

Am I Willing To Give Up My Dependency on Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms?

Step One: We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies, that our life had become unmanageable.

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, that you and your descendants might live! Choose to love the Lord your God and to obey him and commit yourself to him, for he is your life. (Deuteronomy 30)

It is human nature to want to be, and to believe that we can be, in complete control of our circumstances and our lives. But truly fortunate people come to a point in their lives when they realize this is definitely not possible nor even desirable. These people are the fortunate ones because they have come to the end of themselves. Now they are free to go beyond the emptiness of their own resources, free to surrender trying to manage things on their own strength, and free to receive God's unlimited resources.

Our lives are unmanageable. We know it. We feel it. We long to have some kind of control of the chaos and confusion around us. At times, in our desperation for control, we've grasped onto any area of our life and used any means available – healthy or otherwise – to try to manage and find some stability. We've tried anger and intimidation and violence. We've used lying, cheating, manipulation and other tactics in an effort to get our needs met. We've tried "walking on egg shells", running away, silence, or co-dependently propping up those we feared. All these were efforts we tried as we sought to develop a security system in an unsafe world.

At some point in our past we decided we could no longer face our pain. We decided that we couldn't wait for solutions to be worked out in our circumstances. We didn't know how to find the help we needed and what was offered didn't seem to address the need in front of our eyes. At times we were so confused and overwhelmed by the pain in our lives that we wished we could die. No matter what we did, we seemed powerless to change things for the better and the weight of the sadness seemed too heavy to bear. When it seemed all else had failed, we chose mind numbing substances or habits. Unfortunately, trying to maintaining the addiction demon only added to the chaos and unmanageability of our lives.

So as we come into recovery, we are faced again with the reality that life is uncertain and unpredictable and sometimes seems beyond our control. What do we do with that? How do we find a way to live well in the middle of all these unmanageable things inside us and around us? Can we dare to give up the unhealthy coping habits as well as the addicting substances? Is there really another way for us that is secure and safe?

Trusting oneself is foolish, but those who walk in wisdom are safe. (Proverbs 28)

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you. (1 Peter 5)

For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never forsake you." (Hebrews 13)

God has promised to show us a way through our pain into abundant life. God does not lie. Life can be good again if we begin to make choices to know and do things God's way. God has promised us help and strength. Will it all be fixed in a day? No. Will there be challenges that stretch me to face my pain? Yes. Will I need support and encouragement to carry on and do the right thing when I feel like giving up because I've bumped into an obstacle? Yes. Will I be tempted to jump into a short term "solution" like I did before that involves familiar coping strategies like anger, lying, silence, sleeping, cover-ups, violence, or alternate addictions? Sure. Did they work before? No. Will they work now? Not likely. Am I willing to give them up for a new way God will show me?

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, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light." (Matthew 11)

Our lives are unmanageable without the loving care and guidance of God. We say we need a healthy and growing relationship with God, with ourselves, and with one another but will we actually give up the illusion that we can manage on our own? God invites us to "wake up" in each of our circumstances and to ask Him to show us His plans. God invites us to get connected to people who will help us pray and think and choose for responsible ways to face our life situations. Will I not only seek out those people but also give up my own way of thinking and behaving when they suggest something different from what I've previously known? God invites us to trust His control and His provision as we put our hand in His. God is our Loving Father and He invites us to come to him as children, ready to trust, ready to learn, and ready to obey and act on what He shows us. Will we?

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me. I will be found by you," says the Lord. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. (Jeremiah 29)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What coping mechanisms do I try to use to deal with the unmanageability of my life?
2. How do I want to respond to God's offer for stability and hope today?