

RATIONALIZING

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION: 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