

Christian Character in Recovery -- Delayed Gratification

We may be searching for shortcuts to happiness. The road of life often takes us through painful places we would rather avoid. Some of us have gotten off the right track, lured away by hopes of faster and easier ways to "the good life."

In the Bible, Esau traded his special blessings as a firstborn son for a bowl of stew to fill his empty stomach. He was indifferent to the things in life that were really important. His primary concern was to satisfy his immediate physical needs, with no thought at all for his future. He hadn't learned how to delay gratification.

Jesus faced this same temptation. He was destined to become King of all the earth. The plan was that He would come to earth as a man, live a sinless life, die to pay for our sins, rise from the dead, and return to heaven to wait for those who would be His. Then He would return to earth to claim His people and His rightful place as King of kings. Satan offered Jesus a shortcut. *"The Devil...showed Him the nations of the world and all their glory. 'I will give it all to you,' he said, 'if you will only kneel down and worship me.' 'Get out of here, Satan,' Jesus told him. 'For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God; serve only him" ' " (Matthew 4:8-10).* If Jesus had fallen for this trick, He would have sinned and lost everything.

We need to be aware of "shortcuts" that take us even one more step outside of God's will. We are warned: *"Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).* There are really no quick fixes in life. The path of recovery can be long and hard, but many have gone before us and have been successful. As we stay on the path, taking one step at a time, we'll find the good things in life God has for us.

Ten Safeguards For Healthy Living (Otherwise known as The Ten Commandments)

1. **Worship no other god than me.**
2. **Do not make yourselves any idols: You must never bow or worship any objects or images.**
3. **Do not use the name of God irreverently, nor use it to swear to a falsehood.**

4. **Remember to observe the Sabbath as a holy day.**
5. **Honour your father and mother that you may have a long good life.**
6. **Do not murder.**
7. **Do not commit adultery.**
8. **Do not steal.**
9. **Do not lie.**
10. **Do not be envious of your neighbor's house, or want to sleep with his wife, or own anything else he has.**

The lesson Esau needed to learn is very important for all of us in recovery. Satisfying our whims will not meet our real needs. We need to see things in the long view. If we can picture the positive long-range results of life in recovery, we will be able to give up the momentary pleasures that keep us from getting there.

The Bible says, *"Don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time" (Galatians 6:9).* Weeds spring up quickly. Good crops grow more slowly and must be tended steadily, even before we can see anything sprout. It's only in time that we will enjoy the fruit.

God wants us to have a rewarding and fulfilling life. That means we may have to deny ourselves some immediate pleasures. That may mean some long, dark nights struggling with temptation before we experience the joy of victory but, while difficult, it is a small price to pay in order to harvest some rich rewards, both in this life and the life to come.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is "happiness" for me? How do I expect to achieve happiness?
2. How can I resist the temptation to give in momentary pleasure that gets in the road of long term satisfaction?
3. How am I "helping my cause by living the Ten Commandments and in what areas do I need to improve and change my choices?
4. What "rich rewards" do I envision by delaying gratification?