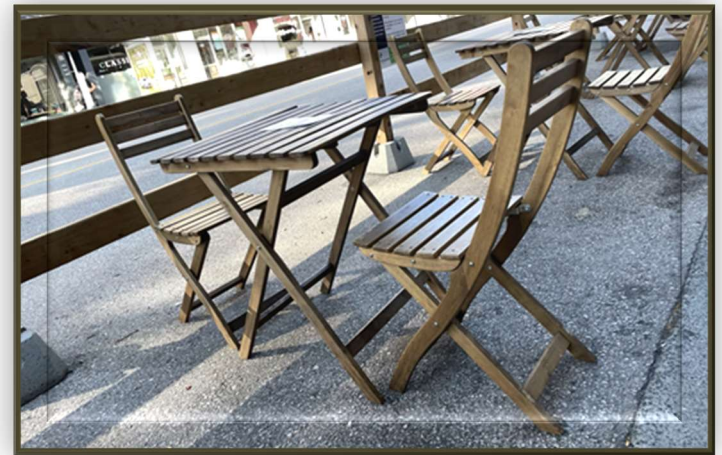


Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION



Book Three

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY RELAPSE PREVENTION

BOOK THREE

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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.

RELAPSE PREVENTION BOOK THREE

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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

EQUIPPED FOR GROWTH

Life in addiction is often described as a slow death because of the decline in the well-being of those who are in bondage to their drug of choice. Therefore, to enjoy a healthy and satisfying lifestyle in recovery we need to recognize our need to grow in the many areas of our being which have been compromised. Two primary places to start equipping ourselves for growth is in our thoughts and in the attitude of our heart.

You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 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 4:20-24 NIV)

What can we elect to do that will support growth? We need to radically determine in our minds that we will put off our old self and former way of life. By a conscious choice of our will we need to abandon and be healed from those things that keep us in bondage to our addiction. We need to give up co-dependent relationships that we used to support our physical or emotional need or longing. We need to surrender our will to God and seek His help to put on our new self. We need to determine that we will walk in God's way, doing those things which will help us grow in righteousness and holiness. We need to get to know our Heavenly Father, so that we will learn to trust Him.

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)

In the Bible we read the story of a young man named Joshua. After the death of Moses, the leader of God's people, Joshua was appointed to lead the people of Israel into the Promised Land. As he started his journey God gave him instructions which are timeless for all who set out on a new path in recovery.

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:8-9 NIV)

SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

For a variety of reasons, 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.

SUBSTANCE ADDICTIONS: Alcohol Caffeine Injected or smoked substances such as: Crack, Crystal Meth, Heroin Marijuana Prescription Medications Sugar Tobacco	BEHAVIOUR ADDICTIONS: 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)
SOFT ADDICTIONS: 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	RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS: Abusive Relationships: Includes: Intimidation, Isolation, Domination, Blaming, Humiliation, Withholding, Forcing acts against one's will Approval dependency Attention Seeking Codependence/Rescuing Power/Control

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.

he puts on each person by giving His beloved son to die for us. In our relationship with God, do we see Him as a loving Heavenly Father and ourselves as His precious children? God's word says:

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs. (Zephaniah 3:17)

We have a choice today – to live in low self-esteem with negative thoughts about past actions or, to welcome a new life of peace and purpose that God has prepared for us. What will we choose?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Who or what determines my value and how I think about myself?
2. How do I allow the unfailing love of God to impact my life?
3. What facts (such as those noted above) are useful to me as I move from low self-esteem to a new place of dignity and value before God?

Heavenly Father, Thank you that, when we believe in Jesus' finished work on the cross, the price of our sins has been paid and we are adopted into Your family as precious children. We are freed from all condemnation and Your Holy Spirit lives within us to guide us into the knowledge of all truth. Help us to renew our minds and hearts to these facts. Help us to stand on the truth that when we are in Christ, nothing can separate us from Your love. We are grateful that we are valued as precious in Your sight. Amen

As we look to God's word to direct our path in recovery, we will find trustworthy guidance and hope for our journey. God is faithful to do everything He has promised.

God has said that He will guide us and help us grow. Our part is to seek to know God, to learn His ways, and then follow them. How do we do that? We learn about God by reading the Bible and believing and doing what it says. We put our trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. When we do this, God's Holy Spirit comes to live in us. The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom to know and understand God's ways. ***When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.*** (John 16:13 NLT) The Holy Spirit will guide, train and equip us to do what is right. Our part is to use the tools provided and regularly consult the Holy Spirit to ensure we are on the right path.

At the same time, we need to be aware that we have an enemy who does not want us to grow and become all God intends us to be. Jesus said that the enemy of our soul comes to steal, kill and destroy. We can take comfort in the truth that the evil one only has power over us as we choose to give it to him. Disobedience or leaving the tools we have been given in the toolbox will leave our lives open to access by the evil one. We need to determine to fill ourselves up with the fullness of God and be doers of God's Word, then we will be equipped for growth.

Jesus said, ***"When a corrupting spirit is expelled from someone, it drifts along through the desert looking for an oasis, some unsuspecting soul it can bedevil. When it doesn't find anyone, it says, 'I'll go back to my old haunt.' On return, it finds the person swept and dusted, but vacant. It then runs out and rounds up seven other spirits dirtier than itself and they all move in, whooping it up. That person ends up far worse than if he'd never gotten cleaned up in the first place."*** (Luke 11:24-26 MSG)

God is very clear that there is a battle going on within us and around us. The good news is that the battle has already been won and the enemy has been defeated. However, the enemy is still prowling around looking for individuals he can destroy. We need to uphold our determination not to give Him any opportunity.

Preparation for battle means surrendering ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His power and authority working through us that sends the forces of darkness fleeing. We equip ourselves for victory when we have an open ear for

God's voice and remain self-controlled and alert to His instructions throughout the battle. We employ effective weapons to resist the devil when we stand firm in our faith in God's strength and goodness. We put the enemy to flight by upholding God's word, just as Jesus did when He was tempted.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV)

Growth comes when we choose to trust in God regardless of our circumstances. God's word says that He works all things together for our good. The enemy of our souls is a created being with limited power. If we look to God who has ultimate power, He will deliver us from any attack the enemy may bring against us.

Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. (2 Corinthians. 1:9-10 NIV)

God has provided tools and instructions to equip us for effective growth today. Are we willing to pick up these tools and follow His instructions in the manual – the Bible?

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:7 NLT)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways am I equipping myself for growth in my new life in Christ?
2. What tools am I using? What other tools am I realizing might be useful?
3. How have I prepared myself to recognize and have victory over the deception of the enemy of my soul?

2) We need to inform our hearts and minds of these truths until our negative thought patterns are reshaped and painful feelings are healed and settled in God's comfort.

3) As beloved children of God, we need to listen to and do those things which please God. Fear and insecurity lead to self-absorption and addictive lifestyles as we feverishly try to cover-up, or cope with inferiority feelings. When we focus on what God says works and put that into practice, we begin to experience a life that is good, satisfying and meaningful.

Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. (Col. 3:2-4a MSG)

God has given us gifts and talents to share with others. In the same way that hands and feet and eyes co-operate in the body, God planned for all of us to work and support one another in community. God has prepared a lifetime of adventure for us as we support and bring hope and healing to one another.

In the strength and peace which God's acceptance and forgiveness brings, we can begin to see ourselves and others with different eyes. We will no longer need to live in chaos and addiction, searching for self-satisfying love. Instead, we will begin to experience loving and satisfying relationships as we share and give in community with others. This is life as Jesus taught us to live it.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself". (Matthew 22:37-29 NIV)

When we question our worth, we need to remember who God our Creator says we are. A one-hundred-dollar bill whether it is in prime condition, or is crumpled and dirty, is still worth what the creator of the bill has determined. God, our creator, has clearly demonstrated the value

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 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. (Psalm 139:13-14 NIV, Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

The devil continues to whisper lies to us. Because we don't feel good about ourselves, our circumstances, or our future, he tells us we're defective and we need something to make us fit in, be accepted, and feel better. The temptation is often towards an addictive substance or a relationship that is destructive. When life unravels around our unhealthy life choices, the devil then emphasizes how flawed we are and how hopeless it is for us to change. Our self-esteem bottoms out as we so easily identify with our mistakes, our shattered dreams, and the pain we feel inside.

Our Heavenly Father, through Jesus, offers to restore the loving relationship with Him that we were always intended to have. The Bible tells us that God loved us so much that He sent His beloved son Jesus into the world to pay the price of our sin and rebellion, which is death. Jesus overcame death on our behalf and because He lives, we can have life forevermore in the Kingdom of God. When we put our trust in Jesus and in what He did for us, we become cherished children of our Heavenly Father. We need to listen to God and believe what He says, rather than pay attention to the deceiver who is trying to steal, kill and destroy the new life we have been given through Jesus.

..to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. (John 1:12-13, 10:10 NLT)

Self-esteem can be rebuilt. How?

1) We need to find out the facts – those things that God says about us such as: “You are forgiven. I, the Creator of the universe pay attention to you when you pray. Nothing can separate you from My love. You are created to do good work. My plan and purpose for your life is to give you a future with hope.”

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I come before You, acknowledging You as my Higher Power. You are an awesome God and Your power is infinite. All life and growth come from You. Help me to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Your beloved son, Jesus. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit who will provide the wisdom and revelation I need to get to know You, and Your plan for my life. I desire to live as Your masterpiece created in love to do the good works You have prepared in advance for me to do. I am forever grateful that You care for me. **AMEN**

LIVING AS HONOURABLE PEOPLE

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10 NIV)

God created us to live as honourable people – honouring God, honouring others, and experiencing the joy of living as persons of integrity and honour. Living life only to please ourselves, whether in addiction or recovery, leaves us dissatisfied and vulnerable to harmful ways of living. However, living our lives with God in recovery is truly satisfying and purposeful. How can we find this good life?

HONOURING GOD AS HIGHER POWER BY OBEYING HIS COMMANDS:

What we believe will cause us to act in an honourable way towards others and in so doing preserve our personal honour. When we believe in the Loving God of the Bible as our Higher Power, then we are guided by Him and live accountable to His laws. God, our creator, knows the best way for His creation to live and, as we read the Bible we find out what a truly satisfying life looks like. One of the Pharisees' religious scholars asked Jesus which of the commandments in all of God's laws was the most important. Jesus answered and said that there are two laws on which all of God's laws are based and that is to love God and love our neighbour.

Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40 NLT)

HONOURING THE COMMON GOOD OF SOCIETY: If we are unsure that God exists, or believe that God does not exist, then we determine our own behaviour and are only accountable to the laws of the country in which we live. If we break a law of our country, and get caught, then we pay the penalty set by the law for our actions. Governments add to, or remove laws, in the belief that the laws will cause the community to honour one another and protect property. However, today's society seems to be on a collision course with the law and appears to be more interested in their individual rights rather than in the common good of society. It is truly evident that life without God does not lead to society honouring one another above themselves.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1-3 NIV)

HONOURING THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: When we believe that God is real and loves us with an all-encompassing love, this belief will be reflected in our behaviour. There is no way we can receive all the love that God pours on us and not have it overflow to others around us. God commands that we honour our Father and Mother. This command may also be applied to our primary care givers. The honour we are to give to our parents is not based on their parenting skills but on their position of authority over us. When we are married we are told to honour our spouse and to keep the marriage bed pure. God knows that adultery and sexual immorality harms our body and our relationship. His desire is that we fulfill our commitment to our spouse in order that the purity of our union of body and soul is preserved. With regards to others, we are instructed to love one another and to honour others above ourselves. Integrity in these disciplines will be achieved when we first find respect for ourselves in the grace that God so generously pours upon us.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one

4. What needs to change in my beliefs and desires so my choices more and more reflect God's life in me?

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

DEALING WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

Low self-esteem. No self-worth. We hear these words said about many who suffer in an addictive lifestyle and often we are reluctant to admit that we also have self-condemning thoughts in our own heads. We make a mistake and we feel like we are a failure. When others don't approve of us we can't seem to cope. We feel like no matter how hard we try we can't ever measure up. What are we left with? A general feeling of hopelessness that God never intended us to have. When God looked at the humans He created He said they were "very good". Our self-worth should be based on what God says, not on what we think, and not on what others say.

When God created human beings, he made them to be like himself. He created them male and female, and he blessed them and called them "human." (Genesis 5:1-2 NLT)

In the very beginning, the devil approached Adam and Eve and implied that humans were not "very good" because they lacked the knowledge of good and evil which God did not give when He created them. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instructions and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it was not Godly wisdom they received but a distorted perspective of life based on self-rejection, guilt, fear, and separation from God.

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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

another above yourselves. (Exodus 20:12; Hebrews 13:4; Romans 12:10 NIV)

LIVING TO HONOUR OTHERS RATHER THAN DEMANDING OUR RIGHTS:

Before we surrendered our lives to God, we likely retaliated in anger and caused strife when we were not treated with the respect we thought we deserved. Based on another's actions we concluded that our worth had been devalued and that our dignity had suffered. In our pride we saw ourselves as deserving of more respect. We may have reacted by "setting the person or persons aright" about the honour they should have given us. While fighting for the honour we supposed we deserved, were we prepared to honour the person or persons involved with the same honour that we expected to receive from them? How about being willing to give up our perceived rights and honour others above ourselves?

How blessed the man you train, God, the woman you instruct in your Word, Providing a circle of quiet within the clamor of evil, while a jail is being built for the wicked. God will never walk away from his people, never desert his precious people. Rest assured that justice is on its way and every good heart put right. (Psalm 94:12-15 MSG)

HONOURING GOD BY REFLECTING HIS CHARACTER: God wants our lives to reflect Him in us. Jesus said that anyone who had seen Him had also seen His Father. Jesus reflected His Father's character when He went about doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the evil one. Are we, like Jesus, willing to look towards the well-being of our family, our friends and those around us? How can we honour them? God will enable us to be the person He created us to be -- a person who experiences honour as we honour God and others above ourselves.

The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation." (Psalm 91:14-16 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do I honour God as my higher power by learning and following all of his commandments? Where does my own self-will or convenience challenge this?

2. How am I doing in this area of being willing to give up my perceived rights and honour others above myself?
3. In what ways do I honour God and purposefully try to honour others around me? Where do I fall short?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, My desire is to live a purposeful and satisfying life devoted to You and willing to honour others above myself. I confess that in the past I have been prideful and puffed up in my self-seeking attitude concerning myself. Fill me to overflowing with Your all-encompassing love. Thank You for enabling me to experience honour as I honour You and others above myself. I am forever grateful that You care for me. AMEN

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH, AND HOPE

Many of us, when we come into recovery, are physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually weak. We're running on empty and are more likely picturing ourselves weary and limping along, rather than seeing ourselves running and not growing weary. We need the strength the Lord will provide to see us through.

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 at heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt. 11:28-29 NLT)

Our motivation for coming to support group meetings is to continue our journey with God in recovery and to share our experience, strength and hope with each other. We share what is working for us. We hear and observe what is working for others. We want to learn from practices which helped old-timers get strong and stay strong and which may also help us.

[God] gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:29 NLT, 40:30-31NIV)

gaps created by failing to reach out with care and blessing, affect everyone in our circle of family and friends.

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

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

Regrettably many people who come to God think they can live any way they choose as long as they attend church, read the Bible, complete an honest set of steps, pray on occasion, and call Jesus "Lord." They believe these activities put them in right standing with God regardless of the fact they consciously continue to sin knowing they are disobeying the word of God. We cannot serve both our sinful nature and God at the same time. Our God is a Holy God and will not accompany us in the presence of sin.

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

CHOOSING WELL

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the beginning we comply with the recovery program guidelines because we believe that there has to be a better life than the one we have been living. We are willing to learn from the experience of others who have walked the path before us. We sleep, we eat, and we talk. We read, we pray, and we write. We exercise, we go to meetings, and we serve. We start to look better and feel stronger. As our strength increases, we begin to have hope for a better life.

At this point, because we have more energy, thoughts of our old way of handling life begin to surface and even seem manageable. The temptation to fix life as we’ve always fixed it begins to call. The desire to run rather than face the troubling events of our past will grow. The voice in our head will assure us that we, by ourselves, know what to do to get well. If we entertain these thoughts, we will drift towards relapse. This is the time to stay close to God and others who are doing well in recovery.

The word of God speaks truth at this time, if we will listen. ***So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*** (1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 7:18 NIV)

As our physical energy is being renewed we need to be careful to correctly identify its source. The source is not ourselves. We are powerless on our own. We need a power greater than ourselves for the rebuilding journey ahead. We need to maintain the routine of turning our will and our life over to the care of God in each and every circumstance. Each day, throughout the day, for the rest of our lives, we will need to affirm our powerlessness and surrender to God who is the source of our strength. As we remind one another of these things in meetings and conversations we will find that God will empower us to be the person He created us to be.

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:18-20 NIV)

No matter how strong we may feel, it's not enough to bring us through to sustained recovery. We will tire out and give up the struggle if we think our own physical or mental strength is enough for the long haul. Strength is a gift. Strength is the product of an ongoing relationship with God. Strength is the result of trusting God, waiting for God to act, and following God's plan for fullness of life. We need to support one another during the tough times and encourage each other to keep going as we learn the ways of God. This is what will give us joy, keep us safe, and help us respond well to the events of each day.

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me 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 wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength. (Exodus 15:2, Psalm 46:1, 1 Corinthians 1:24b-25 NLT)

Jesus taught that real strength comes to us when we remain in His care and grow in His grace. He used a gardening picture to help us understand.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. (John 15:5-6 NLT)

Outside of God, we can't maintain the desire to do what is right, let alone find the strength to do what we know we ought to do. It is the experience of each person who obediently walks with God that He gives power when they feel weakest and this is what continually makes them strong. As we share with each other and learn from one another our desire for more of God's power in our daily life grows and we become increasingly hopeful in God's ability to bring about His good purposes in our lives.

For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him. I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. (Philippians 2:13, 4:13 NLT)

our lives can hinder our discernment. Fear of change can also rob us of the ability to go forward in a season of our lives.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 NIV)

When we have made a decision, peace and joy may be signs that our choice is in keeping with God's plans. Choosing our way forward based on the wisdom and discernment that God gives will result in a life lived to the full as God intended.

Questions for Discussion

1. Where do I see evidence of growth in sound judgment and discernment in my life? How do I consciously make God a part of my decision making processes?
2. Which practices that help develop discernment are part of my daily life? What practices do I still need to adopt?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for bringing me from the darkness of sin and shame into the light of Your presence. Forgive me for the times I have ignored your guidance in favour of my own self-will. I ask You now for the gift of discernment so that I may make wise choices as I move forward into the plans that You have for my life. Lord, give me ears to hear that I might be attentive to Your word. Help me to respond to the urgings of Your Spirit in all that I do and say. AMEN

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1. Humility: Acknowledge that our own understanding is not enough. We need God's perspective and guidance in the small and large decisions of life. ***He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way.*** (Psalm 25:9 NIV)
2. Faith: Believe that God will speak to us. ***Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*** (Hebrews 11:6 NIV)
3. A Clean Heart: Sin blocks God's voice so ask God to reveal any way we've been living in self-will and going against His principles. ***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*** (Psalm 66:18 KJV)
4. A Yielded Will: Intentionally place our trust in God by committing to His way. Guidance from God becomes clearer through obedience. Jesus said, ***If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me.*** (Mark 8:34 NLT)
5. Waiting before God: Give God time to speak, time where we focus on God alone and allow Him to speak into our situation. ***God says: But my people would not heed my voice and Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart to walk in their own counsels. Oh that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways.*** (Psalm 81:11-13 NKJV)
6. Recognize the source of the voice: God's voice is consistent with His word. If we submit our reasoning to Him, He will convey His answer through our spirit. Satanic and demonic powers can bring impressions to our minds. However, we can sift our thoughts by being willing to surrender our heart's desires to God, asking only to know His will. ***We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NLT)

We need to let go of preconceptions, biases, stereotypes or whatever hinders our vision so we can better recognize God's will for our life. Sorrow over a loss in

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I seeking and experiencing God's strength in my recovery?
2. What is the challenge for me to acknowledge that I'm powerless in my own strength and need to daily rely on God's strength?
3. What does the parable of the vine and the branches that Jesus taught convey to me about God and my recovery?
4. Through my own practice and experience, am I both receiving encouragement and encouraging others in their recovery with God?

PRAYER: Loving God, When I was weary and burdened, thank You for pursuing me with Your love and giving me hope for the future. I confess that I cannot do life without You. Jesus, I welcome You into my life as my Saviour and Lord. I surrender to Your guidance. I trust in the mighty power of Your Holy Spirit to be active in me, giving me the desire and will to do what pleases You. I am thankful that your power works best in my weakness. Anoint me afresh with Your Holy Spirit each day. I am grateful for Your lavish love and faithfulness and for the strength and hope you give me each day to live according to Your word. Amen

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN ONE ANOTHER

One of the characteristics of life in addiction is isolation from others and doing things on our own. The life God created us to live, and which we seek to recover is one where we come close to God and others and allow relationships to grow that help all of us live better.

Can we remember a time when someone encouraged us to have hope, to keep going, to do the right thing? What did that person do that felt encouraging? True friends help us become the people we were born to be. Sometime it's as basic as encouraging each other to be our best in daily activities, daily decisions, and spiritual growth. At other times, it's helping us discover our gifts and moving forward to use them for good.

People loved to spend time with Jesus. Everywhere He went, Jesus told people that the kingdom of God was available to them. Jesus taught that anyone who was part of the kingdom of God was a citizen with dignity, a worthwhile servant of the King, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Jesus called people forward to be the wonderful gift God created them to be. We will grow in our own recovery when we practice encouraging others in their journey.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 NIV)

Friendship is based on shared values and goals. At one level people can be friends just because they enjoy the same games or crafts. However, lasting friendship happens when people share their deepest and most important values with each other. A passion to see wrongs made right, for example, can bond friends together no matter what they have to face. If each friend sees the other and believes in the other as salt and light, that encourages and strengthens the person so they become more than they could have been on their own. Knowing God is with us and with our friend is a cord that binds us together in His love.

A real friend helps us carry our burdens, encourages and builds us up, helps us move toward restoration from a challenging experience, and spurs us on to love and good deeds. A real friend doesn't climb into a dark and complaining place with us. A good friend stands with us as we face what comes our way and helps us find God's plan in it.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (From Galatians 6, Hebrews 3, and 10)

Many of us struggle with self-acceptance. Sometimes we compare ourselves with others – their looks, their gifts, their achievements. However, true friendship means seeing ourselves as peers, encouragers, and cheerleaders in each other's lives. We affirm one another for a job well done, and we open doors for each other to try new things and take healthy risk. We air our feelings out loud without fear of rejection and know that with God's help and our friend at our side, we will get better and better at sorting out the pieces in the puzzle of life.

What are we to do? God has given us the answers in His word in the Bible. ***Deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.*** (Psalm 119:124-125 NIV)

God invites us to know Him personally. His desire is that we understand and receive salvation through Jesus Christ. He also wants us to know the plan He has for each of our lives. When we spend time with God in His word, He will give us a discerning heart to know His ways. God wants us to seek Him for direction and, as we desire to know the plan He has prepared for us, He will give us discernment in our spirit about the right way to go.

Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those with discernment listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But in those paths sinners stumble and fall. (Hosea 14:9 NLT)

Discerning the ways of God is the work of the Holy Spirit who comes to live within us when we accept Jesus as our Saviour and Lord. The Holy Spirit directs our path and guides us into all truth. Some simple steps we might take to help us in this process are:

- ✓ list the known pros and cons of each choice.
- ✓ pray with this list, trusting that God will direct our steps in the way we should go.
- ✓ pray and seek guidance from someone who knows us well (pastor, priest, parents, spiritual counselor) about the way we are sensing to go. Consider the gifts God has given us
- ✓ Remember that we may plan our course but if we listen attentively to God, He will direct our path.

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 wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 29:11-14 NLT)

In order that our own imagination or desires do not mislead us, we need to make an honest assessment of our own will versus God's revealed will. Things we need to look at include:

Loving God, I come to You today and present my life before You, past, present, and future. I want to live for You. I want to live in the safety of Your love. Heal me from those things in my past that impact my current relationships. Forgive me for ignoring those boundaries that bring safety to my life. Give me the desire, the courage, and the strength to follow Your principles each day. I am so thankful that your grace is greater than anything that has wounded me. Teach me how to love You and to love others, so that my relationships are healthy and balanced. Jesus, you are the way, the truth, and the life. I choose to follow you from this day forward. Amen

DISCERNMENT

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the *wisdom to know the difference.*”

The final phrase in this prayer, asking for wisdom, is really a request for discernment.

Discernment is more than learning or physical sight. Discernment is the ability to have understanding and sound judgment in knowing and doing the right thing. Spiritually discerning people have the capacity to separate and sift what is good and what is best based on their knowledge of God and His ways.

From the very beginning God planned that we would know Him and live with Him forever. The Bible tells us ***“God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.”*** (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT)

As humans we operate from day to day as though we are going to live forever in this world. We don’t consult God with regards to what is best for us, because we think we know that intuitively and so we end up suffering painful consequences. The truth is that without God’s wisdom, we don’t know how to live successfully in this life, or what will happen to us in the next.

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.
(Proverbs 18:24 MSG)

Here are some things friends do to bring out the best in us:

- Friends stimulate our faith walk with God. They pray for us.
- Friends ask questions. They laugh and cry with us.
- Friends encourage us to try new things
- Friends affirm our strengths and are not threatened by our successes.
- Friends remind us of hope when we feel discouraged.
- Friends challenge us to take a healthy risk.
- Friends stick with us when everyone else gives up on us.
- Friends notice and compliment us on a job well done.

In our recovery, today, we would do well to watch for an opportunity to be a friend to someone, to carry a burden, to encourage and build someone up, to spur someone on to love and good deeds. As we respect their uniqueness, we can ask ourselves, “What would feel encouraging to this person? What would motivate this person to fulfill their calling? Is there anything this person needs? How can I be a supportive friend to this person?”

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I being a friend?
2. How am I reaching out to include the joy and wisdom of friends in my life?
3. What happens that moves me away from friends towards isolation and makes me vulnerable for relapse?
4. Comparing – why do I get caught up in it? What am I doing to change?
5. How deeply or how honestly am I letting myself be known by others?
6. What might I do to improve as a person who “brings out the best” in others?

Dear Jesus, I admit that I struggle with the notion of being a true friend. Please help me take my eyes off myself. Help me to look around at others and truly care about what is going on in their lives. Help me to be friendly towards others as I would be to a beloved brother or sister. Each person I meet could be a potential friend. Help me to be as salt and light to those around me. Help me to learn from You. I am forever grateful that You are a true friend who cares for me. AMEN

ADDICTION OR GRACE

God created the heavens and the earth and established certain laws which were beneficial for all the people on earth. Gravity is one of those laws. When we push a bag of trash into the garbage chute we can't see the law of gravity but we can hear the bag hit the bottom so we know that it is operating. In the same way, the existence of love and grace are evident in those whose hearts are turned towards God. Just like the evidence of gravity can be seen in the physical world, so the evidence of grace can also be seen in those who have turned their will and their life over to the care of God. In our addiction, we didn't take time to think about factors that determined the course of life. Now that we have made a choice to live with God in recovery, we have an opportunity to find out how God created the world and the place in life He intended for us in it.

May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord. 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, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:2-3 NLT)








GRACE – OBEYING GOD'S WORD God created humans in His own image and God is love. Therefore, we know humans were created in love. Non-compliance with God's word separated humans from the relationship with Him that God intended. Because of His relentless love for us, God paid the price of our disobedience through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we accept the finished work of Jesus on the cross as payment for our sin, our relationship with God is restored. Our Heavenly Father delights in His redeemed children and He pours out His endless grace on those who live in His love and care and wholeheartedly follow His ways.

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. (Colossians 1:19-21 NLT)

GRACE – NECESSARY INGREDIENT FOR CHANGE One problem in our society today is that many people try to live with respect for one another and fix human behaviour through self-help and education, without any input from

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them." (Matthew 22:37-40 MSG)

How do we set healthy limits and separate ourselves from harmful events? We do whatever it takes to honour God in every situation and choose to wholeheartedly follow His ways. We purposefully choose to live in an atmosphere of safety, blessing, and encouragement. Here are some actions we can take that will help us set healthy boundaries with others:

-  We name behaviours that are safe and unsafe so our expectations are known to others.
-  We take responsibility for our part in creating a safe and respectful environment.
-  When words become heated or harsh we stop and step away until emotions calm down and thoughts become clear.
-  We take time out to seek God's guidance and ask for counsel from a trustworthy person.
-  We seek forgiveness for our role in any problem.
-  We learn how to communicate and act with love and respect, and ask for the same in return.
-  We refuse to gossip and slander, no matter how difficult the situation, and instead, entrust the person with whom we are having difficulty to God.

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:28 NIV)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of these two are harder for me, setting boundaries on my own wants or setting boundaries on those I am in contact with?
2. How does God help in my boundary setting?
3. Where am I doing well and where do I need to grow in living with healthy boundaries?

Personal Boundaries: As we come into a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, we discover satisfying living in a surprising form – life within limits. Imagine how our road systems would be without rules for driving. It would be utter chaos for road users. So it is with personal boundaries, our lives will be chaotic and at risk if we do not follow God's rules. Setting and living within personal limits is essential in helping us build our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God, created to live with meaning and purpose.

Here are some methods we can use to establish or strengthen our personal boundaries:

- ✚ We say "Yes" to those behaviours that God says bring love, joy and peace to our lives.
- ✚ We say "No" to negative behaviour that steals the satisfying life that God offers us.
- ✚ We get rid of destructive resentment and buried anger. We find peace through forgiveness and letting go.
- ✚ We say "No" to good desires which are just not wise to pursue at this time.
- ✚ We determine to wait for healthy alternatives instead of gratifying our momentary desires with damaging sinful activities.

Live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit you are free. (Galatians 5:16-18 NLT)

Boundaries With Others: We cannot actually set limits on others but what we can do is set limits on our exposure to people who are behaving poorly. We can't change others or make them behave right. We need to let people be who they are but separate ourselves from them when their behaviour is destructive and negatively impacts us. It's beneficial for all concerned when we do this. We are not being unloving. Separating ourselves protects love, because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love.

God. Behaving in destructive and addictive ways is to be expected when we believe everything in life is simply the result of random selection. With that view, we have to figure how to fix ourselves, without knowing what went wrong.

Our behaviour usually reflects what we believe about God. God is love and God created us in love. Do we believe that? To live fully in recovery, an individual must believe that our world and each of our lives are supported and shaped by the love and amazing grace of God. The principle is simple, if we want to behave towards others in a more loving way we have to know that we ourselves are loved.

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1John 4:7-8 NLT)

GRACE – BELIEVING GOD LOVES ME WHEN I DON'T GET MY OWN WAY When we don't get what we want, we believe God could not possibly care for us. When we don't feel loved, we believe we're just not good enough to be loved by God or anyone else. Believing thoughts like these drives us to seek comfort in harmful relationships, practices and ultimately substances. Initially we may not realize the impact of our beliefs but the discontent and anxiety within us will lead us down the path to our substance of choice. That route may be through work, alcohol, prescription or street drugs, sex, gambling, spending, abusive language, rage etc. Addiction substitutes "instant gratification counterfeits" for God's good gifts that develop over time. Sooner or later we will come to know that counterfeits just don't satisfy. Grace recognizes that God is protecting us from harm and helping us develop what is truly helpful and satisfying.

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:2 NLT)

GRACE – FOCUSING ON GROWING WITH GOD RATHER THAN ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Over the long haul, how do we prevent relapse into addictive behaviour and a destructive lifestyle and maintain our choice to live in the love and grace of God? Strangely, we have to **stop focusing on** "not picking up" and focus instead on God's goodness to us, God's strength in us, and God's blessings

around us. We have to **stop focusing on** our own thoughts and behaviour and intentionally refocus our thoughts on God and His principles. It's time to stop dwelling on what happened 5 minutes or 5 years ago and instead focus on the good news that our past sins have been forgiven, comfort and healing for every hurt is available today, and we are free to move forward in our recovery. God pursued us with His love even while we were running away. He did so, not to accuse or condemn us, but to heal and restore us. To live in grace rather than in addiction is to rely on the truth that God's power and love is sufficient to help us stand firm in Christ.

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. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NIV)

The devil, the father of lies who feeds addiction, wants us to dwell on our addiction – the memories, negative consequences, and tempting thoughts. On the other hand, God, the father of love and grace, invites us to seek His help, stand strong, and confidently go forward.

Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? ... But he gives us even more grace to stand against such evil desires ... So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. ... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. (James 4:4-11 NLT)

GRACE – CHOOSING TO RETURN TO GOD God wants to fill us with His life-giving Spirit. He offers us a relationship with Himself that is intimate, deeply satisfying, and brings great joy into our lives. We can, if we want, choose the lonely, destructive, painful path of relapse and addiction, but we don't have to. God's offer of grace and help in time of need remains constant. No matter how far down we may fall, God invites us to return to Him. Continuing in addiction after a relapse is self-will. Returning and being accepted by a forgiving God is wonderful grace.

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with

ESTABLISHING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. (Psalm 3:3 NIV)

People who struggle with addiction are often those who have been exposed to life altering situations. The events sometimes occurred when they were children and they were unable to correctly process or reason why they happened. Without knowing an effective way to express the impact of these events, their boundaries were weakened and they learned a pattern of responding that was unhealthy. Family breakdown, abuse, discrimination, and bullying are examples of situations to which many of us have been exposed and found ourselves feeling forced to do something which did not contribute to our own well-being. We simply learned to cope in whatever ways we could.

Our Heavenly Father is aware of all the events of our lives, and when we enter into a living relationship with Him through Jesus, He will help us rebuild safe and healthy boundaries so we can experience the fullness of life He created us to enjoy.

A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls. (Proverbs 25:28 NLT)

Boundaries help us live respectfully and safely in our relationships. When we define, and uphold personal boundaries, they contribute to our peace of mind. They eliminate resentful feelings which form when we feel compelled to do things that we do not want to do, and which do not contribute to our well-being. How do we follow God's ways in the freedom which boundaries provide?

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 NIV)

Two actions that will contribute to a healthy lifestyle are: 1) setting personal limits; and, 2) setting limits on those we are in contact with. Both are equally important for a healthy and happy life.

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. A righteous man who walks in his integrity—how blessed are his sons after him.” (Psalm 112:4-5 NIV & Proverbs 20:7 NASB)

People of integrity gain the respect of others. Men and women of integrity can be depended upon. People look to them with trust and respect. Neighbours speak highly of them and they are helpful in their community or place of work. Few things are more valued than a good reputation.

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (Proverbs 22:1 NIV)

Integrity is built over time as we diligently apply God’s teachings to the choices we make. Regardless of any unfair words or the behaviour of others, we remain faithful to God’s principles, and leave all the consequences of others’ actions with Him. The result of living with an undivided heart and being a vibrant witness for Jesus to the world around us, is worth the effort.

May integrity and honesty protect me, for I put my hope in you. (Psalm 25:21 NLT)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What situations can cause me to lack sound judgment?
2. What are my personal challenges in living for convenience or being a person of integrity at all times?
3. People of integrity have a clear conscience – is there any clearing I need to do?
4. How does loving God with all my heart, soul and mind and loving my neighbour as myself help me to acquire the quality of integrity?

Heavenly Father, You are an awesome God who loves me unconditionally. Forgive me for the times I have reacted negatively to circumstances and the behaviour of others, and have personally neglected to behave in ways that I know to be right and just. Please help me to consider the impact of my actions and behaviour on those around me. My desire is to love and care for others as You have faithfully loved and cared for me. As I walk in Your ways, help me to become a person of integrity. I am forever grateful that You are a God who is faithful in all Your ways. AMEN

him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. (Philippians 3:8-9 NLT)

God invites us to a satisfying, meaningful, joyful and purposeful life. Are we willing to leave our addiction behind, come close to God, and accept His invitation to live in His wonderful grace?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If I use my behaviour as the measure, am I leaning towards addiction or grace?
2. In what ways have I lived in anger and blame towards God for bad things that happened to me or when God didn’t do what I asked Him to do?
3. Am I focusing on growth with God rather than on addictive behaviours?
4. In what ways do I need to move away from addictive thinking and invite God to give me the grace I need to move forward with Him?

Heavenly Father, I am amazed at Your love and grace poured out on the whole earth and even more, that it was available to me even when I was living in rebellion against You. Thank you for opening my eyes and helping me see that You made me for the joy of having a loving relationship with me. Forgive me for the times I have neither wanted nor recognized Your love and grace in my life. Here and now, I choose You. I choose grace. Help me to live in Your grace each day so I may get to know how amazing You truly are, and grow strong in Your care as I get well and move forward. Thank you for the hope I have today because of your lavish love for me. AMEN

INTEGRITY

Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. (Proverbs 13:6 NIV)

Integrity is one of the most valued character qualities a person can have. A person of integrity has strong moral and ethical principles. They are known to be honest regardless of the circumstances they are in, the company they are keeping, or when alone with no one watching. What you see on the outside is the same person they are on the inside. People of integrity keep their word, even when it is not convenient. They are honest in all their dealings, personal and business. They practice morality in their sexual life, both in mind and with body. They are not perfect. They make mistakes and occasionally sin, but they

do not cover up offences. They confess them, and deal with any consequences.

Integrity is not a character quality most of us could claim when we lived in addiction. It's not something that automatically appears when we come into recovery either. However, integrity can and will be developed in a person who lives according to the Word of God, and who stands with confidence before God.

I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. Because of my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever. (Psalm 41:11-12 NIV)

The story of Daniel in the Bible gives us an example of a man of integrity. Daniel was a man who experienced all sorts of injustice and unfair treatment that could have resulted in bitter resentment and a desire for revenge. In his teens, through no fault of his own, Daniel was made a Jewish captive. In spite of many challenges he became a high government official in Babylon but the injustices continued. His enemies were jealous of him and tried hard to find a way to get him charged and punished for misconduct in his handling of government affairs. Try as they might, his enemies could find no grounds for charges against Daniel. Daniel did not live in reaction to unfair circumstances. Daniel lived with integrity before God.

“...They couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. So they concluded, “Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.” (Daniel 6:4-5 NLT)

The only way these schemers could undermine Daniel's influence with the king was to prey upon Daniel's devotion to God. They convinced King Darius to issue a law which could not be revoked. This law banned prayer for 30 days to anyone, divine or human, except to the king himself. The penalty for not complying with this law was that the person would be cast into the den of lions.

Because of his faithfulness to the living God, Daniel would not obey this unjust law. Daniel went home and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom. When this was brought to the king's attention, even though he regretted having to do it, King Darius ordered Daniel to be thrown into the

lions' den. The next morning when the king discovered that God had delivered Daniel from the lions, he worshiped God as the living God--and ordered all in his kingdom to do the same!

Daniel's integrity, in spite of unjust accusations and unfair actions, brought him the blessing of the king's high regard, lifted him to a position of honor and influence, and brought honour to the living God in a foreign culture.

Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: “Peace and prosperity to you! I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” (Daniel 6:25-27 NLT)

What does integrity look like in our lives, in our time, and in our city? People of integrity set a good example for the children and youth of our society. We may think our children don't know when we cheat, take advantage of a customer or employer, lie to the boss or abuse paid benefits. They see more than we realize. Our misdeeds, whenever they are exposed, will cause our children to lose respect for us, or worse, to pattern their own actions and lives after ours. People of integrity live honestly in all situations, noticed or unnoticed.

People of integrity have the peace of a clear conscience. When we live according to the Word of God we experience a deep inner peace knowing that we have not violated our conscience or hurt someone else. We can be confident that when someone examines us, we will be proven innocent of wrongdoing. In contrast, when our lives lack moral wholeness, we live in constant fear of being “found out” as frauds. If our thoughts and desires were exposed today, would we be seen as persons of integrity?

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out. (Proverbs 10:9 NIV)

A person of integrity experiences the favor of God and His blessings. These flow down, even to the person's children.