Saddam, but in ancient times, the Babylon under my leadership was the undisputed capitol of the civilized world and I was its peerless ruler.

The history books say that I was brutal, cunning, powerful, and ambitious. This much is true. I was a tyrant who ruled my kingdom with an iron fist. Seeking to expand the influence of my vast empire, I attacked Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. Their army was no match against my brave fighters. And where was their God? From my perspective, it seemed as though the God of the Jews had ignored the cries of His people, for they quickly fell into our hands. After my army sacked the holy city of Jerusalem, there was scarcely one brick atop another. My valiant soldiers, emboldened by their great victory, immediately seized the priceless treasures from the temple while robbing the Jews of many of their best and brightest and most talented young people. We humiliated the enemy by taking thousands of prisoners; one of the Hebrew prisoners, a most remarkable young man named Daniel, eventually became my right hand man. I will tell you more about this Daniel later.



You may be asking yourself what any of this has to do with recovery. Let me assure you I have more to share with you than just a lesson in ancient history. As you know, insanity is an inability to think straight, and you will not find many straight thinkers among people whose lives are ruled by drugs and alcohol. Substance abuse takes its victims' minds captive; logic, reason, and clear thinking are the hostages of addiction. Addiction is just another word for insanity.

I know something about insanity. My insanity took me to the depths of human degradation that few women or men will ever experience; I must also tell you that insanity held me captive for a dreadfully long time: seven agonizing, humiliating years passed before Almighty God restored me to my right mind. My story is of record in the Old Testament Book of Daniel.

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me (Daniel 4: 4, 5 NIV).

I will never forget that terrible dream. The evening began well enough; a feeling of contentment and well-being had filled my heart as I prepared for bed. And why not? I was King Nebuchadnezzar, the undisputed ruler of the world's greatest empire. With the mere snap of a finger, all of my wants and desires were granted without question or hesitation. Seldom did a woman or man dare to cross my will and the few who were foolish enough to try me quickly discovered the terrible consequences of my wrath. It was nothing for me to demand the life of an impudent servant who had failed to obey my orders. I had little patience with those who dared to question my supreme authority. I was the world's most powerful ruler, and so I felt content with life as I readied myself for a good night's sleep.

I soon awoke with a start. A frightful dream filled with haunting images and terrifying visions paralyzed me with fear and dread. I could scarcely gather my breath as my mind replayed the strangely surreal dream that had disturbed my peaceful slumber.

So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me (Daniel 4: 6, 7 NIV).

I had to know what this strange dream that had troubled my rest was all about. Never had such images played in my mind. In my search for answers, I summoned the court magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners—in other words, I ordered all those who practiced in the so-called magic arts to my bedside. If you are thinking that my actions were steeped in ignorant superstition, you are correct, but how many of your friends consult psychics or read horoscopes? Perhaps you do these very things yourself. Let's get this straight: I now understand that God condemns psychics, astrologers, and fortune tellers and the Bible strictly warns that we are not to consult them, but in my ignorance, I surrounded myself with those who delved into the shadowy world of the occult.

In my chambers stood an assembly of psychics, astrologers, and fortune tellers—all on my payroll—and all completely befuddled by the strange dream that had haunted my rest. I should have sent this gang of frauds to the dungeon. A hangman's noose would have been too good for them; nonetheless, I dismissed the assembly of worthless phonies while pondering the eerie visions that had aroused me from my bed.

Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him (Daniel 4: 8 NIV).

A page or so earlier, I mentioned how the mighty Babylonian army had sacked ancient Jerusalem. My soldiers plundered the holy city until rubble and ruin were all that remained. Before the dust had settled, my soldiers triumphantly returned to Babylon with Israel's greatest treasures in tow. The treasures I speak of were not made with gold and silver (though we took plenty of these), but the most valuable treasures we stole were Jerusalem's best and brightest young people. There is scarcely a better way of conquering a people than by robbing them of their future leaders. Jerusalem's most promising youth were carried away to Babylon and some of these young people served in my royal court.

Before continuing on, let me pose a question to you. How many of your young people have been taken hostage by drugs, alcohol, or street gangs? How many of your teenagers are held captive in schools marked by low academic performance, political correctness, and high dropout rates? How many of your children are being brainwashed by godless entertainers who make merchandise of your nation's next generation of leaders? How many of your young people will stagger beneath the burden of runaway debt because of the politicians you elected? Yes, you may condemn me for robbing Jerusalem of its youth, but I say your children are being stolen from you. What are you going to do about this?

Allow me to introduce to you a young man named Daniel. Daniel was one of the captives taken during the Babylonian raid on Jerusalem. There has never been a finer young man—honest, intelligent, and wise beyond his years—he was of more worth to me than all the gold we had stolen from Jerusalem. Daniel and a group of his friends were brought to my royal court where they were taught our language, customs, pagan religion, arts, history, and laws. Through our cleverly devised indoctrination, we were seeking to transform these Jewish boys into Babylonians. We even gave them Babylonian names. By the way, what are your schools teaching your children? Do you know?

Let's get back to my nightmarish vision. As I said, my astrologers and psychics were worthless frauds, so I summoned Daniel to my bedside. I knew I could trust Daniel. These strange dreams, you see, were nothing new. Years earlier, I had been terrified by another frightening vision and my royal assembly of astrologers and fortune tellers were utterly baffled by the bizarre imagery that had interrupted my sleep. In my anger, I pronounced a death sentence upon these useless soothsayers, but Daniel came to me with answers hidden from the others. By the power of the only true and living God, Daniel explained the riddle behind the incredible vision. As Daniel had proven himself worthy of my trust in times past, I thought it reasonable to lay my problems once again before him.

I said, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed (Daniel 4: 9-12 NIV).”

Such a tree no one has seen. The majestic California Redwoods are truly a wondrous sight to behold, yet even the mightiest Redwood is but a dwarf compared to the imposing tree of my nighttime vision. Its graceful branches reached forth to touch the billowy clouds. Each leaf was indescribably beautiful, and its luscious fruit grew in abundance. This towering wonder provided shelter for the four-footed beasts that roamed the land while all manner of birds made their homes in the safety of its mighty branches.

“In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: ‘Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people (Daniel 4: 13-17 NIV) .”

As I surveyed all that was about me, a holy messenger from heaven called for the tree to be brought down. How could this be? Why should an axe bring down this magnificent

tree? No! Let the tree stand! Let the birds of the air find safety in its mighty branches! Let the four-footed beasts take sanctuary beneath the tree's cool shade! Let all the woodland creatures feed on its abundant fruit! Why should this towering giant be cut down?

The holy messenger then ordered bands of iron and bronze to bind the tree's stump and roots. What could this mean? Why bind the trunk and roots of a fallen tree? And then I was startled to hear the heavenly angel referring to the tree as if it were a man. Let *him* be drenched with dew! Let *him* live with the animals! Let *his* mind be changed! Could it be that the tree in my vision represented a man? My heart pounded wildly as I wondered if the angel's proclamation was, in truth, a holy judgment condemning some pitiful mortal who had angered the gods. This seemed to be the case, for the angelic messenger loudly declared this verdict from above was being pronounced so that heaven and earth would know the Most High ruled over the world and its leaders. Who was this Most High? I, King Nebuchadnezzar, was the sovereign ruler of great and mighty Babylon, and among all rulers, who was greater than me?

“This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.” Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.” Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds—Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth (Daniel 4: 18-22 NIV).”

Again, this Daniel was an amazing young man. My army had mercilessly ransacked his home--the holy city of Jerusalem. Against his will, he had been taken captive and brought to live in a foreign land. I had destroyed his people and robbed him of his liberty, yet this remarkable young man was truly concerned for my well-being. I could see the grief in his eyes as he explained the meaning behind the strange vision. "Your Majesty, you are that tree!" Yes, that mighty tree was me. Among all earthly rulers, none compared to me, but if Daniel's interpretation of my dream was true, I was destined to fall. The heavenly verdict was a judgment against me. I remained silent as Daniel continued.

"Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.' This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue (Daniel 4: 23-27 NIV)."

According to Daniel, I had come under the judgment of his God, the God of Israel, and yet this solemn decree from heaven was not a sentence of death. My throne was in jeopardy—I risked losing my crown and would live for seven long years as a wild beast—and yet, if I repented of my wrong-doings, Daniel's God would spare me from this unspeakable fate. The mighty tree would stand. I would remain on the throne.

Daniel explained that God's anger had been kindled by the heaping measures of self-importance and unbridled pride that had filled my heart. Pride, said Daniel, is wholly detestable in the eyes of God. Although I was the undisputed ruler of mighty Babylon, Daniel insisted that the Most High God of Heaven ruled over me. Whether I liked it or not, I was God's servant. According to the angelic messenger, I, King Nebuchadnezzar, was to bow in humble submission before this sovereign God. If I willingly submitted to the God of Daniel, I would remain on the throne and all would be well with me, but if I refused to bend my knee to Almighty God, I would be driven from the throne room and sent to live among the wild beasts.

Surveying the events of my past, I can see the insanity of my thinking. As the one who sat upon the throne, I expected the world to bow its knee to me. I was mighty King Nebuchadnezzar. I was the incomparable ruler of the Babylonian Empire. My word was law. My decrees were obeyed without hesitation or question. My enemies were mercilessly crushed, and my heart's desires were fulfilled as it pleased me. I was the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar and who could stand against me?

Do you see the insanity of such twisted thinking? Who was I compared to the Most High God? Had I spoken the universe into existence? Had I hung the sun and the earth and the moon and the stars in the vast reaches of the heavens? Did I send the billowy clouds to bring rain upon the parched soil? Did I command the sun to rise in the eastern sky? Had I taught the majestic eagles to soar above the earth? Did the mammoth whales take their orders from me? Could my decree quiet a raging storm or calm the crashing waves? Compared to God, even one who rules over a vast empire is but an insignificant speck of dust.

Though the hearts of valiant warriors and rival kings were as melted wax at the sound of my name, it never occurred to me that the beating of my own heart was ordained by God Almighty. A most sobering thought, is it not?

As you may now understand, my prideful thinking was sheer insanity. Complete insanity. Total insanity. And yet, just days after this fateful nighttime vision, even more corruption entered into my thoughts. Who was this God of Israel? Had I not defeated His holy city? Had I not ransacked His holy temple? Had I not made slaves of His holy people? Who was this Most High who dared to breathe threats against me? Surely the gods of Babylon were mightier than this lone God of Israel. Daniel's God had been powerless in halting the bloody onslaught of my fierce warriors. Once the dust of Jerusalem had settled, I stood as the undisputed ruler of the known world.

Such thoughts, I now well understand, were not the thoughts of a sane man. Clearly, insanity had taken charge of my reasoning. Beneath that regal golden crown dwelled a mind steeped in prideful corruption.

You, my friend, may be one who, in times past, attempted to convince yourself that alcohol and drugs were not your enemies; you may have vainly argued that you did not have a problem. You may have told yourself again and again that you had not crossed the line of addiction. You may have even assured yourself that if drinking or drugs were to become a problem, you would seek immediate help when, deep down in your heart, you secretly feared the life you were living was no longer your own.

Some are intoxicated by alcohol. Some are intoxicated by the folly of grandeur and self-importance. I had come to believe that I was a god. When the God of Heaven ordered me to bend my knee in reverence, I stood defiantly against Him.

I quickly dismissed the angelic messenger's call to repentance from my thinking.

All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty (Daniel 4: 28-30 NIV)?"

Even today, I shudder in horror and disbelief when recounting the folly of those fatefully spoken words—words uttered by a man intoxicated by his own misguided sense of pride and purpose. I spoke as if I had single-handedly laid each brick, one atop another, until the great city of Babylon had been constructed as a grand monument commemorating the fullness of my majestic glory. I should have known that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, was nothing but a pawn who was subject to the will of the Most High God.

Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird (Daniel 4: 31-33 NIV).

The events that followed may sound unbelievable, but I will assure you every word is true. In a moment, I became as a wild animal grazing on the palace lawn. My transformation from pompous royalty to hairy beast was instantaneous and complete. My tongue was no longer capable of forming comprehensible words and my speech was reduced to animalistic grunts and threatening growls. Likewise, I no longer had the wherewithal to stand upright; according to God’s righteous judgment, I, the once proud ruler of Babylon, could only crawl about on all fours like a dumb beast. My manicured nails became as claws. My long stringy hair was perpetually matted with mud and grime. An odor clung about my unwashed body. I reeked with sweat and filth and neglect. Stripped of both my dignity and humanity, I spent the next seven years eating grass with the other beasts of the field.



Previously, I suggested my story might sound too bizarre to be wholly believed, but I will venture that many of you have been stripped of your dignity in a similar manner. Perhaps you have never eaten grass, but I am certain that many of you have scrounged and foraged for nourishment from germ-ridden, fly-infested garbage bins. And there are those among you who have slept on park benches, dressed in ragged clothing, and spent weeks on end without encountering soap and water. And as for crawling about on all fours or growling like an untamed animal, I have seen countless drunks and addicts behaving as senseless, drooling, maniacal beasts. Insanity has a way of stripping us of our God-given dignity.

It was only by the grace of God Almighty that I survived this seven year ordeal. An enemy—and you can believe me when I say that I had countless political and military enemies--could have ended my life with a single blow, for I was powerless in defending myself. I suppose it was Daniel who watched over me while I grazed on the palace lawn. Have you experienced the grace of God in your life? Whether or not you realize the truth, God has bestowed His mercy upon you in a thousand ways. If you have never thanked Him for the abundance of His goodness and grace, I will suggest you do so immediately.

Even a dog knows enough to wag its tail over its supper dish. Do you have the good sense of a collie?

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;

his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the peoples of the earth

are regarded as nothing.

He does as he pleases

with the powers of heaven

and the peoples of the earth.

No one can hold back his hand

or say to him: “What have you done (Daniel 4: 34, 35 NIV)?”

Great is God’s faithfulness! After seven long years of humiliating degradation, my sanity was fully restored. No longer did I drink the intoxicating wine of self-adoration and self-deification. There is but one true and living God and His holy name is most certainly *not* Nebuchadnezzar.

I shall now attempt to show you what the Most High spent seven long years revealing to me: God’s Kingdom will forever endure. He alone is worthy of praise. You and I are mere creatures. He is the Creator. All creation must bow to Him. He submits to no one. He answers to no one. No one can hinder or frustrate His plans. And He is good. He is merciful. He cares about you and me. He knows how to take those whose lives have been shipwrecked and make them whole.

If you can believe what I have just told you, you are well on your way to full and complete restoration. Thankfully, God is in the business of mending broken lives. He can accomplish more than you and I can imagine. Let Him go to work in your life—you will

not be disappointed in Him. But if you, in your stubbornness, deny these evident truths, you are destined to remain a sad victim of your own insanity. To you I say, “Have another mouthful of grass!”

At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble (Daniel 4: 36, 37 NIV).

God, in His merciful kindness, restored me to the throne. Yes, after seven years of groveling about as a snarling, senseless beast, the God of Heaven gave me back my sanity—and He placed the crown back on my head. He could have left me grazing on the palace lawn; He could have allowed me to die. He could have hurled a lightning bolt at my silly head—and He would have been thoroughly justified in doing so, but the God of Heaven demonstrated a great measure of compassion in His dealings with me. How can I repay Him? I cannot, but I can tell others of His goodness. He is the God who restored my sanity.

Perhaps you never groveled about on all fours eating grass, but some of you know what it is like crawling about on all fours after a night of hard drinking and partying. And as we mentioned earlier, there are others reading this that have slept on park benches and scavenged through dumpsters in hopes of finding scraps of food. Addiction comes at a terrible cost, does it not? And, in the end, this insanity strips us of our God-given dignity. I should know. I behaved as a wild animal for seven years. I daresay there are many of you who have behaved in the manner of senseless beasts, too. This is not a life worth living, but there is a Power greater than you and me who restores misguided souls to sane thinking. Who is this Power? His name is Jesus.

For Discussion

- Nebuchadnezzar was not addicted to alcohol, but he was a victim of his own intoxicating pride. How can pride stand in the way of one's recovery?
- Discuss past incidents in which alcohol or other drugs caused you to behave in the manner of a senseless animal.
- In his book *Miracles*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "God is not merely mending, not simply restoring a status quo. Redeemed humanity is to be something more glorious than unfallen humanity would have been, more glorious than any unfallen race now is (if at this moment the night sky conceals any such). The greater the sin, the greater the mercy: the deeper the death, the brighter the re-birth. And this super-added glory will, with true vicariousness, exalt all creatures, and those who have never fallen will thus bless Adam's fall." Discuss this concept.

Applying Critical Thought: Camille's Story



Name: Camille A

Age: 37

Occupation: Commercial Real Estate
Broker

Marital Status: Single

Education: MBA

Recently, Camille was arrested while driving under the influence of alcohol. For years, she lived the double life of a high functioning alcoholic. By day, she worked as a successful commercial real estate broker in a major metropolitan area. By night, Camille was a closet drinker whose insatiable thirst for alcohol had reached a critical point. Only a handful of family members and friends knew about Camille's drinking problem.

In business, Camille was known as a "people person"—outgoing, personable, and engaging. Her effervescent personality was the key to her success. Camille spent a substantial amount of time entertaining customers, and in Camille's world, entertainment almost always included cocktails.

Camille is an alcoholic. After a rather lively evening of drinks with a group of real estate investors, she was arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol. Thankfully, no injuries or property damage resulted from her reckless behavior. Even so, she spent a

long night in the city jail and is now facing a substantial fine and the loss of her motor vehicle operator's license. She can well afford the fine and related court costs, but the forfeiture of her driving privileges will likely prove to be a bothersome inconvenience. In hopes of securing a measure of judicial leniency when she faces the judge, Camille agreed to enroll in a Twelve Step support group. She attends meetings twice a week.

After much prodding from the group's members, Camille reluctantly admitted that alcohol had rendered her life "difficult," but she would not go as far as saying her life had become unmanageable. She also balked at the notion that God is needed to restore her sanity. "I am not insane. At the very worst, I sometimes drink too much. This DUI has caused me a great deal of grief, but I don't think this qualifies me for a padded cell. I need practical help. Isn't there a pill that can curb my desire for alcohol? Surely, we have the medical science for this. What about yoga? This talk about God may be okay for the less sophisticated, but a Twelve Step program might be inappropriate for a woman of my education and intellect. I will give these meetings a go, but please don't expect me to check my brain in at the door."

Join the discussion:

"I suggested that Camille enroll in a Twelve Step recovery program. Perhaps this will impress the judge who will, in turn, allow Camille to continue driving. It is rather hard to sell real estate without a driver's license. With a little luck, the judge may show her some leniency. I can only wish Camille would show a bit more enthusiasm for these meetings."

—Camille's attorney

"We barely made it through Step One. From the beginning, Camille insisted that 'unmanageable' was a bit extreme in describing her life. Now she is insisting that 'insanity' is equally extreme. How can God restore her to sanity if she refuses to admit the insanity of alcoholism?"—Group session leader

“Insanity? Charles Manson is the poster boy of insanity. I will admit I sometimes drink too much, but I resent anyone who doubts my sanity. Please don’t fit me for a strait jacket!” —Camille

“Maybe I am wrong, but Camille appears to be preoccupied with losing her driver’s license. The loss of one’s driving privileges is a setback and a nuisance, but I think she should be more concerned about breaking the cycle of addiction.”—Group session participant #1

“Being a sophisticated person who has little use for religious myths, calling out to some distant God seems totally foolish. You would think medical science would have a pill that would cure the occasional urge to excessively drink. A friend suggested that I enroll in a transcendental meditation class, but when I appear in court next week, I want the judge to be impressed by my participation in a Twelve Step program. I will play the game if this keeps me from losing my license.”—Camille

“During last evening’s group session, Camille complained it would be difficult entertaining her real estate clients without alcohol. She said cocktails were as much a part of the real estate business as bank loans and property appraisals. She then said it might be possible for her to learn how to become a moderate drinker. As you can guess, this comment created quite a stir in our group. I wonder if Camille truly understands the nature of alcoholism.”—Group session participant #2

“If I lose my driver’s license, my business will take a nose dive! I cannot afford to lose my license! Taking a bus is not an option in my world!”—Camille

“During last night’s session, Camille said we should pick up the pace and not waste too much time on Step Two. She said if we covered three or four steps per session, we could wrap this up and move ahead with our lives.”—Group session leader

“Instead of trusting in some unknown God who is probably too busy to care about you and me, I am going to trust in my inner strength and will power. Why can’t I be my own higher power? I haven’t had a drink in three weeks. I’ve been clean and sober for twenty-one days. That’s an accomplishment and I refuse to give God the credit. Do you know what I think? I believe this group has exaggerated the problems of drinking. Furthermore, I am doing just fine without God.”—Camille

For Discussion

- Camille’s group is currently exploring Step Two. Based upon the interviews, do you believe Camille properly understands our definition of insanity?
- The group leader said Camille was reluctant in admitting the unmanageability of her alcohol-controlled life. In your estimation, is Camille ready to tackle Step Two? Should she go back and explore Step One more fully?
- Based upon her comments, do you think Camille has fully embraced the Twelve Steps as a viable method of achieving sobriety?
- Camille suggested she might learn how to become a moderate drinker. What do you make of this remark? Do you think Camille truly understands the nature of alcoholism?
- Although determining the motives of others can be difficult, what is Camille’s primary motive for attending these group sessions? Is there something other than sobriety that may be more important to Camille?
- Camille gives herself full credit for remaining sober during the past three weeks. Do you believe Camille can rely solely upon sheer will power and determination to deliver her from the chains of addiction?
- Alcoholics and drug addicts risk the ongoing possibility of relapse. What are some warning signs that indicate Camille may be a relapse waiting to happen?
- If you were a member of Camille’s recovery group, what advice or suggestions would you offer her?

Discovery Session 10

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Three
- What is a decision?
- Approaching God according to our knowledge of Him
- The folly of idolatry

Introduction to Step Three:

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

As every journey begins with a single step, we thus began our pilgrimage to the Promised Land of Sobriety by admitting our powerlessness over the bottle, the pill, the pipe, or the needle that had turned the one and only life that God has given us into an endless chaotic nightmare for which there seemed to be no hope of escape. We craved normalcy—we longed to shake off the fetters and shackles of addiction and live quietly, peaceably, and normally as others, but our desire to live a normal lifestyle was dwarfed by the gnawing, insatiable physical cravings triggered by our obsession with alcohol and drugs. Try as we might, we learned that will power alone could not free us from the bonds of addiction. We were powerless and our lives had become unmanageable. Thankfully, by admitting our powerlessness over the addiction that had made shambles of our lives, we had taken the first step to freedom.

As will power and self-determination could not deliver us, we came to believe that God could restore us to sanity. What we could not do on our own, God could do for us. Substance abuse had poisoned our thinking. Our minds had been thoroughly corrupted by the corrosive power of addiction. And here is the folly of it all: though our lives were

crumbling about us, we repeatedly convinced ourselves that one more drink, one more pill, or one more hit would not hurt us—in fact, surrendering to our addiction might even do us a bit of good. Despite a preponderance of evidence proving otherwise, we told ourselves and others that everything was under control. It was a farce, of course, but the runaway addiction that had plagued us for years had duped us into accepting the insanity that ruled our minds. And so, we took a second step by believing that God alone could restore us to right thinking.

We are well on our way to recovery, but the journey is far from over. Even so, let us rejoice in the progress we have made thus far. It is by God's grace that we have taken these two vital steps. It is important to understand that we did not take these steps on our own. God had, figuratively speaking, held our hands while we made these first two steps. We may have stumbled. We may have faltered, but He has been with us from the beginning. He is with us now. The very fact that we are engaged in this regimen is proof that God desires to do a good work in each of our lives. Do not miss this vitally crucial point: Almighty God—the all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present One who spoke the vast universe into existence, is *at work* in the lives of those who have been called out by Him.

For Discussion

- Briefly recap Step One and Step Two.
- Discuss how God led you to this program.
- What evidence indicates that God has begun a good work in your life?

We now continue our journey by making another decision—a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.

As this decision is too important to be misunderstood, let us not be victimized by muddled thinking: *a belief, in itself, is not a decision*. We may believe one political candidate to be more qualified than his or her opponent, but unless we take that belief to the polls and cast our ballot, we have made no decision. A decision is a belief that is backed by an action.

A high school graduate may believe additional education will enhance her ability to pursue a particular career path, but unless she enrolls in college, she has not committed to a decision that will open new doors of opportunity.

Many of us are certain that a regimen of strenuous exercise and healthier food selections will improve our quality of life, but until we back our beliefs with routine workouts and a menu that does not include chili cheeseburgers and triple thick chocolate malts, the superfluous pounds and inches will not go away. It takes more than a belief *alone* to shed unwanted weight—change occurs when healthy decisions are made.

We may believe God is fully capable of mending broken lives, but unless we make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to His able care, nothing will be accomplished.

And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Luke 5: 31, 32 NASB).”

Many people believe repentance is a matter of tears and remorse. To be sure, tears and remorse may be the byproducts of repentance, but when Jesus told His hearers to repent, He was telling them to change directions. When we turn to our Lord Jesus as Savior, we turn away from a life of substance abuse. When we turn to Him, we effectually turn away from the insanity and chaos of addiction. When we become His disciples, we are no longer the enslaved lackeys of alcohol and drugs. Jesus, the Great Physician, said, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick.” Addiction is an illness. Those bound by addiction are sick and in need of a doctor. The Great Physician said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” By turning to Him in faith, we turn away from that which was destroying our lives. We might refer to this as the *insanity* of addiction.

When we say “hello” to Jesus, we say “good-bye” to the miserable failures of the past.

Let us be clear in our understanding: Jesus can deliver us from the chains and fetters of addiction, but He has more to offer than sobriety alone—He longs to make us beloved sons and daughters through adoption into His family. He loves you and me. He *truly* loves us. He loves us despite our weaknesses and short-comings. He loves us without regard to our past sins and dismal failures. By turning to Him, He wipes our slates clean and gives us a brand new beginning. If you think this is too good to be true, your God is not big enough. He loves us far more than we can possibly know. Sobriety is only one of the many lofty aspirations He has for you and me. There is more. As His adopted sons and daughters, we are to live as children of the King—not as dirty-faced beggars groveling about in the mire of defeat; on the contrary, we are destined to live eternally as royal heirs of the King—princes and princesses—not in shameful misery, but in the fullness of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. Ours is truly a “rags to riches” story.

How do we yield our will and our lives over to His care? Quite simply, we turn to Jesus as our Savior. We place our hope in Him as our Deliverer. When we turn to Him in faith, we turn away from the misery and failures of the past. We come to Him in faith believing that He alone can liberate us from the bitter agony that resulted from a life steeped in sin and defeat. And when we place our trust in Jesus as Savior, He transforms us into His highly exalted sons and daughters. Of course, the son of the King is a prince. Likewise, the daughter of the King is a princess. When we place our hope in King Jesus, we become royalty. This is our destiny in Christ Jesus.

Step Three begins with a decision. A decision, we said, is a belief backed by action. Can Jesus rescue the lost? The sick? The dying? Can Jesus restore the shattered lives of those bound by drugs and alcohol? It is one thing to theorize, “Yes, I think He can do all this,” but this belief alone will do us no good until we make the life-altering decision to trust in Him as our *personal* Savior. And when we come to Him in faith, we effectively turn away from the long list of failures and miseries and sins that shipwrecked every facet of our broken lives.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2: 8, 9 NASB).

Salvation is a gift from God. In faith, we simply hold out our empty hands to receive the abundance of His goodness. We cannot merit God's favor by our own feeble efforts. We cannot fix our own brokenness. We are powerless. We admitted to our powerlessness in Step One. Additionally, if salvation could be earned, it would not be a gift, right? In the above passage, the Apostle Paul makes it crystal clear that salvation is an unmerited gift bestowed by God upon all who, in faith, have trusted in Christ Jesus as Savior. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul emphatically states that no one has a right to boast. Perhaps you have noticed the religious phonies and loud-mouthed hypocrites are those who weary us with their endless bragging. Who wants to listen to such mindless tripe? If we must boast, let us boast of what God has done for us.

For Discussion

- Why must a belief be followed by action if it is to be a decision?
- No one can earn God's favor—eternal life is a gift. Discuss this truth.

The “God of My Understanding”

Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step advocates teach their adherents to invoke the “God of my understanding” or the “God as we understand him” for help in achieving an addiction-free life. This idea can be taken two ways. Some interpret the “God of my understanding” as meaning we approach God with whatever knowledge of Him we happen to possess at a given point in time. Obviously, an alcoholic who neither attended church nor studied the Bible would, at best, possess only a rudimentary understanding of the Person and Nature of God; hence, the alcoholic would approach God according to his or her limited understanding. Such an example is found in Luke's account of the crucifixion:

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23: 39-43 NKJV).”

This thief had never attended seminary; he was certainly no theologian, but as he agonized on that roughly hewn cross, he appealed to Jesus with faith rather than knowledge. We may reasonably conclude that the repentant thief reached out to *the God of his understanding*.

Sadly, the “God of my understanding” has been used by a host of recovery programs as a license for creating a so-called higher power based upon the individual’s whims and desires. Such an approach is an affront to logic, for God is not necessarily who we happen to think He is; rather, He is who He knows Himself to be. We cannot create a god of our liking; otherwise, each person would have his or her own personal deity and then we would be required to heartily embrace the tenants of polytheism. Such idolatrous thinking is foolishness that smells of smoke and brimstone.

One particular Twelve Step organization tells its followers that actors and sports figures can be “higher powers” too. Who needs Jesus when there is Hollywood and the NFL? This theological foolishness is tantamount to idolatry. Frankly, indulgent, overpaid actors and spouse-abusing quarterbacks make lousy “higher powers.”

Man's mind is like a store of idolatry and superstition; so much so that if a man believes his own mind, it is certain that he will forsake God and forge some idol in his own brain.

--John Calvin

Based upon teachings common among many recovery groups, even Satan can fill the role as one's higher power. Indeed, he is powerful. He is more powerful than any of us. He is an astute observer of human nature. He is well-versed in matters of science, politics, art, history, and religion. Frankly, the devil has a rather impressive professional resume; he has acquired a vast amount of knowledge over the ages, but do we dare reach out to the devil in our distress?



The god of someone's understanding

We often think of idolatry as a practice common among primitive or ancient peoples. In truth, idolatry is just as prevalent in Manhattan as it is in some remote jungle island, for those who trust in wealth, status, pleasure, education, or even politics are as much idolaters as those who bow to statues fashioned from wood or stone. Again, God is who He knows Himself to be. Our understanding of Him may or may not be accurate.

If we exalt money, status, or sex above the Word of God, we are living in idolatry. Every time we inwardly submit to the strongholds of fear, bitterness, and pride, we are bowing to the rulers of darkness. Each of these idols must be smashed, splintered, and obliterated from the landscape of our hearts.

--Francis Frangipane

As we shall soon discover, the Bible is not lacking in humor. In the following passage, we shall meet two foolish idolaters. One makes an idol of metal while the other fashions an idol from the same log he used to bake his bread.

**The blacksmith with the tongs works one (idol) in the coals,
Fashions it with hammers,
And works it with the strength of his arms.
Even so, he is hungry, and his strength fails;
He drinks no water and is faint.
The craftsman stretches out his rule,
He marks one out with chalk;
He fashions it with a plane,
He marks it out with the compass,
And makes it like the figure of a man,
According to the beauty of a man, that it may remain in the house.
He cuts down cedars for himself,
And takes the cypress and the oak;
He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest.
He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it.
Then it shall be for a man to burn,
For he will take some of it and warm himself;
Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread;
Indeed he makes a god and worships it;
He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it.
He burns half of it in the fire;**

**With this half he eats meat;
He roasts a roast, and is satisfied.
He even warms himself and says,
“Ah! I am warm,
I have seen the fire.”
And the rest of it he makes into a god,
His carved image.
He falls down before it and worships it,
Prays to it and says,
“Deliver me, for you are my god!”
They do not know nor understand;
For He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see,
And their hearts, so that they cannot understand.
And no one considers in his heart,
Nor is there knowledge nor understanding to say,
“I have burned half of it in the fire,
Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals;
I have roasted meat and eaten it;
And shall I make the rest of it an abomination?
Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”
He feeds on ashes;
A deceived heart has turned him aside;
And he cannot deliver his soul,
Nor say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand (Isaiah 44: 12-20 NKJV)?”**

The metal idol was the god of the blacksmith's understanding; the wooden idol was the god of the carpenter's understanding. Again, according to many recovery groups, the idol of metal and the idol of wood are legitimate expressions of faith. This may be in keeping with today's climate of opinion, but worshipping gods of brass or wood is simply foolish. The god of the blacksmith's understanding was nothing but a chunk of metal. The god of the carpenter's understanding was a mere block of wood. Gods made of metal and wood

are useless and incapable of restoring those bound by addiction. Those who advocate addicts should place their faith in a god of their own making are misleading the legions of women and men who have been victimized by drugs and alcohol. We must never tolerate nonsense when precious human lives are being lost to the ravages of addiction.

Let us momentarily return our attention back to the repentant thief. We may take comfort in knowing that God, in His compassion, did not turn a deaf ear to this dying man despite the limitations of his biblical knowledge. Thankfully, God is no less compassionate today than He was two thousand years ago. He continues to meet women and men of limited understanding right where they are, but He is never content leaving them in their ignorance.

False gods patiently endure the existence of other false gods. Dagon can stand with Bel, and Bel with Ashtaroath; how should stone, and wood, and silver, be moved to indignation; but because God is the only living and true God, Dagon must fall before His ark; Bel must be broken, and Ashtaroath must be consumed with fire.

--Charles Spurgeon

J.B. Phillips wrote, "I would very earnestly ask you to check your conception of Christ, the image of Him which as a Christian you hold in your mind, with the actual revealed Person who can be seen and studied in action in the pages of the Gospels. It may be of some value to hold in our minds a bundle of assorted ideas to influence and control our conduct. But surely we need to be very careful before we give that 'bundle' the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God." In this age of so-called religious tolerance, we are asked to accept all manner of expressions of God, but God is who He is and not necessarily who we think Him to be.

Idols are incapable of saving anyone. We cannot conjure our own "higher powers." End of discussion.

For Discussion

- While it is not our intention to denigrate the work of Alcoholics Anonymous or other such groups, discuss how recovery organizations that promote a “God of my understanding” may lead their adherents to idolatry.
- Some idols are made of wood and stone. Other idols are made of wealth and power. Discuss the various forms of idolatry.

Discovery Session 11

Points of inquiry

- Our vulnerability as addicts
- God's protection
- God's comfort
- God's discipline



The Lord is my Shepherd

A Study in Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is universally regarded as the most revered lyrical poetry ever written. For three millennia, people from the far reaches of the globe have turned to this passage as a soothing balm for the easing of their troubled souls. Penned by King David when he was an old man, he knew something about tending sheep, for in his youth, he had been a shepherd. David had cared for his father's sheep. Of this psalm, Matthew Henry wrote, "Many of David's psalms are full of complaints, but this is full of comforts, and the expressions of delight in God's great goodness and dependence upon him. It is a psalm which has been sung by good Christians, and will be while the world stands, with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction. The psalmist here claims relation to God, as his

shepherd. He recounts his experience of the kind things God had done for him as his shepherd... that he needed to fear no evil, that God would never leave nor forsake him in a way of mercy; and therefore he resolves never to leave nor forsake God in a way of duty. In this he had certainly an eye, not only to the blessings of God's providence, which made his outward condition prosperous, but to the communications of God's grace, received by a lively faith, and returned in a warm devotion, which filled his soul with joy unspeakable. And, as in the foregoing psalm he represented Christ dying for his sheep, so here he represents Christians receiving the benefit of all the care and tenderness of that great and good shepherd."

Based upon his boyhood experiences, King David understood the life of a shepherd was not an easy one; a good shepherd often faced wild beasts with large fangs and ferocious appetites. Furthermore, sheep are incredibly stupid animals. Sheep cannot care for themselves. Besides their lack of cleverness, sheep are easy prey for hungry predators. As if all this were not enough, shepherds were disdainfully looked upon in ancient times. Herders of sheep were social outcasts who lived on the fringes of polite society. The life of a shepherd offered little more than long hours, harsh weather, dangerous wild beasts, public humiliation, and the society of really dumb animals.

Perhaps David wrote this psalm while relaxing on the rooftop of his palace. As he penned these words, he may have reflected how God had shepherded him through the exhaustive list of hardships and tribulations he had faced during his long life. David had reached the pinnacle of fame as Israel's mightiest king, but those who are familiar with the scriptures are aware that David's life was punctuated by a series of trials and tragedies that would have crushed the spirits of others. Life had not always been easy, but David could attest that God had never abandoned him.

**The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want (Psalm 23: 1 NKJV).**

Many among us have spent years locked away in a seemingly inescapable dungeon of alcoholism and drug addiction. Ours has been a life of loneliness and endless disappointment. For years, we craved a life of normalcy; rather than normalcy, we lived under a sentence of death. Many in our group have longed for freedom—freedom from the fierce cravings brought on by a recurring obsession with drink and drugs.

There are those among us who have roamed the streets with no place to go. They have slept beneath viaducts and foraged for scraps of food from trash bins. Those among us known as high functioning addicts and alcoholics lived in posh homes and held responsible positions, yet we were neither rested nor contented. Addiction has a way of stripping its victims down to bare nothingness.

Today, we are on the road to recovery. We are surrounded by well-meaning people who love us and are praying for our deliverance from the insanity and *insinity* of addiction. Life is taking on new meaning. Fresh hope has replaced the old feelings of despair. Purpose has replaced the emptiness of the past. We are truly blessed, and it is from our Lord Jesus Christ that these new blessings flow. He is the Good Shepherd. And because He is so good, He is meeting our needs.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters (Psalm 23: 2 NKJV).

As a boy alone in the wilderness, David had protected his father's flock from fierce predators with even fiercer appetites. Sheep cannot care for themselves. Unlike wolves, lions, and bears, sheep do not have huge snarling teeth or razor sharp claws for fending off hungry predators. Sheep possess neither the cunning nor the courage necessary for survival in the brutal wild. It is the shepherd alone who stands between the flock and certain death.

Hungry predators often search for animals as they graze in grassy pastures or refresh themselves by pools of water. As the weaker animals eat and drink, dangerous beasts,

cunning and deadly, move in for the kill. In a like manner, you and I have many enemies. Some are seen and some are unseen. Among our enemies, Satan is the deadliest. He is a foe of incalculable fury, but the Lord Jesus stands guard to keep us from the salivating jaws of our infernal enemy. Those of us who belong to the Lord Jesus can be assured He will protect us to the very end. We can never be lost to Satan. The Good Shepherd guards His sheep against all enemies.

God is not angry with you. He is not looking for a reason to hurl a lightning bolt down upon your head. No matter how badly you have botched your life, He is stooping down with arms wide open to receive you as His own. If you imagine that God is a harsh old deity, you have misunderstood Him.

There was a time when we were at the mercy of the world—hapless victims who were forced to sleep with one eye wide open for fear of falling prey to some deadly predator. Today, we dwell under the watchful eye of our Savior. The Good Shepherd stands vigilant while we rest and take nourishment in His green pastures. The Good Shepherd keeps watch as we refresh ourselves beside His still waters.

He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake (Psalm 23: 3 NKJV).

Those who desire healing understand restoration begins with a simple admission of one's brokenness; the initial step to divine recovery begins with a humble confession of powerlessness. We cannot heal ourselves. The job of restoration is too big for us alone. We must rely on the One who is mighty to save. Thankfully, Jesus Christ is still in the business of restoring broken souls.

While we seek deliverance from the bonds of addiction, we must also seek deliverance from the ravages of sin. As the scriptures teach, the wages of sin is death, and life eternal is a gift that cannot be earned; on the contrary, salvation is given freely to those who, by faith, place their trust in Jesus as Savior. Being good is never good enough, but being forgiven is. Those of us who have placed our faith in Christ Jesus as Savior are clothed in the spotlessly white garments of His perfect righteousness. Again, this is a gift that cannot be earned. We simply hold out our hands in faith to receive.

Those who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ have the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. We are not gods, but we have the Holy Spirit of God residing within us. In other words, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in all who belong to Jesus. How do we benefit from this supernatural indwelling? God's Holy Spirit is always there to lead us; He directs our ways and gives us comfort and encouragement for the long journey ahead. And we may be certain that God's Holy Spirit will neither leave us nor mislead us.

We are never forsaken, for God has not abandoned us as dirty-faced orphans—alone and groveling about for meager scraps of sustenance. Because He loves us, He will never turn His back on you and me. You will not find such faithfulness in any other.

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23: 4 NKJV).**

In the truest sense, we are all under a death sentence. Death can strike anyone at any age, and yet the grim reality of death must give way to the hope of eternal life promised to all believers in Jesus Christ. I am convinced beyond words that once a believer passes from this life into the next, in no way would he or she wish to return. Quoting Matthew Henry once again, the famed Bible scholar wrote, "The wicked are chased out of the world, and their souls are required; but the saints take a walk to another world as cheerfully as they take their leave of this."

In I Corinthians 15: 1-3, the Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was raised from the dead three days after His crucifixion and burial. His execution on a cruel Roman cross took away our sin. His bodily resurrection demonstrated His absolute power and authority over death and the grave. Because He lives, we, too, shall live forever with Him. This is the Gospel. Gospel means good news. The One who mastered death is certainly capable of taming the problems that plague you and me. When we hand over the reins of our will and our lives to His care, we receive His ironclad guarantee of perfect deliverance.

A tee shirt bears the humorous message “Give Jesus a chance. If you don’t like Him, the devil will gladly take you back.” Say, what have you got to lose?

The crook of the shepherd’s staff was handy for grabbing wayward sheep bent on straying from the safety of the flock. And the straight end of the staff could deliver a stinging blow to a little brute in need of some old-fashioned discipline. Jesus said, “Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.” If Jesus loves you, then He will apply discipline as needed. King David, who had strayed from God’s will on a number of memorable occasions, had felt the sting of God’s discipline. Did David complain of this? On the contrary, David found *comfort* in God’s discipline. From time to time, it is good for us to feel the sting of God’s correction, for when we stray, there are hungry wolves waiting to devour us. God will get our attention one way or another—if we remain close to Him and live a life of obedience, we will not need the correction of His divine staff so often.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over (Psalm 23: 5 NKJV).

In ancient times, an offer of hospitality meant more than food, drink, and a place to rest; guests were under the care and protection of their hosts. Jesus offers us refreshment, but like a mother hen protecting her chicks, Jesus hides us under His wings, so to speak,

and no one can steal us from Him. Hungry wolves may snarl and show their fangs, but the Good Shepherd's staff is a highly effective weapon for warding off those who would devour us.

Many saints never fully understand how abundantly God blesses His own. They chase whirlwinds and mine for fool's gold and, in the end, feel as though they have been slighted. God is in the business of filling one's cup to the point of overflowing, but He can only bless us with the goodness of His choosing. Rather than begging for curses disguised as blessings, let us be content with the goodness of His choosing.

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever (Psalm 23: 6 NKJV).**

We humans are a rather silly lot who often live according to two opposing standards: as an example, when someone wrongs us, we demand justice. On the other hand, when we do wrong to another, we ask for mercy. Such hypocrites we are! In truth, God's justice is a fearful thing that we should wish to avoid at any cost. What we need is God's mercy. Mercy is unmerited. Mercy is undeserved. And His mercy leads to everlasting life.

During the presidency of John F. Kennedy, a widely circulated photograph pictured the president sitting at his desk while two of his children played in the Oval Office. This photograph was quite remarkable, for the most powerful senator in Washington or a governor of a largely populated state could not have barged into the president's office uninvited or unannounced, but this strict White House protocol did not apply to the president's kids. They had greater access to their father than all the high ranking officials in Washington, D.C.

And so it is with those of us who have placed our faith in Christ Jesus as Savior. We belong. We are welcomed. We are His. And we shall live with Him throughout the endless ages to come.

For Discussion

- Sheep are neither clever nor are they capable of warding off dangerous predators. In what ways are we like sheep?
- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is summed up in 1 Corinthians 15: 1-3. What did His death accomplish? What promise is found in His resurrection?

Discovery Session 12



Applying Critical Thought: Jill's Story

Name: Jill L.

Age: 23

Education: Eleventh grade

Occupation: Currently unemployed

Marital status: Single with one child

If anyone knows what hitting “rock bottom” is all about, it is Jill. Jill began drinking in middle school. By the time she had reached the age of seventeen, she had graduated from the ranks of mere binge drinking to that of a raging alcoholic. More than once, her high school principal found vodka stashed in her locker. And more than once, the school appealed to Jill’s parents for help in correcting their daughter’s wayward behavior, but her mother and father were at a total loss in dealing with their out-of-control teenage alcoholic.

Jill left school and moved in with a young man with a volatile temper. Marcus was known to be abusive and controlling, but he paid the bills and kept Jill in alcohol. Jill did not mind an occasional slap or shove by his hand as long as she had a place to sleep and a steady supply of vodka. A year after moving in with Marcus, she became pregnant and gave birth to their son.

After an investigation involving child neglect, their young son was removed from the home. For a time, Jill attended parenting classes, but she was asked to leave the group after arriving for class in a state of extreme intoxication. To date, Jill and Marcus' young son remains in foster care.

Bored with Jill and her alcoholism, Marcus turned his attention to another woman after sending Jill packing. Penniless and with no place to go, she sought refuge in a homeless shelter. When a bottle of vodka was discovered beneath her pillow, she was asked to leave the shelter. Her reluctant parents took her in, but when she was arrested for driving her father's car while under the influence of alcohol, her parents' hospitality abruptly ended.

After spending thirty days in the municipal jail, Jill returned to the homeless shelter and enrolled in their Celebrate Recovery program. At this point, she needed little convincing that her life was circling the drain. "If I do not get this drinking under control, I will be back in jail or I could end up on a slab in the city morgue. I am ready to do whatever it takes to regain control over my life."

Up until now, Jill has been the most dedicated participant in the shelter's recovery program, but Marcus has been suggesting that he and Jill get back together. He has promised to be considerate and supportive if Jill returns to him. He has even promised to hire an attorney who will help them regain custody of their son. Jill's case manager has repeatedly warned her against leaving the program, but the young woman is giving Marcus' proposition a good deal of thought.

Join the discussion...

"I told Jill that if she leaves the program and comes back to me, I will help her curb those crazy drinking binges. I know how to handle Jill. I know what's best for her. No one but me knows how to keep Jill in line."—Marcus

"I fear for Jill's well-being and long term sobriety if she leaves the program now. She's too vulnerable. She hasn't been sober long enough to fully comprehend the risks and the consequences of this decision. She needs the guidance of a Christ-centered recovery program and the support of a loving community. She certainly does not need an abuser like Marcus. My advice is to remain here and work the program to its completion."—Jill's case manager

"People misjudge Marcus. Others accuse him of having a nasty temper, but he's basically a good man. On those few occasions when he was angry and struck me, I probably had it coming. If I leave the program, he can help me overcome my addiction."—Jill

"All Jill needs is proper handling. I used to let her drink as much as she liked, but those days are gone. If she can't control her drinking, I'll control her drinking for her. I know how to do it, too. I can handle this girl. I can make her mind me."—Marcus

"Marcus says I need a firm hand. Honestly, if anyone can keep me in line, it is Marcus. He can be rough on me, but it is for my own good. I believe he cares about me."—Jill

"I told Jill that if she comes back, I'll help get her kid out of foster care. She really misses that boy. Don't get me wrong—I miss him, too! And getting the kid back should motivate her to stop drinking."—Marcus

"Until Marcus came back on the scene, Jill was our most ardent program participant. I had great hopes for her ongoing success, and she was an example to the others, but now I am not so sure. She seems less focused on her sobriety than before. If she leaves the program now, I am afraid she will hit the bottle. And I am afraid Marcus will hit her. He's bad news."—Jill's case manager

"When I first met Jill, she was upbeat and positive. She didn't mind the meetings and the homework or sharing a room with three other women. Lately, she has been complaining about everything. What does she expect? Making drastic life changes is never easy. Jill

had better stop complaining and focus on her recovery. After all, that's why she's here. That's why we're all here."—Jill's roommate

"Maybe God wants me with Marcus so that we can regain custody of our son. Maybe it is God's will for us to be a family once again. Maybe it is God's will that I humble myself by learning how to completely submit to Marcus' firm handling. According to Marcus, the Bible says that wives have to do whatever their husbands tell them to do. Okay, so Marcus isn't legally my husband, but in the eyes of God, aren't we sort of married?"—Jill

For Discussion

- Discuss the likely consequences that will result if Jill leaves the program to live with Marcus.
- According to the observations of her case manager and a roommate, how has Jill's attitude toward the recovery program recently changed?
- Marcus insists that Jill needs nothing more than firm handling. Is Marcus capable of "curbing those crazy drinking binges?" Does he truly know "what's best for her?"
- If you were Jill's roommate, what advice might you offer?
- The program's case manager believes Jill risks relapsing if she exits the program prematurely. On the other hand, Marcus insists that he can deal with Jill's addiction. Do you think Marcus understands the nature of alcoholism?
- Is it God's will that a woman submit herself to an abusive boyfriend? How is Jill twisting a Bible verse in an attempt at justifying a conjugal relationship with Marcus?
- Understanding the hidden motives of others has its limitations, but is it possible Marcus is merely baiting Jill by promising to retrieve their child from foster care? Do you think Marcus has either Jill or their son's best interests at heart?

Discovery Session 13

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Four
- The mask of personality
- The daunting task of understanding ourselves and others
- Defining a fearless moral inventory
- A proper response to shame

Introduction to Step Four:

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

Owing to the popularity of *The Christmas Carol*, the name Scrooge has come to mean one who is miserly, greedy, and icily indifferent to the needs of others. From the first few pages of this timeless literary classic, Charles Dickens masterfully portrays Ebenezer Scrooge as a cold-hearted cynic who cares for nothing other than his hoard of money. Scrooge, of course, viewed himself as a prudent businessman who refused to allow mere sentimentality to interfere with his money-making schemes. The poor, he reasoned, had no one to blame but themselves and charity was simply a way of picking a hard-working businessman's pocket. The storyline takes a sharp twist when the villainous Ebenezer Scrooge is forced into making a "fearless moral inventory." Confronted with the truth about himself, he is repulsed by what he sees and immediately wages a one man campaign of compassion in the mean streets of London.

Prior to the trio of ghostly visitations on that fateful Christmas Eve, Ebenezer Scrooge had been well satisfied with himself. He had no regrets nor was he saddled with the oppressive feelings of guilt. He was a practical man whose sole purpose was making money. Anyone or anything that threatened to lift so much as a farthing from his pocket

was suspect. The poor, he reasoned, deserved their poverty. The well-being of a dirty-faced orphan was of no concern to him. And though his acquaintances looked upon him with hearty contempt, Scrooge viewed himself as one of the few truly sensible people in London.



Throughout the ages, philosophers have challenged us to “know thyself.” This is certainly sound advice, but knowing who we are and what we are is no easy matter. Perhaps this challenge motivated King David to write, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139: 23, 24 KJV).”

Scrooge assumed that he understood himself with crystal clarity until three ghosts forced him to reexamine his life.

We humans are not easily understood. We seldom understand ourselves. For that matter, we seldom understand one another. Why is this? We are wondrous, multi-dimensional, complex beings created in the image of God Almighty. According to Scripture, we represent the crowning achievement among His handiwork. The prophet Jeremiah wrote we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” You and I are not easily

understood, for we are highly complex creations. But this alone does not explain the problem of understanding ourselves and others. We are wonderfully made, but we are also deceptive. We go to great lengths in keeping our character defects from the light of scrutiny and examination. We hide the truth about ourselves from ourselves. We hide the truth about ourselves from others. And we do so almost instinctively. We may think we know ourselves and we may think we know each other, but a mountain of evidence says otherwise.

First Impressions

It has been rightfully said that we have only one chance at making a favorable first impression. Perhaps this is why many of us experience a measure of anxiety when interviewing for employment or, perhaps, in meeting someone of the opposite sex. Give a wrong response during an interview and the job goes to another applicant. Say the wrong thing and count on another lonely Saturday night sharing the sofa with a cat while watching old Humphrey Bogart films. Making a good first impression can mean the difference between a paycheck and an unemployment check; for that matter, making a favorable first impression can mean the difference between lifelong companionship and stark loneliness.

What we initially see in others and what others, upon first meeting us, is personality. A personality is a mask worn in order to give a particular impression. Thieves wear masks to conceal their identities. You and I wear masks, too, and with motives that are scarcely better than those who rob and steal. We hide our character flaws and defects behind personality masks. From time to time, we slip up, become careless, lose our masks, and, to our shame and embarrassment, our real identities come to light.

Erroneous first impressions have ways of backfiring. In many cases, faulty first impressions lead to the wrong applicants being hired or the wrong persons saying, "I do!" Of course, some faulty first impressions have fairytale endings. There are happily married couples who, initially, could not stomach the sight of the other. Regardless, first

impressions are, quite often, simply wrong, for it generally takes a long time to really know another person.

Everything you add to the truth subtracts from the truth.
--Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Know Thyself

As odd as it may seem, understanding ourselves may well be an even more arduous task than understanding the people around us. If we dare admit the truth, many of us are guilty of thinking more highly of ourselves than is proper while remaining particularly blind to our long list of faults and shortcomings. Like the pre-repentant Ebenezer Scrooge, we often see ourselves in a flattering, but unrealistic, light. As an example, the professional who views himself as confident and assured may strike others as cocky and overbearing. Interestingly, what he considers self-confidence may be interpreted as arrogance and haughtiness by those who work near him. This truth was humorously illustrated by a pop vocalist from the 1980s who boasted, “I’m not a snob! Ask anyone who matters!” Nonetheless, one’s opinion of oneself may bear only a superficial resemblance to the considered opinions held by others.

A “concerned” friend or relative may, in fact, be little more than an overly intrusive soul—an unwelcomed busybody who perceives her incessant meddling as benign empathy. Likewise, we sneer at the ballyhooing braggart who touts his occasional act of petty altruism as an extreme expression of goodwill and charity that should not go unnoticed by others. Indeed, the highly confident professional, the concerned relative, and the self-proclaimed philanthropist would be surprised and, perhaps, even embarrassed to discover themselves as the objects of hushed ridicule and scorn.

We see ourselves through one perspective; others see us through different lens, but only God sees us as we truly are.

The only shame is to have none.
--Blaise Pascal

As understanding ourselves is such a complex and thorny undertaking, how are we to approach this matter of compiling a “fearless moral inventory” when we scarcely know who or what we really are? We must turn to God asking Him for wisdom and understanding.

**Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting (Psalm 139: 23, 24 KJV).**

Wisdom is seeing people, events, and circumstances through God's eyes. With a measure of godly wisdom, we can come to a better understanding of ourselves.

For Discussion:

- Discuss how people often hide their weaknesses and shortcomings behind masks of personality.
- The confident, self-assured individual may strike others as pompous and overbearing. Why must we avoid self-flattery? How can we see ourselves with a greater measure of accuracy?
- We see ourselves in a certain light. Others see us in a different light. Why is God the only One who truly understands us for who and what we are?

A Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory

It takes a measure of backbone to honestly and accurately examine one's true self. Honesty is not for cowards. Any accurate self-assessment must be searching and fearless. Those who are fearful are unlikely to discover unsettling truths that are evident to God and others. With that in mind, let us set forth three maxims that may prove useful when undertaking the task of making a fearless moral inventory:

- Humans are frequently dishonest with themselves and others (Genesis 6:5)
- Humans tend to think too highly of themselves (Philippians 2:3)
- Humans often see faults in others while ignoring their own faults (Matthew 7:5)

A word of caution is in order: We are likely to discover a number of highly disturbing faults as we pursue the daunting task of self-examination. As we examine ourselves, we may very well be repelled by the hosts of ugly truths made known to us. Shame is the byproduct of honest self-examination. Borrowing from C.S. Lewis, there are scalding liquids too hot to touch, yet we can safely drink them. Drinking from the cup of shame can produce clarity for the purpose of self-understanding, but our merciful God never intended for us to drown in an ocean of shame. Once shame has done its work, we are to set it aside and move forward. Wallowing in shame produces despair and despair may drive us back to drink and drugs. Momentary shame produces honesty. Honesty is good. Honesty drove the disciple Peter to seek our Lord's forgiveness. Prolonged or excessive shame produces despair. Despair is not good. Despair drove Judas Iscariot to hang himself.

For Discussion:

- How does shame allow us to see ourselves more clearly?
- How can prolonged or excessive shame prove detrimental to one's recovery?

- Despair is a feeling of hopelessness. Despair is a false belief that a dire situation is beyond God's ability and that all is lost. Why is despair both dangerous and detrimental to one's recovery?

I am not going to Heaven because I have preached to great crowds or read the Bible many times. I'm going to Heaven just like the thief on the cross who said in that last moment: 'Lord, remember me.'
--Billy Graham

The Day Simon Peter Took a Fearless Moral Inventory of Himself A Study in Luke 5

Among the twelve disciples chosen by our Lord Jesus, none was a more colorful character than Simon Peter. Peter was a fisherman by trade. He had never attended seminary. There was no certificate of ordination hanging on the wall of his study. Frankly, Simon Peter was coarse, common, crude, and crass. He was prone to saying the wrong things at the wrong time. He had a dirty mouth. He was impulsive, impetuous, and imprudent. Simon Peter was hardly a clean-cut Sunday school boy, but Simon Peter was hand-selected for ministry by none other than our Lord Jesus. This should give us hope, for if Jesus can use someone as flawed as Peter, He can certainly use the likes of us, too. And as you and me, Simon Peter was called to make a fearless moral inventory. As our text for today's study, we will examine a passage from Luke's Gospel record. It is my prayer that God's Holy Spirit will give us eyes to see and ears to hear His liberating truths for the transformation of our lives:

On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he (Jesus) was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their

nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him (Luke 5 ESV).

Our friend Simon Peter was a man's man--a rough and ready sort of fellow who was neither a stranger to hard work nor to the inherent dangers of the elements. Peter lived by the sweat of his brow. As said earlier, his language was a bit on the salty side and there were times when Peter was something of a braggart. He had an unfortunate ability to speak when silence would have better served the situation. Maybe he was a bit too outspoken for his own good. Others might say he engaged his mouth before engaging his brain. There is an element of truth in these charges, but Simon Peter had his good points. Peter was an ambitious man whose calloused hands and lined face evidenced a life of honest physical toil. He had not been born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. The rugged fisherman had not lived a life of pampered ease. Whatever he had, he had paid for with gallons of blood, sweat, and tears.



Say what you will about Simon Peter, but we must remember that our Lord Jesus loved this man. He saw something uniquely singular in this brash and burly fisherman. And if Peter was good enough for our Lord Jesus, he is certainly good enough for you and me.

Peter was neither refined nor scholarly, but let us not charge him with ignorance. He was a clever man--a resourceful man--a survivor driven by wit and necessity. Wetting a line was no mere pastime—fishing was Peter's livelihood. This was his chosen vocation--a demanding profession that paid the bills and provided sustenance for his family. And while many among us might enjoy a weekend spent at some scenic fishing resort, most of us would cower at the notion of meeting our many financial obligations from what was attached to the other end of a fishing line. But this is how Peter supported his family. To have satisfied the demands of the landlord, the grocer, the tax collector, and poverty itself, Peter must have been a highly skilled fisherman.

Peter was an authority on fishing, but he also knew himself. He knew who he was. He knew the kind of man he had become. From time to time, his sense of self-worth grew a

bit bloated; there were occasions in which his self-esteem swelled with unwarranted pride, but in his saner moments, Peter had an accurate understanding of who he was.

And here was Jesus at Lake Gennesaret. A crowd had gathered around to hear Jesus preach. As it happened, Peter had pulled his boat ashore and was busy cleaning his fishnet. As the crowd pressed around Jesus, He climbed into Peter's boat and asked him to anchor the vessel away from the shore; using the fishing boat as a pulpit, Jesus taught the crowd. At the end of His teaching, Jesus said to Peter, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

Peter must have marveled at such an odd request. As a teacher of God's word, Jesus was without equal; no man had ever spoken with such authority, but what did a rabbi know about fishing? Let the rabbis teach from the scrolls and leave the matter of fishing to real fisherman. Besides all this, Peter had worked all night and had nothing to show for his efforts. Simon Peter was tired. He wanted to go home. Perhaps the fishing would be better the following night, and yet Jesus said, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."

With a measure of reluctance, Peter answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." And so he did.

Nothing Peter had experienced as a seasoned fisherman could have prepared him for what was to follow; from the deep, the nets quickly swelled with great catches of fish. How could this be? After a long night of frustration and empty nets, Peter's fortunes had suddenly changed and, to his amazement, the strain of so many fish caused his nets to give way. Something had to be done, so Peter quickly summoned his partners James and John to lend their hands in gathering this overwhelming catch of fish.

Never had Peter seen such a catch. It was as if every fish in the lake had been irresistibly drawn into their fishing nets. And as the fishermen hauled their catch into the two boats, their vessels began to sink under the weight of fish.

A miracle? Of course, it was a miracle! Peter had spent too many years on the water to attribute such a catch to mere happy circumstance.

Who was this Jesus? Who was this rabbi who had told him to cast his nets into the deep? In a moment of time, Peter realized that Jesus was the Anointed One, the Messiah, sent from God. There could be no other explanation. With crystal clarity, the fisherman who had toiled through the night with nothing to show for his many hours of difficult work quite suddenly found himself face to face with the Son of God. Peter, a miserable, unworthy, foul-mouthed, dirty-faced sinner, stood trembling in the immaculate glory of God's divine presence.

Awed by the circumstances, Peter humbled himself and cried, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Peter spoke correctly when he identified himself as a sinful man—and how can a sinful, dirty-faced beggar garbed in filthy rags stand in the presence of the Righteous King?

Do we not all reach a point in life in which we must look deep within and take an honest assessment of who we are and what we have become?

Perhaps life's circumstances drove you to a point in which you were compelled to examine yourself—to stand before a moral mirror and take an inventory of your inner being—to render an honest examination of your life, your habits, and your behavior.

Did you find this to be a frightening experience? For those who are honest, taking an accurate, realistic inventory of one's true self can be a dreadful exercise in humility—for in those rare moments in which we are honest—or as honest as we are capable of being--the scales drop from our eyes allowing us the unsettling opportunity of truly discovering the essence of our existence and the substance of our being.

It is as if for the first time, we see ourselves as others see us--and perhaps we see ourselves as God sees us. But there are many men and women who simply refuse to look at their true selves--for the matter of making a searching and fearless moral inventory can be a terribly dreadful experience.

In making an honest inventory of one's true self, the individual sees the horror of his or her actions--the devastating hurt and pain inflicted on self and others by reckless, out of control behavior that is often the result of a rampant addiction and moral degeneration.

There are probing questions we must ask if our self-inventory is to be accurate and meaningful:

- Has this current lifestyle brought harm to my health? To my inner peace? To my happiness? To my overall contentment with life?
- Has this behavior shattered my dreams and ambitions? Am I pleased with my station in life?
- Has addictive behavior inflicted pain and injury to family, friends, and to society at large? Has my lifestyle left a trail of misery and carnage?
- Am I a positive role model for others, or am I someone others simply wish to avoid?
- Has my reputation become an object of scorn? Has my name become a byword reflecting a life tainted by bad choices and careless decisions?
- What have I done with my God-given talents and the opportunities that have come my way?
- As I stand at this moment, could God look upon me and say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant?"

For those of us who dare to answer such brutal questions without flinching, the results of our searching and fearless moral inventories will surely produce feelings of shame, self-horror, and remorse.

But do not be deceived--there are moments in life when a dose of shame will do us a lot of good. In our shame, we often see ourselves as God sees us. No longer garbed in a

cloak of vain excuses, the honest man or woman is given a candid glimpse of who he or she truly is. And this can be therapeutic, for when we understand that we are ill, we can seek a cure.

No fearless moral inventory can be taken if the individual insists upon bringing a supply of excuses into the examining process...

- "I had an unhappy childhood!" This may be the case, but would you have the unhappiness of a troubled childhood spoiling the remainder of your adult years?
- "My father and mother were alcoholics." Then you will do well in breaking the cycle. Some family traditions are hardly worth keeping.
- "I was born this way!" Many born with birth defects have their defects corrected. Being "born that way" does not imply that we are to remain that way. For that matter, we were all born crying, flush-faced, and utterly self-centered, yet we somehow grew into adulthood. Grow up and stop making excuses.
- "Life is unfair!" You speak correctly, for there are many others who were born into circumstances far worse than those in which you and I were born.
- "I cannot change who I am!" This is true; thankfully, God can change who you are into who He wants you to be.

Jesus died for our sins--not our excuses. Making excuses is the surest way of remaining in the depths of our deepest despair, for when we attempt justifying bad behavior with empty excuses, we guarantee a lifetime of unhappiness and misery for ourselves--and who wants that? An excuse is a key that locks a prison cell from the inside.

How can one seek a cure unless he or she first understands the illness? An honest moral inventory can be absolutely liberating, and there is no one among us who is best served by false pride and self-deception.

For those who are sick, the Great Physician stands knocking at the door. The Great Physician is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ and our excuses are of no interest to

Him. He is in the business of healing broken lives—not in listening to a long list of meaningless excuses.

Drain the cup of shame--drain the cup dry for it is medicine that can heal. But as with all medications, take only the prescribed dosage, for medicine taken excessively is toxic.

What happened to our friend Simon Peter? Our Lord Jesus Christ transformed this brash fisherman into a fearless leader in the early church. This story has a happy ending, for after encountering the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter gave up catching fish and became a mighty fisher of men. God had a plan for Peter--a plan that proved to be a grand adventure in faith and action. God has a glorious vision for your life, too. But where should you begin? Peter's adventure began once he took a fearless moral inventory of himself.

Is today the day you begin dealing honestly with yourself?

Let us close with a reading from Psalm 51; these words were penned by King David after his sin involving Bathsheba and the cold-blooded murder of her husband Uriah became known:

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words**

**and blameless in your judgment.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart (Psalm 51: 1-6 ESV).**

At this time, an invitation is given. Jesus stands willing to forgive all who have sinned and need a Savior. Are you stricken? Do you suffer? The Great Physician would like to speak with you. He stands at the door and knocks. Will you open the door for Him?

For Discussion:

- What is the purpose of making a searching and fearless moral inventory?
- Why should we avoid making excuses for our shortcomings and character flaws?
- It has been said that the most damaging lie is the lie we tell ourselves. Discuss how self-deception is an enemy of healing, restoration, and recovery.

Discovery Session 14

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Four
- The challenge of making a fearless moral inventory
- The deeds of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit
- The Apostle Paul's fearless moral inventory checklist

Exploring Step Four:

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

As stated in our previous session, courage is necessary if one is to truthfully and accurately make the searching and fearless moral inventory prescribed in Step Four. Such a task is not for the faint of heart. Any accurate self-assessment must be searching, courageous, and without reservation—a no-holds barred exercise in self-examination. Those who cower in fear are unlikely to discover the unsettling self-truths that are evident to God and others. With this said, let us again consider three axioms that may prove helpful when undertaking the task of making a fearless moral inventory:

- Humans are frequently dishonest with themselves and with others (Genesis 6:5)
- Humans tend to think too highly of themselves (Philippians 2:3)
- Humans often recognize faults in others while ignoring their own faults (Matthew 7:5)

Admittedly, we are likely to discover a number of highly disturbing faults as we pursue the daunting task of self-examination, and, along the way, we may very well be grieved by

the ugly truths we learn about ourselves. Some medicines taste nasty, but are restorative and can make one well; in a like sense, self-examination can be a disagreeable process, but the benefits are worthy of our efforts. As mentioned in our last session, shame is the byproduct of honest self-examination. Drinking from the cup of shame can leave a bitter taste, but shame has its restorative benefits. Shame can produce a stark accuracy in our self-understanding. Shame will often allow us to see ourselves as God and others see us. This can be a lamentable experience—even painful. Painful, but necessary. Thankfully, our merciful God never intended for us to be buried under an avalanche of shame. Once shame has done its work, we are to dismiss it and move forward. Shame produces a certain clarity of mind that is all too rare among humans, but prolonged or excessive shame leads to self-loathing and despair. Despair has sent legions of women and men back into the welcoming arms of their addictions. It is not God's will for any of us to languish in despair.



For those who are uncertain as to how this self-examination is to be conducted, the Apostle Paul gives us a written template for the making of a searching and fearless moral

inventory. As you will soon discover, Paul was quite thorough. Some might go so far as to say that the Apostle Paul was *uncomfortably* thorough.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:16-24 NASB).

Anyone who says that being good is easy is either a liar or has no idea what being good is all about. The Bible teaches that we are born with a sin nature. We have a propensity for doing the wrong thing. Being bad comes naturally. Being good, we might say, is an acquired skill.

Think about it: as parents, we are obliged to teach our children how to properly behave themselves. No one has to teach a child how to lie. The little ones quickly figure this out on their own. The same can be said of selfishness. No one has to demonstrate churlish behavior to a little boy or girl. No one has to instruct a child on the finer points of throwing a tantrum. It is as though ill behavior is instinctive and, unless we teach our children proper conduct, their behavior will go from bad to worse.

Racial prejudice, anti-Semitism, or hatred of anyone with different beliefs has no place in the human mind or heart.

--Billy Graham

Even the Apostle Paul, in attending to his searching and fearless moral inventory, lamented that he did things he did not want to do and did not do the things that he ought to do. If the Apostle Paul found being good a struggle, we can expect the good versus evil struggles in our lives, too. In the above passage, Paul exhorts us to “walk by the Spirit.” Though we were born with a sin nature, Christ followers have the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit quite literally takes residence in those who have placed their hope of salvation in Christ Jesus. We are not gods, but we have God the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter who would guide us in all truth (John 16:7-12). By walking in the Spirit, we can avoid the pitfalls and trappings of the flesh.

The great Christian reformer, Martin Luther, wrote of his own struggles with the deeds or the lusts of the flesh. “When I was a monk I thought I was lost forever whenever I felt an evil emotion, carnal lust, wrath, hatred, or envy. I tried to quiet my conscience in many ways, but it did not work, because lust would always come back and give me no rest. I told myself: ‘You have permitted this and that sin, envy, impatience, and the like. Your joining this holy order has been in vain, and all your good works are good for nothing.’ If at that time I had understood this passage, ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh,’ I could have spared myself many a day of self-torment. I would have said to myself: ‘Martin, you will never be without sin, for you have flesh. Despair not, but resist the flesh.’

“I remember how Doctor Staupitz used to say to me: ‘I have promised God a thousand times that I would become a better man, but I never kept my promise. From now on I am not going to make any more vows. Experience has taught me that I cannot keep them.

Unless God is merciful to me for Christ's sake and grants unto me a blessed departure, I shall not be able to stand before Him...'

"No man is to despair of salvation just because he is aware of the lust of the flesh. Let him be aware of it so long as he does not yield to it. The passion of lust, wrath, and other vices may shake him, but they are not to get him down. Sin may assail him, but he is not to welcome it. Yes, the better Christian a man is, the more he will experience the heat of the conflict. This explains the many expressions of regret in the Psalms and in the entire Bible.

"Everybody is to determine his peculiar weakness and guard against it. Watch and wrestle in spirit against your weakness. Even if you cannot completely overcome it, at least you ought to fight against it."

The "flesh" is the built-in sin nature that has been with us since conception. The "deeds of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21) give us grounds for making our own searching and fearless moral inventory. Mustering as much honesty as is humanly possible, we can apply the checklist given to us by the Apostle Paul for making a meaningful self-examination as prescribed in Step Four:

Immorality: Immoral behavior most commonly refers to sexual misconduct, but immoral behavior extends beyond carnality. God has set forth a moral code of sexual conduct that has been largely ignored over the past few generations. This may explain the rising divorce rate and the staggering number of children born out of wedlock. Simply stated, sexual intercourse is God's wedding gift to a lawfully married man and woman. Sexual intercourse between members of the same sex or among unmarried couples is strictly prohibited. If this sounds terribly out of step in today's permissive culture, you are correct; nonetheless, many of society's social ills are the direct result of rampant sexual immorality. If you happen to disagree, do not blame this writer, for your grievance is with God. He made the rules. But before dismissing God's standards in sexual conduct, remember that He who made us also knows what is best for us. Hollywood has turned

sexual purity into a laughing matter, but we will do well to consider the staggering number of unwanted pregnancies, the wholesale slaughter of the unborn in the name of choice, the rampant spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the number of children raised without fathers, and the skyrocketing divorce rate. Our society is broken. Our children, born and unborn, are paying an exacting price for the deeds of their parents. The secret to lasting contentment is living smack in the middle of God's will. Today's permissiveness is outside of God's will. So in light of this, how are you measuring up to God's standard of sexual morality?

Idolatry: Idolatry is trusting in something or someone other than God. While Moses conferred with God high atop a mountain, the wandering Israelites rebelled by worshipping the image of a calf fashioned from gold. While there is not much of a market for idols carved from wood or stone in Europe and in North America, countless millions of westerners have made idols of politicians, celebrities, wealth, position, power, and even science. Equally tragic is the habit of many recovery programs that encourage followers to make "higher powers" out of people and organizations. One such group insists that we can make higher powers of ourselves. How can a power greater than ourselves be ourselves? One may as well say, "I am higher than me." This is idolatry; idolatry is an affront to God and, for that matter, an affront to common sense, logic, and reason. So how are you doing? Is your faith in Christ Jesus? Are you counting on Him to deliver you? If so, you are doing well, for He alone is mighty to save.

Sorcery: While this may conjure images of black cats and bubbling cauldrons, many people who profess Christ consult mediums and psychics for personal advice and direction. Others turn to horoscopes, Tarot cards, or Ouija boards in search of answers. God flatly condemns all forms of occult practices. There are no so-called Christian psychics or mediums. One who is a psychic or medium cannot be a Christian. For those who have dabbled in the realm of the occult, repent of this sin *immediately* and do it no more, for the practice is wholly detestable to Almighty God.

Bible teacher David Guzik wrote, “Sorcery (translated witchcraft in the NIV) is the service and worship of occult and spiritual powers apart from the true God. It also has another dimension, revealed by the word for sorcery in the original language Paul uses: *pharmakeia*, from which we get our word for ‘pharmacy.’ Morris defines sorcery as ‘the use of any kind of drugs, potions, or spells.’ In the ancient world, the taking of drugs (especially hallucinogens) was always associated with the occult, and the Bible’s comparison of drug abuse and sorcery points out that narcotics can open doors to the occult that are best left closed. William Barclay wrote, ‘this literally means the use of drugs ... it came to be very specially connected with the use of drugs for sorcery, of which the ancient world was full.’ The Holy Spirit never led anyone into sorcery or getting high on drugs!” Thankfully, we have renounced the use of hallucinogens and other dangerous drugs, but many of us may have been unaware that substance abuse was a deadly problem even in ancient times.

God will never direct us to be prideful, arrogant and unforgiving, immoral or slothful or full of fear. We step into these things because we are insensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit within us.

--Charles Stanley

Enmities: Paul is speaking of hatred, hostility, and antagonism. While idolatry and sorcery are sins against God, enmities are sins against others. We are to live peaceably with one another. Those who stir up hatred and strife make a mockery of the Second Commandment. So how are you doing? If married, do you treat your spouse patiently and respectfully? Do you place his or her interests above your own interests? What about your children? Children are a gift from God. Are you treating them as gifts or as something to be tossed aside? How are you treating your neighbors? Your co-workers? How about restaurant servers? Baristas? Cashiers? If you are prone to rudeness and ill-will toward others, you can begin changing for the better today.

Enmity exists when we hold dearly to the festering grudges we harbor against others. We must learn to forgive those who have wronged us for two reasons: Firstly, God commands us to forgive others as He has forgiven you and me and, secondly, harboring grudges robs us of our inner peace. On the matter of forgiveness, C.S. Lewis wrote, "When it comes to a question of our forgiving other people, it is partly the same and partly different. It is the same because, here also, forgiving does not mean excusing. Many people seem to think it does. They think that if you ask them to forgive someone who has cheated or bullied them you are trying to make out that there was really no cheating or no bullying. But if that were so, there would be nothing to forgive. They keep on replying, 'But I tell you the man broke a most solemn promise.' Exactly: that is precisely what you have to forgive. (This doesn't mean that you must necessarily believe his next promise. It does mean that you must make every effort to kill every taste of resentment in your own heart—every wish to humiliate or hurt him or to pay him out.) The difference between this situation and the one in which you are asking God's forgiveness is this. In our own case we accept our excuses too easily; in other people's we do not accept them easily enough."

The opposite of enmity is goodwill. God would have us living peaceably with one another. There should be no room in the Christian's heart for hatred, hostility, animosity, and antagonism. If our hearts beat in unison with the heart of Jesus, we will love everyone—even those who annoy us. What a curious people we are: we talk of world peace and many of us cannot even get along with our neighbors.

Are you employed? Consider how you treat your coworkers. Are you honest with your supervisor? Would you care to work side by side with someone just like you? If you ran a business, would you hire someone like yourself? If you attend church as the Bible instructs, do you speak poorly of your pastor and complain about the music or the thermostat setting or do you uplift and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ? Is your soul troubled by deep resentments toward others? Have you forgiven those who have harmed you? Are long-held grudges robbing you of your inner peace? Are you pleasant? Courteous? Or do you talk down to the people you encounter during the course of a day? Most of us come in contact with women and men from all walks each

day. How we treat others, be they friend or stranger, reveals much about our character. How are you doing? Are you a friend or a foe? Once again, it is never too late to change.

Outbursts of anger: Alcohol and narcotics have a particular way of bringing out hidden anger and loosening the tongue allowing it to spew forth hateful venom. Intoxicants do not, in themselves, create outbursts of anger, but they often reveal the cynicism, brutality, ugliness, malice, spitefulness, and cruelty that dwells deep within us. The great Christian writer, teacher, and philosopher C.S. Lewis wrote, "...surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is? Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth? If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am. The rats are always there in the cellar, but if you go in shouting and noisily they will have taken cover before you switch on the light." While Jesus is working day and night to clean us up on the inside, abstinence is the best way of keeping the rats at bay.

Jealousy: Jealousy, often confused with envy, is an emotion brought on by a fear that a close and cherished relationship will be lost or weakened by the interference of another. Jealousy is not necessarily an evil; there are times when jealousy is appropriate. As an example, when the Israelites turned to idolatry, God spoke of His jealousy. He did not want to share the love and devotion of His people with false gods and idols. Our God is a jealous God. He is unwilling to share us with idols of any kind. People have a right to be jealous, too. A wife, quite naturally, would feel jealous if another woman made inappropriate advances toward her husband. Contrariwise, what kind of husband would condone another man making moves on his wife? The problem with jealousy is when the basis of the fear is groundless and the feelings are excessive and inappropriate. The late comedian Rodney Dangerfield quipped, "My wife's jealousy is getting ridiculous. The other day she looked at my calendar and wanted to know who May was."

A man ought to live so that everybody knows he is a Christian... and most of all, his family ought to know.

--Dwight L. Moody

Envy: *Origin by Design* author and scientist Harold Coffin said, “Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own.” You may envy another man for his wife, his wealth, his car, his home, his career, his position, his looks, his toys, and his education, but at the end of the day, he still has the wife, the wealth, the car, the home, the career, the position, the looks, the toys, and the education and what have you to show for all that envy? A nasty scowl, a rotten disposition, and a knotted stomach. Seems hardly worth the effort, does it not?

The late Brennan Manning wrote, “Too many of us in this culture are enslaved by things. The only way for a Christian to live in an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that their very existence is an act of rebellion. There is nothing more maddening than a free person.” Living free is a way of combatting envy.

Another quick cure for envy can be found in counting your own blessings instead of coveting your neighbor's blessings, which, by the way, may not be blessings at all, but stumbling blocks. Say, how are you doing? Is envy of your neighbor's blessings causing you to take your own blessings for granted?

Drunkenness: As you are here and actively participating in this study, I will assume you are, at the moment, making headway in the sobriety department. Keep up the good work.

Carousing: Carousing is riotous behavior caused by drunkenness. If you are sober, you are not drunk and if you are not drunk, you are not carousing. Once again, keep up the good work.

Up till now, we have been categorizing the “deeds of the flesh.” Immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and the like are the results of our inherent sin nature. When we behave sinfully, we are acting upon what comes most naturally to us. A scorpion stings because it is a scorpion. Stinging is what scorpions do best. The unrepentant man or woman sins because sinning is what unrepentant people do. But when we walk in the Spirit, wonderful, life-altering changes begin taking place in our lives.

For discussion:

- Discuss why a moral inventory must be “searching and fearless.”
- Discuss the “deeds of the flesh” and why sin comes naturally to us.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Apostle Paul refers to the “fruit of the Spirit.” Fruit is good. Fruit is sweet. Fruit is healthful. But consider the source of fruit. Fruit is never picked from weeds. Fruit comes from fruit trees. Weeds cannot produce fruit. Weeds produce problems for gardeners and farmers by choking out desirable plants. The unrepentant man or woman can behave something like a weed, but God’s children who walk in His Spirit are like trees that produce luscious fruit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Love: Love is not a sappy emotion. To borrow from a hit song of the 1970s, love is more than a feeling. Love is action. Love is a verb. God tells us to love our enemies. God did not command us to manufacture counterfeit emotions that would do neither them nor us any useful good. Of what benefit would that be to anyone? On the matter of loving our enemies, C.S. Lewis wrote, “Even while we kill and punish we must try to feel about the enemy as we feel about ourselves—to wish that he were not bad, to hope that he may, in

this world or another, be cured: in fact, to wish his good. That is what is meant in the Bible by loving him: wishing his good, not feeling fond of him nor saying he is nice when he is not.”

As to love, we will do well if we ignore the third rate novelists who confuse sensuality, lust, or attraction for love. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (I Corinthians 13: 4-7 ESV).”

Mother Teresa said, “I try to give to the poor people for love what the rich could get for money. No, I wouldn't touch a leper for a thousand pounds; yet I willingly cure him for the love of God.” Genuine love will motivate us to help others—even those whom we may find unpleasant and disagreeable. Anyone can love a pleasing, agreeable person; those who walk in the Spirit of God can love the unlovable (Romans 5:5). So how are you doing? Is your love patient and kind? Has your love closed the door to envy and boasting? Or is your love tainted with arrogance and rude behavior? Is your love concerned for the interests of others? Or is your love directed toward self? Is your love diluted by resentment? Does your love rejoice in matters of truth? Is your love enduring? Emotions cool. Feelings change. Enduring love is real. Is your love for God and others lasting and genuine?

Joy: Joy is the effervescence of spirit that allows gladness in our hearts, not because everything at the moment happens to be pleasing and agreeable, but because we are resting in the assurance that Christ Jesus our Savior will never leave us nor forsake us no matter what may come.

Martin Luther wrote, “Joy means sweet thoughts of Christ, melodious hymns and psalms, praises and thanksgiving, with which Christians instruct, inspire, and refresh themselves. God does not like doubt and dejection. He hates dreary doctrine, gloomy and melancholy

thought. God likes cheerful hearts. He did not send His Son to fill us with sadness, but to gladden our hearts. For this reason the prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself urge, yes, command us to rejoice and be glad.”

God never intended us to trudge through life burdened with doubt and apprehension. On the contrary, our hearts should be lightened by the knowledge that He will never turn His back on us. If you are not experiencing joy, let me encourage you to consider what God has done for you and what God will do for you.

Peace: In an article by John MacArthur called, *The Gift of Peace*, he writes, “The Hebrew Bible uses a familiar but significant word, shalom. In its purest sense, shalom means ‘peace.’ The connotation is positive. That is, when someone says, ‘Shalom,’ or, ‘Peace unto you,’ it doesn’t mean, ‘I hope you don’t get into any trouble,’ it means, ‘I hope you have all the highest good coming your way.’ Most people in our world don’t understand peace as a positive concept. All they know is the negative aspect of peace, which is merely the absence of trouble. The definition of peace in many languages of the world illustrates that. For example, the Quechua Indians in Ecuador and Bolivia use a word for peace that literally translates, ‘to sit down in one’s heart.’ For them peace is the opposite of running around in the midst of constant anxieties. The Chol Indians of Mexico define peace as ‘a quiet heart.’ Those may be beautiful ways to put it, but they still seem to leave us with only the negative idea that peace is the absence of trouble...”

“The biblical concept of peace does not focus on the absence of trouble. Biblical peace is unrelated to circumstances; it is a goodness of life that is not touched by what happens on the outside. You may be in the midst of great trials and still have biblical peace. Paul said he could be content in any circumstance; and he demonstrated that he had peace even in the jail at Philippi, where he sang and remained confident that God was being gracious to him. Then when the opportunity arose, he communicated God’s goodness to the Philippian jailer, and brought him and his family to salvation...”

If we think of peace as the absence of trouble, we shall not know peace, for life seems to be a treadmill of trials, troubles, and tribulations. Even so, as believers, we have peace with God. The Apostle Paul referred to the enemies of God as “children of wrath.” Once, you and I were children of wrath. Now we are children of God. As we grow in the faith, we learn to remain calm even in the midst of life’s struggles. The late Dr. Adrian Rogers was fond of saying, “Jesus didn’t come to get you out of trouble. He came to get into trouble with you.”

Standing close to Christ Jesus is the safest and, indeed, the most peaceful place on earth. Why is this? The answer is simple. No power in hell has ever produced a Goliath who is bigger than our God. Problems will come, and this we know with certainty, but we serve a God who has never known the agony of defeat. In the eighth chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul rhetorically asked, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Those who fear God need never fear anything or anyone else.

It is God’s will that we live in peace with Him, with ourselves, and with one another. As a Christ follower, you are at peace with God, but have you made peace with yourself? Have you learned to forgive yourself? Have you made peace with others? Have you let go of old resentments? A man filled with grudges is like a bottle filled with poison. No one steeped in resentment will achieve lasting peace. You and I will do well if we empty the bottle and drain the contaminants that inflame our souls. Examine yourself. If you are not at peace with self and others, consider every possible cause and source of the inner turbulence.

Patience: James S. Spiegel of Taylor University writes, “When defined as ‘waiting without complaint,’ patience might seem to be a morally insignificant trait. What’s so virtuous about not complaining? In itself, not complaining carries no particular virtue. Suppose a person awaits the arrival of a friend from out of town, and she spends the time happily reading or watching television. We wouldn’t say that, simply because she’s not complaining, she exhibits patience in this case. Something else must be required to make one’s lack of complaint virtuous. That something is discomfort. It’s because a

circumstance is uncomfortable for someone that we find her refusal to complain remarkable and thus regard her as patient.”

With Dr. Spiegel’s definition of patience in mind, let us consider patience to be “waiting *in discomfort* without complaint.” Perhaps someone among us has been unemployed for an extended period of time; past due bills are beginning to accumulate and securing a second interview with a perspective employer seems to be an impossible task. This certainly qualifies as an uncomfortable situation. As no amount of complaining will produce a follow-up phone call from an employer, more prayer, more searching, more knocking on doors and more patience is the only viable course of action.

In uncomfortable circumstances, we are to bring our petitions to God; however, we must remember that God will not be hurried. He is never late in answering a prayer, but He is likewise never early. Many of the biblical saints endured extreme hardships for agonizingly long periods of time. Apparently, times of “waiting in discomfort without complaint” do us far more good than harm. When needs arise, Jesus instructs us to “ask, seek, and knock.” He did not suggest that we “ask, seek, knock, and bellyache.” Once again, only honest self-examination will reveal the measure of patience in our lives.

Kindness: Many fancy themselves as being kind-hearted simply on the basis of not interfering in the personal matters of others. This is a rather anemic form of kindness that quickly dissipates once the interest or need of another interferes with their own self-interests. According to Scripture, kindness is demonstrated by those who help the poor (Proverbs 19:17), forgive others (Ephesians 4:32), do good without expecting repayment (Luke 6:35), encourage their neighbors (Romans 15:2), care for the afflicted (I Timothy 5:10), live harmoniously with one another (Romans 15:5), and carry one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). Biblical kindness has nothing to do with simply leaving others alone; kindness, like love, is an *action* word—a verb that implies an act. Kindness is a deed. The kind-hearted person is one who demonstrates good for the benefit of others. How are you measuring up? Are you demonstrating good to others?

Goodness: Goodness implies an uprightness of character. An individual may enjoy a good reputation, but character is how an individual behaves when no one but God is watching. Goodness is more than an absence of badness. Like love and kindness, goodness implies action. Goodness is *active* good. Goodness is manifested in the righteous person's actions and behavior. One who neither steals nor lies is not necessarily good, but the one who gives to the poor, helps a neighbor, and makes another smile *and does all this with pure motives and devotion to God* may be rightfully called good.

We must never underestimate the short and long term outcomes resulting from simple acts of good, or for that matter, seemingly insignificant acts of evil. C.S. Lewis wrote, "Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible."

A measure of good may come from a deed that was rendered by a not so good person with less than honorable motives; as an example, a well-to-do individual may donate to a charity because the donation affords a favorable tax write-off. The recipient of the donation is blessed; however, the only blessing that will be gained by the giver is a paltry tax break. We could not say the donor was good, for the donation was born of sullied motives. If we are to do good, we need to do good in the name of the Lord. Mother Teresa said, "Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So, spread your love everywhere you go."

Faithfulness: In Luke 16:10, Jesus says we must be faithful in small matters if we hope to achieve greater accomplishments. And speaking of small matters, we may very well

find great opportunities hiding among the mundane—but we will never know unless we take on the smaller duties.

Examples of faithfulness are kept promises, punctuality, reliability, diligence, and thoroughness. Education, skills, charisma, and talent mean little if the individual is selfish, rude, inconsiderate, or undependable.

Our Savior is the model of faithfulness. Rick Warren explained, “Jesus specialized in menial tasks that everyone else tried to avoid: washing feet, helping children, fixing breakfast, and serving lepers. Nothing was beneath him, because he came to serve. It wasn’t in spite of his greatness that he did these things but because of it, and he expects us to follow his example (John 13:15).”

Gentleness: We often mistake gentleness for weakness when, in fact, our Lord Jesus demonstrated that true gentleness is strength under control. In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote, “True followers of the Gospel must not be sharp and bitter, but gentle, mild, courteous, and soft-spoken, which should encourage others to seek their company. Gentleness can overlook other people’s faults and cover them up. Gentleness is always glad to give in to others. Gentleness can get along with forward and difficult persons, according to the old pagan saying: ‘You must know the manners of your friends, but you must not hate them.’ Such a gentle person was our Savior Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the Gospels. Of Peter it is recorded that he wept whenever he remembered the sweet gentleness of Christ in His daily contact with people. Gentleness is an excellent virtue and very useful in every walk of life.”

Self-control: In Step One, we admitted we were powerless over alcohol and other drugs. This powerlessness led to unmanaged lives. Now that we are living sober lives under the power of God’s Holy Spirit, we are to exercise self-control in all that we do. Our anger must never run rampant. As to sexual behavior, we are not to violate the standards set forth in Scripture. We must not smear the reputations of others with malicious gossip. Quoting again from Martin Luther, “Christians are to lead sober and chaste lives. They

should not be adulterers, fornicators, or sensualists. They should not be quarrelers or drunkards. In the first and second chapters of the Epistle to Titus, the Apostle admonishes bishops, young women, and married folks to be chaste and pure.”

We lost all self-control in our addiction. We can regain the self-control that was forfeited to alcohol and other drugs by turning our lives and our will over to the care of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. Our lives are no longer like a speeding automobile lacking brakes and a steering wheel, for God’s Holy Spirit who supernaturally indwells all believers leads us in the perfect pathway of truth. If you are lacking in self-control, it may be that you are not listening to God’s Holy Spirit. Worse yet, you may be hearing His word but ignoring His admonitions. In this searching and fearless moral inventory, how is your self-control?

For discussion:

- Contrast the “deeds of the flesh” with the fruit of the Spirit.
- Discuss the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit in all born-again believers.

If you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off?' The point is that each person's pride is in competition with every one else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree. Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature— while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone. That is why I say that Pride is essentially competitive in a way the other vices are not. . .Greed may drive men into competition if there is not enough to go round; but the proud man, even when he has got more than he can possibly want, will try to get still more just to assert his power. Nearly all those evils in the world which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of Pride.

--C.S. Lewis

Summary

Making a searching and fearless moral inventory is not a work for cowards. If we are to render a thorough and honest self-examination, we must be prepared to face many ugly truths about ourselves. Such revelations can be upsetting and disturbing; seeing ourselves for who we really are may stir feelings of shame and remorse. Drinking from the cup of shame may help us see ourselves as God and others see us, but we should never allow shame to drive us to the depths of despair; contrariwise, shame should send us running to the Savior. When we confess our sins and failures to Him, we are, in a very real sense, agreeing with Him. He knows all about our sins and our honest, straightforward confessions prove that we are aware of our sins, too.

By the by, we do not sanitize our sins by making excuses for our ill-behavior. “Yes, God, I must confess that I screamed and yelled at my little daughter, and I know my behavior was wrong, but I was tired and hungry, and I had a headache and, well, I wasn’t really at my best.” God forgives sins, not excuses, so do not waste God’s time and your breath with such foolish utterances.

This session should end on a positive note, so here it is: All Christians are, in the truest sense, works in progress (Philippians 1:6). Today, we may be lacking, but we have God’s unbreakable promise that the day will come when we will be like Christ Jesus. In the study of theology, this is called *sanctification*. God loves us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us as we are. When the dust settles, you and I are going to be God’s masterpieces. And this is no empty promise.

For discussion:

- Of what benefit is a “searching and fearless moral inventory” in our quest for sobriety and godly living?
- Discuss the statement, “God loves me just as I am, but He loves me too much to leave me where I am.”
- Discuss the folly of making excuses for our instances of bad behavior. Why is “taking ownership” of our shortcomings a better course of action?

Discovery Session 15

Points of Inquiry

- Introducing Step Five
- Recapping our searching and fearless moral inventory
- Confession to self
- Confession to God
- Confession to others

Introducing Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs

We have spent no small amount of time in the making of a searching and fearless moral inventory. Great thinkers have challenged us to take an introspective look at ourselves—to look deep within, but knowing who we are is no easy matter. Perhaps this challenge motivated King David to write, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24 KJV).”

As previously discussed, we humans are not easily understood. We are a curious lot who seldom possess a clear and reliable understanding of ourselves. On the plus side, we are incredible, multi-dimensional, complex beings created in the image of God Almighty who represent the crowning achievement of His handiwork. The prophet Jeremiah declared that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” We are magnificent creations, yet we are flawed and, admittedly, we are skilled at fooling ourselves and others. Genuine honesty is a trait seldom found in most individuals. We go to great lengths in keeping our character defects from the light of scrutiny. We hide the truth about ourselves from

ourselves just as we attempt hiding the truth about ourselves from others. And we pull off this deception rather instinctively.

Until recently, we may have thought we understood ourselves, but it was not until we made a searching and fearless moral inventory that we came to see ourselves with a measure of clarity and accuracy. We likely discovered a number of highly disturbing faults as we pursued the daunting task of self-examination. We may have been stricken with grief by the unsettling truths that came to light in the fearless and searching moral inventory. This can be a painful process that conjures feelings of shame, but the benefits of self-examination outweigh the negative feelings. Shame is the byproduct of honest self-examination, but never forget the cup of shame is a drink—not a bath. If we immerse ourselves in shame, we risk slipping into despair. Despair may lead to relapse. As God is in the business of mending broken lives, despair has no place in the heart and mind of a believer. Let there be hope.

You ought to live your life with such freedom and joy that uptight Christians will doubt your salvation.

--Steve Brown

So what is next? We admit to God, to others, and to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs.

Although this step implies we begin our admissions of wrong-doings to God, perhaps we will do well by making the preliminary admission of guilt to ourselves. In doing so, we take ownership, so to speak, of our defects and offences. This confession to self can be very liberating, for when we admit to our wrong-doings, we find ourselves *in agreement with God*. In the past, many of us placed the blame for our evil actions on anything or anyone but ourselves. We repressed the guilt within by pointing the accusing finger in every direction except, of course, in the direction where it rightly belonged. By admitting

to the wrong-doings that have marred our lives, we effectively end the silly game of blaming others by taking full responsibility for the transgressions we have committed. In our addiction, we were prisoners fettered in the chains of deception and denial, but as the Lord Jesus promised, the truth will set us free. A self-admission of our guilt is an exercise in honesty.

A warning is in order: an admission of guilt softened by an excuse spoils the entire process. “Yes, I was a bad mom who spent the kids’ school clothes money on cocaine, but my husband was a cruel and unreasonable man. Drugs helped me to cope with my ogre of a husband.” This is not an admission of guilt. This is an excuse. Rather than pleading guilty to her faults as a mother, she is attempting to shift the blame from herself to her husband. She will never know total restoration until she learns to take responsibility for her own actions. Corrie Ten Boom, the brave Dutch hero who helped smuggle eight hundred Jews from Nazi-occupied Holland during World War II, reminded us that Jesus died for our sins—not our excuses. Through the Lord Jesus, forgiveness is offered, but forgiveness must also be received; if we deny our sins, of what possible use will we find in His forgiveness? Let us not be so foolish as to vainly attempt justifying our past actions with excuses.

People don’t like the idea of consequences. They want to be able to live their life freely and do what they want to do without any consequences. And we know that’s just not the way life is.
--Charles Stanley

For Discussion:

- How did the making of a searching and fearless moral inventory help us better understand who we are and what we had become?
- When we admit to our wrongs, we effectively take responsibility for our past actions. How is this liberating? How does this self-admission of fault place us in agreement with God?

- Those who attempt to justify their past actions with excuses do so at the peril of their recovery. How is an excuse, in reality, a vain and worthless attempt at shifting blame away from self?

**O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
For there is not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether.
You have hedged me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high, I cannot attain it (Psalm 139: 1-6 NKJV).**

God knows us better than we know ourselves. Nothing is concealed from Him. To Him, our lives are as open books. What is hidden from His searching eyes? The answer, of course, is nothing. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows our thoughts. He understands our ways. No one knows us more intimately than the One who made us. As the psalmist wrote, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.”

And it is for this reason that we must confess our sinful wrong-doings to Him. True, He already knows every character defect, every personal flaw, and every evil act we have committed, but when we come to Him in open and honest confession, we are *standing in agreement* with Him. And though He knows our every detestable act, such knowledge does not cause Him to hate us; on the contrary, we can go to Him with our confessions of guilt and He will be as a sanctuary—a safe place for healing, assurance, and restoration: “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us (Psalms 62: 8 KJV).”

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4: 16 NKJV).

Standing in agreement with God, we may boldly approach the throne of grace. Thankfully, God is not going to give us what we deserve—He will give us something far better and that something better is forgiveness for our sins and mercy and help in our times of trial. We come to God the Father with our confession of guilt. God the Son, through His death, burial, and resurrection, takes away our sin. God the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers, gives comfort, help, and guidance. God's written word tells us how we are to live. Indeed, we have not been abandoned as dirty-faced beggars, for God has given us Himself and His written word so that we can overcome the bonds of sin and addiction while living full, abundant, meaningful lives.

Please note that the writer of Hebrews says we are to approach Him *boldly*. We need not grovel like forgotten waifs; we need not come to Him in furtive timidity. We are welcome in His throne room of grace. We come as His invited guests. He loves us. He wants the best for us. God is still in the business of mending broken lives. He alone can make us whole.

When we confess our sinful behavior to Him, we need not fear that He will jeer and condemn us. Such is the devil's work. Sadly, there are those among us who were brought up by overly strict, exacting, and even abusive parents. Rather than hearing the comforting words of love and encouragement that all children need, their childhoods were spoiled by the harsh condemnation of uncaring parents. This is sad, for such victims of childhood abuse frequently transfer their long-held anxieties to their understanding of God. If you were raised by abusive parents, please understand that your Heavenly Father desires only the best for you. You are the apple of His eye. You make Him smile. And there is nothing—absolutely nothing in your past that will keep Him from loving you. As a matter of fact, God seems to specialize in making towering saints out of hardcore sinners. Have you made a mess of life? Have your actions and decisions brought hurt and suffering to others? The good news is that God delights in doing the seemingly

impossible. What can He do for you? You will never know until you give Him the chance to really flex His muscles. Some of the kingdom's foremost saints were premier sinners. Again, what can He do for you?

For Discussion:

- When we confess our wrong-doings to God, we are simply telling Him what He already knows. Discuss this truth.
- Why do people who liken God to a demanding, harsh, exacting and abusive parent err in their understanding of Him?
- The writer of Hebrews said we will find help in God's throne room. What kind of help can we expect to find?
- The writer of Hebrews also said we are to approach His throne with boldness. What are the implications of this? What does this say about God's compassion?

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief (I Timothy 1: 15 KJV).

In his first letter to a young pastor named Timothy, the Apostle Paul made a startling confession; he ranked himself as the chief of sinners. Timothy well understood the meaning behind this confession, for prior to Paul's conversion, he had been a murderous persecutor of Christians. Much like today's radical terrorists, Paul had the bloodstains of innocent Christian martyrs on his hands. So what did Paul's confession accomplish?

Firstly, by admitting his guilt, Paul humbled himself. As pride is a detestable stench in the nostrils of our Lord, Paul's humble admission of guilt was as a breath of fresh air. The Apostle Paul possessed outstanding theological credentials, yet he proved his humility by owning up to his shameful past. Secondly, Paul's admission of guilt brought glory to God, for Paul's conversion and subsequent calling to the ministry proved beyond doubt that God offers abundant mercy to all sinners—even to the *chief of sinners*. Thirdly, it may not be a stretch to say Paul's confession made him accountable to the younger Timothy. True, Paul was the teacher and Timothy the student; even so, Paul understood that even

Apostles were to be held accountable for their actions; this was aptly demonstrated when Paul rebuked Peter publicly for momentarily reverting back to religious legalism (Galatians 2:11).

Alcoholics Anonymous advocates persons in recovery making themselves accountable to a sponsor. Although AA is not a Christian organization, I strongly recommend that each person seek out a mature Christian believer who will serve as a sponsor or, if you prefer, an accountability partner.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2 NKJV).

As a believer in Christ Jesus, you have a right to expect others to rally around you in this time of need. Many churches offer small group Bible fellowships or host Celebrate Recovery meetings; these are excellent ways of connecting with other Christ followers. The writer of Hebrews said we should make a practice of assembling with other Christian believers. We find strength in numbers; besides, we have a promise that tells us that wherever even two or three believers are gathered, Jesus will be there, too.

For Discussion:

- The Apostle Paul claimed the title "chief of sinners." We will not insult Paul by saying this was mere "false humility." Paul was the chief of sinners. If God can use the chief of sinners in mighty and wonderful ways, is anyone beyond His reach? Discuss.
- Why should we hold ourselves accountable to others?
- What does the Bible say about sharing each other's burdens? Why are we to care for one another?
- What are the benefits of assembling with other Christ followers?

“Hear my Confession!”

A brief study in Paul’s letter to Philemon

Slaves accounted for roughly half the population of ancient Rome. Some slaves enjoyed position and status in managing their masters' estates while others, not nearly so fortunate, performed menial work at the hands of cruel masters. Slaves enjoyed no rights under Roman law; as an example, a hapless slave in charge of tending an aviary was hanged when his master's favorite pet pigeon was accidentally injured. Some educated slaves managed money and property, but the majority of slaves was unskilled and served in humbler capacities. And yet there was another class of slave in ancient Rome--the runaway slave. The runaway could melt into the faceless masses of Rome with little risk of detection and capture. One such runaway, Onesimus of Colossae, had escaped his master's service by fleeing to Rome.

The name Onesimus means *profitable*. It is likely Onesimus had been in charge of his master's fortune and had proven himself to be financially profitable through his prudent business management skills. Perhaps Onesimus' understanding of business had helped his master accrue a sizable sum of money. Why, then, had Onesimus suddenly left his master's service? Had his master treated him cruelly? Or had Onesimus, as Paul's letter hints, yielded to the temptation of embezzling his master's fortune? For reasons not fully detailed in Scripture, Onesimus fled from his master's home in Colossae to begin a new life as a free man in Rome.

Although chained and fettered to Roman soldiers, the Apostle Paul, a prisoner awaiting an appeal in front of Caesar Nero, continued sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ despite his bonds. With soldiers chained to either side of him, Paul preached along the busy Roman streets to anyone who would listen. Among the converts credited to Paul's preaching was the runaway slave named Onesimus.

Admittedly, we should not put a lot of stock in the so-called wisdom of Hollywood, but entertainer Mark Wahlberg made an interesting comment that ties to our study: “I did a

lot of things that I regretted and I certainly paid for my mistakes. You have to go and ask for forgiveness and it wasn't until I really started doing good and doing right, by other people as well as myself, that I really started to feel that guilt go away. So I don't have a problem going to sleep at night." My guess is that Onesimus, oppressed by the guilt that followed his crime, was having trouble sleeping at night. The Apostle Paul was a good listener; he heard the confession of this runaway slave.



When the Apostle Paul learned that Onesimus was from Colossae, he discovered Onesimus' former master was another of his Christian converts named Philemon. Prior to his arrival in Rome, Paul had established a church in Colossae; Philemon was a friend of Paul and a supporter of the apostle's ministry. But what should be done? Should Onesimus return to Colossae as an escaped prisoner and face a possible death sentence? Or would the cause of Christ be better served if Onesimus remained in Rome? And what about restitution to Philemon? Who would cover Philemon's financial losses? Paul's letter to Philemon is among the most touching of the New Testament writings and the parallel between Onesimus and the legions of lost sinners who, for two thousand years, have been saved by God's grace is more than coincidental.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker...and to the church in your house (Philemon 1, 2 NASB):

Despite his authority as a "called out" apostle and pillar of the early church, Paul esteemed Philemon as a brother in the faith. Such a greeting demonstrated Paul's sincere humility as well as his understanding that we are all brothers and sisters under the headship of Christ Jesus. Believers should never lord rank or position over fellow believers; we are to be a family void of social class or status.

It is worth noting that the church in Colossae met in Philemon's home. This would indicate that Philemon was a man of wealth who was able to afford a home that could accommodate the entire local congregation. Today, far too many Christians own fine homes that are never used for anything more than their own comfort and gratification. Considering the many needs of the saints of humbler means, perhaps such selfishness embarrasses our Lord Jesus. Philemon used his wealth to bless other believers.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Philemon 3 NASB).

Peace always follows grace--not before. Without God's grace, life is a turbulent, risky business. Considering the constant persecution Paul faced, the peace he enjoyed was not based upon external circumstances, but was founded on his relationship with God the Father through God the Son and empowered by God the Holy Spirit. There is no peace with God without a saving faith in Christ Jesus as Savior.

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints (Philemon 4, 5 NASB);

Word of the genuine love and the solid faith of the Colossians had reached all the way to Rome. And these two attributes are the badge of mature believers--gossip, back-biting, stinginess, doubt, unbelief, and petty behavior have no place in the church.

and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake! For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother (Philemon 6, 7 NASB).

Does the sincerity of our love give joy to Christ Jesus? Or have we forgotten our first love? And what about service? Have the saints been refreshed through our efforts? Or are we merely keeping the pews warm?

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus (Philemon 8-10 NASB),

Here is a lesson in diplomacy: Paul could have pulled rank, so to speak, as an apostle of Christ, but for the sake of love, he chose to appeal to Philemon's good conscience. And the appeal was for the benefit of Paul's spiritual son, the runaway slave named Onesimus.

who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me (Philemon 11 NASB),

Paul makes a play on words. Onesimus means profitable, but when Onesimus fled Philemon's service, he could no longer be called profitable, but as a Christian, Onesimus was once again profitable--to both Paul and to Philemon.

We are saved by grace and not by our own works, but service should be a part of every Christian's life. Our works are an outward manifestation of our inner devotion to Jesus. Faith without works is a dead faith, but genuine devotion to our Master makes us *profitable* servants.

And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel (Philemon 12, 13 NASB);

When Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, he sent his very heart, figuratively speaking, for he had come to love the runaway slave from Colossae much as a father loves his son. But Onesimus enjoyed more than Paul's affections; Onesimus had gained Paul's trust, for he had proven himself as a highly useful assistant. Bound to Roman soldiers, Paul's movements were restricted; he did not enjoy a free reign in Rome and Onesimus may have been his feet and legs in that vast ancient metropolis. Again, the Apostle Paul might have pulled rank on Philemon by demanding a release of all charges against Onesimus—and as an apostle, Paul would have had every right to do so, but Paul's humility outweighed his practical needs. He chose, rather, to appeal to Philemon's better nature and so Onesimus went back to Colossae.

but without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will (Philemon 14 NASB).

Only a hardened cynic with ice water flowing through his veins could have refused Paul's gentle plea. Paul did not want Philemon's generosity to come from a sense of obligation, for goodwill and mercy should come from the heart.

For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever, no longer a slave, but more than a slave, a

beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord (Philemon 15, 16 NASB),

Upon Onesimus' return to Colossae, how was Philemon to greet his former slave? As a runaway? As one who had embezzled his fortune? Certainly not! Paul made it clear that Onesimus was to be received *as a beloved brother*. Social class distinction has no place in the Christian faith—regardless of circumstance, we are to treat our fellow believers as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me (Philemon 17 NASB).

Most likely, Philemon had given Paul an open invitation to stay as an honored guest in his home whenever passing through Colossae, but Paul now instructs Philemon to receive the runaway slave just as he would have received the apostle himself. Onesimus would no longer sleep in the slave quarters—he would be passing his nights in the guest bedroom.

If Jesus came knocking at our door, we would offer Him the best accommodations in the house. But shouldn't we receive His servants, our brothers and sisters in the Lord, just as we would receive Him?

But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account (Philemon 18 NASB);

As adopted sons and daughters saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, you and I are robed in our Savior's perfect righteousness. Indeed, who could stand before a pure and holy God clothed in filthy garments--rags soiled by our horrid sins? But this is exactly how the unsaved will face God. Thankfully for us, the Son tells the Father, "Charge their sins, the sins of those who have trusted in Me, to my account!" His death on the cross was a substitutionary death. Jesus, the blameless sacrificial Lamb of God, bore the unbearable

wrath we deserve. He died so that we might live. Jesus paid our sin debt and His perfect righteousness has been credited to our account.

I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well.) Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ (Philemon 19, 20 NASB).

Again, Paul refused to pull rank, but he knew how to make a strong appeal on behalf of Onesimus. And as Paul had brought the saving gospel of Christ to Colossae, he fully expected Philemon to show his gratitude by treating Onesimus graciously. We, likewise, will do well by treating those who bring us sound Bible teachings respectfully and with every courtesy. Pastors, Bible teachers, and Christian workers need encouragement, support, and an occasional thank-you.

Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say (Philemon 21 NASB).

What a compliment! Paul knew his disciple well enough to understand that Philemon's actions would extend beyond the call of duty. But what about us? Is our generosity miserly and begrudging, or do we serve the Lord with generosity and gladness? As to Philemon, we may assume that his response to Paul's written appeal far exceeded the apostle's grandest expectations. Can the same be said of us?

The wall between man and God is sin. Sin separates us from our Creator and it is we who have erected that wall. Without God, we are lost and without hope, yet even our best efforts are not good enough to bring reconciliation between us and Him. Scripture teaches the wages of sin is death, but God, who is rich in mercy, sent His own perfect Son as our sacrifice. Jesus died on a cruel Roman cross for our sins. He who was without sin died for an entire race of lost sinners. And because Jesus arose and walked out of that grave, we, too, shall live together forever with Him.

Just as Paul told Philemon to charge Onesimus' wrong-doings to his account, Jesus tells the Father to charge our sins to His account. Jesus knows that we are helpless in saving ourselves, so He offers to pay our sin debt for us. Salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be earned, but it is free to all who accept Jesus as their Savior. And those who are saved by God's grace are adopted as sons and daughters into His Kingdom. That makes all believers princes and princesses.

When we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be our Savior, we become new creations in Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell within us. The Holy Spirit, our divine counselor, enables us to live victoriously in Christ Jesus. And eternal life is free for the asking because Christ Jesus says, "Charge their sins to my account!"

For discussion:

- In what way was Onesimus profitable to the Apostle Paul?
- Describe Paul's feelings toward Onesimus.
- Paul promised to repay Philemon for whatever loss he had incurred from Onesimus' wrong-doings. How does Jesus "stand good" with the Father for our sin debt?
- In the end, how did Onesimus benefit by confessing his guilt to the A

Discovery Session 16

Points of Inquiry

- Introducing Step Six
- The flawed nature of mankind
- Unholy trinity: the world, the flesh, and the devil
- Grieving the Holy Spirit
- Exulting in tribulations

Introducing Step Six:

We became willing to ask God to
help us remove our defects of character

As we made our searching and fearless moral inventory, we discovered some rather unsettling truths about ourselves. We are flawed. We are broken. We are defective. We are damaged goods. We are weak. We are blemished. And we are incredibly foolish. We make a great hoorah of our petty altruisms while excusing our usual selfish behavior with meaningless platitudes such as, “After all, I’m only human,” or, “I never claimed to be perfect.” Though we have a capacity for doing good, we have, perhaps, an even greater capacity for doing evil.

Perhaps you have observed that we must teach children to share, but no one has to demonstrate selfish behavior to a young boy or girl. Similarly, we must teach children to be forthright and truthful, but the wee ones seem to figure out how to lie and deceive on their own. We do not improve with age. Indeed, the inherent sin nature in each of us can, in a moment’s notice, tower in rebellion against God. Do not be deceived: within us is the ability to act in a thousand loathsome ways.

And yet, God loves us. He truly loves us. He does not love us because we are flawed; rather, He loves us in spite of our flaws.

The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee told of an incident relating to our study that occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930's. As he slowly passed a stalled motorcar parked alongside a narrow road, he noted a little girl sitting in the backseat clutching a rather tattered doll and offering it her dearest affections. He described the doll as having a porcelain face that had been cracked and badly damaged. Despite the doll's ragged appearance, the little girl treated the misshapen plaything as if it was her most highly prized possession. You and I are much like that tattered doll. We are cracked and broken and ugly from the inside out. If we fancy ourselves better, we only deceive ourselves. And yet, the Lord Jesus, like that sweet little girl caressing her wretched doll, loves us beyond measure. He loves us—not because we are good, but because He is good and we are His.

Jesus loves us just as we are, but He will never be content in leaving us where we are. In other words, He is going to renovate us. We are “fixer-uppers,” so to speak.

For discussion:

- Consider the adage “God loves us just as we are, but He will not be content to leave us just as we are.”
- Why are empty excuses such as “I was born this way” or “Nobody’s perfect” harmful to our growth and character development?

On the corner of First and Chestnut Streets in downtown Louisville stands the Old Medical School Building. Constructed in 1893, this charming building was an architectural jewel in its day. Over the years, however, an increased number of medical students eventually exceeded the building's capacity. Like many other dated structures, the old medical school building outlived its usefulness and was eventually abandoned for a newer, more modern building. Age and neglect soon caused the old medical school building to crumble into a state of disrepair. In 1977, the building was purchased by the Jefferson County Medical Society Foundation (now known as the Greater Louisville Medical Society

Foundation) and a bold renovation project was set into motion. Today, the Old Medical School Building is once again an architectural marvel that ranks among the most beautifully restored buildings in America.

Just as highly skilled contractors have the know-how to restore old buildings, our Lord Jesus is the undisputed master of restoring broken lives.

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (II Corinthians 5: 17).

Jesus does more than slap a fresh coat of paint on our lives—He makes us brand new. We become new creations. This implies more than mere cosmetics, for He makes us new from the inside out. This does not suggest that all of our detestable traits and character flaws will be instantly swept away, but the process of perfection begins the very moment we become followers of Christ Jesus. In theology, this is called sanctification. Sanctification is the miraculous process that transforms us into the image of Jesus. Sanctification is a must if we are to be of any use to God. None of us will achieve the lofty goal of sinless perfection on this side of eternity, for as followers of Jesus Christ, you and I are “works in process,” but according to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the saints in Philippi, the day will come when the transformation is complete and it can be truly said that we are finished projects.

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1: 6 NASB).

Jesus spoke of the necessity of a second birth if we are to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this rebirth that makes it possible for us to become new creations in Christ Jesus. The matter of being made new is not of our own doing; it is God who transforms us into the image of His Son. Sanctification is God’s business and, according to the Apostle Paul, when God begins a good work in the life of a believer, He sees that work through to completion. Again, you and I are “works in process,” but the day will come when the process of total transformation will be realized.

For discussion:

- Discuss sanctification and how followers of Jesus Christ are “works in progress.”

Step Six says we must be *willing* to allow God to begin work in removing the character defects that came to light in our searching and fearless moral inventory. Often, we desire to cling to some souvenir—a pet sin, perhaps, from our past. “Lord, free me from my desire to drink, but please do not interfere in my sexual behavior. What I do in the bedroom is my business and my sexual conduct is of no concern to You or anyone else.” Such an attitude will never do, for God’s interest in us goes beyond our drinking habits; He wants to be the Lord who rules over every facet of our lives. Our spending patterns, our sexual conduct, our choices in entertainment, our sphere of friends—indeed, all that we think and say and do should reflect the Savior’s ever-increasing influence in our lives. Those who seek to retain even the smallest of sins will frustrate the sanctifying work of God. We must demonstrate a *willingness* to give God free reign in our lives. This brand of total submission takes a measure of courage and more than a mustard seed of desire, but what God takes, He gives back in abundance.

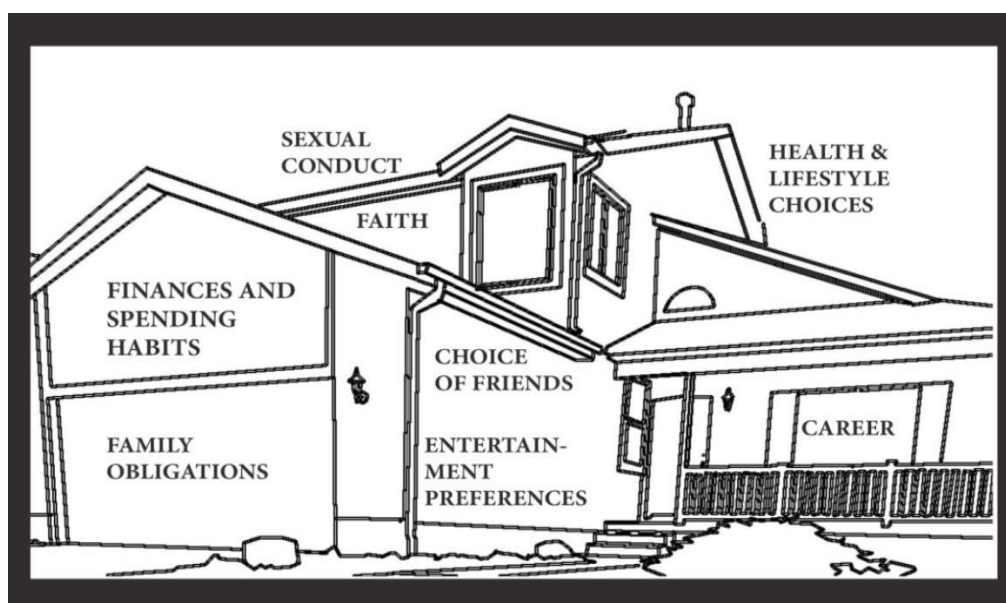
Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2 NKJV).

Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked the earth in a mortal body not unlike our own. Today, He is in a glorified state, that is, He occupies a supernatural body that is impervious to illness, disease, accident, injury, and death. When we reach sinless perfection, we, too, shall live in glorified bodies. What does this mean? The sanctification process is total—we shall be perfect creatures in body and in spirit. If all this sounds a bit vague and mysterious, do not worry, for as the Apostle John said, “...we shall be like Him...” At present, we are “works in process,” but the day will come when the transformation will be complete and “we shall be like Him.”

Let us return to the here and now. At the moment of our conversion, God begins this miraculous transformation process. Like a potter with a wet lump of clay, He begins

fashioning us into the kind of women and men who will bring honor to Him. A lump of wet clay is neither an object of beauty nor is it of any practical use, but in the hands of a skilled potter, that glob of gooey muck is transformed into a stunning work of art. Simply stated, sanctification turns mud into masterpieces. The transformation process is not an easy one, for while we may be willing to give up some vices, we tend to cling tenaciously to others. This creates a divine conflict, for God our Creator is quite unwilling to merely sweep the floors when the windows need cleaning, too.

In fact, we might use an analogy in which one's life is represented as a large, well-furnished house. One room might represent one's personal finances. Another room could represent one's career. Another room, still, could symbolize one's relationship with a spouse and children. One room could represent one's choices in entertainment. Every aspect of the individual's life is represented by a room. When we become followers of Jesus Christ, the Bible teaches that God's Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. We have God living in us. Without the work of God's Holy Spirit, there would be no transformation. Without this divine indwelling, there would be no redeeming changes in our lives. If life is like a house, are we to allow the Holy Spirit entry into certain rooms while restricting Him from others? Shall we post Keep Out signs in select areas? Heaven forbid! You and I must be willing to give God free reign in our lives; otherwise, we frustrate the sanctification process.



For discussion:

- Why must we be willing to allow God to correct *all* aspects of our character? Why must the Holy Spirit be given a free reign if we are to be transformed into the image of Christ Jesus?

God is going to transform every true Christian believer into the image of His Son. We can cooperate or we can go kicking and screaming. Once the dust has settled and all has been said in done, His work will have been accomplished, but it is up to us whether we go the easy route or the difficult route. The key word in Step Six, then, is *willing*. Are we willing to ask God to remove our character flaws and personal defects? Those who attempt “holding out” on God will find themselves in a divine conflict and, in the end, God will have His way. One may as well cooperate. Cooperating with our Creator will save a lot of time, pain, and heartaches.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own (I Corinthians 6: 19 NKJV)?

Let us not miss this point: God the Holy Spirit takes up residence in each believer. This is not figurative language. Every Christ follower has the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit. Our bodies are temples. Let us not desecrate these holy temples by a foolish insistence in retaining even the smallest remnants of our ungodly past. In clinging to these ugly little souvenirs, we give sin a foothold in our lives. These footholds increase the probability of relapse. Do not be deceived, for even the smallest of these unholy trinkets can shipwreck our sobriety. If we are to live free of addiction, we must be willing to allow God to remove the character defects that played a role in the unmanageability of our alcohol and drug-ridden lives.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12 ESV).

Anyone who says being good is easy is either delusional or ignorant of what it means to be good. The world bombards us with messages of greed, lust, envy, and rebellion while our flesh begs to have its unholy cravings satisfied. And the devil, the subtlest of our enemies, incessantly whispers vile, reprehensible thoughts into our minds. This unholy trinity, the world, the flesh, and the devil, are readily posed to lead us away from God and into a spiritual ghetto of no return.

C.S. Lewis said we risk making two errors concerning Satan. Some choose to believe he is unreal while others maintain an unhealthy preoccupation with the devil. Both positions are equally foolish—and dangerous. While many doubting theologians attempt to reduce Satan to that of mere personification, a literary tool representing evil, the Bible is very clear in teaching that Satan is a personal being whose invisible army of fallen angels stands in opposition against God. Others believe Satan and his demons are closely equal to God in might and strength. This, too, is utterly false. Satan and his demons are mere created beings—creatures whose ultimate doom has been foretold in Scripture. The devil is a mad dog, but he is a mad dog on a leash. He can do no more than what God permits and the day is coming in which he and his army will be destroyed.

Something needs to be said about Satan, addiction, and recovery. Satan will use alcohol and drugs to destroy the lives of women and men bound by addiction, but he will use well-meaning recovery support groups as snares for trapping souls, too. Those who have placed their faith in some idolatrous “higher power” of their own making are in no less risk of damnation. Satan cares not if a woman or man is bound by the bottle or ensnared by a fictitious god. Belief in a false “God of my understanding” will destroy a soul as easily as an out of control craving of a dangerous substance. We hear this among those who boast, “AA is my religion.” Let us not be deceived, for legions of sober people are marching along that gently downward sloping highway that leads to eternal destruction.

Satan’s ultimate goal is to steer us away from belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. He may accomplish this with alcohol and drugs or he may succeed using a counterfeit “God of my understanding.” It is all the same with him. We must understand that the devil may be found orchestrating a back alley drug deal, sitting on a barstool in a neighborhood tavern,

or leading a drug and alcohol recovery meeting. The world is a minefield and without the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, we risk becoming devil fodder.

Martin Luther, the great Christian reformer, penned the words to what is arguably the noblest hymn ever written. Unlike many of today's so-called enlightened theologians, Luther believed in a literal devil. Only a fool with a muddled understanding of Scripture would charge Luther with ignorance or superstition; indeed, the world has seen few with keener intellects. He was a brilliant thinker who brought a corrupted form of Christianity to its knees. It is hardly surprising that *A Mighty Fortress is our God* has been hailed as the battle hymn of the Reformation.

*A mighty fortress is our God
A bulwark never failing
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe
His craft and power are great
And armed with cruel hate
On earth is not His equal*

*Did we in our own strength confide?
Our striving would be losing
Were not the right man on our side
The man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be
Christ Jesus, it is He
Lord Sabaoth, His name
From age to age the same
And he must win the battle*

*And though this world, with devils filled
Should threaten to undo us
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us
The Prince of Darkness grim
We tremble not for him
His rage we can endure*

*We know, his doom is sure
One little word will fell him*

*That word above all earthly powers
No thanks to them, abideth
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth
Let goods and kindred go
This mortal life also
The body they may kill
God's truth is living still
His kingdom is
Forever and ever, Amen*

Again, those who claim that doing the right thing is always an easy matter are surely ignorant, delusional, or both. The world, the flesh, and the devil are formidable enemies bent on dragging us into the depths of the infernal abyss, but we are not to fear, for God has promised to transform us into the holy image of His Son Jesus. Sanctification is God's work, but we must be *willing* to allow His hand in the removal of our character defects. A steadfast unwillingness on our part may indicate the insincerity of our faith in Christ Jesus. We must examine ourselves and our motives, for there are many so-called saints who are, in fact, "ain'ts." Let us not be found in the company of hypocrites.

For discussion:

- Discuss how the entertainment industry often glamorizes alcohol consumption and recreational drug use?
- Discuss the futility of holding out on "pet sins" and how our unwillingness in yielding to God increases the risks of relapse?
- The Bible says if we resist the devil, he will flee. How do we resist Satan? How do we avoid his cleverly devised snares?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Romans 15:13 ESV).

Being good is not easy. Being upbeat, positive, and joyous is not always easy, either, for we live in a world filled with loneliness, misery, pain, cruelty, suffering, and heartbreak. No one is immune to hurt and disappointment, but we are never to despair, for the sorrow we face today will give way to the joy that “cometh in the morning.” This is God’s promise to you and me.

Admittedly, many of our wounds are self-inflicted. Much of our suffering is the expected result of our own doing. Again, we must be *willing* to relinquish the pet sins that give Satan a foothold in our lives. It is of no use saying, “God made me this way,” when God has promised to *remake* us in the likeness of His Son Jesus. An incessant unwillingness in yielding to God’s call of holiness frustrates His sanctifying work and, in some cases, reveals the counterfeit faith of an unregenerate soul. The Lord Jesus warned there would be women and men lost for all eternity who had identified themselves as sincere believers. Disingenuous people may deceive themselves, but God is not fooled by empty platitudes. Only those who turn from the evils of sin to Christ our Savior can know the boundless joys of salvation. Are you willing to be the kind of woman or man who brings glory and honor to God?

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30 ESV).

We grieve the Holy Spirit of God by resisting the sanctifying work He performs in our lives. Shall we thwart His efforts in making us holy and pure by clinging tenaciously to our favored sins? Let it not be so, for our resistance brings grief to the Spirit of God and, frankly, such imprudent and irrational stubbornness does us not an ounce of good, either.

For discussion:

- What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit?
- The Lord Jesus compared religious hypocrites to ornate tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled with the bones of dead men. What did He mean by this?
- Discuss how we can avoid spiritual hypocrisy in our lives.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26 ESV).

Again, sanctification is the work of God. We are inherently weak and incapable of achieving the lofty heights of Christ-like transformation, but God is not weak. In truth, nothing is too difficult for God. There is no problem, difficulty, obstacle, or obstruction in any corner of this vast universe that is bigger than Him.

Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us. The Holy Spirit, who raised Jesus from the dead, comes to our rescue when we are weak and faltering under the weight of life's burdens—and no one can deny that recovering alcoholics and drug addicts have their share of burdens. We need not face these burdens alone, for God delights in bringing comfort and renewed strength to His children.

Many of us in recovery have experienced apprehensive feelings of mounting anxiety. We find our spirits burdened with dread while muddled, mixed-up feelings of impending doom cast dark shadows on our sinking souls. Inner peace seems elusive. Fear lurks in every thought. There is no joy in our hearts. And in all this, we are at a loss in pinpointing the exact cause of this gnawing, gripping apprehension. We know something is wrong, but what? Who or what is this dreadful, formidable enemy that lurks just beyond our comprehension? Such vague, enigmatic unknowns are surely the most fearsome enemies of all.

In desperate times as this, we can assuredly rely upon the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” He intervenes when we are in the grip of unknown fear. We may take comfort in knowing the Holy Spirit is not blind to the unseen woes that trouble us. He sees and comprehends that which eludes our understanding; though you and I may be disabled with fear and dismay, the Holy Spirit of God rightfully discerns the nature of that which plagues us, and He is willing to come to our defense.

We are not to grovel about in timidity; we are not to live as helpless orphans frightened by our own shadows. God's Holy Spirit is our divine Comforter who intercedes for us in desperate times. If God be for us, who can stand against us?

Let us revisit the first sentence of this passage: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. While outside forces may trouble us, let us remember that the source of our weakness is often rooted in the defects of our character. In Step Six, we become willing to ask God to remove these character defects which, often enough, fueled behavior and decisions that gave lead to addiction. Again, the key word is *willing*; if we are willing, God is able. Our willingness in submitting to Him is paramount if real transformation is to take place.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:1-5 NASB).

We do not earn salvation by works or deeds; eternal life is not a paycheck for services rendered unto God. Salvation is a gift to those who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. A gift is not earned and the Bible is clear in teaching that we cannot accumulate enough good deeds and works to "buy" our way into Heaven. Salvation is a free gift from God and, in faith, we simply hold out our hands to receive. As adopted sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, we are to live joyfully in hope of God's unbreakable promises. Since the dawn of humanity, God has yet to break a promise; therefore, we can live triumphantly in hope of the glory of God.

But the Apostle Paul goes on to say that "we also exult in our tribulations." To exult is to rejoice exceedingly; to exult is to be in a state of elated jubilation. Paul is telling us to be

overflowing with joy when the bad times come banging at our door. What was he thinking when he penned these words? Who celebrates when life hits a sour note? Joy comes when, say, a rich uncle you never met dies and leaves his entire estate to you, right? Did the apostle honestly suggest that we are to be giddy with uncontrollable laughter when an ill-tempered IRS agent nitpicks every single deduction listed on our tax return? Are we to throw a party when our careless teenager backs the brand new (and heavily financed) convertible into the police chief's parked cruiser? We rejoice when the boss forks over an unexpected bonus, right? We tend to skip the rejoicing when the boss hands over a letter of termination. Who exults in tribulation? How can this be?

Perhaps the explanation is found when we examine our momentary woes through the crystal lens of eternity. Enduring life's tribulations, writes Paul, gives birth to perseverance. To persevere is to steadfastly continue the course without giving up. Perseverance is illustrated by those who trudge defiantly through the muck and mire of hardship with no thought of surrender. In other words, perseverance is defined by those who march boldly forward as others fall haplessly by the wayside. Persistence has stubbornness as a mother and determination as a father. And the byproduct of perseverance is character.

Reputation is understood as what others say about us; conversely, character is defined by who we are and how we behave when no one is watching. Step Six demands that we *willingly* submit to God who can alter our character. By faithfully enduring the trials, troubles, turmoil, and tribulations of life, God can go to work shaping and molding our flawed character. We can choose to face the hardships and tough times by kicking, screaming, whining, and complaining, or, as Paul teaches, we can "exult in tribulations."

Let us speak frankly; rejoicing in tribulation is contrary to human experience. The only possible means by which one can be joyful while in the midst of adversity is through a total and unwavering reliance in the supernatural power of God's Holy Spirit. God can give us the ability to do things we cannot do on our own. The writer of this manual ruefully admits that he is light years from achieving the lofty goal of always expressing abandoned joy during times of woeful circumstance. Again, this is strangely foreign to our way of

thinking; yet, consider of unshakable faith of such a saint who had learned to exult in tribulations. Such a great faith would leave no room for worry or fear. Imagine facing each day with unflinching confidence—no doubts, no uncertainties, and no misgivings. Inconceivable? Perhaps, but if this were an unattainable way of living, Paul would have never penned these curious words. The apostle has challenged us to exult in tribulations. In the very least, we can attempt to follow his instructions. When we fail, we can try again.

Of life's bitter trials, Martin Luther wrote, "'Whatever virtues tribulation finds us in, it develops more fully. If anyone is carnal, weak, blind, wicked, irascible, haughty, and so forth, tribulation will make him more carnal, weak, blind, wicked and irritable. On the other hand, if one is spiritual, strong, wise, pious, gentle and humble, he will become more spiritual, powerful, wise, pious, gentle and humble.'" The way in which we face our problems will either make us or break us.

As our character grows, so does our hope. And in the end, when the dust has settled and all has been said and done, our hope in Christ Jesus will not lead to disappointment, for His promises are irrevocable and unbreakable. Again, we must respond to adversities from an eternal perspective. Given enough time and pressure, a worthless lump of coal is transformed into a rare and beautiful diamond. If we will learn to see beyond the tips of our noses, we will come to understand that today's trials are tomorrow's glories.

The Apostle Paul assures us against disappointment in Christ "because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The saints who are sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit joyfully experience the lavish outpouring of His love in newness each day. Contrariwise, those who squelch the Spirit through anger, resentment, bitterness, doubt, unrepentant sin, stubbornness, and unbelief are wholly incapable of truly appreciating the fullness of God's abounding love. Does one wear dark glasses when beholding the glorious radiance of the evening sky? Would a lover of music stuff his ears with cotton before entering the concert hall? Unless we guard against the contamination of our hearts, we will never fully experience the joy that comes in knowing that we are loved by the One whose love matters most.

It is the defectiveness of our character than spoils the joy intended for us. Many of us were drawn to alcohol and drugs in the hope that chemicals could, in some way, satisfy the gaping emptiness in our lives. God's love satisfies as nothing else satisfies, but character defects prevent us from experiencing the fullness of His lavish affections. In other words, far too many saints live as orphans when they should be living as beloved sons and daughters.

Step Six teaches we must be willing for God to remove our character flaws. We will do well in remembering that when God repairs a grotty little house, He must be allowed to mend the *entire* house. He will not be satisfied in merely painting the shutters when the entire structure is in shambles. And no area of the house, inside or out, must be made off limits. God must have free reign if we are to be made whole. Those who willfully resist God's sanctifying work give our enemy Satan a spiritual foothold from which he launches his vicious, fiery attacks; additionally, resistance to God makes the addict a prime candidate for relapse.

For discussion:

- Why did Paul teach us to “exult in tribulations” when complaining comes more naturally?
- It has been said that the sun which melts the wax also hardens the clay. Discuss how adversity can make some individuals cynical and bitter while making others patient and longsuffering.
- How can resistance to God's sanctifying work make us susceptible to relapse?
- A fairly lengthy list of character flaws follows on the next page. Randomly select three or four character flaws and discuss how they fuel addiction. Consider, too, how the removal of these flaws enhances the addict's recovery.

An Incomplete List of Really Nasty Character Flaws

<i>aloofness</i>	<i>indecisive</i>	<i>stingy</i>
<i>arrogance</i>	<i>indiscreet</i>	<i>stubborn</i>
<i>belligerence</i>	<i>inflexible</i>	<i>stupid</i>
<i>big-headed</i>	<i>interfering</i>	<i>superficial</i>
<i>bitter</i>	<i>intolerance</i>	<i>tactless</i>
<i>boastful</i>	<i>irresponsible</i>	<i>timid</i>
<i>bossy</i>	<i>jealous</i>	<i>touchy</i>
<i>callous</i>	<i>lazy</i>	<i>thoughtless</i>
<i>cantankerous</i>	<i>materialistic</i>	<i>truculent</i>
<i>careless</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>two-faced</i>
<i>changeable</i>	<i>miserly</i>	<i>unkind</i>
<i>clinging</i>	<i>moody</i>	<i>unreasonable</i>
<i>cold-hearted</i>	<i>narcissistic</i>	<i>unreliable</i>
<i>compulsive</i>	<i>nasty</i>	<i>unrepentant</i>
<i>cowardly</i>	<i>naughty</i>	<i>untrustworthy</i>
<i>crabby</i>	<i>nosey</i>	<i>vague</i>
<i>cranky</i>	<i>obsessive</i>	<i>vain</i>
<i>cruel</i>	<i>obstinate</i>	<i>vengeful</i>
<i>cunning</i>	<i>overcritical</i>	<i>vulgar</i>
<i>cynical</i>	<i>overemotional</i>	<i>weak-willed</i>
<i>deceitful</i>	<i>parsimonious</i>	<i>whiney</i>
<i>detached</i>	<i>patronizing</i>	
<i>dishonest</i>	<i>perverse</i>	
<i>domineering</i>	<i>pessimistic</i>	
<i>foolish</i>	<i>pompous</i>	
<i>foolhardy</i>	<i>possessive</i>	
<i>fussy</i>	<i>prideful</i>	
<i>greedy</i>	<i>quarrelsome</i>	
<i>grumpy</i>	<i>quick-tempered</i>	
<i>gullible</i>	<i>resentful</i>	
<i>harsh</i>	<i>rude</i>	
<i>haughty</i>	<i>ruthless</i>	
<i>hot-headed</i>	<i>sarcastic</i>	
<i>illogical</i>	<i>secretive</i>	
<i>ill-tempered</i>	<i>selfish</i>	
<i>impatience</i>	<i>self-centered</i>	
<i>impolite</i>	<i>self-indulgent</i>	
<i>impulsive</i>	<i>silly</i>	
<i>inconsiderate</i>	<i>sneaky</i>	
<i>inconsistent</i>	<i>sniveling</i>	

Discovery Session 17

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Seven
- Pride as a stumbling block to recovery
- Spiritual rebirth through faith in Christ Jesus as Savior
- Understanding God's work of sanctification
- Why unremoved character defects increase the risks of relapse

Introducing Step Seven:

Humbly asked God to remove our character defects

As we worked through Step Four, our many moral imperfections came to light. In Step Five, we confessed our long list of character flaws to God and others. Next, we determined our readiness for God to remove these many defects. Now, in taking Step Seven, we humbly ask God to remove each of these character imperfections.

God delights in those who are humble of heart. The Bible makes it quite clear that pride, haughtiness, and arrogance are traits of particular abhorrence to Him. As a means of illustrating this truth, we will consider a story told by our Lord Jesus of two men, one an upright religious leader and the other a traitorous cheat, who approached God according to the attitudes of their hearts.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I

tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 19:10-14 NASB)."

The Pharisee was a member of a sect that specialized in the rites, rituals, and rules of the Jewish faith. Prior to his conversion, the Apostle Paul had been a Pharisee. Because of their strict adherence to the customs of their religion, Pharisees were highly regarded by the people as being particularly devout in the faith. By contrast, the tax collector in our story was a traitor who had sold his soul to Rome. Operating contrary to Jewish law, but with the full blessings of Caesar, tax collectors used extortion and violence in exacting tribute from their fellow countrymen. After meeting Rome's exorbitant monetary quotas, these turncoat Jewish tax collectors kept the surplus monies for themselves. This was a lucrative means of lining one's pockets with ill-gotten gain, but their riches came at a personal cost; tax collectors were despised by the people as greedy quislings who had sunk to the absolute depths of degradation. To be a tax collector was to be a wealthy, though hated, social outcast.

The Pharisee approached God on the basis of his impressive spiritual resume: "God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." According to the Pharisee, he was morally superior to other people. He did not steal. He was fair and upright in his dealings with others. He fasted, that is, he endured long periods without eating, as an expression of his deeply rooted religious devotion. He gave large sums of money to the temple. He strictly adhered to the rules of his faith. He kept his appetites and passions in check. He was generous to a fault. By his own account, he had every right to boldly approach the throne of God.

If your nose detects a whiff of sanctimonious self-righteousness in the prayer of this boastful Pharisee, you are not alone. Jesus said the Pharisee "was praying this to himself." You might say that his prayer was not reaching Heaven.

Standing in the distance with his eyes cast downward, the tax collector prayed, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector had no impressive spiritual resume. He was a thief, a liar, an extortionist, a traitor—and he knew it. The evil spoken of him was true; his vile reputation was deserved. Unbridled greed and an insatiable craving for wealth had corrupted his heart. He was a disgrace. He was despised by his fellow Jews. The religious community had branded him as an unredeemable moral outcast. He was unfit for the society of all except other tax collectors. But in contrast to the Pharisee, the tax collector saw himself with 20/20 clarity. He knew who he was and what he was—a hopeless sinner in desperate need of God’s mercy.

Jesus said the tax collector was *justified*. To be justified is to be made acceptable in the eyes of God. Unlike the Pharisee with his phony self-righteousness, the tax collector approached God in humility and God honored his contrite spirit and honest prayer with a full pardon. The tax collector was made right before God.

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice...There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility.

--C.S. Lewis

Hear the words of Jesus: “...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” On what basis should any of us be proud? We all have something good in us—some gift or ability or talent, but are not all gifts, abilities, and talents from God? Is He not the source of whatever good can be said of us? So why

should we feel self-pride for what He has given us? Would not gratitude be a more appropriate response to any good that is in us? Pride distanced the Pharisee from the very God he claimed to worship. Conversely, humility drew the tax collector closer to God.

Assuming that we want our prayers to rise higher than the prayer of the Pharisee, we must ask God *in humility* to remove our character defects.

For discussion:

- Pride causes one to be self-reliant. Those who trust in their own abilities fail to see their need for God. Why is a “self-assured” recovering addict in danger of relapse?
- Why is a prideful heart foolish in the eyes of God?

Pride can blind us to character defects that are clearly evident to God and others; furthermore, pride can prevent us from seeking God’s hand in the removal of our character imperfections. Unless we are honest, and honesty requires a hefty dose of humility, we may come to believe that certain character flaws are, in fact, commendable virtues. Greed is often mistaken for thrift and ambition. Cynicism is seen as realism. Inflexibility is simply living “by the book.” A harsh tongue is merely “telling it like it is.” In the eyes of these hard-bitten individuals, gentle persons are scorned for lacking in backbone and compassionate souls are condemned for being annoying “do-gooders.” Unless we approach God in humility, we risk clinging to our faults or, even worse, misidentifying our most reprehensible character defects as moral virtues.

We might say Step Seven is the *Sanctification Step*. According to *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, “The generic meaning of sanctification is ‘the state of proper functioning.’ To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer. A pen is ‘sanctified’ when used to write. Eyeglasses are ‘sanctified’ when used to improve sight. In the theological sense, things are sanctified when they are used for the purpose God intends. A human being is sanctified, therefore, when he or she lives according to God's design and purpose.”

Sanctification is the lifelong process of being transformed into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we grow in faith, we become more and more like Him. In contrast to us, Jesus had no moral defects. He was without fault or imperfection. On the other hand, we are riddled with moral defects. Step Four's fearless moral inventory revealed our inherently flawed nature. To be like Jesus, these moral defects must go. We will not reach moral perfection on this side of eternity, but we have God's promise that the day is coming when our transformation will be perfected (Philippians 1:6).

Moral defects are as cancerous tumors that do great harm to the soul. Figuratively speaking, let us ask God to surgically remove these tumorous defects so that we may be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Let us ask with humble hearts.

For Discussion:

- Just as poor dietary choices and a lack of exercise make one vulnerable to heart disease, what moral defects may cause an alcoholic or drug addict to be particularly vulnerable to relapse?
- As we grow in the image of Jesus Christ, we are less likely to relapse. Why is this?

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

Through faith in Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. John the Baptist publicly declared that Jesus takes our sins away. This is good news, for when we place our faith in Jesus as Savior, God no longer holds our sins against us. According to Scripture, we are adorned in the righteousness of God's Son. Being good is never good enough, but being forgiven is. Those who have been made righteous through faith in Christ Jesus are adopted into God's family as beloved sons and daughters. The son of the King is a prince. The daughter of the King is a princess. No prince or princess should grovel about with a bottle or a needle or a pipe.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

How many among us have sworn again and again to remain drug and alcohol free only to relapse? It is all very tiresome. If you are weary from repeated attempts at sober living, Jesus said you can come to Him and He will give you rest from your troubles. You need never fall back into addiction again.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:1-6).

We meet another Pharisee named Nicodemus. He was an exceedingly respected religious leader who was greatly esteemed as a pillar in the Jewish community. Nicodemus called on Jesus under the cloak of darkness; perhaps he did not want his venerable colleagues to know that he was consulting an "outsider"—a carpenter turned itinerate rabbi whose radical teachings were rocking the foundation of Jewish life. Why had he come to see Jesus? Perhaps Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus because of His many miracles. It was widely known that Jesus had raised the dead, restored sight to the blind, and cleansed the corroded skin of lepers. Nicodemus reasoned that Jesus spoke with the imprimatur of God's authority, "for no man can do these miracles that thou doest,

except God be with him.”

Jesus responded to Nicodemus by saying that no man will see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. This statement confounded Nicodemus. Perhaps you feel confounded, too. Can a man enter his mother’s womb a second time? How can such a thing be? But Jesus was speaking of a new birth—a spiritual rebirth *from above* that comes by the cleansing of God’s word (Ephesians 5:26) and the regeneration of God’s Holy Spirit. Do not miss this point: we become *new creations* in Christ Jesus.

To some degree, we can reinvent ourselves. Legions of men and women, well into their adult years, return to school so as to pursue new dreams and adventurous, lifelong ambitions. Others, frustrated by lethargy and various health woes, say good-bye to greasy fast foods and endless hours on the sofa for a regimen of healthy eating and strenuous physical activity. Library shelves are well-stocked with self-improvement books and, indeed, most of us have plenty of room for improvement, but only God offers a genuine, lasting spiritual rebirth. This is not mere religion. Rebirth has nothing to do with rites and rituals. Spiritual rebirth is much more than simply putting forth more effort in living a righteous life. Mistaken are those who think that Jesus is merely in the business of slapping a coat of fresh paint over a broken life—the Apostle Paul declared, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (II Corinthians 5:17 NASB).”

Oswald Chambers, founder of the Bible Training College in London and author of the best-selling devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* wrote, “When we pray, asking God to sanctify us, are we prepared to measure up to what that really means? We take the word sanctification much too lightly. Are we prepared to pay the cost of sanctification? The cost will be a deep restriction of all our earthly concerns, and an extensive cultivation of all our godly concerns. Sanctification means to be intensely focused on God’s point of view. It means to secure and to keep all the strength of our body, soul, and spirit for God’s purpose alone. Are we really prepared for God to perform in us everything for which He separated us? And after He has done His work, are we then prepared to separate

ourselves to God just as Jesus did? ...The reason some of us have not entered into the experience of sanctification is that we have not realized the meaning of sanctification from God's perspective. Sanctification means being made one with Jesus so that the nature that controlled Him will control us. Are we really prepared for what that will cost? It will cost absolutely everything in us which is not of God. Are we prepared to be caught up into the full meaning of Paul's prayer in this verse? Are we prepared to say, 'Lord, make me, a sinner saved by grace, as holy as You can?' Jesus prayed that we might be one with Him, just as He is one with the Father (see John 17:21-23). The resounding evidence of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is the unmistakable family likeness to Jesus Christ, and the freedom from everything which is not like Him. Are we prepared to set ourselves apart for the Holy Spirit's work in us?"

For Discussion:

- What does it mean to be born-again? What are the implications of a spiritual rebirth? How does this new birth give us a second chance at life?
- Sanctification is the process by which we are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Why is it impossible for this miraculous transformation to occur in the lives of those who cling to their character defects?
- Why are those who hold tightly to their "pet" vices susceptible to the risks and dangers of relapse?

First published in 1942, *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis is a satirical novel steeped in wit and fancy. The book appears as a series of letters written by a senior demon known as Screwtape to a junior tempter named Wormwood. In each letter, the more diabolically experienced Screwtape instructs the budding junior demon in the fine art of snaring a man's soul. Hell is portrayed as a bureaucracy, Satan is hailed as "Our Father Below," and God is referenced as the "Enemy." Wormwood's intended victim is simply known as the "patient." Screwtape's advice to Wormwood includes the much quoted "...the safest road to hell is the gradual one –the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

C.S. Lewis is considered by many as the greatest Christian writer of modern times. With

apologies to Lewis and his legions of loyal readers, a much inferior imitation is offered in this study of Step Seven. This writer makes no pretense of being a worthy match for such a genius as C.S. Lewis. Those who are familiar with the real *Screwtape Letters* will readily see this author's literary shortcomings in the paragraphs that follow.

My dear Wormwood,

I do not mind saying that your efforts to snare this human weed have thus far been singularly disappointing. Rather than driving him back to drink, your clumsy attempts at inducing a relapse have apparently strengthened his resolve to remain sober. This will never do, Wormwood, and you have been repeatedly warned of the unhappy fate of devils who fail to get their man. Must we go through all that again?

Even so, all is not lost. Step Seven requires your patient to *humbly* ask the Enemy to remove his character defects. This simple directive, contained in a mere eight words, would appear as being among the more easily accomplished of the Twelve Steps, but the exact opposite is quite true, for nearly all humans rebel against humility. Search the length and breadth of the world and you will seldom find an honest human who owns up to his or her character flaws. Additionally, many of the creatures often mistake their most damnable character flaws as virtues. Let his greed be seen as mere financial prudence. Sanitize his lust for recognition or his appetite for materialism by calling them drive and ambition. Convince your man that his pet flaws are, in fact, virtuous and he will fight tooth and nail before allowing our Enemy to remove these hideous defects from his character.

Our research has shown that an overwhelming majority of these foolish bipeds have only a vague understanding of how genuine humility is properly manifested in human character. As an example, I once had a patient who, in spite of his modest upbringing, grew to become a highly successful professional of no small reputation. He had been reared in a poor home by parents who often struggled to meet their financial obligations; however, the Enemy had blessed this young man with a keen mind and an opportunity to attend a respectable university.

Early in his professional career, my patient expressed a sincere, heartfelt gratitude to the One who had blessed him abundantly. Of course, the young man's devotion to our Enemy would never do, and so I set into motion a rather simple plan to secure his soul. First, I cultivated feelings of shame and embarrassment by employing frequent reminders of his parents' personal shortcomings and his family's long history of financial struggles. These grim childhood memories led to a deep-seated insecurity that would, in time, do me much good. Next, I convinced him to mask these nagging insecurities with the most outlandishly pretentious behavior. As the years passed, my patient became an absolute bore bloated by his own sense of accomplished importance. I was no fool, Wormwood. To secure ownership of his soul once and for all, I spent countless hours cultivating in him a most disagreeable habit of talking down to others as though they were not so bright children. You will do well to remember that arrogance is a failsafe anodyne for the eradication of godly humility. As my man nears the end of his long and seemingly successful life, I eagerly count the days when, at long last, the title deed to his soul will fall into my hands.

Keep your man pompous and proud. Any human steeped in pride is incapable of recognizing his character flaws. One of the Enemy's servants—I can no longer recall his name, was known to say, "Among the damned, boasters outnumber murderers a thousand to one."

Although these creatures were created in our Enemy's image, we can thank our Infernal Father for seeing that each of these mortal beings is riddled with a host of deplorable character flaws. Owing to the great fall of mankind in Eden, every human leaves its mother's womb with an inherent sin nature. Yes, they bear the image of their Creator, but our mark is upon them, too! Parents must teach their children to share, but the wee ones learn the finer points of selfish behavior on their own. Similarly, children soon learn to murmur, grumble, complain, slander, and lie as if their little tongues were made just for this. And though they are taught to read and write only after much effort, little boys and girls learn to hurt, steal, and covet with the greatest of ease.

The few obedient humans who willingly and humbly submit themselves to the indwelling of their Creator will yield, as the man Paul once wrote, spiritual fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Any human whose life is hallmarked by these undesirable traits becomes nearly impermeable to our infernal assaults. This so-called spiritual fruit is as armor plating that repels our most devious attacks and cleverly hidden snares. Do not lose heart, Wormwood, for in these modern times, we seldom encounter this variety of Spirit-led believer, but if your patient ever yields in full abandonment to the will of His Creator, you will find him as nearly untouchable as any saint of old. Indeed, in former times, we used to burn these saints at the stake—not that the smoke and flames did any good in weakening their devotion to Him.

If the man must love, let him love himself. Or his money. Or his house. Or his reputation. Or his politics. Or his dog. Or the right kind of people, but for hell's sake, do not let him love the poor, the disenfranchised, the lonely, and the forgotten. Do not let him spend his affections on people who can do him no possible good in return. Reduce his friendships to mere business and social connections. See that he surrounds himself with only those who can further his worldly ambitions; conversely, make certain that he avoids the society of spiritually mature persons who, in love, will call him aside over a breach of conduct. If you will keep your man in the midst of others who can be made to overlook and even endorse his vilest character flaws, you will surely own this blaggard's soul throughout the endless ages to come.

If love has an opposite, its opposite is indifference. Let the man's heart be indifferent toward his Creator. Our Enemy describes those who are neither cold nor hot in their affections as being *lukewarm*. He then cautions the lukewarm that they are in danger of being vomited from His mouth. If you are on your guard, Wormwood, and properly play your hand, you will be there to catch your man when he is spewed forth from the Enemy's mouth. As the humans are fond of saying, one man's trash is another man's treasure. This maxim holds true in the spiritual realm, too, for Heaven's rejects stock the cupboards

of Hell. Keep your man lukewarm and he will leave a bitter aftertaste in the mouth of our Enemy. You, of course, will find him as dainty a morsel as ever graced a devil's skewer. *Bon Appétit!*

This soppy state of being known as joy is an affront to the solemn austerity of Hell. We have no use for the buoyancy of spirit which the Enemy bestows upon those who remain particularly close to Him. As with love, we must pervert joy if our cause is to be advanced. If he must feel joy, let his elation be found in the misfortunes of an adversary or by profiting from the gullibility and recklessness of another. Unless your man's bliss comes at another's expense, it will be of no use to us. See that his happiness is tainted with jealousy, hatred, vengeance, and avarice. Do this and his soul will be a pretty little plaything for your unending amusement.

Thanks to the heraldic efforts of His Infernal Majesty's Imperial Army, nearly all of mankind's history has been marred by the stark brutality of war. And why not? We of the underworld wage war with Heaven and the earth is our great battlefield. Of course, our brilliant strategists see that the conflict between Hell and Heaven escapes the notice of all but a few of these earthly creatures; if the ignorant masses ever came to understand the reality of this great spiritual war, our advantage would be lost. We must blind them to this truth.

As I said, the earth is our battlefield, but the Enemy promises a peace of mind and heart to those who trust Him. How He accomplishes this in the midst of the raging battle is a well-guarded secret. His offer is open to all who believe, yet very few of these disgusting mortals ever experience real, lasting peace. Our research indicates that peace is a commodity nearly all humans hope to attain, but by keeping their focus on the here and now, we blind them to an eternal perspective of life. Our Enemy created the human vermin for eternity, but with a measure of finesse and, perhaps, sleight of hand, we have insured that most of the mortal creatures will never see beyond the tips of their noses. It is this short-sided view of life that keeps them in a frenzied state of nervous anxiety.

The day will come when we will introduce an earthly leader who will orchestrate a world peace that will last just long enough to lull them from their sensibilities. Our Enemy refers to him as the Man of Perdition. He may call him whatever He likes, but we think our man of peace will halt Heaven's juggernaut in its tracks. Forced into waving the white flag of defeat, our Enemy will have no option other than surrender after which the earth and all that is upon it will finally be ours. What a grand and glorious finale—victory over Heaven and dominion over the Enemy's creation! And all this will have been accomplished by the luring of these silly mortals into a deadly trap baited with an empty promise of world peace. This is our scheme, Wormwood, and I can scarcely see how we can fail.

But let us return to the business at hand. Your patient, like all humans, has a deep inner craving for peace. As your man is a recovering alcoholic, you have a distinct advantage, that is, if you are clever enough to make use of it, for deep within the recesses of his mind, he remembers that alcohol once gave him moments of relief from the demands and worries of life. As the pressures of life begin to mount, gently remind him of those bygone days when alcohol brought relief (albeit temporary) from whatever woe that happened to trouble him at that time. Relapse is only one drink away.

Men drink water to satisfy the dryness in their throats; men drink alcohol to satisfy a particular dryness of soul. In sufficient doses, alcohol can mask pain, regret, uneasiness, loneliness, weariness, insecurity, guilt, unhappiness, and fear. A jolly individual may drink to celebrate good fortune, but a tormented soul will more likely drink--and drink excessively--as an escape from life's harsh realities. Keep this in mind, Wormwood, and your subtle promptings may send him racing back to the bottle at the very next crisis.

As we have made life on their planet increasingly complex, patience has become a virtue that is rapidly falling out of fashion. Our Enemy would have these silly creatures living simply, easily, and quietly, but we know that by cluttering their waking hours with meaningless activities and endless comings and goings, we can redirect their focus from the eternal to the here and now. This unnecessary activity of our own invention not only serves as an unholy distraction, but the chronic busyness that muddles their brief earthly

lives produces another highly useful byproduct—impatience. Simply stated, we would have the blighted creatures too busy to attend to the needs of others. Attending to the needs of others is their God-given duty, but when your man is confronted by a fellow creature in want, let him see this, not as a divinely appointed opportunity for doing good, but as an insufferable annoyance or, better yet, as a needless obstacle hindering his own personal agenda.

I am familiar with an aging chaplain employed by a homeless shelter who has been known to writhe with impatience when a person in need interrupts the preparation of his next weekly sermon. Only in his better moments, which are few and far between I might add, does he understand that the garrulous old drunk that God has set before him takes precedence over some administrative trifle. Nothing pleases our Infernal Father more than when one of the Enemy's saints shows more interest in checking off tasks listed on an agenda than in ministering to the needs of a living, breathing, flesh and blood fellow being. A detestable human named Dickens very nearly spoiled our little secret when he wrote, "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

Of all virtues, kindness is the most easily tainted. Many of the silly creatures consider themselves kind-hearted on the grounds that they do not give their neighbors any trouble. Their altruistic claims are based upon a belief that they are good simply because they have not been bad. Conversely, we have convinced those busybodies known for their prying interests into the personal affairs of others that meddling is, in fact, the stuff from which human kindness is made. See that your man fancies himself kind-hearted on false grounds.

Recently, our propagandists have moved many of the humans to focus their kindness on the welfare of rain forests, wildlife, or the polar icecaps. While the Enemy would have them acting as good stewards of the planet, we have twisted this in such a way that legions of high-minded humans give more thought to the well-being of spotted newts than

broken-down humans. Indeed, I could show you environmentalists who weep over the diminishing number of tokay geckos while hungry women, men, and children huddle in makeshift camps. There is nothing quite so infernally comical as a lover of nature who has but a marginal concern for the welfare of people.

During the Incarnation, the Enemy said none is good but God. We may conclude, then, that good people are those whose lives reflect the goodness of their Creator. If the planet were suddenly populated by people who strived to be like Him, our work would be in ruins. War would give way to peace. Sorrow would drown in a sea of joy. Greed would cower in the radiance of those who placed the interests of others above their own self-interests. There would be no hunger. Prisons would be demolished and their grounds would be made into lush gardens. Every word spoken would be truthful. The art, music, and entertainment that now putrefy would from henceforth edify. No child would suffer from want. Locks, vaults, manacles, security cameras, barbed wire, and guns would become oddly out of place in this new world--mere curiosities relegated to museum displays. Such a world would be no fit place for a devil, Wormwood.

See that your man avoids a quality known as personal goodness that is a natural byproduct of a sincere devotion and personal intimacy with his Creator. If you allow your man's relationship with our Enemy to flourish, his behavior and thoughts--indeed, his whole being will quickly take on the disgusting qualities of Heaven itself. If he must be good, let him be a good musician, a good businessman, a good painter, a good speaker, a good organizer, a good knuckleball pitcher, a good teacher, a good piano tuner, a good chef, a good grammarian, a good strategist, a good planner, a good soldier, a good surgeon, or a good recovering alcoholic, but never, ever let your patient be a good man, for a good man is a godly man; a good man may know nothing of business or piano tuning, but he knows God intimately and this is precisely what we cannot allow to happen. Never forget that those nearest to Him behave more and more like Him. A good man or woman will seldom fall prey to our cunning little deceptions. We snare good stock brokers and good chess players every day, but you cannot find a single good man or woman in any of our crowded dungeons.

Our propaganda has caused many humans to reject the reality of a world they cannot see. This renunciation of an unseen spiritual world populated by ethereal beings they call gods, angels, and demons sets up a most amusing dilemma for atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and materialists seeking an escape from addiction through 12 Step organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous. On one hand, they are told to place their faith in an unseen deity, but we have countered this with an assurance that their “god” can be whomever or whatever they wish it to be. In so many words, we are teaching them that faith in any “god” will do. For many 12 Step devotees, “god” is an imagined deity that bears only a superficial resemblance to our Enemy, the God of Heaven. Others have made a god of Alcoholics Anonymous--you will recognize these by their idolatrous mantra, “AA is my religion.” We have even convinced a few of these muddle-minded fools that they can be their own “higher power.” Faith in anything or anyone other than their Creator advances our cause and you will find the end results of their illogical incongruities to be quite entertaining.

You have two options: Encourage your man to conjure a “god” from his own fertile imagination--a god who will make no annoying demands of him--a god who cares only about his happiness and nothing more—a god who will turn a blind eye to sexual sin, unbridled greed, godless ambition, or any other of a thousand vile behaviors that will distance him from an intimate relationship with his Creator. If your man is sufficiently corrupted by a rejection in anything that is not materialistic, then you must encourage him to place his faith in the organization. As I previously stated, let Alcoholics Anonymous be his god and let the 12 Steps be the foundation of his religion. Your man can be a “man of faith” as long as we determine the object of his faith. To be sure, we have no objections to a human’s allegiance to any so-called “higher power”, for idolatry remains among the sharpest arrows in our quiver. We are, of course, defiantly opposed to the one and only Highest Power. It is against Him that we wage this ancient war.

True gentleness, an attribute that is increasingly rare these days, is a particularly irritating quality in humans. You will seldom be troubled by a truly gentle saint--oh, how the sight

of Mother Teresa made me want to vomit--I would have rained poisonous scorpions on that old gray head had not the Enemy stood against me! It was disgusting, Wormwood--positively disgusting watching her cleaning leprous scabs and bandaging open wounds while whispering prayers for the dying! She mocked us! She made a laughing stock of our Infernal Father! How I hated that old woman--that disgustingly gentle old woman! She was the vilest of all mortals! And when she finally breathed her last, she went to be with Him! Regrettably, Mother Teresa is now beyond our reach, but we have assigned a highly specialized committee of tempters with the arduous task of tarnishing her memory. If we cannot do harm to her, perhaps we can do damage to her reputation.

I breathe easier knowing the Mother Teresa type of Christian is a true rarity. Thanks to our finest propagandists, most humans are so busy protecting their "rights" that they find trampling over the rights and interests of others entirely excusable--even justifiable. See that your man is gentle only as long as his interests are never sacrificed. Better yet, muddle his thinking by equating gentleness with weakness. What man wants to be seen as weak? Remind him that the weak fall prey to the strong--survival of the fittest and all that. Emphasize the belief that gentle people are usually made merchandise by others. Play your cards right and your man will be as hard as iron, yet he will tout his hardness as a commendable and even admirable trait.

Self-control is another of those highly detestable virtues that drive the human prey away from our cleverly placed nets and snares. Our Enemy would have the humans exercising mastery over their feelings and appetites. He wishes them to maintain dominion over their cravings, while we would have them cowering as slaves to their every appetite. These desires may not, in themselves, be inherently evil; indeed, a human's desire for food, comfort, companionship, and security makes it possible for their race to survive. Evil occurs when appetites are uncontrolled. See that your man's volition is ruled by his passions.

As your patient is a recovering alcoholic, you have an advantage that must be played if you are to bring him back into the fold. Stay close to your man. Stick to him like glue.

During a moment of weakness, remind him how good he felt with alcohol sloshing about in his belly. Have him believe that one drink would do him no harm--indeed, one drink might even be beneficial as a tonic for soothing his jangled nerves. Never let him recall that one drink will only increase his desire for a second drink and the second drink will fuel his cravings for a third drink and so on and so forth. Deep down, he knows that one drink is too many and a thousand drinks are never enough, but if you keep your wits, you may be able to convince him that he can stop at one drink. We know, of course, that once he tastes alcohol, he will go down like a house on fire and you will have all eternity to enjoy the smoldering ruins of his damned soul.

Above all, keep your patient away from the company of mature Christian believers. Convince him that the road to sobriety is best traveled alone. Thwart his prayers and give him a thousand reasons for not studying the Bible. The farther he strays from the Enemy, the nearer he draws toward us.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

For discussion:

- Discuss the maxim, "One drink is too many, and a thousand drinks is never enough."
- How does pride make an alcoholic more susceptible to relapsing?
- If you were being observed by an infernal being, which of your personal weaknesses and shortcomings would he use to bring you down?

Discovery Session 18

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding Step Eight
- The innocent victims of addiction
- Addiction and families
- Addiction and the workplace
- Addiction and the community at large

Introduction to Step Eight:

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

The needle that pierces the lone addict's vein poisons the world. Would you agree? Is the addict only harming himself or is he doing harm to those about him—his family, his friends, his employer, his community, his nation—indeed, his world—a world that includes us? Poet, lawyer, and clergyman John Donne penned *No Man is an Island* some four hundred years ago; his words resound with a clarity of truth that many readers find unsettling—even startling.

No Man is an Island

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.

As well as if a man of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

**I hate myself for being what I am. I do not like what I see and how I feel.
--James, an inmate who has long battled addiction**

If no man is an island, then we must regard the addict's cry, "I am harming no one but myself," as a vain, empty, and totally untrue expression that reeks of smoke and brimstone. Like it or not, our lives are intertwined and no one lives in total isolation. Every action, every deed, every course, and every decision is like the concentric circles resulting from a stone that is tossed into a lake; each act of the will creates a ripple effect that reaches far beyond the individual. We share this world and no one lives in an impenetrable bubble. And just as every addict bears the scars of addiction, *every addict inflicts cruel wounds that scar the lives of innocent others*. Many victims of alcoholism have never tasted a drop. Many casualties of heroin have never felt the pinch of a needle. Who are these wounded? They are our husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, coworkers, and fellow citizens. They are people we thoughtlessly damaged while we busily damaged ourselves. Most assuredly, we have done many people much harm. If we possess a shred of honesty, we must no longer claim to have harmed no one but ourselves. On the contrary, we are called to make a list of all persons we have injured and be willing to make amends to them.

Addiction and the Family

Substance abuse exacts a demanding toll upon those who are close to the addict. Typically, but not always, the addict's immediate family suffers most. The following blog was written by a wife who lost her husband to heroin. Her story has been edited for clarity:

"I knew Tom had some issues when I met him, but by the time I found out the extent of his problems, I was in too deep to walk out. Tom was a heroin addict and for the first four years of our relationship, I dealt with it, ignored it, and accepted it. It really was a horrible time. Then I got pregnant with our first child and I gave him the ultimatum—and to my complete surprise, the ultimatum worked. He went into treatment and followed an excellent recovery program. After seven years and two more children, life was good.

"Then I started to notice a change in Tom; he had become moody and secretive. I really thought he was having an affair, but a photograph told a different story. In a photo taken by one of our children, Tom looked gaunt and empty.

"I challenged him. Was it heroin? He, of course, denied it and I swore to him that if I found out it he had gone back to using heroin, I would take the children and leave. It only took three months for me to get the definitive answer; she was back—good old Miss Heroin.

"So I did as I promised. I left. No arguing, no confrontation, nothing. It broke my heart to leave, but my children and I could not go back to living with an addict. I loved Tom, but I hated his addiction.

"After that, Tom barely managed to function; he was a complete, full blown addict again. We kept minimal contact and all our dealings revolved around the children. Life went on and even though he was still an addict, he was able to lead a somewhat functional life.

“I really hoped he would get himself clean for his children’s sake, but last year, I got the call: Tom had been found dead with a needle in his arm.

“Heroin won. She got him in the end and three beautiful children were left without a father. I felt so guilty. Did my leaving him make his addiction worse? This question still haunts me at times. I still mourn my lost life, my children’s lost lives, and I do mourn for Tom. I loved him until the day he died, but I just couldn’t handle the addiction.”

In the end, there was one dead and four wounded. Next, the ex-wife of an alcoholic shares her story. Again, this narrative has been edited for clarity:

“I hope my story helps someone else. My husband is the son of an alcoholic; he comes from a very dysfunctional family. His father is also abusive and molested his sisters when they were just little kids. The mother is an enabler and ignores it all.

“I didn’t know any of this until after my husband abandoned me and our child in the middle of the night. It was at that point I started to ask questions, search for answers, and attempt to sort out what was really happening. He had a drinking problem. He claimed that he wanted to quit drinking, yet he was drinking on the sly and I knew it. I then prepared myself for the worst. I knew it wouldn’t be long until he hit the point of total self-destruction.

“Out of the blue one night, he just got up and walked out of the home and never came back. When he left, he took every penny we had. I went to my parents for a few days. While my little two year old daughter and I were with my parents, he stripped the contents of our home and left us with nothing but the few clothes we had taken with us.

“It took four months for the police to recover our belongings. I scraped together enough money to hire a lawyer. During those four months, he moved in with another man—his drinking buddy—and drank non-stop every day. He also started using drugs and it appeared as if his life was out of control.

“Then the IRS was looking for him; also his ex-wife obtained a judgment against him for non-payment of child support. I, too, brought suit against him for non-support and sought sole custody of our children. I did not even want him to have visitation privileges. He never appeared for any hearings. Even his lawyer could not reach him. His once high paying job was a mere pittance due to all the garnishments and I am certain that the alcohol and drugs are eating up the rest of the money. I found receipts showing the amount of money he spent on alcohol. It was disgusting.

“Today, I am building my life all over again; my daughter and I are getting our own home. My finances are on the way to being restored and life is beginning to be peaceful once again. It seems as my life improves, his life becomes worse. The situation is far different from the day when he abandoned us. I was left with nothing—homeless, penniless, broken, and devastated—and our little girl was the true victim in all this. He was such a jerk. He took her clothes, her bed, her toys—he took everything from her!”

For Discussion:

- In both cases, how did substance abuse affect the addicts’ wives?
- In the first account, the wife said, “I loved Tom, but I hated his addiction.” Discuss.
- In the second account, the alcoholic husband’s addiction left his wife and child in a state of poverty. Compounding the injuries to his family, his behavior, which included the taking his daughter’s bed and toys, was undeniably hateful and vindictive. Discuss.

I did anything and everything to get my next fix—that’s all I cared about.
--David, an inmate serving a twenty-three year sentence

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25 NASB),

It is God's will that husbands love their wives just as our Lord Jesus loves His church. Obviously, it is God's will that wives love their husbands in return, but this passage deserves our strict attention because the brand of love demonstrated by our Lord Jesus is selfless and sacrificial. In death, Jesus endured public ridicule, a scourging, a beating, a mocking crown made of piercing thorns, and iron nails mercilessly driven through His hands and feet. According to this passage, a godly husband must be willing to lay down his life in order to save the life of his wife. It is reasonable to conclude that this sacrificial love extends to the couple's children as well. No husband whose life is ruled by alcohol or drugs can properly love his family, for he will sacrifice all to satisfy the gnawing cravings of his addiction. Without exception, the interests and well-being of the addict or alcoholic's wife and children will be subservient to each of the exacting demands of his addiction. Over time, the wife of an addict may

- suffer from anxiety and feelings of insecurity
- experience a loss of self-esteem
- endure financial hardships
- undergo depression
- blame herself for her husband's woes
- suffer physical abuse
- lose interest in sexual intimacy
- unwittingly become a nursemaid instead of a wife
- experience shame and embarrassment for her husband's behavior
- become isolated and out of touch
- evolve into an enabler of his addiction
- transfer her anxieties and fears to the children
- place her career, education, or personal ambitions in jeopardy
- become bitter, resentful, and weary of living
- resort to suicide

Of course, husbands of alcoholics and drug addicts are prone to a similar variety of physical, emotional, familial, financial, vocational, and societal hardships that hallmark their wives' addiction.

Alcoholism is not a symptom of underlying problems. It is an illness in and by itself, producing its own symptoms. Before the onset of the disease alcoholism, the excessive drinking of alcoholic liquor generally is symptomatic of underlying problems. Once the line has been crossed and the drinker has become an alcoholic drinker, his drinking is then symptomatic of that illness.

--Maurice Gelinas

Edited for clarity, another wife recounts how her husband's addiction is shipwrecking their personal finances along with their faltering marriage:

"We have been together for twenty years and have four children. I love him deeply, but our life is taking a dive. We grew up together and I would do anything for him, but I just recently found out he is smoking crack. He maintains a job and he will do his duties around the house most of the time, but then he goes off to do his thing and he will not come home until the end of the night. Some nights, he does not come home at all. He will spend his whole paycheck on crack in a single night. He is very secretive about this. He and his brother smoke crack together. When I complain, he accuses me of interfering with his family. This is not true, of course, and my husband would do well to stay away from his brother.

"When I first confronted my husband about his crack habit, he cried and said it was a relief that I knew and he promised to stop. I told him he needed to go to rehab, but he wanted to quit on his own. That was three months ago and he continues to smoke crack. His crack habit has created a devastating financial burden. My kids ask me, 'What does daddy do with all this money?' I do not want to lie to our children, but I cannot come right out and say he's a crack-head. I do not know what to do. We are close to losing our house in foreclosure and we argue all the time about everything. There are times when I find myself saying some very ugly things to him. I have no outside support. I love this man with all my heart and I do not want to lose him, but I cannot cope with his addiction

anymore. I am suffering from excessive anxiety and frequent panic attacks; with all this stress, I am turning into a miserable person.”

**Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged
(Colossians 3:21).**

Parents owe their children a selfless love—a pure, sacrificial love in which the interests of the offspring are placed ahead of parental interests. The needs of the children should always supersede the needs of the parents. Children raised by a parent or parents bound by addiction will never know true normalcy in the home, for the disease will insist that the raging desires and insatiable cravings of the parents must be satisfied before the needs of the children are met. The ugly truth is this: children raised by addicts will live in the shadow of the bottle, the pill, the pipe, or the needle. The tender heart of God is grieved when children suffer from the instability and volatility that are the unavoidable byproducts of addiction. Parents insisting that they place their children’s interests first while steeped in the unmanageability and insanity of addiction are blind to the stark reality that belies their empty claims.

The Apostle Paul wrote we are not to provoke our children to anger. Children crave security, normalcy, stability, and selfless love. No parent in the throes of addiction can provide a proper measure of security, normalcy, stability, and selfless love, for the all-consuming addiction will never take a backseat to the primary needs of the children. When these basic needs are insufficiently met, the children must endure the relentless anxiety, shame, and frustration that afflict dysfunctional homes.

In the previous account, the wife and the children are suffering from the immediate effects of anxiety and ongoing financial woes, but over time, how else does addiction affect children? What are the long term consequences of growing up in a home with one or more alcoholic or substance-abusing parents? It is widely believed that children of alcoholics and addicts are often

- plagued by feelings of isolation

- raised in an atmosphere of financial want
- fearful of authority figures
- approval seekers who lose their true identities
- overly fearful of angry people
- unduly fearful of personal criticism
- alcoholics and addicts themselves
- married to alcoholics, addicts, or people with other debilitating disorders
- burdened by a sense of unrealistic personal responsibility
- saddled with guilt when standing up for themselves
- prone to giving in to the will of others
- prone to confusing love with pity
- unable to express their feelings
- victims of a poor self-image
- overly dependent upon others
- overly fearful of abandonment
- compulsive in their personal behavior
- prone to depression
- unable to enjoy intimacy with others
- drawn to chaotic lifestyles

Children brought up in households overshadowed by the cruel provocations of addiction will quite naturally experience anger, resentment, hostility, and bitterness. This is not to say the scars and wounds inflicted by their addicted parents will doom these children all the days of their lives, but growing up, even in a normal, happy home, has enough challenges without the added burdens common among dysfunctional homes.

For Discussion:

- How do alcoholic and substance-abusing parents provoke their children to anger?
- If you were raised in a dysfunctional home plagued by addiction, discuss your own childhood frustrations.

Alcohol and the Workplace

The following article, *Alcohol and the Workplace*, was taken from the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc.'s website:

Out of millions who hold full time employment in the United States, close to fifteen million are heavy drinkers of alcohol, exacting a high cost on work organizations, as employees who drink a lot are often absent from work, suffer from a lot of health problems, and are at a greater risk of harming themselves and others.

In the workplace, the impact of alcoholism focuses on four major issues:

- Premature death/fatal accidents
- Injuries/accident rates
- Absenteeism/extra sick leave
- Loss of production

Additional problem areas can include:

- Tardiness/sleeping on the job
- Theft
- Poor decision making
- Loss of efficiency
- Lower morale of co-workers
- Increased likelihood of having trouble with co-workers/supervisors or tasks
- Higher turnover
- Training of new employees
- Disciplinary procedures

While alcoholism can affect any industry and any organization, big or small, workplace alcoholism is especially prevalent in these particular industries:

- Food service
- Construction
- Mining and Drilling
- Excavation
- Installation, maintenance and repair

Two specific kinds of drinking behavior significantly contribute to the level of work-performance problems: drinking right before or during working hours (including drinking at lunch and at company functions), and heavy drinking the night before that causes hangovers during work the next day. And it isn't just alcoholics who can generate problems in the workplace. Research has shown that the majority of alcohol-related work-performance problems are associated with nondependent drinkers who may occasionally drink too much—not exclusively by alcohol-dependent employees. In addition, family members living with someone's alcoholism also suffer significant job performance related problems including poor job performance, lack of focus, absenteeism, increased health-related problems and use of health insurance.

It is God's will that employers deal fairly with their employees; conversely, God expects employees to demonstrate diligence and integrity in the fulfillment of their assigned duties. Chronic absenteeism, inefficiency, increased safety hazards, and low morale represent only some of the many workplace woes posed by employees whose lives are riddled by addiction. The Bible teaches, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men (Colossians 3:23)." It is hardly possible for alcoholics and substance abusers to *heartily* approach their workday duties; the rendering of an honest day's work brings honor to our God. Sadly, addicts are compelled feed their cravings at the expense of all else.

For Discussion:

- Discuss safety risks posed by addicts working with dangerous chemicals or heavy machinery.

- How does excessive absenteeism affect the efficiency and overall profitability of a business?
- Discuss firsthand accounts in which your addiction adversely affected your job performance.

Addiction and the Community at Large

No man is an island. Our lives are intertwined and no one lives in isolation. We share this world and our neighbors become our victims when our lives are compromised by addiction. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, alcohol abuse plays a role in 40% of violent crimes. Each year, 3 million violent crimes are committed by individuals who were intoxicated. How else does addiction affect our community and, indeed, our nation?

- Each year, over 100,000 people die prematurely due to alcohol
- Half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol related
- Alcoholism costs America \$60 billion or more annually

Our unintended victims are those we thoughtlessly damaged while bringing harm to ourselves. Those of us who have lived unmanaged lives have brought about great harm to our fellow citizens. To deny our role in the affliction of others is an inexcusable affront to honesty, personal responsibility, and sound reasoning. Indeed, we risk the ever-present dangers of relapse if we refuse to accept blame for our ill-guided actions. For our benefit and for the benefit of our victims, we are called to list all persons we have injured with a willingness of making amends. The list of injured parties begins with family and friends, but we must understand that the victims of our unmanaged lives include our employers, our coworkers, our neighbors, our community, and our nation.

For Discussion:

- If alcoholism was eradicated and addiction ceased rendering millions of lives unmanageable, what would happen to this nation's crime rate?
- Discuss the folly of addicts who insist, "I harm no one but myself."

Discovery Session 19

Points of Inquiry

- The “how to” of Step Eight
- Making amends to family and friends
- Making amends to coworkers
- Making amends to casual or chance acquaintances

Exploring Step Eight:

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

The following illustrates a journal entry in which the individual in recovery is attempting to list the persons he harmed.

Dear God,

I am to make a list of everyone I have harmed. I am also to show my willingness in making amends to everyone who has suffered because of my addiction. This will not be easy. For starters, I cringe in horror and contempt when I think how my runaway drinking has harmed those whom I most love. Will they ever forgive me? For that matter, will I ever forgive myself? Can you forgive me? Secondly, I may not recall everyone that I have harmed. I must, then, ask you to help me remember all of the people I have victimized. Finally, I am afraid I may not know how to make amends to those whom I have harmed. Can I go back in time and undo the past? No! So how can I erase the hurt I have caused? How can I compensate others for the injuries and wrongs that bear my fingerprints? As you can see, God, I desperately need your guidance if I am to take this step to recovery!

I suppose I will start with my ex-wife. How Elizabeth managed to put up with me and my drinking for as long as she did is a mystery. When we first married, I vowed to be her protector, but as my life slowly unraveled, she tried her best to protect me from the consequences of my drinking. When morning hangovers kept me in bed, it was she who made excuses to my boss. How humiliating this must have been. When my employer dismissed me, Elizabeth took on a part time job in an attempt at keeping our house out of foreclosure. At that time, the repeated phone calls from the bank were of no concern to me as long as I had my good Kentucky bourbon.

Elizabeth may have married a man, but alcoholism had reduced me to a sniveling coward who drowned his fears and frustrations in an ocean of alcohol. I was weak. I was self-centered. I cared only for myself. When she tried reasoning with me, I made vain promises that I never intended to keep. When she complained of my unwillingness to change, I shut her down with threats and insults. Over time, our old friends stopped coming by. I did not mind, of course, for I had made a brand-new set of friends—drinking buddies who never criticized my insatiable thirst for alcohol. I cannot imagine the loneliness poor Elizabeth must have endured. Although I was blinded by addiction, I now understand that my rampant drinking isolated Elizabeth and our kids from the rest of the world.

After the foreclosure, Elizabeth and the kids moved in with her parents. Looking back, I am amazed that she tolerated me as long as she did. For a time, I attended a few AA meetings and we even talked about getting back together, but then I convinced myself that I could cut back on my drinking without actually giving it up altogether and it isn't hard to guess what happened next. After figuring me for a lost cause, Elizabeth filed for divorce. She remarried about a year ago. I cannot blame her for leaving me, but I must say that I miss her terribly.

Our kids had a bad time of it, too. My drinking saw to that. Conner, our oldest, was quite an athlete. He may have been a high school kid, but he could throw a baseball like a seasoned big leaguer. Conner would cringe whenever he saw me sitting in the stands.

This is hardly surprising considering that I made a habit of showing up for his games with a belly full of bourbon. While alcohol coursed through my veins, I passed the time taunting his coach, the umpire, and the opposing team with my usual string of crude insults and vulgar profanities. Once, his coach asked me to quiet down—he said my drunken outbursts were embarrassing my son. Did I listen and pipe down? No! In my anger, I took a clumsy swing at the coach. Everyone laughed when I tumbled out of the bleachers—everyone, that is, except Conner. Eventually, Conner left the team.

I made it tough for our daughter Emily, too. She deserved more than a father who could not hold a job because of drink. Before my addiction had gotten out of hand, we owned a lovely home in a very respectable neighborhood. Emily loved that house. It was a very fine house, indeed, but when I was fired for drinking on the job, the mortgage payment was a bit heftier than my wife's income would permit. When it became obvious that I would not be earning a paycheck any time soon, Elizabeth took on a second job, but at that point, we had fallen hopelessly behind with the bank. Our daughter Emily cried and cried the day we were forced out of our home. Emily had always been a shy and sensitive sort of girl, but after the foreclosure, she grew sullen and withdrawn. I suppose the humiliation was too much for her to bear. We took an apartment across town and that meant a new school—and the loss of her old friends. She never quite adjusted to the new neighborhood. Emily was terribly unhappy. It was my fault that she dropped out of school prior to graduation.

As a husband and father, I give myself a big fat “F” for failure. God, I wish I knew how to mend their broken hearts. We are no longer a family. Elizabeth has a new husband and the kids have little to do with me these days—not that I blame them, but even if I never drink another drop as long as I live, we will never be a family. What can I possibly do that would make everything alright once again? How can I make amends?

Come to think of it, this step doesn't say that I have to make amends—Step Eight says that I must be *willing* to make amends. Okay, God, I am willing! I cannot change the past, but I am willing to do all that is humanly possible in an effort to make up for the

terrible pain and suffering I have caused. I pray, dear God, that you will open doors of opportunity so that I can make amends to my former wife and our children. And when you open doors of opportunity, please open my eyes, too, so that I will not be blind to the opportunities you have set before me—opportunities of making amends to those closest to me—opportunities for making amends to those whom I have most harmed. I believe, God, that you can help me heal the wounds that I inflicted.

Okay, who is next? When times were desperate, I borrowed money from my mother and father to cover fines, court costs, and attorney fees resulting from my arrest for drunken driving. I never repaid that debt. Now that I've gone back to work, maybe I can give them a few dollars out of each paycheck. It may take some time, but I am willing to repay all the money that I owe. It is the right thing to do.

No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes are in the airing cupboard. The only fatal thing is to lose one's temper and give it up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us; it is the very sign of His presence.—C.S. Lewis

If my memory serves me correctly, I recall borrowing some cash from Elizabeth's parents, too. I cannot remember what the money was for. Knowing me, I probably spent it on booze. That's all behind me now. By God's grace, I do not drink anymore, but that does not erase the debt owe to my ex-wife's parents. Again, I cannot repay my obligation in one lump sum, but I am willing to send them a small amount each payday until the debt is satisfied.

After losing my job, we struggled—or maybe I should say Elizabeth struggled to keep our creditors at bay. As I said, she took on a second job after determining that I would not be earning a paycheck anytime soon, but even that supplemental part time income was not

enough to keep us afloat. When times became desperate, I stole money from my grandmother. We all knew that she kept what she called her “emergency cash” in the old green vase that sat on her fireplace mantle. One evening, as she fetched me a cup of coffee, I stole her money. Everyone in the family, even my grandmother, knew that I had robbed the green vase, but no one said a word to me about it. What kind of man steals money from his ninety-one year old grandmother? An insane man living an unmanageable life is who! My grandmother died last year, so I cannot make amends to her, but even though she is in Heaven, I like to think she knows that, at long last, I am sober and living for Jesus Christ.

Who else have I hurt? A few years ago, I put a big crease in the right front fender of my brother’s car. Dan was reluctant about loaning me his car, but I swore that I had not been drinking, which was a lie, of course, and he was not at all pleased when I returned that evening in a late model Buick with several hundred dollars in body damage. His insurance company covered the repair bill, but maybe I can repay him for the aggravation. I know what I can do: Dan suffers from asthma and mowing the lawn triggers his breathing difficulties, so I will attend to Dan’s lawn this summer. It is the least I can do and I think he would appreciate the gesture. Maybe this will make up for the damage I did to his car.

After Elizabeth and the kids left me, I had a brief affair with my brother-in-law’s wife. It was a stupid thing to do—I know that now, but at the time, I was feeling sorry for myself and I did not care who I hurt as long as my needs were satisfied. Since then, Melissa and Rob have started attending church and their marriage is much stronger. I truly regret my part in this adulterous affair, but if I apologized to Melissa and Rob, my confession would most likely yield more harm than good. Other than opening a Pandora’s Box of painful memories and old wounds, what good could possibly result from revisiting this foolish indiscretion from the past? There are times when making amends is perfectly in order, but in this case, I believe that keeping my mouth closed while discreetly accepting God’s forgiveness is the best course for all parties concerned. This is surely an occasion when silence is golden.

In truth, I suppose I have caused my family and Elizabeth's family a boatload of grief. It is painful to admit, but I am nearly overwhelmed by shame whenever I think of the obnoxious behavior that I demonstrated during our family gatherings. Some drunks are quiet and nod off early, but drinking made me loud and boisterous. No doubt, my big mouth spoiled a good many holiday dinners for a whole lot of people from both of our families. I am aware that I cannot undo the past, but maybe I could send cards expressing my sincerest regrets to our relatives. I would like them to understand that I no longer drink. By God's grace, I am not the staggering, inebriated, insufferable loudmouth they surely remember. Maybe they will find it in their hearts to forgive me. Even if some family members choose to harbor resentments against me, I will feel better knowing that I attempted making amends to those I wronged.

I am already making amends to my best friend Baxter. He is the one who introduced me to my new Christian recovery group. I eventually learned that my old drinking buddies were not real friends—they chose to turn a blind eye to the dire consequences of my runaway drinking, but Bax had the guts, thank God, to share the life-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ with me. Not that I listened to him right off the bat. Come to think of it, I gave him the old brush-off for years and years, but Bax hung in there. He never gave up on me. Today, I am a clean and sober child of God. So how am I making amends to the one true friend who stood by me all those years? Ours is no longer a one way friendship. In the past, he did all the giving, and I did all the taking, but since I am learning to live without alcohol, I can do some giving, too.

And while I am making amends to those whom I have harmed, I must not forget about my former coworkers who endured an avalanche of drunken nonsense from me. What a goldbrick I was in those days! Between the chronic absenteeism and the missed deadlines and the habitual inefficiencies, I marvel that they kept me on the payroll as long as they did. How can I make amends to my former employer and coworkers? I could drop by the office with a couple of dozen donuts and tell them that I am a changed man—and I must ask their forgiveness, but maybe the best way of making amends is by giving my new employer my very best efforts. In truth, the old me was unreliable, but now I have

an opportunity of showing them how dependable a sober Christian employee can be. The old me was riddled with inefficiency. From here on, I will make amends by finishing every job, big or small, according to schedule. Perhaps a way of making amends to my former employer and coworkers is by *not* imitating the slovenly behavior of my past.

A few weeks before joining this recovery group, I stopped at a neighborhood convenience store to purchase a twelve-pack of beer. When my bank card was rejected, I blasted the cashier with a string of insults and profanities. It was not her fault that my bank account was overdrawn, but I let her have it all the same. I can hardly believe how shabbily I treated that poor little cashier. I do not know her name, and I am not even certain if she continues working there, but I must make an effort of finding her and offering my sincerest apologies. In the meantime, I can make amends by treating others with courtesy and respect. Everyone is created in the image of God. Each of us is made in His likeness. When I unfairly abuse and mistreat another individual, I grieve the tender heart of God. In my journey, God may reveal more individuals I have harmed. In the meantime, I know what I must do.

For Discussion:

- Discuss what it means to make amends to those we have harmed.
- Step Eight says we must be *willing* to make amends to those we have harmed even if we are uncertain how this is to be accomplished. Discuss what it means to be willing.
- The Bible teaches there is no condemnation to those who have placed their faith in Christ Jesus as Savior. In other words, our sins are forgiven. God does not hold the evil of our pasts against us. For this reason, God would have none of us overwhelmed by feelings of sorrow, guilt, grief, or remorse. We are to approach Step Eight with joy—not despair. Discuss.
- How does making amends bring healing to addicts and their victims? Why is this good for all involved?

Discovery Session 20

Points of Inquiry

- Exploring Step Nine
- Healing through restitution
- Credibility through restitution
- Honor through restitution

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



Before Earl, There Was Zaccheus

A number of years ago, American television viewers were introduced to a loveable scallywag named Earl who, after cashing a winning lottery ticket, spent his days

attempting to undo a long list of wrongs by making restitution to a legion of friends, relatives, neighbors, a rather brassy ex-wife, and other assorted victims who had suffered from his felonious behavior and petty thievery. Earl's heart was in the right place and his intentions were certainly noble, but he and his not too bright younger brother quickly learned that undoing a long list of wrongs by making restitution to an equally long list of victims is no easy matter. During the show's four year run, audiences were treated to the comical mishaps and misfortunes of this former ne'er do well turned respectable citizen. But two thousand years before Earl, there was Zaccheus. Zaccheus, too, was a sinner turned saint; this is his story:

He (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich. Zaccheus was trying to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way. When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. When they saw it, they all *began* to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19: 1-10 NASB)."

Those who think the Bible is void of humor do not know the Bible. Not only is the encounter between Jesus and Zaccheus among the more memorable stories in Scripture, their meeting has all the makings of a good comedy. To fully appreciate the humor found in Luke's Gospel record, a bit of background is in order.

Zaccheus was a tax collector. Admittedly, no one enjoys paying taxes, but taxes are one of those necessary evils that keep our military armed, our libraries stocked, and our highways safe. Our federal, state, and municipal governments hire respectable women and men to collect taxes that are rightfully owed by the citizens who benefit from a strong military, safe roads, and good schools—well, our taxes support some not-so-good schools, too, but this is another matter. Many of us may not feel so charitable come April 15, but reasonable persons—even those who find themselves sending a check to the Internal Revenue Service each April—would not openly ridicule those diligent, hard-working government employees who collect taxes. But I am afraid you err if you think Zaccheus was simply a mild-mannered bureaucrat in the business of collecting past due tax bills.

Ancient Israel was under the iron-fisted rule of Rome. No longer a sovereign people, the conquering Romans demanded massive tribute payments from the Jews. The Roman system of collecting tax money from the subservient Jews was both calculating and efficient: traitorous Jews of the lowest character were hired to collect extravagant sums of money from their fellow countrymen. Tax collectors, often referred to as publicans, had strict quotas to meet; these tax collectors were obligated to submit a predetermined sum of money to Rome. Monies amassed in excess of Rome's share went straight into the pockets of these oily publicans. Tax collecting was a very lucrative business.

It was of no concern to Rome if these tax gathering quislings resorted to underhanded schemes such as extortion and deceit. As long as the required tribute payments were submitted in a timely manner, the Roman government turned a blind eye to whatever dishonest tactics the tax gatherers employed in exacting the necessary amount of tribute money from their fellow countrymen. When recruiting Jews as tax mercenaries, the Roman overseers cared little about such attributes as honesty and integrity among the job applicants. On the contrary, evidence of greed and duplicity in a would-be tax collector was seen as a virtue and the total eradication of even the smallest trace of moral character was considered a real plus.

An ambitious tax collector could live quite sumptuously on his earnings. Again, once a tax collector satisfied Rome's minimum requirements, surplus monies became the property of the tax collector. A tax collector who was long on greed and short on scruples could be assured of amassing a tidy fortune for himself. To their discredit, seasoned tax gatherers had an arsenal of dishonest methods of extorting the maximum amount of wealth from their fellow Jews; also, the Jews had little recourse against these greedy extortionists. Tax collectors applied their fraudulent schemes with impunity while enjoying the full blessings of their Roman overseers.

For reasons all too obvious, tax collectors in ancient Israel were a despised lot. No faithful Jew would have dared to sell his soul to Rome, but tax collectors were rightfully branded as double-crossing catspaws in league with their hated foreign invaders. Adding to the degradation of the profession were the shameful methods tax collectors commonly used in squeezing excessive sums of money from their helpless victims. No manner of dishonest scheme--not even the threat of extortion--was deemed off limits by Rome. Tax collectors were given a free hand by pragmatic Roman officials who were interested only in results. Couple all this to the opulent lifestyles of the more notorious tax collectors and it is easy to understand why the Jews eyed these traitors with unmitigated contempt. A tax collector was nothing but a well-healed turncoat who fared sumptuously on the ill-gotten gains of treason.

With that, let us examine the text in detail:

He (Jesus) entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man called by the name of Zaccheus; he was a chief tax collector and he was rich (Luke 19:1, 2 NASB).

Zaccheus was a tax collector--actually, Zaccheus was a *chief* tax collector. He was not your average turncoat and traitor; Zaccheus' uncanny knack for extorting excessive sums of money from his poor, beleaguered countrymen was the talk of Jericho. A rare mixture

of ruthless cunning, raw moral degradation, and a stony heart that pumped ice water through his veins ushered him to the highest ranks of his profession. There were tax collectors and then there was Zaccheus. The Roman tax authorities unanimously agreed that no one could steal the shirt off of a neighbor's back quite like Zaccheus.

Verse 2 says that Zaccheus was rich. How rich? Tax collectors fared very well, but chief tax collectors were in another league altogether. And though Scripture does not say, it is reasonable to assume that Zaccheus owned the finest home in Jericho. We can only imagine how his opulent lifestyle must have vexed the townspeople. Perhaps a conversation between the local butcher and the town's baker went something like this: "Did you see that new wrought iron gate at the front entrance of his home? Zaccheus paid for that fancy new gate by robbing me of every penny in my cashbox!" The baker may have answered, "Oh, yeah? Zaccheus ordered three coats of whitewash brushed upon his big house after stealing me blind! And he even helped himself to every loaf of bread in my shop!"

In the previous chapter, there is the account of Jesus healing a blind beggar on the outskirts of Jericho. We are told that a crowd had been following Jesus; another crowd was assembling in Jericho. This much is certain--Jesus drew crowds wherever He went. Many gathered, no doubt, in hopes of seeing a miracle; Jesus' healings were public, and He turned away no one. There were plenty of eye-witnesses who had seen Him restoring sight to the blind or raising the dead back to life. We will do well to remember these miraculous events were not hidden from public view. Jesus healed people in full sight of everyone. His ministry was open. He did nothing in secret. Understandably, His arrival in Jericho had created quite a stir--the townspeople had dropped whatever they were doing to catch a glimpse of this amazing man.

It is interesting to note that Jericho was a "cursed city." You may remember that, centuries earlier, God had destroyed the wicked people of Jericho with a warning that anyone rebuilding the city would be cursed. As Jesus and His disciples traveled toward Jerusalem, perhaps one of the twelve suggested bypassing the city altogether. Jericho

was, after all, a cursed city. But Jesus had an appointment in Jericho. He was to meet a wealthy tax collector.

Earlier, I said the Bible contains humor. Maybe you will find some humor in this account, too; for starters, the name Zaccheus means *pure*. Meet Mr. Pure! What a name for a man whose hands were in everyone's pockets! As an infant, his young mother may have held him near to her heart while saying, "My dear little baby boy is so innocent! So precious! So pure!" Forty years later, the butcher and baker may have pointed scornfully in the direction of Zaccheus saying, "There goes Mr. Pure! Pure greed, that is!" We can be certain there was a good bit of sarcastic chiding when the name Zaccheus was brought into a conversation.

Zaccheus was trying to catch a glimpse of Jesus but was unable because of the crowd, for he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree in order to see Him, for He was about to pass through that way (Luke 19:3, 4 NASB).

The arrival of Jesus was big news in Jericho and Zaccheus did not want to miss out on the excitement; unfortunately, his view was sorely hampered by his limited height. As Zaccheus was likely the least popular person in Jericho, it is doubtful that anyone offered him a front row view. Determined to see Jesus, Zaccheus scrambled up a sycamore tree. What a sight this must have been! Can you imagine the crowd laughing and jeering as this vulgar little man clawed his way up that sycamore tree?

A sycamore can grow in excess of one hundred-fifty feet--that's as tall as a fifteen story building. A sycamore tree also represents strength and safety. As far as Zaccheus was concerned, the stately sycamore that grew along the road afforded him a birds-eye view of the Lord Jesus. Although this is not mentioned in Scripture, my guess is that a number of the townspeople were in hopes that Zaccheus would fall from the tree and break his neck.

When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, “Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house (Luke 19:5).”

Jesus must have been amused upon seeing this funny little man perched in a sycamore tree. For that matter, the entire assembly probably had a good laugh as Zaccheus clung to the sycamore branch.



Here is a question to ponder: how did Jesus know Zaccheus' name? I cannot say with certainty, but if you will read Luke 18, Jesus tells the story of a self-righteous Pharisee and a contrite tax collector who had gathered outside of the temple. While the religious leader grandiosely boasted of his many good and noble deeds, the tax collector simply lowered his head in shame while begging mercy from God. Who was this tax collector? Perhaps it was Zaccheus.

Zaccheus had more money than he could spend in a lifetime, but what he desperately lacked was peace with God. The Lord Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem. Once in Jerusalem, He would be arrested, beaten, and nailed to a crudely hewn wooden cross. The sacrificial death of Jesus would take away the sin of the world--and that included the sin of a lost sinner named Zaccheus, too. Why did Jesus pass through Jericho? Jesus had an appointment with an undersized tax collector in dire need of mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly (Luke 19:6 NASB).

Jesus must have had another good laugh watching Zaccheus negotiating his way down from the dizzying heights of the sycamore tree. The text says that Zaccheus responded *gladly*. Consider this: Zaccheus was a despised man. His name was a curse among the people of Jericho. The only friends he had were fellow tax collectors, yet this famous rabbi who restored sight to the blind, brought strength to the lame, and gave life to the dead was asking for an invitation to his home.

Jesus said, "Zaccheus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house!" These may have been the first kind words Zaccheus had heard in years. Many of us have a distorted view of God. There are those who are convinced that God is some sort of cosmic ogre waiting to hurl lightning bolts of destruction upon those who live sinful lives. To be sure, the day will come when God will have no choice but to squelch a worldwide rebellion, but for now, we are living in the age of grace--and God is ready to extend His lavish grace upon all who will accept His gift of eternal life. Regardless of what you may have heard, we do not earn God's favor through our own good deeds. We are not rewarded with God's favor by virtue of our own merits. Salvation is a gift. It is free to those who simply hold out their hands to receive. Do not be deceived by thinking that eternal life is some sort of divine paycheck for a life well lived. Being good is not good enough. The Apostle Paul likened our good works to dirty rags and those who dare to approach the throne room of God garbed in dirty rags are shamefully under-dressed for the

occasion. Better to be clothed in God's mercy than in some ridiculous costume stitched together by our own sickly little works and deeds.

When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner (Luke 19:7 NASB)."

Up until now, the people of Jericho had hailed the Lord Jesus as a hero who was admired by all, but when He extended His grace and mercy to this hated little tax collector, the crowd suddenly turned sour. A few weeks ago, two rather testy letters sent to my attention heartily condemned our ministry's involvement with the homeless. Both anonymous letter writers viciously opposed our work with women and men bound by the ravages of substance abuse and alcoholism. One of the unsigned letters referred to me as a "bleeding heart." Indeed. But the matter can be settled easily enough. Who needs healing? Those who are well or those who are sick? Jesus, the Great Physician, came to heal those who had been hopelessly stricken by the putrefying curse of sin. Zaccheus was riddled through and through with sin; Zaccheus needed the One who is mighty to save helpless sinners. Rather than cheering Jesus for reaching out to Zaccheus, the crowd lustily grumbled, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!"

Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:8-10 NASB)."

Under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, Dr. Luke did not record the conversation that took place inside the home of Zaccheus, but when the Lord Jesus and His host emerged sometime later, we can know beyond all doubt that Zaccheus had been born again. The filthy heart of a greedy tax collector had been replaced with the *pure* heart of a saint. Turning to the Lord Jesus, Zaccheus declared, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions

I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.”

Zaccheus was saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Offering restitution to those he had defrauded did not save Zaccheus--God saves no one based upon charitable works and kind deeds--but good works and deeds are the *evidence* of salvation. That afternoon, Zaccheus discovered something far more precious than money--Zaccheus had a personal, one-on-one relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The friend of publicans and the friend of Rome was now a friend of God. Again, it was not this new-found generosity that brought Zaccheus into a right relationship with God. The giving heart merely evidenced Zaccheus' conversion experience. Do not be misled by those who teach that we earn God's love by our actions: faith alone saves alone, but a saving faith is never alone--saving faith is followed by good works.

Half of his wealth was immediately given to the poor. The rest was to be divided among those he had defrauded. As Zaccheus spoke to the Lord Jesus, a long line began queuing at the entrance of his home. Zaccheus had robbed a lot of people. He had done great harm to a good many of his fellow citizens. In gratitude, Zaccheus sought to undo the damage he had inflicted upon others. By the end of the day, Zaccheus may have been a pauper, though he was surely the richest man in Jericho, for Zaccheus had made peace with God.

That night, Zaccheus slept like a baby. With his conscience eased and his sanity restored, Zaccheus began life as a new man--a new creation in Christ Jesus. No longer a slave to the passions of greed, Zaccheus exchanged his trinkets of silver and gold for the imperishable crown of eternal life.

Zaccheus quickly came to appreciate the therapeutic value of making rightful restitution to those he had wronged. Although the official biblical account of Zaccheus ends with the tenth verse, it is reasonable to conclude that Zaccheus was transformed from being the most hated man in Jericho into the town's leading citizen. People who had hitherto

avoided his society at all costs were now seeking his company at every opportunity. There is indeed a lesson in this: restitution is necessary in restoring those broken relationships from the past. We are more likely to experience the forgiveness of others when we seek to undo the injuries we have caused.

Restitution provides credibility to our personal testimonies. You say you are a new person? You say you are no longer the raging madman who, in a drunken rage, puts his fist through the drywall? You say you are no longer the dishonest employee who helps herself to the cash drawer while others are not looking? Prove it. Don't simply say that you are a new person--prove it. How? How do you convince others that your conversion is genuine? You back your claims by making restitution to those you have wronged.

There is an old story about a pickpocket who claimed to be a Christian. "In the old days," he often boasted, "I would steal ten or twelve wallets a day! Now that I am a Christian, I only steal three or four wallets a day!" Unfortunately, there are many who claim to follow Christ Jesus while continuing in a life of sin and corruption. In truth, a thief who steals only half as much as before remains a thief. If it is a bullet-proof testimony you desire, begin making restitution to those you have harmed. Restitution makes believers out of scoffers. Restitution gives credence to testimonies. Restitution offers peace to the restless, and restitution brings honor to our Lord Jesus Christ.

For Discussion:

- Discuss how restitution brings peace within one's inner self.
- Discuss how restitution brings peace with those whom we have wronged.
- Discuss how restitution gives credibility to one's personal testimony.
- Discuss how restitution gives glory to God.
- Discuss how making amends with one's victims helps to tear down strongholds of false pride that can hamper one's journey to recovery.

- How might the people of Jericho reacted to Zaccheus' profession of faith had he kept his wealth rather than giving it away?
- Was Zaccheus justified by God because he gave away his money? In other words, was Zaccheus saved by his works? Or did his works reflect his faith? Please refer to Ephesians 2: 8, 9.
- Making amends to one's victims can ease the burden of pent up guilt. How might unresolved guilt derail one's recovery?

Discovery Session 21

Points of Inquiry

- Exploring Step Ten
- Understanding Step Ten's link with Step Four
- When excuses are inexcusable
- Step Ten as a safeguard against relapse
- The problem with dry drunks

Exploring Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory, and promptly admitted when we were wrong

As we discovered in Step Four, making an honest and accurate moral inventory requires a lion's share of backbone and courage; this is scarcely an undertaking for the faint of heart. Any accurate self-assessment must be searching, fearless, and without hesitation or reservation. The timid are unlikely to discover the glaring self-truths that are evident to God and others. Why is this matter of self-assessment so difficult? Perhaps honest introspection is toilsome and demanding because we humans

- are frequently dishonest with ourselves and others (Genesis 6:5)
- tend to think too highly of ourselves (Philippians 2:3)
- are quick to recognize faults in others while ignoring our own faults (Matthew 7:5)

In working Step Four, our careful self-examination brought a number of highly disturbing personal faults to light. Without addressing our personal short-comings, we are prone to relapse. Additionally, how can any among us accept God's unconditional forgiveness while denying the ugly sin conceived in our corrupted nature? To be certain, this matter of self-scrutiny can be a disagreeably painful process, but the benefits are worthy of our efforts. This brings us to a word of warning—and a word of encouragement: Shame is

a byproduct of honest self-examination. Drinking from the cup of shame can leave a bitter taste, but draining the cup can be restorative, for shame produces clarity in self-understanding. Shame allows us to see ourselves as God and others see us. Thankfully, God never intended for us to drown in an ocean of shame. Once shame has done its work, we are to dismiss it from our minds and proceed forward. Prolonged or excessive shame produces despair. Despair has sent legions of women and men back into the welcoming arms of the bottle, the pipe, the pill, and the needle. It is not God's intended purpose that any of us wallow in sorrow and despair. We are to admit our faults, accept God's forgiveness, and move on with life.

For Discussion:

- Shame can lead us to clarity and understanding, but prolonged shame can bring about despair. Discuss.

Ninety-nine percent of the failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses.
--George Washington Carver

As understanding ourselves is such a daunting and arduous undertaking, how are we to approach this matter of self-examination when we scarcely know who or what we really are? In truth, we are prone to seeing ourselves through one perspective; others see us through different perspectives, but only God sees us as we truly are. Our sobriety depends, in part, on the clarity of mind that only God can provide.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23, 24).

This matter of self-examination and the maintaining of a personal moral inventory did not end with the completion of Step Four; on the contrary, Step Ten establishes this as an ongoing process that demands a prompt and proper response whenever we do wrong.

If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (I John 4:20, 21 ESV).

For those of us who truly wish to love God sincerely and whole-heartedly, learning to love our brothers and sisters is a good place to start. To love God is to love our spiritual family. How do we demonstrate this brand of *agape* love? We prove our love of God by promptly admitting the wrongs we commit against others. We are never to make lame excuses for our bad behavior; we are to take full responsibility for our grievous wrongdoings. We must never shirk our rightful obligations to those we have injured just as we must never seek to hide from the painful consequences that follow our ill-dealings with others.

He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.
--Benjamin Franklin

Statements such as, “Sorry, but I am only human,” or “After all, nobody’s perfect,” are merely vain, empty excuses that must be eradicated from our speech if we are to grow in God’s love. Owing up to our mistakes is essentially important if we are to mature as Christ followers; additionally, those who take personal responsibility for their ill-advised actions shield their hearts and minds from the dangers of relapse.

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8 ESV).

Some of our brothers and sisters can be particularly abrasive and are, quite frankly, not so very lovable. God knows this. Even so, He wants us to love them in spite of their annoying character flaws. This is no easy task, but with God, even the impossible becomes possible. If we struggle to love others, the Holy Spirit of God will produce love in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion (Proverbs 28:13 NASB).

We may attempt to hide our wrongdoings from others and, indeed, we may even attempt to conceal our transgressions from ourselves, but to do so is a recipe for failure. Those who live in the shadows of denial will never mature. The most damaging lie is the lie we tell ourselves; dishonesty stunts personal growth and without proper development, we will never be of any use to God and others.

Most people don't have that willingness to break bad habits. They have a lot of excuses and they talk like victims.

--Carlos Santana

When we wrong another, we must settle the matter without delay. This is God's will for you and me. Typically, most people are forgiving and as the writer of this proverb stated, we who confess and forsake our wrongdoings "will find compassion."

Again, let us remember that making excuses for bad behavior is, well, inexcusable! Avoid apologies with imbecilic disclaimers such as,

- "I'm sorry, but I've had a really bad day!" (Since when did having a bad day give one the right to behave like a jackass?)
- "Sorry, but if you knew what I've been through, you'd understand!" (Sounds like a martyr complex—give it up!)

- “Sorry, but only God is perfect and I’m not God!” (Oh, boy! This excuse is so lame, it comes with a pair of crutches!)

An apology that is tagged with an excuse is no apology at all. For those who are prone to making excuses instead of amends, here is a tidbit of timely advice: as soon as you say, “I’m sorry,” shut your mouth and say no more. Never allow a meaningless excuse to come waddling behind a perfectly good apology.

For Discussion:

- How does an excuse differ from an apology?
- It is commonly said that Jesus died for our sins and not for our excuses. Discuss.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16).

James, the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, admonishes us to confess our faults to those we have injured. This is good medicine, for confession brings healing—both to the injured party and to the one who inflicted the injury. Additionally, it is often helpful to confess these same faults to a trusted pastor or to another mature believer who will listen patiently and then provide support and encouragement.

Even though God knows what we have done and no evil deed is hidden from His sight, we are to confess our faults to Him in prayer, for the sincere, heartfelt prayer of a righteous believer will accomplish much good. We are to approach Him in confidence, for He never turns His sons and daughters away in anger or contempt. God loves us just as we are—but He will never be content to leave us just as we are. He has plans for you and me—plans to prosper us, not to harm us—plans to give us hope for brighter tomorrows!

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29 NKJV).

The tongue is like a wild beast that is not easily tamed. Left unchecked, the tongue can inflict great damage to others. For that matter, ill-spoken words from our very lips can bring an avalanche of hurt and shame upon us. An unbridled tongue

- is capable of lashing out against those closest to us—our spouses, our children, and our parents—the very people we are to love and honor.
- can lash out against trusted friends who love us and, ultimately, drive them away.
- is used as an instrument for ruining the reputations of the innocent.
- is a catalyst for violence and even death—each day's headlines bring tragic news of violence and bloodshed that can be traced to raging tempers and heated, out of control arguing. Words can kill.

The Apostle Paul said our speech should build up and edify others; a good word spoken in gentleness and sincerity is a powerful instrument of hope, healing, and comfort. To be sure, a good word of encouragement

- is a balm of healing to hearts burdened by trouble and grief.
- will give new hope to those who are experiencing trials and disappointments.
- will transform strangers into friends.
- will bring honor to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our words should uplift and edify others—careless words spoken in anger can lead to all manner of evil, but it is God's desire that our speech will strengthen and encourage those whom He has placed in our paths.

But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may

come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will (II Timothy 2:23-26 NKJV).

Most arguing generates an abundance of suffocating heat but very little light. Throughout recorded history, mankind's propensity for heated arguing has created a brand of global warming whose consequences are a far greater threat than any real or imagined results of the so-called climate change debate.

Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race.
--William E. Gladstone

God's servant is not to be quarrelsome. Standing firm for what is right is our duty, but petty quarreling over peripheral, inconsequential matters falls into the "foolish and ignorant disputes" category that Paul warned against. On the contrary, God's servants must be

- gentle to all—let us attract others, not by winning arguments, but drawing others to the truth through gentle persuasion born of compassion and mercy.
- teachers who can lead others to Christ Jesus and, in our case, show others bound by addiction the way to a clean and sober lifestyle.
- patient toward others just as our Savior Jesus Christ is patient with us.
- able to correct others in gentleness, for a true leader has a gentle heart.

If we do all this, God will use us to draw others to a change of mind, heart, and direction. We once trod along the downward slopping path of destruction, but by the richness of God's mercy, we have been adopted into His kingdom. No longer are we slaves of the devil. Today, we are sons and daughters of the King. Let us grovel about as beggars no more. And while we celebrate our rich blessings, let us determine to invite others into our royal family so that they, too, can know the goodness of God's abounding love.

A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense (Proverbs 19:11 NIV).

Wisdom is found in a patient man or woman whose skin is thick enough to overlook the offenses of others. We humans are prone to living by a double standard. As an example, when we offend others, we ask for mercy, but when others offend us, we demand justice and restitution. Let us show mercy to others; in doing so, we will enjoy the blessings of God's mercy.

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another (Romans 12:10 NKJV).

Addicts and alcoholics tend to place their interests and desires above the needs of others. Addiction may be the ultimate expression of selfishness. As we journey to the Promised Land, let us begin thinking more highly of others than ourselves. In the past, we

- spent money intended for rent, groceries, and utilities on harmful addictive substances that would temporarily ease our cravings.
- lied about our whereabouts and actions and cloaked our faults and shortcomings in dishonesty and deception.
- manipulated others in order to pursue the very substances that were ruining our broken, unmanaged lives.
- shunned our personal responsibilities to the detriment of our families and loved ones.
- thought only of ourselves.

That was then and this is now and now we are to show kindly affection to one another in brotherly love while honorably demonstrating preference to our families, our friends, and our neighbors.

For Discussion:

- Addiction and selfishness go hand in hand. Discuss.

- Addicts are manipulative, self-centered individuals who seek to satisfy the screaming demands of their condition with little regard to the needs of their family, friends, and loved ones. Discuss how sobriety can restore broken relationships and mend past hurts.

Years ago, an automobile manufacturer advertised their line of vehicles with the slogan, “Ask the man who owns one.” As we are promoting recovery rather than cars, let us see what other women and men on the road to recovery are saying about Step Ten:

“For my sobriety, I must work this step every day. At times, I get frustrated and angry with others who annoy me, but this is usually because I am being selfish and wanting my own way. Step Ten has afforded me the ability to recognize this in myself. Without working this step, I would continue to believe I am always right.”

By working Step Ten, this individual is able to recognize the stubborn selfishness—the dreaded “it’s all about me” tendency that dwells within all of us. Step Ten is a mirror, so to speak, that reveals us for who we truly are.

“I love this step! It keeps me honest and humble and keeps that inner peace with me that I sought for so very long. I know immediately if I have hurt someone; in daily living, I really try to always stop and think before I open my mouth.”

According to this recovering addict, Step Ten is a safeguard against ill-spoken words that are injurious to others. To stop and think before speaking is sound advice that we would all do well to follow.

“I learned that it makes me feel good when admitting to making mistakes and being truly sorry for it. Whenever this is accomplished, I feel serene and at peace. It sure does beat the heck out of getting drunk over a bad situation!”

The inner peace that comes to admitting mistakes has helped keep this recovering alcoholic safe and sober. Adherence to Step Ten is a vital component of relapse prevention.

“Step Ten is my least favorite step. Me? Wrong? Can't be! And when I am wrong, I always find a way to turn it and twist it and make it the other guy's fault. That's what I did for years. Today, I very reluctantly admit when I am wrong, and to tell you the truth, even though it makes me feel better, I still don't like doing it. The reason is simple: ego.”

The Bible teaches that pride is the deadliest of all sins. There is hope for this recovering alcoholic, for he understands that his ego continually resists the owning up to his faults. Admitting one's mistakes requires a healthy dose of humility and, in the recovering alcoholic's words, the process can be initially disagreeable but, in the end, entirely therapeutic.

“For me, Step Ten is very important to my daily living. What a joy to not let any mean-spirited deed or thoughtless remark fester. The act of quickly trying to right the wrong keeps my mental house clean. If I cannot ‘fix’ the hurt directly to the person, I try to do an unexpected kindness to another. Works for me!”

As this individual states, cruel deeds and injurious speech leave wounds that, unless treated, will fester over time, but by making timely amends, he keeps his mind clean and healthy. And if he is unable to make direct amends to a victim of a thoughtless word or deed, he attempts to rectify the wrong by showing kindness to another.

“Saying ‘I am sorry’ is easy. Meaning it is a different story. Today, when I say I'm sorry I usually mean it and try not to repeat the same mistakes. I do carry this step into all my affairs. It just seems easier with casual acquaintances or strangers. It is a process and so far I haven't had to take a drink because I didn't do my part.”

Again, by working Step Ten, this recovering alcoholic has retained her sobriety. By admitting her wrongs and making sincere amends, she has discovered that she is less likely to repeat the same offense and this has helped to keep her away from the bottle.

The time is always right to do what is right.
--Martin Luther King, Jr.

Step Ten is an extension of Step Four. Step Four had us taking stock of our faults, weaknesses, and short-comings, but Step Ten has us maintaining that fearless moral inventory—keeping it current and up to date, so to speak. To accomplish this, a commitment to honest self-evaluation along with the subduing of stubborn pride will help to guard against ill-spoken words and hateful actions that harm those around us. Figuratively speaking, the swallowing of one's pride is much like swallowing a sixteen pound bowling ball—it does not go down easily, but we will do well to remember that no one likes the company of a boastful individual. Those whose natures are hallmarked by an unassuming gentleness draw others to themselves. Arrogance pushes others away, but humility is a magnetic attribute that attracts those around us. By adhering to Step Ten, we take ownership of our faults by admitting our wrong-doings to those we have harmed. Keeping a watchful eye on the state of one's moral inventory is a proven safeguard against relapse. Doing what is right has its rewards.

For Discussion:

- In what way is Step Ten an extension of Step Four?
- Step Ten requires that we admit to our faults on a daily basis. How is pride an obstacle to the successful fulfillment of this vital admonition?
- C.S. Lewis said the moment we think we have finally achieved humility, we have deceived ourselves. Discuss.

The Problem with Dry Drunks

A dry drunk is an alcoholic who no longer drinks, yet whose recovery is stunted because of an absence of healthy emotional or behavioral changes. A dry drunk may be likened to a sober burglar—he may no longer drink, but he is still a burglar. A dry drunk is one who has stopped chasing the bottle, yet he lives without the joy and freedom that other recovering alcoholics experience.

One Twelve Step organization's literature explains that dry drunks are "restless, irritable, and discontented." In spite of their sobriety, they are disgruntled with life and live in an almost continuous state of agitation. Sadly, the day to day routine of living becomes increasingly burdensome to those who have cheated themselves from the measure of joy that comes with sobriety. Any attempt at describing the countless benefits of living an alcohol-free life usually leads to an understatement, yet those whose souls have been poisoned by a deadly elixir of emotional and behavioral regression find little satisfaction in sober living.

The dry drunk's negative mental outlook poses a number of hazards. Anger, which may be the dry drunk's number one enemy, prevents the healing of broken relationships and the making of amends to those whom he has harmed. Left unchecked, dry drunks face the risks of relapse and suicide. Even in best case scenarios, dry drunks labor under the shadow of anger, futility, and resentment. Unless internal changes occur, dry drunks will never experience a full, meaningful life.

Negativity is the byproduct of the dry drunk's regressed emotional state. A dry drunk is one who could stand in the presence of the world's most beautiful woman and complain about the color of her shoes. With resentment and negativity comes isolation; dry drunks resent the company of others and, for obvious reasons, others are not drawn to the company of dry drunks. Isolation leads to self-centeredness and selfishness and is a breeding ground for further emotional regression and, again, possible relapse.

The dry drunk's isolation becomes a roadblock to regular church attendance and active participation in recovery support group meetings. This loner mentality coupled with anger and irritation makes working the Twelve Steps virtually impossible. Again, isolation causes the dry drunk to be particularly prone to the perils of relapse.

Over time, dry drunks may become disillusioned with sobriety. Once the honeymoon is over, so to speak, dry drunks may begin wondering if sobriety is really such a prize. Rather than rejoicing in their new-found sobriety, dry drunks often begin treating sobriety like a punishment.

The dry drunk syndrome may be a result of unfulfilled expectations. As an example, an alcoholic may enter recovery in hopes of restoring a broken relationship with his or her spouse and children. If the alcoholic's lofty expectations are never realized, he or she may begin harboring doubts about the benefits of sobriety. This leads us to another peril. Dry drunks often fall victim to the deceptions of a *selective memory*. A selective memory is illustrated by one who remembers the good times that came with drinking and drugging while conveniently forgetting the chaos and insanity that hallmarks every addict's lifestyle.

Because of the dry drunk's stunted emotional and behavioral development, they are prone to making poor decisions that can affect their continued sobriety, personal relationships, vocational success, and financial security. C. S. Lewis warned that corruption of the intellect leads to corruption of the will. The dry drunk's intellect, steeped in frustration, negativity, and narcissism will lead to decisions that can hinder every aspect of the recovering alcoholic's life.

A dry drunk may be likened to a millionaire who chooses to live like a beggar. Even with all of the pluses that come from a life of sobriety, dry drunks live in a round-the-clock state of negativity. Over time, negativity and frustrations will take their toll. It takes very little imagination to foresee the possible dire fates of the dry drunks whose mental outlook continuously deteriorates over time.

It is not God's will for the dry drunk to remain in a perpetual state of anger, frustration, and isolation. The Bible holds the key that will unlock the self-made dungeon that keeps the dry drunk from experiencing the lavishness of God's joy.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (James 4:8 NASB).

The nearer we are to God, the more we will take on His holy attributes. Unlike the dry drunk who is steeped in anger and resentment, God is slow to anger and unwilling that anyone would perish. By the leading of God's Holy Spirit, the dry drunk can learn to cast off negative feelings of resentment, frustration, and despair, for it is God's will that His adopted sons and daughters live full, abundant, meaningful lives.

We have been created for joy. Abundant joy. Lasting joy. Unwavering joy. We were not created to live in a continual state of misery, unhappiness, sorrow, and discontentment. Scripture is quite clear in teaching that God never intended us to grovel about as abandoned orphans.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:23-25 NKJV).

There is strength in numbers. The journey to the Promised Land is best traveled in the company of others. We are to surround ourselves with those who can uplift us, encourage us, and keep us honest. Just as our Triune God is a community in Himself, we were made for community. We were made for each other, for isolation is an enemy that will seek to send us back into the pit of addiction.

For Discussion:

- Define a dry drunk. Without naming names, can you think of a dry drunk?
- How does emotional instability make the addict prone to relapse?
- How can the recovering addict avoid becoming a dry drunk?

Discovery Session 22

Points of Inquiry

- Exploring Step Eleven
- Personal ambitions versus God's dreams for our lives
- The dangers of worldliness and materialism
- The God of possibilities—not impossibilities
- Discovering God's "master plan" for our lives

Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying for knowledge of God's will and the power to carry that out

It was the celebrated historian and businessman James Truslow Adams who made "The American Dream" a part of our national lingo. In *The Epic of America*, he defined the American Dream as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement...It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." In spite of our national faults, America remains a land of opportunity where ambition is neither mocked nor jeered—a nation in which dreams, even far-fetched dreams, are realized.

For many, a sprawling home in a prestigious neighborhood is the ultimate trophy—a brick and mortar monument attesting to one's ambition and industry. This may explain why a middle-aged couple would feel cramped in anything less than a three thousand square foot house. For others, the American Dream has little to do with the accumulation of wealth or conspicuous materialism; self-fulfillment is the prize that stirs these dreamers

to action. This may be illustrated by the occasional CPA or attorney who, over the protests of well-meaning family and friends, abandons a perfectly good professional career to pursue acting or writing or even a two year stint in the Peace Corp. Particularly among Third World immigrants arriving in the United States, the American Dream is often expressed as a yearning hope that their children may come to know the abundant blessings of living in a nation of nearly unlimited freedom and opportunity. Indeed, this is a land of diverse people whose individual perceptions of the American Dream are equally diverse.

For much of the world's population, the American Dream represents mankind's loftiest ideals—an opportunity to pursue one's personal ambitions in an atmosphere of boundless freedom. The American Dreams says nothing is impossible to those who are willing to try, try, and try again. In other words, hard work and perseverance are the two necessary ingredients for realizing the American Dream. But might there be an expression of hope—an even loftier pinnacle of personal fulfillment that soars above the most far-flung of all our American Dreams?

The answer is a resounding “Yes!” There is a much grander dream that originates beyond the borders of our fifty states—a dream born in the fertile infinity of our Creator's mind.

“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 NIV).”

The God who made us and the God who loves us is also the God who has a dream for each of us. Unlike the dreams conjured in our finite imaginations, His dreams for you and me

- are always attainable—if He tells us to fly, He will give us wings
- satisfy our heart's deepest longings—money and fame can leave us empty and unfulfilled, but God's grand design for our lives satisfies as no mere earthly trinkets can

- yield rewards that follow us into eternity—earthly treasures are divided among our surviving heirs, but God’s rewards are stored in Heaven’s vaults

With God, all things are possible, but without God, there are a lot of impossibilities. Not every human ambition will be realized. Not every personal longing will be satisfied. Most dreams will remain just that—dreams. But if we set aside our personal ambitions and accept the divinely appointed ambitions originating from the hallowed halls of God’s Throne Room, we simply cannot fail.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13 NKJV).

God knows nothing of failure. Is anything impossible to the One who spoke this vast universe into existence? He is the God of possibilities—not impossibilities. Because of this truth, the Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed that he could accomplish all that God had set before him through the power of Jesus Christ. When God handed Paul his marching orders, He also granted him access to the infinite power of the One who conquered death and the grave. As long as Paul remained obedient to God’s will and purpose for his life, he could fully rely upon the unwavering strength of Christ Jesus to overcome the obstacles and roadblocks that stood in the way of ultimate success. Of triumph and the accomplishment of *all things*, Paul spoke truthfully, for at the end of his earthly life, he was able to declare an uncompromised victory by saying, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith (II Timothy 4:7).”

God has a dream for you and me. His dream is our blueprint for living. His master plan gives us direction and defines the divinely-inspired goals we are to pursue. God’s dream reveals the nature and purpose of our life’s work. Here we must be warned: God’s dream for you and me may collide head-on with our own personal ambitions. This is understandable. Americans typically define success in terms of wealth and status. What is it that most of us want? A big house in a prestigious neighborhood? Lots and lots of money? Recognition? Position? The envy of others? In our saner moments, we realize

these are mere trinkets—baubles and playthings capable of satisfying no one other than the mercenary of heart.

For Discussion:

- We dream of that which we think will make us happy and fulfilled, but do we always know what is best for our lives?

The inherent flaw in American Christianity is worldliness. Crass materialism has invaded the church, but the lust for wealth, as the Apostle Paul warned, is the root of all manner of evil. A life dedicated solely to the accumulation of wealth, prestige, and status is a life wasted. This is not a condemnation aimed at the rich. Abraham was a wealthy man. So was Job. And so was David, but these men, first and foremost, pursued a right relationship with God. Their lives were not dedicated to the accumulation of wealth. Abraham, Job, and David were upright men who treasured God above gold. Again, any dream that is primarily focused on the accumulation of wealth, prestige, and status is not of God. Jesus instructed us to “seek first the kingdom of God.”



The folly of endless consumerism sends us on a wild goose-chase for happiness through materialism.

--Bryant H. McGill

When we lay our personal ambitions at His feet, we give ourselves over to His care. And what does He do? He molds us. He transforms us. He makes us new. He gives us

purpose. He infuses meaning into our lives. He adopts us into His family. And then, when we least expect it, we suddenly discover that by giving ourselves to Him, He, in turn, has given us back to ourselves. And this “new self” that He gives us is far, far better than the old self we gave Him.

A wild dog, mangy and flea-bitten, is nothing but a snapping, snarling, salivating predator in search of its next meal, but when trained and cared for by man, the irrational beast is transformed into an object worthy of humanly affection. Over time, the domesticated animal takes on some of the attributes of its master. And so it is with you and me. On our own, we are selfish, indulgent, foolish creatures in search of our next dollar or our next drink or our next sexual encounter, but in yielding to Him, we are transformed into dazzling new creations beloved by Him; according to the promises of Scripture, we become His highly prized sons and daughters. The son of the King is a prince. The daughter of the King is a princess. This is the rightful destiny of those who have trusted in Christ Jesus as Savior. Conversely, those who withhold themselves from God are as dirty-faced beggars fiercely clutching their gaudy little trinkets. We who have given ourselves over to Him need never to grovel about in the mire of this fallen world, for we are royal children.

God wants what is best for you and me. Quite likely, what we think is best is not what God knows to be best for us. The choice boils down to this: Will we take His hand and follow where He leads or will we chase after that which will leave us eternally unfulfilled? Will we accept His superior goodness, or will we pursue our inferior lusts? Do we trust the infinitely wise and powerful Creator or will we yield to our own spurious instincts? The answer is not as obvious as it may appear, for very few people experience the joy of living as sold-out, whole-hearted followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apathy, not persecution, is the enemy of the American church; this will explain why many who identify themselves as women and men of faith limit their Christianity to an hour or so on Sunday mornings.

We will never realize God’s best until we silence the raging lusts of the flesh. Deep down, we are rebels seeking to usurp God’s authority. We insist upon living life as if He had

nothing to say—or as if He did not even exist. Until we lay down our arms and surrender to Him, our instincts will lead us along perilous detours that were never intended for our travel.

As He (Jesus) was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.” Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” They were even more astonished and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?” Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God (Mark 10:17-27 NASB).”

God has a dream—a divine master plan—for each of our lives. His dream for your life is unlikely to be identical to the dream He has for the woman or man sitting next to you. We will do well to understand that God’s best for you may not be His best for your neighbor. In the above passage, God’s best for the rich man was two-fold: first, he was to give his

wealth to the poor; after this, he would join the other twelve followers of Jesus. In time, Judas would betray Jesus. Perhaps God had chosen the rich man to replace this foul-minded quisling. What we know with certainty is this: God had spectacular plans for the rich man's life—a thrilling adventure that would have transformed his rather ordinary existence into a legend that would never be forgotten.

Sadly, the rich man would not trust in the goodness and wisdom of his Creator. God had a perfect, divine master plan for the rich man—a dream that would have made him infinitely happy and eternally fulfilled, but the rich man had a plan of his own. His plan was to keep his money. He preferred gold to God. In the end, the rich man turned away from Jesus. He said no to God. Two thousand years later, the story remains the same—what we own most often owns us. We are slaves of our own base desires. Jesus says, “Come, follow Me,” but our rebellious hearts, steeped in fear, doubt, and unbelief, stand against the ultimate fulfilling of our divinely-appointed destinies. As such, most will never know *all of the good* that God intended for us to enjoy. Those whose hands are already filled with earthly spoils have no room for the priceless treasures found only in God's coffers. How odd, indeed, that many who claim to want “more out of life,” are willing to settle for “treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal (Matthew 6:19).” In truth, the crass materialists who hunger for the so-called good life never quite find it.

For Discussion:

- When is wealth not a blessing? What are the risks that come with riches?
- A popular music idol once boasted, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” Is this true? Discuss.

And so we ask, “What is God's will for my life?” Many answers pertaining to life's thorniest questions are found in Scripture.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalm 119:105).

As God does not want His children stumbling about in a state of clueless ignorance, the basic truths about His divine will for our lives are clearly spelled out in the Bible. We simply need to open the book and read. Other answers to life's questions are made known by the providential hand of God. God plants dreams and desires in our hearts that conform to His will; God also opens doors of opportunities that reveal the master plan He has devised for each of us. Thankfully, He also closes doors and pathways that lead to failure and misery. God wants what is best for you and me. As to understanding God's will, we begin with the basics. Once we have mastered the basics of knowing God's will, He will reveal more to us.

The thief (Satan) cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I (Jesus) am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

It is God's will that you live an abundant life. Abundance signifies a life that is rich in blessings—a life abounding with *more than enough* blessings. An abundant life

- is a life abounding in love
- is a life hallmarked by purpose
- is a life overflowing with joy
- is a life brimming with peace
- is a life filled with hope

We crave love. God offers love abundantly. We long for purpose. God gives meaning to a meaningless life. We desire joy. It is God's will that we live in a state of everlasting joy. We long for peace amidst the turbulence. God's peace transcends all the world's calamities. Without hope, life becomes a weighty burden. God gives hope to the hopeless regardless of situation or circumstance. Love, purpose, joy, peace, and hope are the five necessary components of an abundant life—a life of happiness and contentment—a life worth living. This is God's will for you and me.

American poet Edward Arlington Robinson's *Richard Cory* reveals the meaninglessness of a life that, based on external circumstances, was the envy of others.

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
'Good-morning,' and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

We remember the rich, the famous, the celebrated—people who seemingly possessed everything the world has to offer—who, by bullet or by destructive lifestyle, dug for themselves an early grave. For these sad figures, the lives they led, though envied by the masses, afforded them no real or lasting pleasure. Steeped in despair, they ultimately chose six feet of dank earth to the stark emptiness of fame, fortune, and finery.

Do not be arrogant nor put your hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but put your hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (I Timothy 6:17 NIV).

If toys could make us happy and give us hope, God would have sent us Santa Claus, but He offers us something far better because our happiness and hope depends upon something better; He gives us His love. The Creator of the universe—the One who spoke each star and planet into existence, loves us *individually*. He loves us madly. He loves us passionately. He loves us without reservation. His is a radical, abandoned, incomparable kind of love. For those of us brought up by loving parents, the concept of a loving Heavenly Father is easy to comprehend. Even so, God's love exceeds even that of the most patient, indulgent parent.

It is God's will that you bask in the warmth and security of His abounding love. Do not miss this point--*you are loved and He wants you to know this*. You need not worry about earning His love. He loves you, not because you are good, but He loves you because He is good.

For many of us, some secret sin or a history of alcoholism or substance abuse or, perhaps, a criminal record have made us believe we are worthless, useless, beyond redemption, and even unlovable. Such feelings are lies that smell of smoke and brimstone.

"And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty (II Corinthians 6:18 NASB).

It is God's will that you live like a highly beloved prince or princess. In practical terms, this means that you need never doubt your worth and value according to the One whose affections matter most. The love of others can be capricious or conditional, but the love of God is pure and wholly reliable. Unlike the love struck school girl plucking pedals from

a daisy as she whispers, “He loves me, he loves me not...,” God cannot help but love us. And He is never stingy or miserly with His love.

Would God wish evil on one whom He loves? Heaven forbid! “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,” says the Lord, “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV).” Because He loves us, our best interests are always before Him. And as He alone knows what is truly best, the master plan He has for us cannot fail to bring us peace, joy, and unimaginable happiness for the eternal ages to come.

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16 NIV).

Have you groveled about as an abandoned, dirty-faced beggar? Do you see yourself as unworthy and unloved? Have you lived in the cold shadows of doubt, despair, and discontentment? God wants to change all this, for it is His will that you to live each day in the confident assurance of a highly-favored child of the King. This immutable truth is the foundational keystone in God’s master plan for your life.

For Discussion:

- Those who doubt the goodness of God can never appreciate the magnitude of His love. Discuss.
- How might those who were raised in homes dominated by cruelty or anger doubt the goodness of God?

When we become followers of Jesus Christ, our sins, past, present, and future, are forgiven. Period. End of discussion. John the Baptist said that Jesus “takes away our sins.” It is God’s will that we live as women and men who were, are, and will be forever forgiven. With that said, God wants us to confess our sins to Him. When we confess our

sins to our Heavenly Father, we are acknowledging, that is, taking ownership and responsibility of our sins before Him. We are not confessing our sins for the sake of forgiveness—we have already been forgiven, but we are to confess our wrongdoings because we *recognize* that our actions were sinful.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20, 21 NIV).

As we are now citizens of Heaven, we must adopt an entirely new attitude toward this earthly existence. In the truest sense, as the sons and daughters of God, we are but foreigners in this strange and hostile land who, step by step, are making our way back home. The world and all its trappings should no longer captivate our hearts. We are in the world, but we must never be *of the world*. So why are we here? The Apostle Paul wrote that we are ambassadors of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador is a representative of another. For the remainder of our days on earth, we are to represent Jesus Christ.

It is God's will that we live a life of purpose and meaning. The reason we are here is quite simple and straight-forward: we are His duly appointed ambassadors. We are His assigned representatives on earth.

This is not to say everyone is called to full time ministry, but we are each called to be full time Christians. Christianity is more than a Sunday morning affair. We have been called to represent Him in the workplace. We are asked to represent Him in our neighborhoods. We are to represent Him in the classroom. We should represent Him at the ballot box. We are to serve the cause of Jesus Christ in our careers. God needs Christian physicians and teachers, but let us not forget that He has a place for Christian cranberry pickers, too. It is God's will that we represent Him in all that we do.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16 NASB)." Each morning, millions climb gloomily out of bed wondering, "Why am I here? What is life all about?" Earning a paycheck is important and God does not condone laziness, but making money, paying bills, and dreaming of retirement is no proper way to live. We have a purpose. We have a reason for crawling out of a warm bed each morning. We are God's ambassadors. We represent the King of the universe.

Many people approach the last days of their lives with misgivings and regrets. What have they to show for their seventy, eighty, or even ninety years? A house? Stock certificates? A pension? Addressing a crowd of many thousand hearers, Jesus rhetorically asked if there was not a greater purpose than merely seeking after the rudimentary needs of life:

Then he (Jesus) said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God (Luke 12:15-21 NIV)."

Our life's work is more than the acquiring of a mortgage-free home or a tidy retirement fund. A debt-free home and money in the bank are worthwhile *secondary* goals, but what really matters is our service to Jesus Christ. If we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, our earthly needs will be met (Luke 12:31). Additionally, as we faithfully

represent the Lord Jesus Christ in our day to day walk, we prudently store away treasures in Heaven that will be ours to eternally enjoy (Luke 12:33).



The American Dream

For many, a sprawling home in a prestigious neighborhood is the ultimate trophy—a brick and mortar monument attesting to one's ambition and industry...

Once again, we are citizens of Heaven. The earth is not our home. We are sojourners—pilgrims on our way to our Father's house—foreigners in a strange and hostile land. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are His duly appointed ambassadors. We represent Him. And in our service to Him, we find real significance and purpose in life. We need not wonder about the meaning of our earthly existence—we need not wonder why we are here, for our identity is found in Him.

Wealth and riches; that is, an estate above what sufficeth our real occasions and necessities, is in no other sense a blessing than as it is an opportunity put into our hands, by the providence of God, of doing more good.

--John Tillotson (1630-1694)

For Discussion:

- Not everyone is called to full time ministry, but everyone is called to be a full time Christian. Discuss.

- What does it mean to be a citizen of Heaven?

Many among us have sought peace in a bottle, a pill, a pipe, or a needle. At first, these dangerous stimulants or depressants provided temporary relief from the burdens of life, but as the effects of these toxins began to fade, the anxieties returned—and with a vengeance. As our addictions worsened, our physical and mental well-being steadily deteriorated. The only cure, or so it seemed, was larger and more frequent doses of the poisons that were killing us. But this was no cure at all. And so our anxieties increased. Our situations became unmanageable. We were powerless over our addictions. There was no peace in our lives.

The life of an addict is wearisome. Particularly among high functioning alcoholics and substance abusers, the normal problems of maintaining a home, keeping relationships, and managing a career are compounded by the countless woes that come with addiction. The only peace an addict experiences is self-induced and short-lived. Once the effects of the drugs wear off, the anxieties return and they are more threatening than before. Such a lifestyle of constant inner turmoil is not in accordance with God's master plan for our lives.

We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God, for, beholding His greatness, we realize our own littleness; His purity shows us our foulness; and by meditating upon His humility we find how very far we are from being humble.
- Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)." For many among us, His gracious words tell of rest from the double-life of an addict. With freedom from addiction comes peace. Peace that comes from normalcy. Peace that comes with renewal. It is not God's intended purpose for anyone to live in the grip of addiction. Peace and tranquility are components of God's master plan.

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge (Psalm 62:5-8 NIV).

What is God's will? It is God's will that we live free of the ravages of alcoholism and substance abuse. No alcoholic or addict will experience true inner peace until the addiction has been overcome; the disease of addiction, progressive and chronic, is a thief that robs us of our health, ambitions, and relationships—a thief that takes all that we have and leaves us empty and alone. Through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, we can be at peace with God, with others, and with ourselves. No longer under the heartless dominion of addiction, our formerly unmanageable lives become lives marked by quiet tranquility. Accept the promise of Jesus: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27). This is God's will for your life.

For Discussion:

- Addiction is a form of slavery. God wants us to live in freedom. How does He break the chains of drug and alcohol addiction?
- While a comfortable home, a reliable car, and a well-stocked pantry are blessings, forgiveness, eternal life, freedom from addiction, and a life of meaning and purpose are treasures whose worth cannot be calculated in dollars and cents. Discuss this truth.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (Romans 12:12 NIV).

Many years ago, police cars were only equipped with one-way radios. Police officers were limited to receiving transmissions from the station dispatchers; the radios placed in their automobiles were incapable of transmitting messages back to the station. Many of us consider prayer in the same light. We send messages to God, but we never expect to hear back from Him.

Far too many people believe a prayer is like a message in a bottle; we send out a prayer with some vague hope that it will somehow find its destination. How odd, indeed, that most of us fail to realize prayer is more like conversation. We meet God in prayer. We speak to Him. He speaks to us. Prayer is a two way conversation. And though we are unlikely to hear the audible voice of God, He will converse with us all the same.

What is God's will for you and me? It is God's will that we speak with Him through prayer. The Apostle Paul said we are to be "faithful in prayer." This would indicate that God wants to hear from us regularly and routinely. Satan wishes to keep us from praying. He convinces some that God does not wish to be bothered. This is, of course, utter nonsense and the devil is best ignored, for just as loving parents enjoy conversing with their children, our loving Heavenly Father wants to remain in close and constant contact with His children.

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 42:5 NIV).

When speaking with God, we should tell Him we love Him. We are also to glorify Him through our praises. We recognize God's wondrous attributes through praise. God is deserving of our adoration; additionally, by recognizing the goodness of God, our faith in Him is multiplied. The more we know of Him, the more we can trust Him, and the more we trust Him, the smaller our problems appear to us.

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known (Jeremiah 33:3 ESV).

“Call to me and I will answer you,” says our Heavenly Father. Pray to Him and He will reveal “great and hidden things that you have not known.” What is God’s will for our lives? It is God’s will that we bring our questions, problems, and decisions to Him. God has answers. Ask Him.

And I (Jesus) tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you (Luke 11:9 ESV).

Should I marry? Which college should I attend? Should I accept this job offer? Is this the right house for our family? Should I go into business for myself? Life is full of tough questions and the decisions we make often affect us for many years to come. Bad decisions lead to regrets and, frankly, some individuals appear to be particularly prone to making poor choices in situations that matter most. As we all wish to avoid the dire consequences of bad decision making, we can rest easier knowing that it is in accordance with God’s master plan that we bring life’s toughest questions and decisions to Him.

The first step is simple; we ask. We bring our questions to the Throne Room of God. And why not? By His very nature, God knows everything. He sees all situations, from beginning to end, with crystal clarity. Nothing befuddles Him. No task is too difficult. No problem is too complex. No question is too arduous. And so we come to Him with our difficulties and concerns. Because He is good, He will not turn us away.

After we ask, we are to seek out answers. Many of life’s thorniest issues are addressed in the pages of Scripture. The Bible, then, should be our primary source for answers, but not every decision can be based upon a particular chapter and verse. As an example, accepting or declining a job promotion that requires relocating to another city may necessitate the methodical weighing of all the pluses and minuses before a final decision to stay or to move can be made. Such a decision requires one to seek out answers. If

we ask God for wisdom in our decision making, He will faithfully honor that request (James 1:5). Wisdom is the understanding of people, events, and circumstances through God's eyes, in other words, a wise person sees the world through Heaven's lens.

Seeking out answers may also require that we consult others who are known to be reliable and knowledgeable. Bakers know about bread. Jewelers know about jewelry. A wise individual does not ask a bricklayer to rebuild an automobile transmission and a part time drug store cashier's opinion on investment strategies is spurious at best. Far too many people are eager to give out worthless advice on matters about which they know nothing. Oddly enough, there appears to be an abundance of folk who willingly lend their ears to these worthless, useless, uninformed advisers. It is not God's will that we follow the direction of fools.

As we seek out answers, we knock on doors of opportunity. Knocking comes in the form of submitting employment applications or meeting college admission representatives or negotiating terms with bankers or consulting godly marriage counselors. In other words, we are to be active participants in the decision making process—we do something—we proceed forward—we explore—we knock on doors in expectation of favorable results.

Are you in need of employment? Submit resumes and job applications. Meet with perspective employers. Bang on doors. Have you dreamed of becoming an architect? Schedule a visit with a college admissions counselor. Apply for grants and financial aid. Are you struggling with an addiction? Join a Christian support group. Work the Twelve Steps. Do something. Be active. Participate. Try, try, and try again. Prayer is not a coin nor is God a vending machine. When in need, it is His will that we ask, seek, and knock.

By the by, God answers every prayer. Of this truth, you may be assured. Of course, He does not answer every prayer with a yes. God sometimes says no to our requests. God is sovereign and it is well within His rights to deny our petitions. He knows what is best for you and me. Let us avoid any kind of foolishness that attempts to make God a genie in a bottle. Finally, God answers some prayers with a "not now." Our timing may be off.

God is never late with His answers; likewise, He is never early with His answers. Those of us who have walked with Him for some time will attest that God can neither be rushed nor hurried.

I have so much to do that I should spend the first three hours in prayer.
--Martin Luther (1483-1546)

For Discussion:

- What does it mean to ask? To seek? To knock?
- Why must God say no to some of our prayer requests?

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119:11 ESV).

We are to meditate on the teachings of the Bible. By internalizing God's word, we have, so to speak, a moral compass that will steer us away from places we ought not to go.

There are those among us who are new to the faith; as such, our newcomer friends are unfamiliar with the teachings of Scripture. New believers often find that two books in particular, Mark and Proverbs, are easily read and easily understood. Mark is an action-packed, fast-paced Gospel record of the earthly life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Proverbs is God's treasury of wisdom; Proverbs is both practical and entertaining—a literary masterpiece that has captivated readers for over two thousand years. Biblical illiteracy is not part of God's will for our lives; meditating on God's word is uplifting and sound biblical knowledge shields us from the vicious attacks of an unbelieving world.

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth (Psalm 46:10 ESV)!”

In this chaotic world, we must keep our minds focused on God. Meditating upon Him is as a soothing balm for healing our troubled hearts. God says, “Be still...” When the pace becomes maddening and life’s problems hit us from all sides, God says we are to stop what we are doing, find a quiet place, and direct our praiseworthy thoughts upon Him. As we exalt our Creator, He will refresh us and our souls will find rest.

Recovery is a journey. There is no denying the pathway to sobriety is arduous and difficult, but we do not travel alone. We have God and we have our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. And though the journey spans a lifetime, we make the trip one step at a time. We have been warned that detours and roadblocks are before us, but through prayer, meditation, Bible study, and an understanding of God’s “master plan” for our lives, we will make it home. Let us travel in confidence, for He has given us all that we need for the road ahead.

For Discussion:

- How can we know God’s will through Bible reading?
- How can we know God’s will through prayer?
- It is God’s will that we have a *relationship* with Him. How does a relationship differ from mere religion? Discuss intimacy with God.
- How can those who enjoy *intimacy* with God better understand His purpose for their lives?

Discovery Session 23



Melanie is an alcoholic. At present, she and her four-year-old daughter Beth live in a small but comfortable apartment, but after losing her job due to excessive absenteeism—a problem resulting from frequent and outrageous drinking binges—Melanie and her daughter are facing eviction.

This situation is hardly new. Two years ago, Melanie's problem with alcohol led to an abrupt dismissal by her previous employer. Without an income, Melanie could not meet her financial obligations. She sought assistance from her parents. Melanie's parents agreed to help if she would see a substance abuse counselor and attend weekly support meetings. Melanie downplayed the severity of her drinking problem; nonetheless, she promised to see a counselor and attend weekly alcohol support meetings in exchange for a loan from her mother and father. A short time later, without reason or explanation, Melanie cancelled her weekly counselling sessions and stopped attending the group support sessions, too.

A year later, Melanie found herself in severe legal and financial straits after being charged with driving while intoxicated. Unable to pay the fine, legal fees, and court costs, Melanie went back to her parents for financial assistance. As before, they encouraged her to seek help.

Unemployed, Melanie is again approaching her parents for money. Her mother and father do not want their daughter and granddaughter to be homeless; however, they are wondering if, perhaps, their ongoing financial assistance is, in fact, enabling their daughter's addiction. Is their financial aid shielding Melanie from the consequences of runaway drinking? Could it be that another cash bailout would be detrimental to their

daughter's prospects for recovery? Is their help only making matters worse? Maybe, but if they do not come to their daughter's rescue, what will happen to Beth? Like doting grandparents everywhere, they want whatever is best for their granddaughter—but a decision that is in the best interest of their granddaughter may not necessarily meet the expectations of their demanding alcoholic daughter. Melanie's mother and father feel as though they have been placed between the proverbial rock and hard place.

Join the discussion...

"According to my supervisor, I was discharged because of excessive absenteeism and poor job performance. In spite of what everyone else thinks, alcohol had nothing to do with my dismissal. If anyone cares about the truth, I was fired because my supervisor simply did not like me. Maybe there was a personality clash. She treated everyone else okay, but for some odd reason, she took her resentments out on me. Don't ask me why. My conscience is clear." —Melanie

"Two years ago, Melanie lost her job. We paid her bills until she found another job. Now we have learned that Melanie has lost this job, too. Until Melanie learns to control her drinking, she will never be able to keep a job. We want to help her, but until she learns to help herself, this situation is going to repeat itself again and again."—Melanie's father

"My mother and father seem to resent helping me, but if they turn their backs on me now, the landlord is going to toss Beth and me out on the street. What kind of grandparents would allow their little four-year-old granddaughter to become homeless? Surely Beth and I are worth more than their dirty old money!"—Melanie

"I never take the dismissal of an employee lightly. Melanie was warned again and again that her absenteeism and job performance were unacceptable. On two occasions, we sent her home in a cab for drinking on the job. We are not heartless. Our firm offers free substance abuse counseling. Professional help was available, but she refused every attempt we made in assisting her with her drinking problem. We had no choice but to let her go."—Melanie's supervisor

“Do I drink too much? Maybe I do, but try raising a child without any help. My life is anything but easy. Give me a break! If you had my problems, you’d probably drink too much, too.”--Melanie

“I had a long talk with Melanie. If she expects her father and me to help her, she must be willing to help herself. If she will join a treatment program, we will take care of Beth. And we’ll pay the costs of treatment, too.”—Melanie’s mother

“I don’t need a treatment program. I just need a loan to hold me over until I get back on my feet. Why does Mom have to make an issue out of my drinking? My drinking isn’t a problem—my problem is a lack of money. I will repay their precious money as soon as I am back to work.”—Melanie

“We would gladly spend our last dollar to see Melanie clean and sober, but if we continue handing out cash each time she gets into trouble, her drinking problem will likely become progressively worse. As it is, I am wondering if her mother and I are enabling her addiction.”—Melanie’s father

“My mother and father are obligated to help me. I am their responsibility. If they won’t live up to their rightful obligation, then I won’t allow them to see Beth. They can agree to pay up or they can say ‘good-bye’ to their only granddaughter.”—Melanie

“What can we do? If we refuse to bail her out, Melanie has threatened to take Beth from us. This is emotional blackmail. Our hearts would be broken if we could never see Beth. Maybe it would be easier to simply give in to Melanie’s demands and write the check.”—Melanie’s mother

“What kind of parents turn their backs on their daughter and granddaughter? It looks as though my mother and father think more of their bank account than they do of us. Unlike my parents, I believe in putting my daughter first. If they love their money more than they love us, I don’t want Beth growing up around them. And there’s more. What gives them the right to dictate how I choose to live my life? I am an adult, but they want to treat me like a child. I need their money—not their advice! I think I can make my own decisions without them prying into my private affairs.”—Melanie

Discovery Session 24

Points of Inquiry

- Understanding the “spiritual awakening” concept according to the teachings in the New Testament
- Following God’s example of sacrificial love
- Avoiding hypocrisy and appearances of evil
- Bringing the wounded to Jesus

Taking Step Twelve:

Having had a spiritual awakening (or reawakening) as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs

For many, the Twelfth Step represents the final step—the last in a long series of steps leading to a life of sobriety. After many weeks of hard work and personal reflection, we have reached the last of the Twelve Steps, but Step Twelve also represents the first move toward a brand new approach to living. Once, we were slaves to alcohol and drugs. Our lives, best described as unmanageable, lay in crumbled ruins at our feet as we stood powerless against the poisons that held us hostage. Medical science could not help us. Our family and friends could not help us. We could not help ourselves. In desperation, we cried out to God. He came to the rescue. Today, there is peace where chaos once reigned. We are sober. We no longer turn to the chemical killers that formerly dominated our lives. And we marvel that God, in His mercy, has transformed this assemblage of former drunks and drug addicts into beloved sons and daughters. We, who once groveled about as lowly slaves, are now the beloved princes and princesses of God’s kingdom. Today, at long last, we can begin to fulfill our destinies according to God’s master plan.

This is not about religion. We have been born from above. We are new creations in Christ Jesus. Rites, rules, and rituals—the three r’s of religion—have nothing to do with the supernatural transformation that has taken place within us. We were once, as the Apostle Paul stated, “children of wrath.” Today, we are children of light. The light that shines within us is the light of Jesus Christ. We, who once wasted away as deadly toxins surged through our veins, are alive and sober. Today, our formerly meaningless lives are steeped in purpose. God has quickened our deadened spirits to a newness of life. We are no longer the walking dead—we are spiritually reborn sons and daughters of Almighty God.

Others may look upon us with skepticism, but the transformations that took place about us were genuine. In our better moments, we would say these spiritual awakenings, or in some cases, re-awakenings, were nothing less than miraculous. We have been touched by the hand of God. God began a good work in you and me and God will see that work to its finish (Philippians 1:6).

While in the grip of addiction, we were takers. We thought nothing of robbing ourselves and others for the sake of satisfying our cravings. Now that we are sober, we can be givers. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. This is our time to be channels of blessings to others.

Figuratively speaking, God has done more than slap a coat of paint on our old lives. The spiritual awakening that took place in us was nothing less than a new birth—we have been supernaturally born from above. The Apostle Paul said we are new creations in Christ Jesus. Immersed in defeat and filled with despair, we needed more than mere cosmetics. To become His children, a second birth had to occur. Such a transformation could have only come from above. Those who have truly experienced a miraculous rebirth have no use for empty religion. We are God’s masterpieces and He is pleased to call us His beloved sons and daughters.

Today, we are sober. We are alive. So what is next? As God rebuilds our damaged lives, He asks us to share His love with others. God's love was never meant to be hoarded. God's love is never in short supply. There is enough love for everyone; therefore, we are to share the fullness of His love with those who are now as we once were.

Do we have what others want? If we are sober and our lives are hallmarked by joy, the answer is yes. If we are sober, but there is no joy in our hearts, we cannot expect others to want what we have. Without joy, what we have is not worth giving away.

Of course, before we give anything away, we must examine ourselves to determine if we have what others want and need. If we are sober and our lives are hallmarked by joy, the answer is yes. What addict or alcoholic would not want that? If we are sober, but there is no joy in our hearts, we cannot expect others to want what we have. Without joy, what we have is not worth giving away. It is not worth keeping, either. If joy is absent from our lives, we have missed the point of living. We have been created for joy. Endless joy. Boundless joy. Abiding joy. The church has exceeded its quota of tightly wound, sour-faced, dull-eyed, humorless Christians who appear as if they have been spit out of an open grave. If this is your idea of Christianity, please do us all a great favor and become a Buddhist.

Has God been good to you? Has He brought about an amazing change in your life? If so, it is time to share what you have with others. There are legions of alcoholics and drug addicts who need what you have. And as we share the message of hope with others, we guard ourselves against the risks of falling back into our old ways. Step Twelve is an effective anodyne against the recurring threat of relapse that looms over those who have struggled with addiction. We cannot lose our salvation, but we can lose our sobriety. Step Twelve will help keep us clean.

For Discussion:

- What does it mean to be born of above? What are the implications of being new creations in Christ Jesus?
- If we have been truly born-again, we cannot lose our salvation, but we can lose our sobriety. Discuss this truth.

Following God's Example of Sacrificial Love

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1, 2 NIV).

The Apostle Paul encourages us to *follow God's example*. As children of God, we are to imitate our Heavenly Father. He loves us. We are to love Him in return. He gave Himself for us. As imitators of Christ Jesus who *follow God's example*, we are to give freely of ourselves. We are to walk in the way of love—a sacrificial love that is hallmarked by unselfish giving.

Now that we have learned to live as free women and men who are no longer slaves of alcohol and drugs, we are to bring the life-altering message of God's love and His plan of redemption to those who remain bound and fettered by addiction. The key that unlocked the doors to our personal dungeons will open doors of freedom for others held captive by addiction. Let us share what we have so that no one is left behind. This is the essence of Step Twelve.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ

and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them (Ephesians 5: 3-7 NIV).

Hypocrisy among so-called believers does more harm to the cause of Christ than the legions of militant terrorists who slaughter our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa, India, and the Middle East. The Apostle Paul warns against *even a hint* of sexual immorality, impurity, or greed. It is interesting to note that Paul ranks greed alongside of sexual immorality. Those who devote themselves wholly to wealth are, in the apostle's words, idolaters and idolaters have no inheritance in God's kingdom. Sadly, there are the carnal-minded who profess an abiding commitment to the Gospel while engaging in gross sexual sin. Let this not be said of us. We can expect unbelievers to behave like unbelievers, but God has called us to a higher standard of living. Evidence of sexual immorality, impurity, and greed among Christ followers dishonors our Savior; additionally, rampant sin among believers gives our doubting neighbors reasons to question the sincerity and validity of our faith. Let us live like free women and men who are no longer slaves to the world, the flesh, and the devil.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to govern our tongues. Paul condemns obscene talk, foolish conversation, and crude humor. This verbal filth is out of place among those who have been called out by God. Let us replace our coarse verbiage with words of thanksgiving and praise. We will do well to remember that the words from our lips reflect either the good or evil that dwells in our hearts.

Paul then warns us to be weary of those who deceive with "empty words." Truth is in short supply these days. There are all manner of lying prophets and religious leaders who would steer us into spiritual bondage and away from the freedom found only in Jesus Christ. We must also be aware of entertainers who promote drunkenness, substance abuse, crass materialism, shameful perversion, and self-indulgent behavior that is unbecoming of women and men who have been set free by Jesus Christ. Likewise, we must not be misled by self-serving political leaders who, like the unjust judge of Jesus' parable, have

no regard for the righteousness of God. We are to listen with discerning ears and carefully weigh the words of those who seek our allegiance and loyalty. If their message does not align with the clear teachings of Scripture, we are to distance ourselves from them—even if we belong to their particular denomination, league, organization, or political party. Above all, we are called to be followers of Christ's truths and, as such, we must resist that which is false while fleeing from compromise. God does not wish us to check our brains in at the gate. Let us be on guard, lest we find ourselves deceived by those who speak a language of vain rhetoric, empty promises, and lying words.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:8-10 NIV).

As recovering addicts and alcoholics, we understand all too well the misery of living in the stifled gloom of addiction—a deathly shadowland where there is no light. We know the sorrow that comes from the toilsome existence of a beaten and bruised slave dominated by a poison that slowly and deliberately drained the lifeblood from our veins. Wearied by the ceaseless demands made by our cruel master, we lived in never-ending darkness that could be tolerated only by the physical and mental numbness afforded by our drugs of choice. But that was then and this is now. Today, we are children of light, and by God's grace, we need never venture back into the veil of night again.

We have not been ordered to cram our religion down the throats of others. We have been called to share the lavishness of God's love and His life-saving plan of redemption with those who long for freedom from the ravages of sin and addiction.

Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, we are to reflect the light of Jesus Christ. If others cannot see the goodness of Christ in us, how will they come to know Him? We should live in a manner that inspires others to want what we have.

This, too, needs to be said: we have not been ordered to cram our religion down the throats of others. We have been called to share the lavishness of God's love and His life-saving plan of redemption with those who long for freedom from the ravages of sin and addiction.

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

**“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you (Ephesians 5:11-14 NIV).”**

Those who walk in the Spirit will manifest love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. As such, we are warned against any involvement with the *fruitless deeds of darkness*. We have been called to a life that brings honor to God and hope to others, but if we slip off into some spiritual back alley where evil is practiced, we bring dishonor to our Savior and ourselves; we also risk the dangers of relapse. Our behavior and our choice of friends will either enhance or do harm to our continued sobriety.

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from

the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:15-19 NIV).

In the past, we lived as fools—perpetually drunk on alcohol and high on narcotics. We did harm to our health. We brought misery to our families and loved ones. We made vain excuses for our reckless behavior. We attempted to cover up our wrongs with empty excuses, ill-spoken half-truths, and blatant lies. We wasted money on that which was destroying us. We wasted opportunities, too—opportunities that would have ultimately brought gain to ourselves and others. Our shameful conduct was a never-ending source of embarrassment to those who, in spite of our countless faults, loved us.

Again, that was then and this is now. We are no longer fools. We are sober women and men. Our lives have new meaning. We have a purpose for living. God has a grand master plan for our lives. We have so much to live for, but due to the ever-present risks of falling back into old habits, the Apostle Paul warns us to be careful how we live. There are no shortcuts to a life of continual, ongoing sobriety. If we walk in the Spirit, He will lead us to the Promised Land.

Next, Paul encourages us to make the most of every opportunity. Opportunity is everywhere; this is evidenced by the countless addicts who are in need of what we now enjoy. No longer dirty-faced orphans wallowing in the shadows of a spiritual ghetto, we were adopted as beloved sons and daughters into the family of God. The days of groveling about as miserable waifs are behind us. We are children of the light. Let us, then, be faithful ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ by sharing His love and His plan of redemption to those who are ravaged daily by the cruelties of addiction. We have a message of hope to share. Others need to know about the One who delivered us from death. This is our high and noble calling. Let us apply shoe leather to Step Twelve by sharing the message of redemption to those who are enslaved by addiction.

For Discussion:

- A doubting world is put off by hypocrisy among those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ. Why is it vital that our actions match our words?
- How does the Twelfth Step help us avoid the dangers of relapse?
- If we are sober and our lives are marked by joy, drug addicts and alcoholics will want what we have. If our lives are joyless, no one will want what we have. Discuss.

God has done more than slap a coat of paint on our old lives. This spiritual awakening is nothing less than a new birth—we have been supernaturally born from above. In other words, we are new creations in Christ Jesus. We needed more than mere cosmetics. To become His children, a second birth must occur. Such transformation can only come from above. Those who have truly experienced a miraculous rebirth have no use for empty religion.

The Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan

Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ Which of these three

do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"

And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same (Luke 10:30-37 NASB)."

For a moment, let us consider this parable from a recovery standpoint. Our victim, stripped, beaten, and half dead, is an alcoholic. Alcoholism has robbed him of his health, his wealth, his dreams, and his sanity. All that remains are bloody wounds and prospects of an early grave.

The priest and the Levite in Christ's parable represent women and men of faith who are unwilling to help those struggling with addiction. Far too many Christians sit back and do nothing for two possible reasons: they either lack compassion or they believe themselves incapable of helping those in need. Neither excuse is valid nor does our Heavenly Father condone the ineffectual laziness of these do nothing saints. We have been called to serve others through the prompting, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit. While others ignore the cries of the wounded, there is not one among us who can justifiably refuse coming to the aid of those bound by addiction. Again, we have exactly what suffering addicts and alcoholics need. We must act. To do nothing is shameful and casts shadows of doubt upon the sincerity of our faith. Charles Spurgeon said he had never met a man who refused to help the poor who likewise failed to give at least one admirable excuse.

In ancient Israel, Samaritans were a despised people cruelly branded as racially and spiritually inferior. Perhaps we have some Samaritans among us—women and men who, in spite of their newfound sobriety, live among the gazes and the whispers of unacceptance or resentment. If you have been made to feel unworthy or inferior by others, it is well worth noting that neither the Samaritan's pedigree nor his past were on trial, for God is hardly concerned by one's status or social standing. Best of all, He neither harbors grudges nor does He dredge up mistakes from the past. God's forgiveness is

complete and He will never taunt His beloved children with grim remembrances of yesterday's failures. As believers clothed in the righteousness of our Savior, it is our willingness to obediently serve the cause of Christ that matters most to Him.

In Jesus' parable, the Samaritan's heroic actions spared the dying robbery victim from an early grave. We, too, can be heroes by bringing the good news of God's love and His plan of redemption to those who have been battered, bloodied, bruised, and left for dead by the bottle or the needle or the pipe.

Yesterday, we were takers. If we gave away anything at all, it was grief. But those days of darkness are past tense. Today, we are free. We have been pardoned. The death sentence of addiction has been over-turned and the barred doors that once kept us caged have been yanked from their iron hinges. So how would God have us to live? Shall we behave in the manner of the Levite and the priest who walked past the dying man? We have been called to be like the Samaritan who bandaged the wounds of the dying stranger. In truth, millions of our neighbors are dying of alcoholism and substance abuse. We have our marching orders. Coming to the aid of those in bondage is only a step away.



Four Friends and a Stretcher

One day He (Jesus) was teaching; and there were some Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing. And some men were carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. But not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.” Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. They were all struck with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today (Luke 5:17-26 NASB).”

Whenever and wherever Jesus spoke, the gathering about Him turned into a full-fledged event. People flocked in great numbers to hear and see this amazing itinerate rabbi whose power enabled Him to heal the sick and raise the dead. But Jesus was more than a worker of miracles. People clamored to hear His teachings. He taught as no other teacher. His teachings bore the unmistakable imprimatur of God's authority. Two thousand years later, Jesus stands as the single most important figure in human history.

Jesus had enemies. His enemies, oddly enough, were the religious rulers. On this particular day, His enemies, the Pharisees and teachers, were in the crowd who had come to hear Jesus speak. They had witnessed His miracles. They had listened to His teachings, but because of the hardness of their hearts, they would not accept Him as the Holy One sent by God.

Two thousand years later, Jesus has many friends, and He has a great many enemies, too. His friends include women and men such as Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, C.S. Lewis, Nelson Mandela, Frederick Douglas, and George Washington Carver. Among His enemies are Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Voltaire, Marx, Nero, and Pontius Pilate. Those who love Jesus are in good company. As to our Lord's distractors, we will do well for ourselves by avoiding the society of those who shout, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

There was a paralytic. His withered limbs kept him confined to bed. The paralytic was blessed by having four friends who believed that Jesus had the power to heal. In their desire to help, the four friends attempted to set the paralyzed man before Jesus, but the crowd prevented them from drawing near. Undaunted by the masses, the four men, carrying the paralytic upon a mat, climbed onto the roof of the house where Jesus was speaking. After removing a portion of the roof, the four men lowered the paralytic before Jesus. Upon seeing the suspended stretcher, Jesus healed the paralytic. Miraculously, the man with the withered limbs was made whole. The healed man rolled up his mat and went home glorifying God while the astonished crowd of onlookers exclaimed, "We have seen remarkable things today!"

From our past come the names of acquaintances who, like the paralytic in this passage, are paralyzed by addiction. These paralytics need faithful friends who will bring them to Jesus. The Twelfth Step is about bringing the wounded to Jesus. Say, how are you at carrying stretchers?

For Discussion:

- In what way are drunks and drug addicts like the paralytic?
- How are we to be like the friends who carried the paralytic's stretcher?
- Who are the friends of Jesus? Who are His enemies?

Summary

We have come to the end of our study, but we have not come to the end of our journey. We have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep. By the authority of Jesus Christ, each participant in this study is granted the privilege of writing the next chapter in this story of hope, renewal, and redemption. May the Lord bless you and keep you safe and sober.

Scriptural Quotations

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