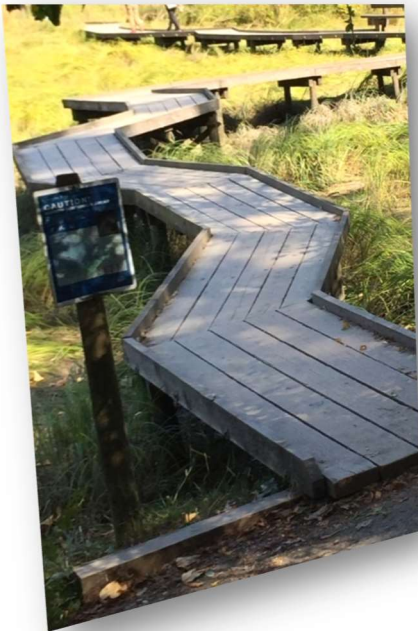


Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION



Book Two

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY RELAPSE PREVENTION BOOK TWO

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FRESH START – NEW DAY

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24 NKJV)

How many times in the dysfunctional dark days of our addiction did we waken up and wish that we had not. Life seemed tiresome. Problems loomed large in front of us. Circumstances were out of control. We felt abandoned and alone to cope with another day and wondered what might help stop the cycle. God in His grace was drawing near to us and somehow, with His help, we made it into recovery.

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:19-23 NIV)

What a difference each day is when we walk with God in recovery. We start the day with the promise of God's unfailing love and goodness. We have new life today, a fresh new opportunity from God. We can be ourselves without the mask of addiction. We can explore and build on our loving relationship with God. We can read His word and talk with Him in prayer. Out of the peace and security we experience with God, we can then share with others all that we have received. Our lives begin to reflect the truth of what we say from week to week in our statement of Life Affirmations: *My life is of great beauty and infinite value. God has a plan for my life that is meaningful, purposeful, and joyful. There is a work for me to do today that will bless others and give me deep satisfaction.*

This life we've been given, this new season that is before us, begins with each new day. Yesterday's mistakes, blunders, worries and pains are behind us. We are unable to change what has been said and done. We need to admit that and leave them with God. Worries about tomorrow's potential problems and burdens in addition to today's troubles could overwhelm us. God already knows the beginning and the end of each day. God is with us and will help us face whatever presents itself in our day. As we acknowledge God in the middle of our troubles, we will find that any difficulty can be worked out and overcome.

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Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Jesus said: I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (Matthew 6:33-34, John 16:33 NIV)

Treatment programs, sponsors, counselors, speakers at meetings, and recovery materials can help us identify harmful thoughts and behaviours that are the outcome of an actual problem we have had to deal with. That initial problem needs to be identified and brought into the light of the presence of our Heavenly Father for healing. God alone knows how today fits together with yesterday and tomorrow and we need to turn each day over to His care. A new beginning takes place in our lives when we humbly admit that we are powerless on our own, that our lives are unmanageable, and that we need a life-giving relationship with the God who created us and who cares about us. Other solutions we may try on our own will only return us to the insanity from which we have come.

Throughout the Bible we learn that self-willed, rebellious people are the history of humankind. On the daily news we see the insane actions of people from our own country and from around the world. This kind of behaviour is likely to continue until the end of time. God's plan for our lives and His solution for those who have gone astray is forgiveness and restoration through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What is the root of all sin: doing things our own way; choosing to live as though God did not exist; running after pleasure; and attempting to solve problems in our own limited way.

What is the solution? By the power of the Holy Spirit of God we need to overcome the rebellious bent of our hearts and respond to God's offer of salvation and a new way of living through Jesus Christ. We need to listen to and surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who comes to live with us and is in us. He will show us behaviour and thoughts based on insanity, brokenness, and character defects. As we turn our will and our lives over to God's care, walk obedient to His ways, and humbly ask Him to remove our defects, He will equip us with everything we need to live life to the full.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what

is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21 NIV)

Are we ready to welcome the gift of God's new way of life for us or are we trying to recycle old thoughts, habits and old program ideas? God's plan for us is good, perfect and pleasing. Our lives in recovery are more than simply sorting out our past. We sort the past only to remove obstacles that hinder us from fully living the new life that God gives us. If we reach out and embrace it, this new life is available to us. Whether we are brand new in recovery or returning after many stumbles, God is with us, and when we call on Him, He will answer us.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame. This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. (Psalm 34:4-6 NIV)

Today is a new day in recovery for us. Let's determine to go forward with God and rejoice and be glad for all that He has done and will continue to do for us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Does the thought of a new season bring joy, fear, or a bit of both? What can I do with those thoughts as I enter this new season?
2. Am I trying to recycle thoughts and behaviour patterns from the past rather than trashing them completely and getting something new?
3. Along with sorting my past, how am I exploring God's will and plan for my life today?
4. How am I making a break from "life on my own terms" and moving more and more into "life on God's terms?"
5. Am I fully surrendered to live my life in relationship with God?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for each day You have planned for my life. I repent of my rebellious ways and seek from this day forward to walk in the truth of Your word. Lord, please strengthen me. As I begin this new season I ask You to make straight paths for my feet. Help me to acknowledge you in all my ways so that I may clearly hear Your voice as You direct my path. I acknowledge that each day in relationship with You is truly a day in which I can rejoice. I am forever grateful that You care. AMEN

RELAPSE PREVENTION: ATTITUDE CHECK

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it ... Do all things without complaining and disputing. (Psalm 118:24, Philippians 2:14 NIV)

The story is told of two young boys who decided to play a prank on their sleeping grandfather. They crept into his bedroom and smeared blue cheese on his moustache. A short while later he awoke and declared, "This room smells!" He went into the kitchen where grandma was baking some chocolate chip cookies. But he couldn't smell the baked goods. "This room smells too," he exclaimed and headed to the porch at the back of the house. As he stood on the porch he sighed, "The whole world smells!" This story demonstrates how a bad attitude, like the smelly cheese, can influence our perception of everyday life.

Have you ever said to yourself, "If I just had more money I would be happy," or "If I had done things differently I'd be happy?" or "If this person or that person would change, everything would be fine." The error in this thinking is that external factors have very little to do with our contentment. In life we will all experience trials. Things will go wrong. Unfortunate circumstances will happen. Experiencing difficulties will either harden us to life or soften us to become more caring. At some point in life, we will need to decisively choose how we will respond to unexpected happenings. If we seek God, He will help us.

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

In the Bible, we read the story of God's people as they left slavery in Egypt and moved towards the land God had promised them. When they bumped into difficulties on their journey they repeatedly grumbled and complained. God was clearly leading them by day and by night yet they doubted. They quickly became fearful when they faced difficult challenges. However, one man was different. His future, and the future of his family, was forever changed for good because he had a different attitude and wholeheartedly trusted God

But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land. (Numbers 14:24 NLT)

Choosing to remember God's promises and His goodness, is the foundation on which we build our confidence and maintain a positive attitude.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2 NIV)

Our attitude and perspective in life can be like medicine that heals or like poison that kills. When we look at our circumstances, is our instant response positive or negative? When we look at those around us, do we first see their gifts or their faults? Are we cynical? The cynic trusts no one and is suspicious even of the best intentions of others. There is no doubt we will face problem people along life's path, but if we will seek God, He will give us discernment in handling situations that we are uncertain about.

"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the Lord. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT)

What do we do when we find ourselves struggling with a negative perspective or bad attitude?

1) We need to recognize that a bad attitude comes from negative thinking that impacts our responses. The Bible teaches: ***Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*** (Ephesians 4:22-24 NLT) Even though someone may trigger a hostile response in us, our attitude is our own, not theirs, and we need to submit it to God.

2) When we have harmed someone by our negative response we need to make amends to that person. ***Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*** (Matthew 5:23-24 NIV)

3) Together with God, we need to make every effort to uncover the root cause of our bad attitude and receive healing and release from its bondage. ***Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as***

brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. (1 Peter 3:8 NLT)

ATTITUDE CHECKLIST

What kind of attitude should a person living with God in recovery strive to have towards the following?

GOD: *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' Humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* (Mark 12:30, James 4:7 NLT)

SIN: *"This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he says, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.* (Hebrews 10:16-18 NLT)

INJUSTICE: *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.* (Romans 12:19 NLT)

MISUNDERSTANDINGS: *Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.* (Colossians 3:13 NLT)

LEADERS: *Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.* (Hebrews 13:17 NLT)

GOVERNMENT: *For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.* (1 Peter 2:13-14 NLT)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What effect does my attitude have on my quality of life?
2. When am I most likely to have a bad attitude? How might I prepare in advance for this person or situations?
3. When I recognize I'm holding a negative or cynical attitude, what can I do about it?
4. As the challenges of life confront me, what would it take for me to be like Caleb and have, "a different attitude than the others have"?

Heavenly Father, Forgive me for my bad attitude towards You, towards others, and towards life in general. I confess that I have not loved You with my whole heart and I have not loved my neighbour as myself. Help me understand the underlying root of my bad attitude and self-centered thinking so that I may be set free from its bondage. Lord Jesus, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. I am forever grateful that You are faithful and will complete the work You have begun in me. I am forever grateful that You care. AMEN

STAYING STRONG – CHOOSING WELL

So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.. (Genesis 1:27 NLT)

God created women and men in His image and in His wisdom, included the supreme privilege of free will – the ABILITY TO CHOOSE. It was God's intention that humans would have a relationship with Him built on holiness and righteousness. In the creation process humans were made last, not because they were unimportant but rather because they were the great masterpiece of God's work. They were not made in the likeness of anything that had already been made but in the likeness of the creator Himself. God breathed into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life, and he became a living being. When God saw what He had made He said it was "very good."

God made men and women true and upright; we're the ones who've made a mess of things. (Ecclesiastes 7:29 MSG)

When Adam and Eve CHOSE TO DISOBEY God's instructions they separated themselves and all humans from God, and from the relationship He had planned with them. Jesus came to earth to do what was impossible for us – to give new life to all of us and restore the broken relationship with God. Reconciliation with God can only be attained through CHOOSING TO BELIEVE AND TRUST in the death and resurrection of Jesus as payment for our sins. Humanity once again has the OPTION TO CHOOSE whether or not we will believe what God says.

Then they asked him, [Jesus] "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29 NIV)

The choices we make affect our own life and the lives of our loved ones. When we do not acknowledge that God exists then we are CHOOSING TO REBEL against God. We may not be aware that our actions reflect this rebellion towards God as He may not even be on our horizon. However, if we are not loving God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves, then we are CHOOSING TO DISOBEY God and that has a negative impact on every relationship. Our unkind actions and the gaps created by failing to reach out with care and blessing, affect everyone in our circle of family and friends.

God describes this condition this way: ***Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster ... love the Lord your God and keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you ... But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed.*** (Deuteronomy 30:15-18a NLT)

To a sensible person these would seem like easy choices – life over death; prosperity over disaster; blessings over curses. Unfortunately, many of us CHOOSE TO FOLLOW OUR OWN WAYS AND DESIRES and suffer the harmful consequences. Why? We don't want to give up our sinful pleasures, and we want to maintain control of our circumstances. Many of our sinful practices are destructive and yet we CHOOSE TO CLING to them because we enjoy them. Sin can be very pleasurable for a time! Getting our own way seems like the most convenient and pleasant path for a time. That's why we choose for it. God, through the death of His beloved son, has shown us the cost of our sinful choices. Jesus died a punishing death on a cross to pay the price for our sin. God desires us to come to Him and CHOOSE TO ACCEPT HIS FORGIVENESS. He is pursuing us with His love. His grace is sufficient to fulfill the deepest longings of our soul. When we CHOOSE TO WALK IN GOD'S WAYS and become a doer of His word, our hearts will be filled with His peace and our lives with His blessings.

Regrettably many people who come to God think they can live any way they choose as long as they attend church, read the Bible, complete an honest set of steps, pray on occasion, and call Jesus "Lord." They believe these activities put them in right standing with God regardless of the fact they consciously continue to sin knowing they are disobeying the word of God. We cannot serve

both our sinful nature and God at the same time. Our God is a Holy God and will not accompany us in the presence of sin.

The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil. Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. (1 Peter 3:12, Matthew 7:21 NLT)

Too often we CHOOSE TO DO JUST WHAT WE FEEL LIKE DOING when we feel like doing it. If our desire is to have a relationship with God, we cannot behave in this way. A person who chooses to live for God must surrender their life to the ways of God. They must CHOOSE TO FOLLOW GOD'S PRINCIPLES as the Spirit of God directs them.

When we are truly surrendered to God, regardless of our feelings, we will CHOOSE TO OBEY Him because we are committed to doing what He says. We will study and reflect on His Word in the Bible and seek guidance from our pastor or other responsible Christians to understand what God is saying. When we do things God's way our lives will demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit who lives within us. However, if we CHOOSE TO RETURN TO OUR FORMER WAY OF LIFE we will no longer exhibit the qualities of the Kingdom of God.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT)

If we are missing any of these attributes in our lives, it's likely because we are making SELF-WILLED CHOICES and doing things our own way rather than God's way. A CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO FOLLOW GOD'S way brings change in our lives. It may not be instant change but as we choose to obey God, our relationship with Him and others will prosper and we will grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus and be complete in Him.

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:6-7 NIV)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What effect has my history of choices in pre-addiction, in addiction, and now in recovery had on my life?
2. How has making a conscious choice to learn and follow God's ways supported my new life in recovery?
3. ***"Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster"*** -- what does this choice look like in my life today?
4. What needs to change in my beliefs and desires so my choices more and more reflect God's life in me?

Heavenly Father, You made me and know me. You know all my ways and are familiar with the former path I chose. My relationship with You, my family, and my friends have suffered because of my fleshly desires and self-centered choices. Your Word says You will give me the desire and power to do what pleases You. My desire is that the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control would be evident in my life. From this day forward I choose life because I choose You. Thank You for caring for me. AMEN

RELAPSE PREVENTION: DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1 NKJV)

We often feel awkward about bringing our recurring sins before God. We may be embarrassed by the number of times we have had to deal with the same issues -- those things that we don't want to do, yet we keep doing over and over again. What is going on? Why can't we beat this thing that causes us problems? What will it take for us to find solid ground on which to build a firm and lasting recovery?

The slogan - "If nothing changes, nothing changes" - is so true. Each time we find ourselves coming back from the "same old failure" we need to reassess what changes we have made and what we are holding back. We need to use this opportunity to let God take us deeper into our buried pain and allow His forgiveness and healing to change our hearts. We need to ask ourselves what is the resentment, the hatred, the fear, the pain, or the shame that we are seeking to cover with our addictive behaviour. God offers us comfort for our grief and

healing for our hurts but freedom requires honesty in what we are willing to reveal and deal with. The truth will set us free. The question remains, are we willing to reveal the truth -- the whole truth -- about ourselves and our default reaction to situations which cause us to stumble?

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. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. (James 4:7-10 NLT)

Relapse happens because we have a divided mind that tries to be loyal to God but also dwells on foolish things. We are told to stand fast on the truth that we are loved and cared for by God but too often, in a moment of pain or frustration, we embrace the lie that "Nobody really understands me. Nobody cares about me. I need to take care of myself." We easily forget that our best efforts at caring for ourselves, by medicating our feelings, took us to places of pain and suffering that we are now seeking recovery from. Still, when we become unsettled in our recovery we often find that we begin to entertain risky thoughts such as the following:

"I need a break": Recovery is hard work. In the past, we always "grabbed what we needed when we needed it." Recovery demands that we spend a lot of emotional time in unfamiliar territory. It requires energy. We get to the point where we simply want to take a break from dealing with life and just take it easy. We want to feel better for a while and certain habits and relationships from the past seem to offer that comfort. We rationalize that we've worked hard in so many areas and given up so much for our recovery that we deserve "a little something" even though it is harmful. We may be deceived into thinking that because our desire is not in the primary area of our addiction we are safe to indulge. Divided loyalties such as this lead us towards relapse.

"Life around here is unfair": Relapse into recurring sin often results from hanging onto sin --our own sin or the sins of others. Little by little discontent drifts into our thoughts until it seems to fill them. We begin to see all the things that are wrong with others -- what they get away with, how they treat us badly, what they said, the attitude they had, how demanding they are, how unwilling they are to really understand our point of view. We think this or that is unfair. The

list is endless. Each of us is responsible for the state of our heart today. While we cannot control the words and actions of others, we are responsible for our reactions. We cannot afford to have a divided heart that contains resentment and blaming. The truth is that if we're honest, many times the real source of our sense of injustice and frustration is actually a failure to face our own inner turmoil that is rooted in our own character defects.

God alone gives us life. It is God to whom we must give account for our life. All other relationships need to be second to our relationship with God. To avoid drifting into active addiction requires that we NOT try to figure out what is wrong in our relationship with anyone else until we have identified and been obedient to what God is saying to us.

O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 NLT) Single minded obedience to this command from God is the simple formula for success in recovery and in life. How do we comply with this command?

Choose what is right in God's eyes: Our responsibility is to wholeheartedly follow God's way of living. When our thoughts and God's word differ, we need to change our thinking rather than try to bend God's principles to fit our circumstances. God knows what will heal, satisfy and give us true contentment. We need to humbly admit that we do not.

Give and receive mercy unconditionally: No matter what others have done to us, or will do to us, God's standard for us is to act with forgiveness and kindness in the situation. God unconditionally forgives and is kind towards us no matter what we have done. His desire is that we treat others as He treats us. Are we willing to let go of the harm done to us, and by us, and receive forgiveness and healing, comfort and care from Jesus, who paid the price for all sin?

God's ideas before our own: When we are on the path to relapse we always think we know better than God or the people around us. It is at those times that we are called to be humble and to simply keep walking with God *"trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next."* (Serenity Prayer)

Are we willing to turn away from those attitudes and actions that keep our hearts "divided"? Are we willing to accept the forgiveness and healing God gives us for EVERY wrong? Are we willing to turn our attention and our efforts to God and follow His commands? Are we willing to RECEIVE the loving care God provides? This is the road to life and health. There is no easier way. If we follow this simple plan we will find our way OUT of the frustrating cycle of relapse and recurring sin and INTO the fullness of life Jesus came to give us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some ways I live with divided loyalties?
2. Where am I at and maybe feeling vulnerable, to saying "I need a break" or "Life around here is unfair?"
3. When my thinking disagrees with God's principles, why is it important to acknowledge that I am wrong?
4. We want to turn away from obsessive thoughts but find it difficult. What works?
5. If I'm honest, what's irritating and painful in me today and needs to be shared with God and a trusted person?
6. Why is the receiving and giving of forgiveness so important in our healing journey?

Lord Jesus, Too often I've gone my own way and sought my own solutions only to find myself drowning in painful failure. I come to you tonight because I need help. I admit that the only way to live is to live in relationship with you. Jesus, I believe You are the way, the truth, and the life. I choose to admit my failures and rely on Your forgiveness and healing accomplished for me on the cross. I submit every part of my life to you. Direct me, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit, give me strength to live for you. Thank you for your unconditional acceptance of me. Thank you that you care. Amen

STREET SMART OR LIVING WISELY

"Anyone who listens to My teaching and obeys Me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against the house, it won't collapse, because it is built on rock". (Matthew 7:24-25 NLT)

To live wisely in recovery requires the development of a spirit of humility that says, "I don't know what is best for me in this situation but I'm willing to learn,

to think new thoughts and practice new behaviours. In the Bible, God has revealed the way to a good life. Anything that contradicts the principles written there is flawed reasoning which we would do well to ignore.

For the Lord grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest. He is a shield to those who walk with integrity. He guards the paths of the just and protects those who are faithful to him. Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair, and you will find the right way to go. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will fill you with joy. (Proverbs 2:6-10 NLT)

When we were in our addiction we made poor choices and walked down paths that caused us and others around us pain and harm. We picked up a lot of “street smarts” as we tried to figure out ways to deal with circumstances. We were considered smart when we managed to lie our way out of trouble. It did not matter to us whether we blamed or criticized those around us as long as we got ourselves “off the hook”. We thought we were smart, or the person who helped us was smart, when we outwitted any person who was trying to hold us accountable.

We felt smart when we managed to get in and out of a store and shoplift without getting caught or ripped someone off without them knowing it was us. In the legal system, we looked for loopholes to help us “beat the rap” rather than looking at truth and dealing with the consequences of our actions. These “street smarts” are things we’ve relied upon in the past but they are certainly not a foundation for wholesome, healthy living in recovery.

Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted. These men turn from the right way to walk down dark paths. They take pleasure in doing wrong, and they enjoy the twisted ways of evil. Their actions are crooked, and their ways are wrong. (Proverbs 2:12-15 NLT)

We bring many “street smarts” into recovery with us. They are still in evidence when we compare ourselves to others and decide we’re not so bad because others are doing worse things than we are. We gossip and feel important because we know something others don’t know. We feel pretty good about ourselves when we counterattack with a smart remark someone who challenges us. We use degrading words which embarrass or victimize a person or an ethnic group. Any of these practices are evidence that we’ve left wisdom behind and settled for “street smart” behaviour.

The Bible tells us: ***An honest witness tells the truth; a false witness tells lies. Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing. Truthful words stand the test of time, but lies are soon exposed.*** (Proverbs 12:17-19 NLT)

We’re often not long in recovery when we notice that “street smart” thinking is filtering back into our thoughts. We try to convince ourselves that life in addiction “wasn’t so bad.” Things are not changing quickly enough for us so we tell ourselves that there are too many challenges, and not enough help, and so we need to find a way to do what works for us. These familiar, but twisted ideas roll around in our head challenging the truth that is still fresh and unfamiliar. If we give our old thoughts much attention, we’ll soon find ourselves discontented and well on the way to relapse. A safe and solid life in recovery requires that, with God’s help, we learn to think and act in new ways and develop a wise heart.

The naive believe anything, but the prudent give thought to their steps. The wise are careful and avoid evil, but fools become excited and overconfident. Short-tempered people make stupid mistakes, and schemers are hated. (Proverbs 14:15-17 CEB)

God’s plan is that we replace our fallen ways of being “street smart” with kind ways that are guided by His wisdom. ***Respect and obey the Lord! This is the first step to wisdom and good sense.*** (Psalm 111:10 CEV)

Wise people seek advice from others who walk with God and whose desire is to see God’s way of life come into every moment of every day. Allowing themselves to stray into areas forbidden by God’s word is a certain path to relapse. ***Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.*** (Proverbs 13:20 NLT)

We don’t need advice from people who sound like us and speak things we want to hear. We need to listen to people who are not afraid to contradict our dysfunctional thinking and tell us the truth which may be difficult to hear, but necessary for experiencing a new way of life.

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 NLT)

NO ACCUSATION – NO CONDEMNATION

When we accept Jesus as Saviour we receive new life and God's Holy Spirit comes to live in us. He gives us a clear understanding of God's Word, and the power to put it into practice in our lives. Being wise can be judged by whether we surrender our lives to follow those principles or just read and then ignore what is written.

But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. (John 16:13 MSG)

"Street smarts" took us to the end of a dead end road. Applying God's wisdom will give us a full and satisfying life.

Grow a wise heart—you'll do yourself a favor; keep a clear head—you'll find a good life. (Proverbs 19:8 MSG)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How will I change my thinking and actions in order that I am guided by wisdom rather than "street smarts?"
2. Where do I seek wisdom today?
3. Where does God say the source of wisdom is found?

Heavenly Father, You are an awesome God who has provided everything I need to live life to the full. My desire is to stop all my former "street smart" ways which have contributed to who I am today. I ask for discernment to recognize and the courage to change those things that keep me in bondage to my past. Help me to live wisely in recovery and seek to know your principles for living life to the full. Lord, Your word says I will do myself a favour if I grow a wise heart, please help me to do so for I no longer want street smart ways to govern my life. I am grateful that You care for me. AMEN

Certain thoughts or words negatively impact us and may contribute to relapse. Few things are more powerful in this regard than hearing accusation or condemnation from others or even from within ourselves. When we take our focus off who God says we are, and allow our thoughts to dwell on condemning words, we begin to believe recovery is too hard for us. We convince ourselves that we are not progressing in our relationship with God or in our life in recovery. We start to believe we are too messed up, it hurts too much, or it costs too much to change. We tell ourselves we are stupid and a failure at whatever we try to accomplish.

The Bible tells us our enemy, the devil, prowls around looking for a way to limit the progress we are making. He lurks around us, just waiting for a chance to "kick us to the curb." One of his favorite tactics is to tempt us to make a wrong choice and then immediately condemn us for being weak and powerless to do the right thing. When we are doing well, he'll try to take away our contentment by reminding us of the times when we failed. When we have joy in following the ways of God, he'll attempt to steal our joy by making us believe we are proud and self-righteous. When we are simply enjoying the satisfaction of doing right in God's sight, he'll tell us that we're not good enough because we're not perfect. His one purpose is to get us so discouraged, so frustrated, or so disheartened with pain and shame, that we simply give up, go out, and pick up again.

"I know that as soon as I'm gone, vicious wolves are going to show up and rip into this flock, men from your very own ranks twisting words so as to seduce disciples into following them instead of Jesus. So stay awake and keep up your guard. (Acts 20:29-30 MSG)

While we can't justify a bad choice based on several good ones, it is still important to **NOT** allow ourselves to dwell on one failure when we've had victory in many other areas. God strengthens us in our areas of growth and encourages us in the areas where we still need to grow. The evil one's purpose is to dishearten us when we fail. God, like any good earthly father, reassures and supports us to keep going. The evil one says, "Failure," but God says, "You are growing more and more like Jesus."

How comforting it is to have the assurance that God knows we will make mistakes as part of our growing and maturing.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (1 Peter 5:8-9, Romans 8:28 NIV)

Getting us to compare ourselves with others is another way the enemy tries to discourage us. When we don't feel good about ourselves, or when we're feeling shame, he'll be right on our shoulder telling us what a failure we are in comparison with the next person. Rather than keeping our thoughts simple and focused on what God wants us to do, the evil one tries to get us to give our attention to what others are doing or not doing, what they are expecting of us or not, whether they are noticing and appreciating us or not. On and on the evil one goes with accusation and condemnation. How confusing our own thoughts become when we pay attention to what the evil one is whispering in our ear. We begin to evaluate, accuse, and even condemn others based on our flawed thinking. This enables us to quickly get into the "victim mode" and, from there, how easy it is to stumble into relapse.

I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends. Be on guard so that you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! (2 Peter 3:17-18 NLT)

Is there an area within us that is just too painful to touch? Are we avoiding dealing with pain because the evil one tells us we are a real mess and it would not be wise to uncover hidden things at this time? Jesus said the truth will set us free. Whose voice will we choose to believe?

Have we done wrong? If so, we simply need to repent before God, ask for forgiveness, and be reassured that we are cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus. When we've repented of our wrongdoing and been forgiven, any voice of accusation that we hear is lying and attempting to

push false guilt on us. Will we choose to base our recovery on lies or the truth?

We also need to be on guard against thoughts that accuse and condemn others. As soon as we notice such thoughts, we need to do a self-check and find out what is wrong in our own heart. When we observe negative traits in others, we should pray for them and bless them and leave their negativity with them, rather than allowing their problems to become ours.

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)

How do we defeat the discouragement of accusation and condemnation that comes from others? Jesus tells us: ***But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*** (Luke 6:27-28 NIV)

God neither accuses nor condemns those who are in Christ Jesus, so any such words said to us by others, or from our own self-criticism, are simply words we need to let go. God speaks the truth to us in love, and He challenges us to do the same when we speak to ourselves or others. ***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*** (Romans 8:1 NKJV)

As children of God, will we choose to agree with God and ban all accusation and condemnation from our thoughts and relationships? If not, why not?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does accusation and condemnation affect my recovery and make me vulnerable to relapse?
2. God's Spirit convicts us of sin. How is this different from condemnation?
3. In what ways have I prepared myself to face and defeat the evil one's strategies to discourage me?

Heavenly Father, You are the one who knows me. You know how I respond to accusation and condemnation, both from the evil one and from others. You know how condemning words cause me to stumble. When I am discouraged, help me to stay focused on the TRUTH, and proclaim Your word against all accusation and condemnation. Give me wisdom and courage to acknowledge You in all my ways. Thank You that You are working all things together for my good. You are a faithful God and I am forever grateful that you care for me. Amen

FULL OF JOY (HAPPY JOYOUS AND FREE)

Chapter 9 in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous discusses rebuilding relationships and how joy will impact our ability to do so. *"We aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life."* On page 133 we read this confident statement, *"We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free."* We don't have to study the chapter very carefully to notice that the founders of AA link misery to self-will and addictive habits, and joy to a loving relationship with God. The founders followed God's ways and recognized how it brought joy into their relationship with God and others. Joy is a quality we surely need as we move forward in our life with God in recovery.

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4 NLT)

Life in recovery can be challenging at times. We have joy in the fact that we are no longer in the pit of our addiction, but we are now treading waters that are unfamiliar to us. To remain full of joy in the middle of it all is a challenge. We are unfamiliar with our daily lifestyle and are learning new ways to cope with what is going on inside us. We have been the "experts" in surviving our dysfunctional lifestyle but now we are the "newbies" in coping with life in recovery. People around us are encouraging us to stay the course but we are unsure and even fearful of our new environment. Those who have walked this path before us

continue to reassure us that this is a normal reaction. Thankfully, God has promised to be with us throughout the transition process and show us this way of life that is "happy, joyous, and free."

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. (Psalm 16:11 NLT)

Our FOCUS AND MOTIVATION is the key to functioning in a "happy, joyous, and free" lifestyle. As people of God in recovery we are instructed to live each day for the glory of God rather than for self-fulfillment. Is there truly joy in walking in the ways of God? Sometimes we can easily say a definite "yes" as we experience the joy that results from making good decisions. At other times, we find ourselves in a battle with our will, being tempted to turn to dysfunctional but familiar ways of our past. We forget how we felt when we groveled in the darkness of our addiction. God has called us out of the darkness we were in and invites us to walk steadily forward in the light of His presence. Like a good Father, God rejoices with us when we take a few steps forward and when we stumble and fall He encourages us to get up and keep going. God is calling us to fullness of joy as, together with Him, we walk into the light.

How happy are the people who know the sound of joy! They walk in the light of Your face, O Lord. They are full of joy in Your name all day long. And by being right with You, they are honored. (Psalm 89:15-16 NLV)

SURRENDERING OUR MINDS to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is another key to experiencing joy and peace in our whole being. God is a God of order. He is not a God of confusion. When we let confusion reign in our minds, life is like being tossed about in choppy waves in the ocean. Thinking and acting on our own self-centered thoughts brings fear and despair to us and grief to those who love and care about us. Choosing instead to live guided by God's Holy Spirit takes us to calm waters where we can rest with Jesus and experience joy and delight with those around us. We are filled with confident hope when we move in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For God is not the author of confusion but of peace. Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 14:33a; Romans 15:13 NKJV)

What steals our joy and causes us to stumble? The underlying trait that steals our joy and jeopardizes our life in recovery is pride. We begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. We start to find fault in our recovery program, in the people around us, and in our leaders and mentors. We blame others and our environment for our discontent. We start to feel confident in our ability to manage our recovery. Sadly, our prideful thinking makes us feel we can succeed on our own. We begin to believe that we could return to our old habits and lifestyle and handle life more successfully than we did in the past. We forget that it is only due to the help and guidance of God and those around us that we are currently feeling stronger.

You have felt secure in your evil ways. You have said, 'No one sees what I'm doing.' Your wisdom and knowledge lead you down the wrong path. You say to yourself, 'I am like a god. No one is greater than I am.' (Isaiah 47:10 NIRV)

Physically we are now in a better place than we were when we came into recovery and are more alive to the world around us. However, we will need the ONGOING SUPPORT OF WISE COUNSELORS to learn and establish safe boundaries, and to maintain our healthy lifestyle. When we start to think we are so great that we can do recovery alone we need to share these thoughts with a trusted friend or mentor. They will understand what is happening within us. We came from a lonely forsaken place and now, by the grace of God, are getting acquainted with the real person we are. Our joy in recovery will be maintained as we give thanks for our current well-being to the God who brought us out of the slimy pit we were in, and for those He has given to support and guide us on our journey.

The path of honest people takes them away from evil. Those who guard their ways guard their lives. If you are proud, you will be destroyed. If you are proud, you will fall. (Proverbs 16:17-18 NIRV)

If we desire to be joyful in our recovery we need to always be mindful of our thoughts and actions. We need to find out what God's principles are for successful daily living and reshape our behaviour around them. We need to surrender pride in self every time it raises its ugly head. We need to remember that the Holy Spirit is always with us to give us wisdom and guidance. We need to admit our need of God's power to change us and

be willing to accept the fact that we cannot live a joyful life on our own. As we practice these principles in all our affairs we will be able to say with the founders of AA, "We are sure God wants us to be happy, joyous, and free."

When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. (John 15:10-11 NLT).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What changes have contributed to joy in my daily living?
2. What steals my joy and causes me to stumble?
3. In what ways am I noticing the truth that as I walk with God and helpful individuals, that my life is happier, more joyous, and I feel free to be me?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving and caring for me even when I was in deep darkness and unaware of who You are. Forgive me for being prideful and believing that I could live a joyful life in recovery without You and without those who counsel and mentor me. Thank You for pursuing me with Your unfailing love and for revealing to me the reality that You alone give fullness of life. I am forever grateful that You, the God of hope, will fill me with all joy and peace as I trust Your ways to take me forward in my recovery. Amen

VULNERABILITY – RUNNING ON EMPTY

In the past, bad habits and negative attitudes played a significant role in our lives. When we felt vulnerable we anesthetized ourselves to what was going on inside us. We used our substance of choice to help cope with the emptiness, the nameless pain, the loneliness or some other distress we were experiencing. Our daily agenda in addiction was entirely focused on meeting our own needs. Now that we are aware that God has promised to meet all our needs, are we willing to let Him do so?

God invites us, ***Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*** (Psalm 50:15 NASB)

When we admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our life had become empty and unmanageable, we sought a recovery

program. We stopped using our substance of choice and began to deal with our vulnerable feelings which previously led us to our addictive lifestyle. In sobriety, how can we actually face these overwhelming feelings, and the pain of loneliness, frustration, disappointment, and even shame, without picking up again?

Life in recovery is about living in truth, and the truth is that on our own, our hearts are empty. That is why we often struggle with fear when we feel vulnerable and powerless. God, and trusted people in recovery around us, assure us that there is a safe way forward for us. Step by step we will come to know and believe in a Power greater than ourselves who will restore us to sanity. We are encouraged to make a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of this powerful God. When we choose to do so, we will find that our dead hearts begin to come alive.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

As we go through life in the recovery process, we begin to trust God to meet all our deepest needs and invite Him, on a daily basis, to fill us up with the power of His Holy Spirit. We intentionally reflect on what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will—which promises to satisfy the nagging emptiness within us. We ask God for understanding of His word and how to apply His principles to our lives. We read the Bible daily and in order to fully understand what God is saying to us, we discuss what we've read with our pastor, sponsor, mentor or other godly persons. This is how a person begins to be "filled up" on a daily basis.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)

As we seek to live in God's will each day, we ask God to help us deal with those events in our past which our addiction helped us medicate—feelings of pain and loss, loneliness, frustration, grief and dissatisfaction.

How can we ensure these areas of vulnerability are occupied with healthy thoughts and behaviours?

We first have to admit to the presence of these feelings and recognize that they relate to events we have never fully faced. If we desire to live the life we've always longed for, then our familiar response of hiding our weaknesses will have to change. How do we do that? As honestly as we know how we name our vulnerability to the painful events of our past, and trust that Jesus will work all these things together for our good. We ask Him for healing for the deeply wounded areas in our soul and, in faith, receive health and wholeness. It is also helpful to seek out trusted people who are willing to talk and pray with us.

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 ... he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT)

In our lives today, how do we activate "everything we need for living a godly life"? It's not a complicated process. 1) We admit that our addictive desires are corrupt and choose to forsake them. 2) We get to know God's promises by reading the Bible. 3) We practice "speaking truth to ourselves" rather than simply reacting to how we are feeling. 4) We start to put God's principles into daily practice. As we persevere, we will surely find that peace will come, our emotions will quiet down, and we will begin to experience goodness filling our hearts and our minds.

Where we have previously lived in loneliness, Jesus invites us now to take the risk of building new relationships with healthy friends and sponsors who will come alongside us and help us grow. When we experience feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, God invites us to see this as a signal that something is wrong. We then need to identify the empty place deep within us that needs to be filled and take the appropriate action for our situation. Rather than run away, it's time to see that a breakthrough might be just around the corner. Where we lacked accountability because of the absence of Godly correction, Jesus now invites us to put ourselves under the guidance of a mature and trustworthy Godly person and let them mentor us as we move forward in our recovery. Where we waited for others to come and fix us and drag us out of dark places, we

now need to do the reaching out, and by so doing, experience the connectedness and joy of Godly relationships.

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Hebrews 10:36 NIV)

Feeling empty and vulnerable, and clinging to thoughts or practices that present us with an opportunity to relapse, are signs that we need to seek help. There is always something we can do that will ease the craving in our mind and body. We must let go of the lie that our substance of choice will best fulfill that longing. We wouldn't be in recovery today if it had. We can fill the void in our heart by telling ourselves the truth. God does care! To those who ask for it, God will give the strength needed to stand firm in the truth of His word. Our choice today is, do we believe what God says and fill up on that, or, do we continue to run on empty until we give into an addictive obsession?

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 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. (1 Timothy 6:6 NKJV, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NIV)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How have I used a substance or an addictive habit to cope with emptiness, pain, loneliness, or other distress I was experiencing?
2. What obsessive thoughts are lurking within me that have, in the past, made me vulnerable to relapse? How am I hiding that vulnerability?
3. If I desire to live the life I've always longed for, then my familiar response of hiding my weaknesses will have to change. How do I do that?
4. What positive action am I taking to get past the feeling of being empty and vulnerable? What action am I avoiding taking today? Why?
5. How am I building a lifestyle of transparency and accountability?
6. How am I activating God's promise to give me "everything I need for living a godly life"?
7. What healthy risks am I taking to build new relationships with friends and sponsors who can come alongside me and help me grow?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you that you are the same, yesterday, today and forever. I know I can trust you because you are faithful to do everything you promise. When I feel vulnerable and afraid, I can trust you to help me because Your word says you give strength to the weary and increase power to the weak. Thank you that you actually hold us up and support us with your righteous right hand. Help us to put our hand in Yours as you lift us up and take us forward in our recovery. We are forever grateful that you care. **AMEN**

DEALING WITH DYSFUNCTION

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)

Our lives are not a hopeless mess. The effects of the past actions done to us or by us do not have to influence our future. God's word tells us to forget former things and not dwell on the past for He is doing a new thing. When we accept Jesus as Lord of our lives we put on our new nature and are given power by the Holy Spirit to do those things God has planned for us to do. Regardless of the past, God has a new day, a new season, and a new life for us today.

Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands. (Isaiah 43:18-19 MSG)

For a variety of reasons, many of us retain an underlying structure of disorders that is damaging to us and to others. In our addiction we lived separated from God and opposed to His will. This resulted in actions which caused much pain to ourselves and to others. Many of us came into recovery because we found the pain we were experiencing and causing others too overwhelming to live with. While it is true that God wants to heal and restore us to sanity, the real focus of God's plan is that we begin to live transformed lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. God wants to bless us so that we will be a blessing to others. He has a plan for us to discover that will give us a life that is meaningful, purposeful, and joyful.

O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 NLT)

When a person is ill, the first step in getting well is to acknowledge that something is wrong. Painful symptoms take us to the doctor who is then able to diagnose the cause and offer us a treatment plan. Alternatively, we can live with the pain and be frustrated by its impact. We need to get ourselves to the doctor, find out what the source of the pain in our soul is and begin treatment. Only then we will start to get well. What we are doing when we go to the doctor is admitting the limits of our personal knowledge and trusting someone who has superior knowledge and effective solutions for our pain.

We sometimes tend to think we know all we need to know to answer these kinds of questions—but sometimes our humble hearts can help us more than our proud minds. We never really know enough until we recognize that God alone knows it all. (1 Corinthians 8:2-3 MSG)

As former self-directed addicts we need to come to God and acknowledge before Him that we are unable to diagnose and heal ourselves. We admit to God, as honestly as we can, what is painful and taking away our joy. We acknowledge that we are not sure of the source of our problem, but we trust that He knows and cares. We thought the pain and dysfunction experienced in our addiction was the problem but now realize there are other underlying conditions. We need to confess all the painful situations we are living with to God and perhaps to someone else. We need to listen to the diagnosis and treatment plan offered and agree to act on it. When the treatment plan is followed regularly it should eliminate our own self-medication and other expressions of a destructive lifestyle that we have used to mask the pain. The way of life God prescribes in His word is the only real remedy for a dysfunctional lifestyle.

He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! (Psalm 103:3-5 NLT)

Thank God for a clear diagnosis and treatment plan for our sinful self-centered ways of living life separate from Him. Thank God for a wonderful Saviour in Jesus who forgives our sins and heals our diseases. Thank God for the principles of a healthy lifestyle which are clearly defined in the Bible. Thank

God for the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us enabling us to put into practice, and finally experience, the functional, purposeful life God created us to live.

My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body. Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. (Proverbs 4:20-23, Philippians 2:13 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of the following characteristics indicate that I lived as a dysfunctional person? (see chart below)
2. What expressions of the same dysfunctions do I recognize in myself even as I seek to live a sober life?
3. What needs to change in my conversation with God, so we work on the real problem rather than simply trying to control uncomfortable symptoms?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank You for bringing me out of the pit of my addiction and creating me anew in Christ Jesus. My desire is to cast off everything that hinders me from becoming the masterpiece You created. I ask for help to recognize and overcome my lingering dysfunctional thinking and behaviour. Thank You that You are at work within me giving me the desire, and the power, to do what pleases You. Please help me to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You, my God. AMEN

COMMON BEHAVIOURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL PERSONS

1. **LOW SELF-ESTEEM:** judge ourselves and others without mercy; cover up; try to be perfect; get angry or gossip instead of confronting.
2. **RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULTIES:** choose to associate with emotionally unavailable people who have addictive personalities; constantly in crisis; lack trust; few or no clearly defined boundaries; feel intimidated by anger, criticism or strong opinions
3. **VICTIM MENTALITY:** confuse love with pity or rescue; work hard but feel unappreciated; think good things only happen to others; try to manage my affairs but something always seems to invade my plan; feel anxious and overly sensitive

4. **OVERLY RESPONSIBLE OR VERY IRRESPONSIBLE:** try to solve others' problems or expect others to be responsible for me
5. **FEEL GUILTY:** give in to others; store anger instead of releasing it properly; seldom express my true feelings; slam doors, scream, break things when no one is around
6. **DENY, MINIMIZE, OR REPRESS FEELINGS FROM PAST TRAUMA:** can't remember portions of life; overwhelming panic, anxiety, or fear and don't know why; cover fear with something
7. **DEPENDENT OR APPROVAL SEEKING:** terrified of rejection or abandonment; panic in silence; try to smooth over disagreements; panic at mistakes or criticism
8. **CONTROL:** overreact to change; panic; take out frustration on others; take control with lots of activity; find it hard to sleep or relax; need things done my way; threaten or deny in order to get my own way
9. **IMPULSIVE:** take action before considering alternative behavior or the consequences of the action taken; settle for less than; make commitments we later regret; jump from one thing to another to solve a problem
10. **DIFFICULTY FOLLOWING THROUGH TO THE END:** last minute; clutter; guilt for wasted time on ideas and schemes that didn't work

SEEKING GOOD COUNSELORS

When we enter a recovery program, why are we strongly encouraged to quickly find a sponsor and listen to the advice of people who have been in the program for a while? It's not a new concept introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous. For thousands of years the wisdom of God, as recorded in the Bible, has been reminding us that we need wise counsel if we are to succeed in recovery, and in living life to the full.

I'm absorbed in pondering your wise counsel. Yes, your sayings on life are what give me delight; I listen to them as to good neighbors! (Psalm 119:24 MSG)

Jesus knew his disciples would experience deep grief as they observed His suffering and death on the cross. He was concerned for them, and is equally concerned for us when we go through grief and severe trials. When Jesus' time had come, He gathered His disciples around Him and spoke with them about the future. He asked them to show their love for Him by doing those things He had taught them. He also said that He would ask His Father to give them a wise counselor who would be with them forever. Jesus wanted His

friends to be cared for. He wanted them to receive guidance as they moved forward in life.

Jesus told them, ***"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.*** (John 14:15-18 RSV)

We live in difficult days. Jesus knows what we need. His prayer for us today is that we too would seek and find wise counsel to help us on our journey to life and peace. Jesus is always present with us in the person of the Holy Spirit and He is the wisest counselor that anyone could have. As we seek Him for guidance in every area of our lives, He will show us what is truth in all circumstances. Jesus said, ***"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"*** (John 8:32 NIV)

In recovery, we must find new direction for our lives, new ways of responding to issues and new guidelines for making decisions. Our old pattern of thinking and behaving brought us to where we are today. As we establish new and healthy boundaries and actions based on God's Word, God will support us through the power of His Holy Spirit. He will also bring us together with human counselors and trustworthy people who are walking with Him. We certainly need help from people who continue to walk the path that remains unfamiliar to us. Through sharing our life's stories, these people will inspire us to receive healing for past traumas that hinder our recovery. They will also have worthwhile suggestions on how to cope with the changes we need to make. When we surround ourselves with wise, dependable counselors, we are building a solid foundation for recovery.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14 NKJV)

Good counsel can come from many sources, the Bible, pastors, friends who know and live for God, or books and media that honour the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It may also come from a professional Christian counselor who understands addiction and recovery. Knowledgeable people we encounter on our journey may also encourage us by sharing the Godly

wisdom they received when dealing with issues similar to those we are currently experiencing.

Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down the other can help him up. But if someone is alone ... there is no one to help him ... Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 GNT)

We need help from everyone who can enlarge our vision and broaden our perspective. We need to share honestly about the temptations we are experiencing. The family of believers understands temptation because they continue to experience it. We are not unique! We need to pay attention to what God and others are saying to us. We need to respond in humility to honest feedback others are giving us, and, foundational to all other counsel, we need to seek the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17 NIV)

The founders of AA and the 12 Steps were aware of Biblical principles and based on these, they structured the program to include counselors whom we call sponsors. If we haven't done so, it's probably time to prioritize the involvement of wise counsel into our lives. Following is some helpful information to consider as we prayerfully seek a sponsor.

What is the Role of a Sponsor?

1. A sponsor may discuss, in detail, troubling issues that are too personal to share, or would take up too much time, in a group meeting.
2. A sponsor is available in times of crisis or potential relapse.
3. A sponsor serves as a sounding board by providing an objective point of view.
4. A sponsor is there to encourage one to work through recovery principles at one's own speed.
5. A sponsor attempts to model the lifestyle that results from personally working the steps.

What are the Qualities to look for in a Sponsor?

1. Does he/she have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and demonstrate the character of Jesus in their life?
2. Does their walk match their talk?

3. Does the person express the desire to help others on the road to recovery? (Helping others find help versus trying to fix others)
4. Does he/she show compassion, care and hope but not pity? (I don't need someone who is simply going to feel sorry for me.)
5. Is the person a good listener?
6. Is he/she strong enough to confront my denial or procrastination?
7. Can the person share his/her own current struggles with others? (Openness, vulnerability, transparency)

Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Why are we strongly encouraged to quickly find a sponsor and listen to the advice of people who've been in the program a while?
2. What am I doing these days to seek wise counsel from trusted individuals?
3. What obstacles am I facing in my search for a counselor?
4. What am I doing with feedback I know is good for me?
5. What am I doing with feedback I don't like?
6. Where am I avoiding counsel and resolving to keep issues

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, Thank You for pursuing me with Your love and for sending Your Holy Spirit to give me counsel and to help me come to the knowledge of all truth. Give me ears to hear what You say. I commit to lay down my pride and seek help from other wise counsellors. Keep me honest. Help me walk in the light of Your presence and follow the path of recovery to new life in You. I am forever grateful that you care. AMEN

SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

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.