

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION



Book Two

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY RELAPSE PREVENTION

BOOK TWO

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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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.

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.

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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

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)

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.

own mistakes and others will make theirs. We need to forgive ourselves and others and determine to learn from the mistakes we have made. God is active in our lives and, as we seek Him, He will teach us His ways. We will build healthy relationships with others when we pursue God first.

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

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

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

Heavenly Father, Thank You for caring for me and for those I am in relationship with. I ask You to show me the way to live in a healthy relationship. I acknowledge that I need to begin with my relationship with You. Help me to believe and put into action what You say in Your Word. Forgive me for the times I have chosen to be co-dependent with another. Help me to love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Help me to love and care for others with the same love and care You have shown me. Teach me Your ways that I may live according to Your truth. I am forever grateful to be loved and accepted by You. AMEN

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)

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?

PRAYER: 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

1. I am a loved person. I do not have to earn love. Jesus loves and values me. God says: ***I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.*** (Jeremiah 31:3 NLT)
2. I am a chosen person. I have nothing to prove or accomplish in order to be chosen, wanted and accepted. God has already chosen me. ***Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself.*** (Romans 8:3 NLT)
3. I am a forgiven person. There is no sin too evil for God to forgive. The blood of Jesus cleanses all sin. ***God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.*** (1 Peter 1:2 NLT)
4. I am a person of love and power and wisdom. God lives in me and blesses me with new life. God gives me power to make wise choices. ***For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*** (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT)
5. Although I am a limited human being, I belong to the God who has limitless power and unconditionally loves me and those I love. ***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.*** (Psalm 33:6-7;18 NIV)

God is committed to walking with us while we learn how to live well in relationship with Him and with others. Life will become satisfying as we learn to relax in the acceptance of God's unfailing love for us. When our self-worth is not based on our success or failure, we will move away from a lifestyle of co-dependency. ***Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.*** (Isaiah 41:10 NLT)

We need to abandon the impossible expectations we put on others. Another person cannot love us enough or touch us deeply enough to satisfy the longing in our hearts. Only God can truly satisfy those longings. As far as it depends on us, we need to understand that we have only limited responsibility for another's happiness. We have our own desires and dreams and we need to let others have theirs. We make our

- Fear of being abandoned or alone
- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy and/or lacking boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty
- Poor communications
- Difficulty making decisions¹

We are living co-dependently when we are looking to another to affirm and maintain our value. The person we are looking to has limited ability to understand us, or to provide for our needs. When another is co-dependently looking to us, we also face these limitations. That's why we do such a poor job when we try to rescue or prop up another person. God wants each of us to come to that place where we first identify with Him and acknowledge who we are in Christ. Contentment in life does not come from trying to control another so they will meet our needs or, by trying to please someone so they will like us and meet our need to feel secure.

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

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

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

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

longer want street smart ways to govern my life. I am grateful that You care for me. 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)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. How am I welcoming God's word to shape my life today?
2. What challenges me as I seek to live "one day at a time" – the past, the future, loneliness, daily needs, regrets, worries, resentments?
3. What helps me refocus and practice living "one day at a time, one moment at a time?"

4.

Heavenly Father, Your Word tells me not to worry about my life or the things of tomorrow. Forgive me for my lack of confidence in Your daily guidance and Your ability to work everything into something good. Please help me to deal with those things I can, and make changes where necessary. Help me to leave those things I cannot change in Your care. I choose to seek first your kingdom and your righteousness as I live one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time. Thank You for Your great mercy which is new every morning and for being faithful to me even when I have not been faithful to You. You truly are an amazing God. AMEN

CO-DEPENDENT NO MORE

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

Co-dependency is a relationship addiction which touches many lives. People who are co-dependent often form relationships that are one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive. The co-dependent person bases their identity and personal value on who they perceive themselves to be in a harmful relationship. They interact with the other person in ways that are detrimental to their own well-being.

Characteristics of co-dependency include:

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to "love" people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don't recognize their efforts
- An extreme need for approval and recognition
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others

One of the greatest gifts of this new life in recovery is that having had a spiritual awakening we can now share this message of hope with others who "silently suffer" in what appears to be reasonably good life circumstances. Amazing but true, living one day at a time in relationship with God, is the only lifestyle that results in a truly good, pleasing and perfect life for all – the wealthy and the poor.

4. GIVE UP WORRY AND REGRET: It is easy to slide into worrying about tomorrow, dwelling on the "what ifs" and the "if onlys" of our life. It is tempting to deny present happenings and try to escape reality. This is part of the insanity of an addict's way of life. Each day brings with it a host of things which we personally cannot change. We need to come to terms with the limitations of our humanity. We are human beings confined within the slice of time we call today. We have some training, certain talents, and a few resources. God has promised to take care of all our todays and tomorrows. We simply need to live one day at a time under His guidance and care to ensure it all works well, according to His plan.

Jesus said, ***"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things."*** (Matthew 6:25, 33-34 NKJV)

Each day will bring us something in which we can find joy because God has promised to give us power and strength to handle any difficulties we may encounter. Since God's grace comes in daily doses, we can be sure of this, "one day at a time" is the best way to face life.

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 3:22-23 NIV)

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

As we learn to live one day at a time, it's essential that we come to God with a willingness and intention to surrender our will and our life into His care. What does that mean? What does this way of living daily surrendered to God look like? What steps can we take to implement it in our daily lives?

1. **ONGOING FORGIVENESS:** It's important to daily confess our sins and receive God's mercy, forgiveness, and fresh cleansing.

But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7 NLT)

2. **DAILY GETTING TO KNOW GOD'S WILL:** What are we doing from day to day, even moment by moment, to train ourselves to listen and respond to the Word of God? What tools are we using to help us learn and grow? In what ways are we challenging ourselves to do what needs to be done, particularly when we don't feel like doing it?

The Son can't independently do a thing, only what he sees the Father doing. What the Father does, the Son does. The Father loves the Son and includes him in everything he is doing. "I can't do a solitary thing on my own: I listen, then I decide. You can trust my decision because I'm not out to get my own way but only to carry out orders. (John 5:19-20, 30 MSG)

3. **MAKING GOD'S AGENDA FOR ME, MY AGENDA FOR TODAY:** Our new life in recovery may differ from the way of life we see many people in our society exhibit. Some people make power, prestige, or money their idol. In the past some of us made sex, drugs, and alcohol our idols. Today, all of us are invited to make God's priorities our priorities, and in so doing gain a life that is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19 MSG)

willing to do all that He asks of us. In humility, help us to be generous and look out for the interest of others rather than seeking after, and tending to, our own interest. We ask You to bless us so we can be a blessing to others. Thank You for enriching us in every way so that we can be generous on every occasion. We pray that Your name will be glorified in all that we undertake to do. AMEN

LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME

A key principle we often hear in recovery circles is "living one day at a time." In many meetings someone will read "Just for Today" - a list of positive actions that we may give focused attention to each day. When we pray the full version of the Serenity Prayer we quickly come to a line that says, "living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time." God's Word encourages us to continuously surrender our will and our life into His care. As we take time to reflect on our on-going life in recovery, the Lord will give us knowledge and understanding to sort out any problems that arise. He will also give us the strength to endure as we follow through with healthy choices.

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

Over and over again we hear doctors encouraging us to exercise every day. Simply walking 25 minutes a day has been shown to keep us fit and add years to our lives. This is useful advice for our physical well-being only if we put it into practice. In our life with God in recovery we need to develop healthy spiritual muscles for our spiritual well-being. "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it" is one spiritual exercise that many have found to be beneficial. We need to let the principles of God's Word, as recorded in the Bible, challenge, stretch, and develop us as we draw close to Him and live in the light of His presence.

Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us. (2 Timothy 3:17 MSG)

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)

given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. (Luke 6:37-38 MSG)

If we feel we are lacking in generosity and unable to care for others, we need to come before God and ask Him to fill us up with whatever we need. Are we lacking in love, joy, peace, patience, compassion or something else? God has promised to meet all our needs but we cannot fill up with what God gives and then withhold what we have received from others. We are blessed to be a blessing! Generosity is not just about blessing with money and possessions. It's about loving the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind because He first loved us. As we fill up on the love of God, we in turn, will have more than enough to share with and care for our neighbour.

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. (1 Timothy 6:17-18 NIV)

When we were in our addiction and least deserved God's grace, He sought us and generously poured out His love on us. God did not wait for us to love Him first before He acted on our behalf. He now calls us to generously do the same for those we interact with each day. ***But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*** (Romans 5:8 NIV)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. In recovery, how do I receive another's generosity towards me?
2. How difficult is it for me to give generously to my family, my friends, my enemies?
3. What difference has the unconditional love of God made in my life?
4. How has my attitude, my reactions, and my behaviour towards others changed because of my receiving God's unconditional love?
5. Is there an area or relationship in which I would like to extend my generosity this week?
6. What am I willing to change so that I can be generous with others?

Lord Jesus, Thank you for demonstrating the true heart of a servant for us. Thank you for taking on the humble position of a human and for being obedient to death, even death on a cross. Help us to seek the plan of God for our lives and to be

of our ways and admit that on our own we are powerless to change. God invites each of us to embrace His generous gift by turning our will and our life over to His care. Believing in this generous love of God for us is the foundation upon which we successfully build a new life in recovery.

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (Matthew 7:11, John 3:16 NIV)

Many of us, who have been living in poverty because of our addictive lifestyle, assume we have nothing to give to others. We are waiting until we feel better about ourselves or until we get a job and have money etc. This may take time because of our commitment to recovery or a work training program. When we receive God's lavish grace, we are already fully equipped to give to others from what we have received. What does it cost to smile and welcome a new comer to a recovery program, an AA meeting, or invite them to the church we are attending? If someone is feeling guilty or anxious about their past actions or circumstances, what is the cost of listening to, and encouraging that person? We are only limited in our generosity by what we are unwilling to do.

Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. (Deuteronomy 15:10 NIV)

God has promised to bless us if we make ourselves available to bless others. Sometimes we choose not to be generous to someone because we judge they are unworthy. They may have done something which we do not approve of. They may have differing opinions on politics, cultural politeness or perhaps are just rude through not having been taught how to behave in the company of others. These are things, which through love and patience, can be overcome. Everyone, no matter who they are, needs compassion and we are in the care of a God who is generous and full of compassion and will impart these gifts to us.

Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—

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?

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

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

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

Jesus, for our forgiveness and freedom from sin. When we receive God's lavish gift we are empowered to live faultless in His sight. In view of our former dysfunctional lifestyle, that is a very generous gift indeed.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:6-9 NIV)

Jesus once told the story of a son who humiliated his father in the community, squandered his inheritance on wild living, and then ran out of money. He became homeless and destitute. When his money was gone, his friends disappeared and he ended up alone. He spiraled downwards and was subsequently employed as a hired hand feeding pigs for his employer. Although his relationship with his father had been broken, he decided to go home. He knew his father was a kind and just man and so he planned to ask his father if he would hire him as a lowly servant in the household. Upon arrival, his father generously welcomed him back, not as a hired servant, but as a beloved son.

Taking the son back after he had humiliated him would have been considered an extremely generous act by the father. Nevertheless, the father did not stop there. Because of his unconditional love for his son, the father restored him to his former position within the family. It is unclear if the son was washed after he came from feeding the pigs. The father, however, was not deterred either by what he had done or how he looked. He immediately dressed him in the attire of a beloved son and called for a feast to celebrate his return. This is how God lavishes His extravagant grace on us when we repent and turn to Him. We become children of God and are dressed in robes of His righteousness. The angels of God rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents.

God's love is unconditional and generous towards those who trust in Him. God's love and generosity is based on who God is, not on how we think He might be. It's not about anything we deserve. It's not about what we can do to earn His favor. It's about God making provision for us to be free from the power of sin and restoring us to eternal life with Him. We could never achieve this for ourselves, it is a gift of God. God waits patiently for us to see the error

free from its bondage. We ask God to touch our emotional core and heal and restore us to new life in Him.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION and DISCUSSION

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

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

GENEROSITY – GIVING AND GETTING

The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:25 NLT)

What does generous living have to do with recovery? For numerous years, each of us lived a dysfunctional, self-centered lifestyle which eventually became our typical way of life. We seldom thought of God let alone desired to know Him. We were focused on ourselves and how we might fulfill our need of the moment. To satisfy our selfish desires, we used whoever or whatever was available. We gave little thought to the consequences of our actions or the impact they might have on another person.

In recovery, we are now learning to live in a way that is both rewarding for us and which creates a healthy environment for those around us. The lifestyle we are being taught is one of generous giving. However, we can only give from what we have received. God has generously made provision, through His son

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, Philipians 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.

offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. (Colossians 3:12-13 NLT)

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

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

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

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS

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

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

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

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good. (Romans 12:18-21 NLT)

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

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

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who

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

STORED ANGER

Anger is an involuntary reaction to a displeasing situation or event. If it is a limited reaction to a displeasing event, it may be considered normal. However, when anger is stored, then it becomes dangerous. Stored anger causes us to be resentful and hostile with the urge to get even. Inner turmoil is the result of not obeying the following advice.

In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. (Ephesians 4:26 NIV)

Unresolved displeasing situations or events may cause us to store anger which, if not dealt with, deteriorates through time into frustration, anxiety, hatred, despair, rage, hopelessness. Carrying feelings like these from childhood into adulthood may result in us trying to control each situation we encounter so we

can be in a position to hurt others before they hurt us. We may become people pleasers in order to gain favour and solicit another's good will. We want to "fit in" and desire to be loved and treated with respect. To help fit in with the crowd we may enter into unhealthy relationships and/or addictions which we believe will fill the emptiness inside.

Unfortunately, all the painful baggage we have not dealt with will accompany us until we actually deal with it. Anger stored inside us erupts and spews into our relationships causing the other person frustration and pain. Addictions we thought would help us deal with our pain and frustration actually push us further into the dark side of hopelessness and the persona we adopt keeps us from being real even with ourselves.

At some point we came to the realization that we needed help to deal with the confusion residing in the deepest places of our being. When we came to know Jesus and accepted salvation through His death on the cross, we became new creations. The old has gone and the new has come.

We are challenged by God to demonstrate this transformation by acting and reacting in new ways. ***"...now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."*** (Colossians 3:8-10 NIV)

This is really good advice but how do we change what has become for us a normal way of behaving? We first need to accept the freedom that comes with salvation and understand that we are deeply loved by our Creator.

"My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:14-19 MSG.)

To resolve stored anger, we need to focus on dealing with the root cause of our anger rather than dwelling on the current problem. People, places and

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

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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

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

GRUDGE, RESENTMENT, FORGIVENESS

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

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

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

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

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

Many of us have discovered that, no matter how strong we feel, or how smart we think we are, it’s not enough to bring us through to sustained recovery. We will tire out and give up the struggle if we think any physical or mental strength of our own is enough for the long haul. Strength and wisdom are gifts. They are the result of an ongoing relationship with God. They come from trusting God, waiting for God to act, following God’s word, and seeking His plan for our lives. This is what gives us joy, keeps us safe, and helps us understand and respond differently to life around us. Trusting in God, rather than in our best thinking, is the foundation that helps us maintain our new life in recovery.

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

things may trigger anger. Our reflection and prayer must be directed at uprooting any hostility and resentment that supports our attitude and responses. We need to understand the fullness of God’s love for us even in the midst of our past and present experiences. His healing power will free us from anger and we’ll eventually experience His peace in our hearts. As we come to acknowledge the grace and love we have received through Christ, we are able then to forgive and grace others, as God has forgiven and graced us.

As we go forward, we can avoid relapse into stored anger by practicing some simple principles.

1) Instead of trying to get others to understand us, we need to try to understand where others might be coming from when they behave in a particular way.

God’s word directs us, ***“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*** (Romans 12:3 NIV)

2) We’ll see positive changes when we practice the “PUT OFF” and “PUT ON” principle: ***“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** (Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV)

3) Practice looking for God’s help and encouragement rather than getting discouraged when things are not as you would have them. Remember that God is able to make you stand firm in Christ. ***“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”*** (Philippians 1:6 NLT)

It’s time to get rid of the stored anger that’s been packed away in the dark places of our soul. God is ready and willing to comfort and heal us. God is faithful and will show us safe and healthy ways to deal with challenging situations and relationships without resorting to anger.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How has stored anger been a problem in my life?
2. Where do I notice resentment in me and a desire to “get even” as I reflect on events in my life?

3. What have I done to get rid of expressions of anger such as, rage, gossip, negative talk, complaining, and profanity?
4. How am I addressing the root problem in me rather than the triggering events or people?
5. Three principles are given to help us avoid relapsing into anger. How am I doing in implementing these principles?
 - a. Try understanding the “triggering person or thing” and our outburst of anger in relation to the person or thing.
 - b. Practice “putting off” and “putting on”
 - c. Seeking encouragement and help from God
6. What action can I take to experience more success in not sinning in my anger?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask forgiveness for the times I have reacted in anger and caused harm to others. Please show me the underlying root of my destructive anger. My desire is to have peace in my heart and to treat others with respect. I choose to “put off” anger and rage which hinders my relationship with you and with others. Help me to “put on” my new self which is clothed in righteousness and holiness. Make me more like you. I ask these things in the precious name of Jesus. AMEN

SLOGANS OR SPIRITUAL FOOD

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

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

Based on His awareness of each of our personal situations, God, who has perfect knowledge, arranges and sets things in place in order to bring about a good and satisfying life for us. We can hardly imagine that level of love and commitment to us in our new life in recovery. What we have to work at is to fully surrender

our old way of life, exchanging it for the new life God has planned for us. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us in all our ways so that we can receive all that God wants to give us. Life finally works when we work it in this way.

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

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

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

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

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

“OUR BEST THINKING GOT US HERE”

After recognizing that our lives were unmanageable, many of us entered into detox and then treatment programs where we found support and began to