

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION



Book Three

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY RELAPSE PREVENTION

BOOK THREE

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EQUIPPED FOR GROWTH

Life in addiction is often described as a slow death because of the decline in the well-being of those who are in bondage to their drug of choice. Therefore, to enjoy a healthy and satisfying lifestyle in recovery we need to recognize our need to grow in the many areas of our being which have been compromised. Two primary places to start equipping ourselves for growth is in our thoughts and in the attitude of our heart.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:20-24 NIV)

What can we elect to do that will support growth? We need to radically determine in our minds that we will put off our old self and former way of life. By a conscious choice of our will we need to abandon and be healed from those things that keep us in bondage to our addiction. We need to give up co-dependent relationships that we used to support our physical or emotional need or longing. We need to surrender our will to God and seek His help to put on our new self. We need to determine that we will walk in God’s way, doing those things which will help us grow in righteousness and holiness. We need to get to know our Heavenly Father, so that we will learn to trust Him.

Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. (Psalm 55:22 NLT)

In the Bible we read the story of a young man named Joshua. After the death of Moses, the leader of God’s people, Joshua was appointed to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. As he started his journey God gave him instructions which are timeless for all who set out on a new path in recovery.

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:8-9 NIV)

As we look to God's word to direct our path in recovery, we will find trustworthy guidance and hope for our journey. God is faithful to do everything He has promised.

God has said that He will guide us and help us grow. Our part is to seek to know God, to learn His ways, and then follow them. How do we do that? We learn about God by reading the Bible and believing and doing what it says. We put our trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. When we do this, God's Holy Spirit comes to live in us. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom to know and understand God's ways. ***When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.*** (John 16:13 NLT) The Holy Spirit will guide, train and equip us to do what is right. Our part is to use the tools provided and regularly consult the Holy Spirit to ensure we are on the right path.

At the same time, we need to be aware that we have an enemy who does not want us to grow and become all God intends us to be. Jesus said that the enemy of our soul comes to steal, kill and destroy. We can take comfort in the truth that the evil one only has power over us as we choose to give it to him. Disobedience or leaving the tools we have been given in the toolbox will leave our lives open to access by the evil one. We need to determine to fill ourselves up with the fullness of God and be doers of God's Word, then we will be equipped for growth.

Jesus said, ***"When a corrupting spirit is expelled from someone, it drifts along through the desert looking for an oasis, some unsuspecting soul it can bedevil. When it doesn't find anyone, it says, 'I'll go back to my old haunt.' On return, it finds the person swept and dusted, but vacant. It then runs out and rounds up seven other spirits dirtier than itself and they all move in, whooping it up. That person ends up far worse than if he'd never gotten cleaned up in the first place."*** (Luke 11:24-26 MSG)

God is very clear that there is a battle going on within us and around us. The good news is that the battle has already been won and the enemy has been defeated. However, the enemy is still prowling around looking for individuals he can destroy. We need to uphold our determination not to give Him any opportunity.

Preparation for battle means surrendering ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His power and authority working through us that sends the forces of darkness fleeing. We equip ourselves for victory when we have an open ear for

God's voice and remain self-controlled and alert to His instructions throughout the battle. We employ effective weapons to resist the devil when we stand firm in our faith in God's strength and goodness. We put the enemy to flight by upholding God's word, just as Jesus did when He was tempted.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV)

Growth comes when we choose to trust in God regardless of our circumstances. God's word says that He works all things together for our good. The enemy of our souls is a created being with limited power. If we look to God who has ultimate power, He will deliver us from any attack the enemy may bring against us.

Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. (2 Corinthians. 1:9-10 NIV)

God has provided tools and instructions to equip us for effective growth today. Are we willing to pick up these tools and follow His instructions in the manual – the Bible?

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:7 NLT)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways am I equipping myself for growth in my new life in Christ?
2. What tools am I using? What other tools am I realizing might be useful?
3. How have I prepared myself to recognize and have victory over the deception of the enemy of my soul?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I come before You, acknowledging You as my Higher Power. You are an awesome God and Your power is infinite. All life and growth come from You. Help me to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Your beloved son, Jesus. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit who will provide the wisdom and revelation I need to get to know You, and Your plan for my life. I desire to live as Your masterpiece created in love to do the good works You have prepared in advance for me to do. I am forever grateful that You care for me. AMEN

LIVING AS HONOURABLE PEOPLE

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.
(Romans 12:10 NIV)

God created us to live as honourable people – honouring God, honouring others, and experiencing the joy of living as persons of integrity and honour. Living life only to please ourselves, whether in addiction or recovery, leaves us dissatisfied and vulnerable to harmful ways of living. However, living our lives with God in recovery is truly satisfying and purposeful. How can we find this good life?

HONOURING GOD AS HIGHER POWER BY OBEYING HIS COMMANDS:

What we believe will cause us to act in an honourable way towards others and in so doing preserve our personal honour. When we believe in the Loving God of the Bible as our Higher Power, then we are guided by Him and live accountable to His laws. God, our creator, knows the best way for His creation to live and, as we read the Bible we find out what a truly satisfying life looks like. One of the Pharisees' religious scholars asked Jesus which of the commandments in all of God's laws was the most important. Jesus answered and said that there are two laws on which all of God's laws are based and that is to love God and love our neighbour.

Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40 NLT)

HONOURING THE COMMON GOOD OF SOCIETY: If we are unsure that God exists, or believe that God does not exist, then we determine our own behaviour and are only accountable to the laws of the country in which we live. If we break a law of our country, and get caught, then we pay the penalty set by the law for our actions. Governments add to, or remove laws, in the belief that the laws will cause the community to honour one another and protect property. However, today's society seems to be on a collision course with the law and appears to be more interested in their individual rights rather than in the common good of society. It is truly evident that life without God does not lead to society honouring one another above themselves.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1-3 NIV)

HONOURING THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE PERSONAL

RELATIONSHIPS: When we believe that God is real and loves us with an all-encompassing love, this belief will be reflected in our behaviour. There is no way we can receive all the love that God pours on us and not have it overflow to others around us. God commands that we honour our Father and Mother. This command may also be applied to our primary care givers. The honour we are to give to our parents is not based on their parenting skills but on their position of authority over us. When we are married we are told to honour our spouse and to keep the marriage bed pure. God knows that adultery and sexual immorality harms our body and our relationship. His desire is that we fulfill our commitment to our spouse in order that the purity of our union of body and soul is preserved. With regards to others, we are instructed to love one another and to honour others above ourselves. Integrity in these

disciplines will be achieved when we first find respect for ourselves in the grace that God so generously pours upon us.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Exodus 20:12; Hebrews 13:4; Romans 12:10 NIV)

LIVING TO HONOUR OTHERS RATHER THAN DEMANDING OUR RIGHTS:

Before we surrendered our lives to God, we likely retaliated in anger and caused strife when we were not treated with the respect we thought we deserved. Based on another's actions we concluded that our worth had been devalued and that our dignity had suffered. In our pride we saw ourselves as deserving of more respect. We may have reacted by "setting the person or persons aright" about the honour they should have given us. While fighting for the honour we supposed we deserved, were we prepared to honour the person or persons involved with the same honour that we expected to receive from them? How about being willing to give up our perceived rights and honour others above ourselves?

How blessed the man you train, God, the woman you instruct in your Word, Providing a circle of quiet within the clamor of evil, while a jail is being built for the wicked. God will never walk away from his people, never desert his precious people. Rest assured that justice is on its way and every good heart put right. (Psalm 94:12-15 MSG)

HONOURING GOD BY REFLECTING HIS CHARACTER: God wants our lives to reflect Him in us. Jesus said that anyone who had seen Him had also seen His Father. Jesus reflected His Father's character when He went about doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the evil one. Are we, like Jesus, willing to look towards the well-being of our family, our friends and those around us? How can we honour them? God will enable us to be the person He created us to be -- a person who experiences honour as we honour God and others above ourselves.

The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with

them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation." (Psalm 91:14-16 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do I honour God as my higher power by learning and following all of his commandments? Where does my own self-will or convenience challenge this?
2. How am I doing in this area of being willing to give up my perceived rights and honour others above myself?
3. In what ways do I honour God and purposefully try to honour others around me? Where do I fall short?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, My desire is to live a purposeful and satisfying life devoted to You and willing to honour others above myself. I confess that in the past I have been prideful and puffed up in my self-seeking attitude concerning myself. Fill me to overflowing with Your all-encompassing love. Thank You for enabling me to experience honour as I honour You and others above myself. I am forever grateful that You care for me. AMEN

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH, AND HOPE

Many of us, when we come into recovery, are physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually weak. We're running on empty and are more likely picturing ourselves weary and limping along, rather than seeing ourselves running and not growing weary. We need the strength the Lord will provide to see us through.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matt. 11:28-29 NLT)

Our motivation for coming to support group meetings is to continue our journey with God in recovery and to share our experience, strength and hope with each other. We share what is working for us. We hear and observe what is working for others. We want to learn from practices which helped old-timers get strong and stay strong and which may also help us.

[God] gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:29 NLT, 40:30-31NIV)

In the beginning we comply with the recovery program guidelines because we believe that there has to be a better life than the one we have been living. We are willing to learn from the experience of others who have walked the path before us. We sleep, we eat, and we talk. We read, we pray, and we write. We exercise, we go to meetings, and we serve. We start to look better and feel stronger. As our strength increases, we begin to have hope for a better life.

At this point, because we have more energy, thoughts of our old way of handling life begin to surface and even seem manageable. The temptation to fix life as we've always fixed it begins to call. The desire to run rather than face the troubling events of our past will grow. The voice in our head will assure us that we, by ourselves, know what to do to get well. If we entertain these thoughts, we will drift towards relapse. This is the time to stay close to God and others who are doing well in recovery.

The word of God speaks truth at this time, if we will listen. ***So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*** (1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 7:18 NIV)

As our physical energy is being renewed we need to be careful to correctly identify its source. The source is not ourselves. We are powerless on our own. We need a power greater than ourselves for the rebuilding journey ahead. We need to maintain the routine of turning our will and our life over to the care of God in each and every circumstance. Each day, throughout the day, for the rest of our lives, we will need to affirm our powerlessness and surrender to God who is the source of our strength. As we remind one another of these things in meetings and conversations we will find that God will empower us to be the person He created us to be.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:18-20 NIV)

No matter how strong we may feel, it's not enough to bring us through to sustained recovery. We will tire out and give up the struggle if we think our own physical or mental strength is enough for the long haul. Strength is a gift. Strength is the product of an ongoing relationship with God. Strength is the result of trusting God, waiting for God to act, and following God's plan for fullness of life. We need to support one another during the tough times and encourage each other to keep going as we learn the ways of God. This is what will give us joy, keep us safe, and help us respond well to the events of each day.

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory. God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. Christ is the mighty power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. (Exodus 15:2, Psalm 46:1, 1 Corinthians 1:24b-25 NLT)

Jesus taught that real strength comes to us when we remain in His care and grow in His grace. He used a gardening picture to help us understand.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. (John 15:5-6 NLT)

Outside of God, we can't maintain the desire to do what is right, let alone find the strength to do what we know we ought to do. It is the experience of each person who obediently walks with God that He gives power when they feel weakest and this is what continually makes them strong. As we share with each other and learn from one another our desire for more of God's power in our daily life grows and we become increasingly hopeful in God's ability to bring about His good purposes in our lives.

For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him. I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 2:13, 4:13 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I seeking and experiencing God's strength in my recovery?
2. What is the challenge for me to acknowledge that I'm powerless in my own strength and need to daily rely on God's strength?
3. What does the parable of the vine and the branches that Jesus taught convey to me about God and my recovery?
4. Through my own practice and experience, am I both receiving encouragement and encouraging others in their recovery with God?

PRAYER: Loving God, When I was weary and burdened, thank You for pursuing me with Your love and giving me hope for the future. I confess that I cannot do life without You. Jesus, I welcome You into my life as my Saviour and Lord. I surrender to Your guidance. I trust in the mighty power of Your Holy Spirit to be active in me, giving me the desire and will to do what pleases You. I am thankful that your power works best in my weakness. Anoint me afresh with Your Holy Spirit each day. I am grateful for Your lavish love and faithfulness and for the strength and hope you give me each day to live according to Your word. Amen

CO-DEPENDENT NO MORE

The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. (Isaiah 58:11 NLT)

Co-dependency is a relationship addiction which touches many lives. People who are co-dependent often form relationships that are one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive. In a harmful relationship, a co-dependent person bases their identity and personal value on who

they perceive themselves to be. They often interact with another person in a way that is harmful to their own well-being.

Characteristics of co-dependency include:

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to "love" people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don't recognize their efforts
- An extreme need for approval and recognition
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others
- Fear of being abandoned or alone
- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy and/or lacking boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty
- Poor communication
- Difficulty making decisions¹

¹<http://mentalhealthamerica.net/co-dependency>

We are living co-dependently when we are looking to another person to affirm and maintain our value. Another person cannot fully understand us or provide for our needs, no matter how much they may care. When another person looks co-dependently to us to establish their worth, we face the same limitations. That's why we do such a poor job when we try to rescue or prop up another person. We need to abandon the impossible expectations we put on ourselves or others.

Contentment in life does not come from controlling or trying to please someone, hoping they will meet our needs and make us feel secure. Another person cannot love us enough or touch us deeply enough to satisfy the longing in our hearts. Only God can truly satisfy those longings. As far as it depends on us, we need to understand that we have only limited responsibility for another's happiness. We have our own desires and dreams and we need to let others have theirs. We make our

own mistakes and others will make theirs. We need to forgive ourselves and others and determine to learn from the mistakes we have made.

God wants each of us to come to that place where we first identify with Him and acknowledge who we are in Christ. Only then can we build healthy relationships with others.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

Fullness of life and real freedom from co-dependency can only be found when we are first rooted in a relationship with our Heavenly Father. We need to acknowledge that God made us in His image and we have great value in His sight. When we base our worth and identity around this truth, rather than on the opinions of others, we begin to experience peace, freedom and security. What does God say about who we are and why He actually created us?

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT)

From God's perspective, these things are true about me:

1. I am a loved person. I do not have to earn love. Jesus loves and values me. God says: ***I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.*** (Jeremiah 31:3 NLT)
2. I am a chosen person. I have nothing to prove or accomplish in order to be chosen, wanted and accepted. God has already chosen me. ***Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself.*** (Romans 8:3 NLT)
3. I am a forgiven person. There is no sin too evil for God to forgive. The blood of Jesus cleanses all sin. ***God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.*** (1 Peter 1:2 NLT)

4. I am a person of love and power and wisdom. God lives in me and blesses me with new life. God gives me power to make wise choices. ***For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*** (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT)
5. Although I am a limited human being, I belong to the God who has limitless power and unfailing love for me and those I love. ***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.*** (Psalm 33:6-7;18 NIV)

God is committed to walking with us while we learn how to live well in relationship with Him and with others. Life becomes satisfying as we learn to relax in the acceptance of God's unfailing love for us. When our self-worth is not based on our success or failure, we will move away from a lifestyle of co-dependency.

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10 NLT)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Do I identify with any of the co-dependency characteristics listed?
2. How does knowing and affirming God's view of me help me avoid co-dependent behaviour?
3. Why is building a healthy relationship with God more important than holding on to a co-dependent relationship with another person? What makes us so easily choose the wrong way in this situation?
4. In what way do we sometimes behave co-dependently with God? What have I learned that challenges me in all my relationships?

Heavenly Father, I am forever grateful that I am loved and accepted by You. Forgive me for being co-dependent with another rather than trusting in You. I acknowledge that You made me and You alone know my heart, and my anxious thoughts. I ask You to show me how to live in a way that honours You and honours others. Teach me Your ways that I may live according to Your truth. Help me to love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and to love my friends and neighbours as myself. Fill me with Your love and give me wisdom to seek You in all my ways. AMEN

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN ONE ANOTHER

One of the characteristics of life in addiction is isolation from others and doing things on our own. The life God created us to live, and which we seek to recover is one where we come close to God and others and allow relationships to grow that help all of us live better.

Can we remember a time when someone encouraged us to have hope, to keep going, to do the right thing? What did that person do that felt encouraging? True friends help us become the people we were born to be. Sometime it's as basic as encouraging each other to be our best in daily activities, daily decisions, and spiritual growth. At other times, it's helping us discover our gifts and moving forward to use them for good.

People loved to spend time with Jesus. Everywhere He went, Jesus told people that the kingdom of God was available to them. Jesus taught that anyone who was part of the kingdom of God was a citizen with dignity, a worthwhile servant of the King, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Jesus called people forward to be the wonderful gift God created them to be. We will grow in our own recovery when we practice encouraging others in their journey.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 NIV)

Friendship is based on shared values and goals. At one level people can be friends just because they enjoy the same games or crafts. However, lasting friendship happens when people share their deepest and most important values with each other. A passion to see wrongs made right, for example, can bond friends together no matter what they have to face. If each friend sees the other and believes in the other as salt and light, that encourages and strengthens the person so they become more than they could have been on their own. Knowing God is with us and with our friend is a cord that binds us together in His love.

A real friend helps us carry our burdens, encourages and builds us up, helps us move toward restoration from a challenging experience, and spurs us on to love and good deeds. A real friend doesn't climb into a dark and complaining place with us. A good friend stands with us as we face what comes our way and helps us find God's plan in it.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (From Galatians 6, Hebrews 3, and 10)

Many of us struggle with self-acceptance. Sometimes we compare ourselves with others – their looks, their gifts, their achievements. However, true friendship means seeing ourselves as peers, encouragers, and cheerleaders in each other's lives. We affirm one another for a job well done, and we open doors for each other to try new things and take healthy risk. We air our feelings out loud without fear of rejection and know that with God's help and our friend at our side, we will get better and better at sorting out the pieces in the puzzle of life.

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family. (Proverbs 18:24 MSG)

Here are some things friends do to bring out the best in us:

- Friends stimulate our faith walk with God. They pray for us.
- Friends ask questions. They laugh and cry with us.
- Friends encourage us to try new things
- Friends affirm our strengths and are not threatened by our successes.
- Friends remind us of hope when we feel discouraged.
- Friends challenge us to take a healthy risk.
- Friends stick with us when everyone else gives up on us.
- Friends notice and compliment us on a job well done.

In our recovery, today, we would do well to watch for an opportunity to be a friend to someone, to carry a burden, to encourage and build someone up, to spur someone on to love and good deeds. As we respect their uniqueness, we can ask ourselves, "What would feel encouraging to this person? What would

motivate this person to fulfill their calling? Is there anything this person needs?
How can I be a supportive friend to this person?"

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I being a friend?
2. How am I reaching out to include the joy and wisdom of friends in my life?
3. What happens that moves me away from friends towards isolation and makes me vulnerable for relapse?
4. Comparing – why do I get caught up in it? What am I doing to change?
5. How deeply or how honestly am I letting myself be known by others?
6. What might I do to improve as a person who “brings out the best” in others?

Dear Jesus, I admit that I struggle with the notion of being a true friend. Please help me take my eyes off myself. Help me to look around at others and truly care about what is going on in their lives. Help me to be friendly towards others as I would be to a beloved brother or sister. Each person I meet could be a potential friend. Help me to be as salt and light to those around me. Help me to learn from You. I am forever grateful that You are a true friend who cares for me. AMEN

RATIONALIZING

Addicts are experts at creating excuses to rationalize their behavior and to minimize the complexity of their problems. Rationalizing is an attempt to explain or justify one’s behaviour with complicated excuses or reasons. It is a way to minimize the significance of the risky actions they intend to proceed with, or defend things they’ve already done.

There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.
(Proverbs 14:12 NLT)

As fallen human beings, in a broken world, our reasoning is flawed by the misinformation coming at us every day. Rationalizing our behaviour is rebellion against God whether we specifically disobey God’s commands or just silently choose to say “no” to God’s quiet voice in our spirit. No matter how much we try to justify our sinful behavior, it has its consequences and will hurt us. Sins of

omission – those things we know we should do but avoid doing or just can’t be bothered making the effort to do – are equally important in this scenario.

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. (James 4:17 NLT)

Here are three reasons for excusing and rationalizing our behaviour: 1) We want what sin has to offer us, and 2) Doing the right thing and being responsible for our actions is too challenging or inconvenient. 3) We are afraid of the shame, pain, or embarrassment associated with our poor choices.

1.) Wanting What Sin Has To Offer: Rationalizing provides convenient explanations for our conduct. We desire the pleasure the sinful behaviour gives us. Deep in our hearts we know that it is not right and it is not God’s will for us. However, the sin captures our imagination and is so appealing that we purposefully dwell on it. We then rationalize away the truth and potential consequences of our actions and fulfill the resulting desire.

Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. (James 1:14-15 NLT)

2.) Accepting Responsibility Seems Too Challenging: Rationalizing endorses the internal belief that we are victims of circumstances beyond our control. We reason that our wrong choices are justified because of what we have experienced. We believe that the person who inflicted harm on us is responsible for our learned behavior towards others. We make excuses for our actions based on the hurt we have sustained.

3.) We’re Afraid of Shame and Embarrassment: We rationalize because we are afraid of the shame, the pain, the embarrassment, or the disappointment that has resulted from our poor choices. It seems easier to make excuses for our behaviour or blame someone else in order to get the burden “off our shoulders.” As long as rationalizing makes us feel better, we deceive ourselves into thinking that the situation has improved. To be honest and confess that we have made a poor choice may, in the short term, threaten our comfort zone, be inconvenient in the moment, or even cause us embarrassment. However, we still need to admit that we were wrong or did wrong. Without acknowledging any responsibility for our actions, we will continue to search for excuses for our

behaviour and eventually find ourselves sliding down the slippery slope that leads to harmful behaviour.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. (Romans 7:21-25 NLT)

Sometimes we've rationalized our behaviour for so long that it has become an unconscious process rather than a deliberate deception. We need to seek God to awaken us to the harmful choices we are making. He knows the poison stored in the roots of our destructive actions and reactions. He knows and understands the actual impact of all the events that make up our lives – good and bad. We need to ask the God who loves us unconditionally to show us the root of everything that damages His wonderful plan for our lives. As we seek God in all our ways, we can be sure He will give us guidance and the power to make good choices that will set us free.

There may be traumatic events in our past to which we still have emotional links and the resulting fear translates into rationalizing. God wants to heal our wounds and set us free from the false belief the evil one attached to those memories. Are we willing to be healed, or will we continue to let the devil “kick us while we are down”? The trigger to our rationalizing may be a bitter root of unforgiveness against someone who harmed us or didn’t help us when they should have. Our way is to hold on to the hate and rationalize why we have a right to it. God’s way of restoration is through forgiveness given, and received. Continuing to choose our way through rationalizing, rather than God’s way of forgiving, will have a damaging effect on our recovery.

Rationalizing is a sin because it means telling lies, and telling lies has grave consequences. Making excuses for sin gives it a foothold in our lives, damages our relationship with God, and causes harm to us and to others. If we continue to rationalize our rebellious actions, our hearts will become hard and the Holy Spirit’s voice in our ears will grow increasingly faint. A relapse won’t be far behind.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV, Philippians 2:13, 4:13 NLT)

God’s love goes deeper than any painful, shameful action in our past. For all sin that results from rationalizing our behaviour, there is instant, total, and completely undeserved forgiveness. This is the way God’s truth begins to come alive in us – when we speak truth to our hearts and minds, and choose truth over our rationalizations. When we surrender our imperfect understanding of ourselves and our past to God, and ask for His help, He will reveal the root cause of our confused behaviour and bring us to the knowledge of all truth. He will also give us the power to stand strong in the truth of who we are in Christ Jesus, free from all harmful rationalizing.

Jesus said: ***“You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** (John 8:31-32 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what circumstances am I vulnerable to rationalizing my thoughts and actions?
2. What tools or strategies help me to recognize and move beyond rationalizing?
3. What keeps me from facing my actions without excuses?
4. Am I willing to receive healing and trust that the love of God that makes me safe goes deeper than any brokenness?
5. Am I willing to let go of resentments and offer forgiveness to those who have unfairly harmed me?

Heavenly Father, I confess the root cause of my rationalization is really my rebellion against Your ways. Forgive me for the times I have rationalized my thoughts in order to accommodate my disobedience against You. Help me to get rid of the roots of bitterness and fear which support my rebellion. Help me to forgive those who have harmed me. Help me to forgive myself for the harm I have caused others. Help me to walk in the light of Your truth. I ask You to give me the wisdom and courage to examine my thoughts and actions in accordance with Your word. I am grateful that You have begun a good work in me and will never fail to uphold me in my integrity. AMEN

SLOGANS OR SPIRITUAL FOOD

“KEEP COMING BACK. IT WORKS IF YOU WORK IT”

At the end of many recovery meetings we say the words, “Keep coming back. It works if you work it.” While it is important to do our part, we should be grateful that our recovery depends on the God who created the universe and not on us. There actually is hope for a better life because God works on our behalf, can we imagine that? The God who put all the stars in place thinks about us and our circumstances in a very personal and caring way. Coming back again and again to this God who works on our behalf is what works for a secure life in recovery.

Based on His awareness of each of our personal situations, God, who has perfect knowledge, arranges and sets things in place in order to bring about a good and satisfying life for us. We can hardly imagine that level of love and commitment to us in our new life in recovery. What we have to work at is to fully surrender our old way of life, exchanging it for the new life God has planned for us. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us in all our ways so that we can receive all that God wants to give us. Life finally works when we work it in this way.

No one has ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like it—what God has arranged for those who love him. But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10 MSG)

God knows where we are at and promises to accompany us as we move forward into a bright but unknown future. One of our greatest hindrances to experiencing a great future is this: we think we know what the good life looks like. We go through the 12 steps of A.A. and attend meetings. Some of us enter treatment centers. We sort out some of the wreckage of our past and begin to form an idea of what we think the next phase of life should look like. The truth is, the vision we have of our new life is too narrow when it is formed on the basis of our own thinking. Our ideas are no match for the reality that God has in store for us. God actively works all things together for our good. Our lives will begin to work and have new meaning if we do the work of listening to God and obeying His word. When our thoughts drift elsewhere, this is the truth we need to return to – “keep coming back”.

Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. (Psalm 37:3-5a NLT)

Are we willing to trust the fact that God really is good; that he is pouring out His love and grace into our lives; that he is bringing about a future with hope for us; and that he surely has better and more wonderful plans for us than we have for ourselves?

Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. (Psalm 55:22 NLT)

“OUR BEST THINKING GOT US HERE”

After recognizing that our lives were unmanageable, many of us entered into detox and then treatment programs where we found support and began to grow stronger. We began to attend 12-step recovery meetings and in many of those meetings often hear the words, “Our best thinking got us here”. With the clarity of rational thinking that time in recovery brings, we were able to give witness to the fact that what we thought and did got us into the mess we ended up in. We had our own self-centered agenda and worked at fulfilling it regardless of the cost to our own well-being or the well-being of those around us. Amazingly, in the middle of our turmoil, we were drawn to a power greater than ourselves to seek victory over the chaos that was our life in addiction. Now it's time to focus on the plans of our loving God which are far wiser than our best human plans.

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my victory ... God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble ... Christ is the mighty power of God and the wisdom of God. This “foolish” plan of God is far wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is far stronger than the greatest of human strength (Exodus 15:2, Psalm 46:1, 1 Corinthians 1:24b-25 NLT)

Many of us have discovered that, no matter how strong we feel, or how smart we think we are, it's not enough to bring us through to sustained recovery. We will tire out and give up the struggle if we think any physical or mental strength of our own is enough for the long haul. Strength and wisdom are gifts. They are the result of an ongoing relationship with God. They come from trusting God,

waiting for God to act, following God's word, and seeking His plan for our lives. This is what gives us joy, keeps us safe, and helps us understand and respond differently to life around us. Trusting in God, rather than in our best thinking, is the foundation that helps us maintain our new life in recovery.

Outside of God, we can't even maintain the desire to do what is right let alone find the strength to act on what we know we ought to do. ***For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.*** (Philippians 2:13 NLT) It is the experience of those who have walked with God that He pours out power at the very time we feel weak and that's what actually makes us strong. God says, ***"My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness."*** (2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT) As we ask for, and receive God's grace and power, then we are able to say, ***"For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."*** (Philippians 4:13 NLT)

It's time to trade in our best thinking that got us on the road to nowhere and receive the truth that God is speaking to us today which will put us on the road to life.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What's changed in my understanding of "what works" and how has that impacted my day to day living?
2. What are some examples of "my own best thinking" that I have needed to trade in for God's truth? How has this changed the way I live today?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for giving me new thoughts, new strength, and new life as I rely on You and live in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Help me to be relentless in getting rid of all that would hinder me in my relationship with You and in my new life in recovery. I want to know You more and the plans You have for me. Help me to seek You in all my thoughts and to listen to and obey Your direction for my life. I am forever grateful that You love and care for me. AMEN

SHOWING RESPECT

When some folks were asked on a blog what makes a person worthy of respect they listed qualities such as: integrity, trustworthiness, adhering to a code of honour, goodness, decency, being respectful of others. Most of us would agree that qualities like these would be evident in people to whom we would show respect. However, even in our new life in recovery, we find ourselves behaving in ways that are just the opposite. We believe we have good reason why we do not treat some people with respect. Politicians, church officials, and other leaders make faulty decisions or behave badly, and we reason they don't deserve respect. People may do things that hurt us, frustrate us, or make us angry and we react with disrespect. In so many ways, we justify our disrespect even though God says to respect everyone.

Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king. (1 Peter 2:17 NLT)

Respect shows high regard for authority, other people, self, property, and country. We show respect by treating others as we want them to treat us. All people have value as human beings, regardless of their status or behaviour and we commit ourselves to living that way. Showing respect and being worthy of respect matters to God. The "Ten Commandments", (Exodus 20:3-17) given by God to His people, were instructions which empower God's people to honour God, and live respectfully with each other. The first four commandments were given to help people know how to respect and honour God, their creator. The following six were given to help them show respect to their parents and live morally and in peaceful harmony with their neighbours.

People who despise advice are asking for trouble; those who respect a command will succeed. (Proverbs 13:13 NLT)

It is God's will that we be respectful of our parents, people in authority, people around us, and their property. This is difficult when we face those who have harmed us. Some of us may attribute our low self-esteem or addictive lifestyle to the disrespectful ways others have behaved towards us. However, no matter how badly others have treated us, this does not nullify the commandments of God.

It is God's standard that, as we forgive those who have been disrespectful towards us, God will forgive us for having spoken and acted in disrespectful ways toward others. Forgiveness breaks our bondage to the events that caused us to stray from being the person God created us to be. God is a righteous judge and He can be trusted to judge the other person's harmful actions. That person is accountable before God unless they also repent.

Servants, respectfully obey your earthly masters but always with an eye to obeying the real master, Christ. Don't just do what you have to do to get by, but work heartily, as Christ's servants doing what God wants you to do. And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God. (Ephesians 6:5-7 MSG)

The book of Genesis in the Bible tells us the story of a man named Joseph. Joseph was loved by his father but not by many others, including his own brothers. For more than 13 years Joseph suffered unfair treatment – including being sold into slavery, imprisoned on a false accusation of rape, and broken promises for a fair hearing of his case before Pharaoh. No matter what situation Joseph found himself in, he honoured God and respected those around him. (Read the story in Genesis 39-42)

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27 NIV)

Joseph must have felt frustrated by the undeserved harm that others caused him by their character defects. He was sold as a slave by his own brothers and justice failed him for doing the right thing when his master was absent. Joseph may have had some pity-parties over the impact of disrespectful people and unfair events that seemed to happen repeatedly but, even on the darkest days, Joseph continued to honour God and respect those around him. In God's timing, Joseph was honoured and raised up to be a leader over the very people who had unfairly treated him. In the life plan that God had for Joseph, he was in the right place at the right time to rescue many people from starvation. God's plan also worked in an amazing way to restore the relationship between Joseph and his family.

But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.' My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me. (1 Samuel 2:30, Psalm 62:7, Psalm 50:15 NIV).

We have all heard the saying, "actions speak louder than words". This is extremely important in the matter of giving respect to others around us and over us. As God has been kind and merciful to us, he commands us to be kind and compassionate towards others – all others. God's standard is not, "some of the people some of the time". God's standard is, "all of the people in all circumstances". It seems an impossible standard and, without God's grace and forgiveness it is. But with God's grace and forgiveness, we will be able to treat others with honour and respect in all our affairs. When we honour God with our lives, we can expect that, just like Joseph, God will honour us before others.

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12 NLT)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION and DISCUSSION

1. In what situations am I challenged to show respect?
2. When and how do I justify my disrespectful words or behaviour?
3. What would it take for me, in "less than perfect" situations, to practice ongoing respect?
4. What changes do I need to ask God to make in me, so I can honour Him in all my affairs?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask you to give me the will and the desire to obediently follow Your way in whatever circumstances I am presented with. Your word says, both riches and honour come from You and You hold strength and power in the palm of Your hand. When hard times come, help me to remember that You are always with me and I am choosing to walk in Your plan for my life. Help me to honour and respect you not just in what I do, but also in my thoughts, motivation, and desires. Strengthen me and help me to show respect to each person I meet, even when I may disagree with their ways. I am forever grateful that You love and care for me. Amen

GRUDGE, RESENTMENT, FORGIVENESS

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. (Romans 12:17 NKJV)

We feel hurt when another's unkind words or actions cause our self-worth to be devalued. We feel violated when someone has psychologically, physically, or sexually abused us. They have taken away the dignity of the person we are and left us scars in need of healing. We want an admission of guilt for the harm done to us by the person who committed the offence. We want them to make amends. If, for whatever reason, amends are not made for sustained personal injury, we often carry grudges against the offenders which will cause us further harm.

Unresolved grudges from offences committed against us in childhood, usually show up in adulthood as deeply rooted bitterness. Some of us have carried the grief of offenses for decades, and have tried to relieve the pain and hopelessness we feel with addictive substances or co-dependent relationships. The problem is, we only cause ourselves even more grief by not dealing with these situations before God.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:15 NIV)

Forgiveness is the only way to stop the ongoing pain from buried grudges. For some of us who have been victimized, forgiveness is unthinkable. We still feel the pain of the offence and forgiveness rips at our sense of justice. We want the offender to pay; to suffer in return for the suffering they have inflicted on us. However, until we forgive the offender, the offence he or she committed against us, will continue to harm us. The occurrence will fester with resentment in our souls, and the link between us and the perpetrator will remain, due to our unwillingness to forgive. The Bible gives us the following advice:

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to

you." ***Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.***
(Romans 12:18-21 NLT)

These Biblical instructions may appear difficult but they are not impossible. We are not called to create peace, only to live in a peaceable state as much as we can. We are not required to say that others don't deserve punishment, only to turn judgment over to God. We don't give up a dispute because someone else is necessarily right, but for the sake of allowing ourselves to be at peace with others and with God.

We can't change other people but we can ask God for the courage to change ourselves. Hanging on to a bitter grudge and seeking revenge only sickens our soul and damages those who are close to us. Bitterness is like a cancer that feeds on our insides and shows itself in outbursts of irritability, anger and resentment. Someone has said, "Holding resentment or bitterness against another person is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. (Colossians 3:12-13 NLT)

Our unwillingness to grace others, as we have been graced by God, is often the barrier to our letting go of grudges. Our desire for revenge is much stronger than the way of forgiveness. We want to be forgiven for any sins we have committed, but we want others to suffer the penalty for the sins they have committed against us. This is not how the Kingdom of God works! After being brutally beaten and nailed to the cross for all sin, Jesus said, "***Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.***" (LUKE 23:34 NKJV)

Jesus died for every wrong done to us, or done by us. We are reconciled to our Heavenly Father by Jesus' death and resurrection. As believers, to refuse to forgive someone, will cause us even more pain because we are actually disobeying God. Why not choose to forgive others their sins as God has forgiven ours? Why not take the lingering pain and resentment of offences against us to the cross where they have been atoned for? Why not be guided in all our ways by the love of God?

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1a;3 NIV)

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiving is not forgetting.
2. Forgiveness is not seeking revenge. It is simply a decision to not hold another's offence against them. It is letting another person off our hook, knowing they are still on God's hook unless they repent. Vengeance is God's. He will repay.
3. Forgiveness is not a "feeling". It is a choice we make, with God's help.
4. Forgiveness means letting go of resentment. We don't heal in order to forgive; we forgive in order to heal.
5. Forgiveness is something we do for our own sake so we can be free. Forgiveness is mainly an issue of obedience between us and God. Forgiving is how one stops the pain.
6. Forgiveness must be given from the heart. How do we do that? We allow God to uncover our mental agony, our emotional pain and feelings of resentment toward those who hurt us. We acknowledge the hurt and hate we have carried in our hearts and ask God to set us free from its bondage. We ask God to touch our emotional core and heal and restore us to new life in Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION and DISCUSSION

1. When is it fairly easy for me to forgive someone?
2. When does it seem difficult or even "wrong" to forgive?
3. What excuses do I make for choosing not to forgive?
4. How do I notice God working in my life in helping me give up grudges?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving me so much that You sent Jesus into the world as an atoning sacrifice for my sin. Please help me to forgive others their sin against me, as You have forgiven my sin against You. I bring all grudges and bitterness that I have held against others to You and ask You to set me free from the bondage I have formed for myself. I acknowledge that You are the righteous Judge and I am not. Please heal and restore those dark damaged places within me and let me walk in the light of new life with

You. I am forever grateful that I can bring all my cares to You because You love and care for me. AMEN

ADDICTION OR GRACE

God created the heavens and the earth and established certain laws which were beneficial for all the people on earth. Gravity is one of those laws. When we push a bag of trash into the garbage chute we can't see the law of gravity but we can hear the bag hit the bottom so we know that it is operating. In the same way, the existence of love and grace are evident in those whose hearts are turned towards God. Just like the evidence of gravity can be seen in the physical world, so the evidence of grace can also be seen in those who have turned their will and their life over to the care of God. In our addiction, we didn't take time to think about factors that determined the course of life. Now that we have made a choice to live with God in recovery, we have an opportunity to find out how God created the world and the place in life He intended for us in it.

May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:2-3 NLT)

GRACE – OBEYING GOD'S WORD God created humans in His own image and God is love. Therefore, we know humans were created in love. Non-compliance with God's word separated humans from the relationship with Him that God intended. Because of His relentless love for us, God paid the price of our disobedience through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we accept the finished work of Jesus on the cross as payment for our sin, our relationship with God is restored. Our Heavenly Father delights in His redeemed children and He pours out His endless grace on those who live in His love and care and wholeheartedly follow His ways.

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who

were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. (Colossians 1:19-21 NLT)

GRACE – NECESSARY INGREDIENT FOR CHANGE One problem in our society today is that many people try to live with respect for one another and fix human behaviour through self-help and education, without any input from God. Behaving in destructive and addictive ways is to be expected when we believe everything in life is simply the result of random selection. With that view, we have to figure how to fix ourselves, without knowing what went wrong.

Our behaviour usually reflects what we believe about God. God is love and God created us in love. Do we believe that? To live fully in recovery, an individual must believe that our world and each of our lives are supported and shaped by the love and amazing grace of God. The principle is simple, if we want to behave towards others in a more loving way we have to know that we ourselves are loved.

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1John 4:7-8 NLT)

GRACE – BELIEVING GOD LOVES ME WHEN I DON'T GET MY OWN WAY When we don't get what we want, we believe God could not possibly care for us. When we don't feel loved, we believe we're just not good enough to be loved by God or anyone else. Believing thoughts like these drives us to seek comfort in harmful relationships, practices and ultimately substances. Initially we may not realize the impact of our beliefs but the discontent and anxiety within us will lead us down the path to our substance of choice. That route may be through work, alcohol, prescription or street drugs, sex, gambling, spending, abusive language, rage etc. Addiction substitutes "instant gratification counterfeits" for God's good gifts that develop over time. Sooner or later we will come to know that counterfeits just don't satisfy. Grace recognizes that God is protecting us from harm and helping us develop what is truly helpful and satisfying.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:2 NLT)

GRACE – FOCUSING ON GROWING WITH GOD RATHER THAN ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Over the long haul, how do we prevent relapse into addictive behaviour and a destructive lifestyle and maintain our choice to live in the love and grace of God? Strangely, we have to ***stop focusing on*** "not picking up" and focus instead on God's goodness to us, God's strength in us, and God's blessings around us. We have to ***stop focusing on*** our own thoughts and behaviour and intentionally refocus our thoughts on God and His principles. It's time to stop dwelling on what happened 5 minutes or 5 years ago and instead focus on the good news that our past sins have been forgiven, comfort and healing for every hurt is available today, and we are free to move forward in our recovery. God pursued us with His love even while we were running away. He did so, not to accuse or condemn us, but to heal and restore us. To live in grace rather than in addiction is to rely on the truth that God's power and love is sufficient to help us stand firm in Christ.

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NIV)

The devil, the father of lies who feeds addiction, wants us to dwell on our addiction – the memories, negative consequences, and tempting thoughts. On the other hand, God, the father of love and grace, invites us to seek His help, stand strong, and confidently go forward.

Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? ... But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires ... So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. (James 4:4-11 NLT)

GRACE – CHOOSING TO RETURN TO GOD God wants to fill us with His life-giving Spirit. He offers us a relationship with Himself that is intimate, deeply satisfying, and brings great joy into our lives. We can, if we want, choose the lonely, destructive, painful path of relapse and addiction, but we don't have to. God's offer of grace and help in time of need remains constant. No matter how far down we may fall, God invites us to return to Him. Continuing in

addiction after a relapse is self-will. Returning and being accepted by a forgiving God is wonderful grace.

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. (Philippians 3:8-9 NLT)

God invites us to a satisfying, meaningful, joyful and purposeful life. Are we willing to leave our addiction behind, come close to God, and accept His invitation to live in His wonderful grace?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If I use my behaviour as the measure, am I leaning towards addiction or grace?
2. In what ways have I lived in anger and blame towards God for bad things that happened to me or when God didn't do what I asked Him to do?
3. Am I focusing on growth with God rather than on addictive behaviours?
4. In what ways do I need to move away from addictive thinking and invite God to give me the grace I need to move forward with Him?

Heavenly Father, I am amazed at Your love and grace poured out on the whole earth and even more, that it was available to me even when I was living in rebellion against You. Thank you for opening my eyes and helping me see that You made me for the joy of having a loving relationship with me. Forgive me for the times I have neither wanted nor recognized Your love and grace in my life. Here and now, I choose You. I choose grace. Help me to live in Your grace each day so I may get to know how amazing You truly are, and grow strong in Your care as I get well and move forward. Thank you for the hope I have today because of your lavish love for me. AMEN

SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

For a variety of reasons, many of us have an underlying structure of disorder that is damaging us and others. We invite God to show us the truth about ourselves so we can personally receive God’s forgiveness to set us free and healing to make us strong.

<p>SUBSTANCE ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Alcohol Caffeine Injected or smoked substances such as: Crack, Crystal Meth, Heroin Marijuana Prescription Medications Sugar Tobacco</p>	<p>BEHAVIOUR ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Anger/Rage/Bullying Cutting Crime Eating Disorders: Bulimia, Anorexia, Binging, Obesity Gambling Hoarding Sex/Pornography Verbal Abuse: Gossip, Lying, Accusing Blaming, Condemning Violence (physical, verbal, cyber)</p>
<p>SOFT ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Digital Use: (Time or Content) TV/Phone/Tablet; video games, Social Networking; Cyber-bullying; Online shopping; Gambling, Pornography Exercise Food (See Eating Disorders) Isolating/Sleep Money: Debt/Fraud Religion Shopping Sports Work/Achievement</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Abusive Relationships: Includes: Intimidation, Isolation, Domination, Blaming, Humiliation, Withholding, Forcing acts against one’s will Approval dependency Attention Seeking Codependence/Rescuing Power/Control</p>

PRAYER FOR HEALING AND RESTORATION

Loving God, Thank You for rescuing us from the dark power of Satan and bringing us into loving relationship with Your Son, Jesus. We ask for wisdom and understanding from Your Spirit in order to live as people who honour You. Heal us. Make us new. Make us strong followers of Christ. Root us deeply in Your love. We place our trust in Your power that can do far more in us than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

JUST FOR TODAY

Just for today I will try to live in conscious contact with God praying only for knowledge of His will and the power to carry it out.

Just for today I will strengthen my mind. I will take a few minutes to read and meditate on God’s word, seeking God’s perspective for my life today. I will take note of one helpful thing God is saying to me and seek to behave accordingly.

Just for today I will be joyful, optimistic, and grateful. I will take time to notice the gifts in me, in others, and in my surroundings and let the rest go.

Just for today I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything else to my desires. I will trust that God is working all things for good in my life.

Just for today I will be agreeable. I will not criticize, not find fault, and not try to improve or control anybody except myself. I will pray blessing on one person with whom I struggle to relate.

Just for today I will have a quiet half hour all by myself to relax and enjoy all that God is giving me.

Just for today I will be unafraid, believing that as I trust in God with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding, He will lead me along a good path.

Just for today I will seek to serve others with kindness, doing what is right, and walking humbly with God.

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 NLT

How To Enjoy New Life With God In Recovery

God created us to have a wonderful life. In love, God planned for us and carefully put us together. God has always been calling out to us to enter into a relationship of love with Him. He doesn't force us but He invites us. Many of us have learned what a painful and confusing wreck our lives become when we try to live independently from God. Today is a good day to begin to live the full and rich life God intended for us. Nothing in our past can keep us from this life, if we want it and choose for it.

The 12-Steps remind us that our lives are unmanageable without the loving care of God and that we can get to know and come to believe that He is a power greater than ourselves. As we turn our will and our lives over to God's care, we find a solid foundation upon which to build a new life.

When we confess our sin and brokenness to God, repent and turn towards God, He gives us new life. When we invite God to come into our lives we find that He is ready and waiting for us. A simple prayer like the following, offered sincerely, establishes this new relationship with God that will last forever.

God, my life is unmanageable without you. You created me to live in relationship with you. There really is no good way to live on my own. Forgive me for not including you. I turn from my independent ways and surrender my will and my life to you. Thank you Jesus for dying on the cross for my sins and making a way for me to have new life and be filled up with Your Holy Spirit. Come into my heart and wash me clean. Teach me to do your will. Transform my way of thinking. Strengthen me to obey You in all I do. Amen

If you prayed that prayer sincerely from your heart, God forgives you and receives you. God makes you His son or daughter. God wants to show you how to live well and give you strength to do that every day. We would love to provide you with some information to support you as you move forward in your journey with God. Please contact us. You'll find our contact information on the front cover of this booklet.