

Chapter Seven:

If I Can't Do It - Who Can?

This second step in our journey is about the beginning of faith. If we stopped at the first step, the step of despair and hopelessness, we would be ready to give up and say, "What's the use, there is no hope. But we don't stop there. As we begin to reach out for answers to our dilemma we come to realize that God is our only answer.

The second step in 12 Step programs says, "Came to realize that a power greater than myself could restore my sanity." We have actually come far enough to go beyond the generic higher power and identify Jesus Christ as our source of restoration.

The phrase, "restore my sanity" caught my attention. Remember the definition of insanity? Doing the same things over and over and expecting different results. What is being said here is that our ego won't let us admit defeat so it drives us to keep trying on our own.

We finally have to admit that this doesn't work. Then Jesus steps up and restores our sanity. That is, he breaks that cycle of trying the same things over and over. He comes in as the answer. The question for many of us turns from "Who can rescue me" to "How do I find God?"

Main Idea: Only God can give us the ability to overcome

Practice This: Keep remembering that he is our strength

1, Where would we be if we stopped here and didn't go any further?

2. What does this step mean by "restore my sanity?"

3. What part does ego play in this process?

Beginning to listen and hear

This second step is about discovering God. In step one of our journey of faith we discovered ourselves. We found out where we were and we wanted to change. Now we are reaching out to God. How do we find God?

One writer of the New Testament wrote, “Anyone who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). How do we come to believe in him?

In Romans 10:17 we are told that, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Remember when we talked about the way our belief system is developed, and that our behaviors are a reflection of our belief system? One way we come to believe things is that we hear them being spoken.

Paul asks the question, “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” His answer was that God calls someone to tell the message and when the message is heard people believe and are changed.

In the earlier chapters of his writing to the Roman church Paul talks much about the issues that separate us from God and the remedy to that separation.

4. How does Jesus restore our sanity?

5. What does Hebrew 11:6 say one must do to come to God?

6. What is the subject Paul talks about in the early chapters of Romans?

7. What is he addressing in chapters four and five?

In Romans chapters four and five he talks about how we are justified before God by our faith in Jesus Christ. Then in chapter six he talks about how we are to be dead to sin and slaves to righteousness. Paul goes on in chapter seven to talk about the challenge of making a practical application of chapter six.

In chapter seven Paul deals with how the Law itself becomes a stumbling block because it constantly reminds us of what we are and it reminds us of what we cannot become. The shortcoming of the law is that it only deals with do's, don'ts, and the penalty if you do or don't – but it gives no remedy for the condition of being a law-breaker.

Then, at the end of chapter seven and in chapter eight Paul talks about the hope we have in Christ. He writes of how we can live with our lives submitted to and controlled by the Spirit of God. He talks about how living in our natural self separates us from God and creates a war between us and him, and the only remedy is to submit to him and become converted.

11. Does the Law require us to perform or God to perform?

12. How does the work of the Spirit in us fulfill the Law?

8. Paul talks about being dead to sin in chapter six. What does he mean?

9. Why does he call the Law a stumbling block in chapter seven?

10. The Law deals with do's and don'ts; what remedy does it give for us?

13. Step two in the God walk is about the birth of faith. Romans 10:14-15 explains this. What does he write about:

What must happen before one believes? _____

How does someone become a preacher of the good news?

What happens when someone hears the good news preached?

In Chapter 10 Paul begins to invite us to act upon what we have learned about Christ. Beginning in verse 9 he gives the conclusion to verse 17, so lets look at the logical sequence in the process. In verse 9 he concludes, “If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved [set free from habits and behavioral bondage; healed of the effects of the past, etc]”. But this is the conclusion.

First, someone is sent with a message (v15). What is the message? The message is simply that Jesus Christ is the answer to our dilemma. Finally, after all the frustration of trying to work the unworkable on our own we are told of a solution.

The message has been studied for 2000 years. Books have been written, and a whole branch of theology has been developed. In seminary they call it *soteriology*, the study of salvation. But there is no more profound explanation than what was given in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world [*you and I*] that he gave his only begotten son that whoever [*you and I*] believes in him will not perish [or continue with unacceptable behaviors] but have everlasting life [free of sin’s bondage].

The person with the message had to talk about their message (v14). It is important to remember this vital component in our own restoration. Someone must communicate to us that there is an answer. Paul writes, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” We must hear the message to believe that God is there.

When we hear the message, and believe the message, we are ready to be restored. Verse 17 declares that faith comes from hearing the message. It’s as simple as that.

Hearing the message is not just about the words being spoken within reach of our hearing. It is about hearing, or receiving, the message that is carried in the words. Many have believed the facts of the message but have never realized the power of the message because they did not make a personal application.

Here we are at decision time. We understand that God is there, just waiting to be called upon. We have come to believe that he does care. Now, what are we going to do about it?

The third step we take in the journey of faith is making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God. If you have gone through steps one and two, step three is logical. We have admitted we have a problem we cannot resolve. We have concluded that the solution is in the message of Jesus Christ. Now we must take the step many have called, “the leap of faith.”

This is the step that takes us from the precipice of despair over the human condition and lifts us into the realm of divine intervention. It is at this point that our impossibilities become God’s opportunities.

14. What happens when one hears the word of Christ preached? (v17)

15. Step Two is not about taking action so what is it about?

16. When one is at the brink of despair, how important is it to come to a belief in God?

17. What does Romans 10:9 have to do with step three?

18. If Jesus is Lord of our life is our confidence in ourselves or Him? Explain.

19. What is the ongoing process of working out your salvation referred to in Philippians 2:12-13?

Now it is time for Romans 10:9. It is time to believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths that Jesus is *Lord* of our life.

It is important that we realize what that means to us. To confess that Jesus is Lord of our life is to proclaim that our own self-will no longer dominates our life. It says that we will no longer trust ourselves to keep us free from the bondages of our past. It says we have but one source of continued freedom; if we at any time turn back to trusting ourselves we will be drawn back to the same place that trusting ourselves put us in the first place.

In Philippians 2:12-13, The Apostle Paul tells of the ongoing process of restoration. He first tells us to “continue to work out your salvation [restoration] with fear and trembling.” Restoration is a continuing work and we must proceed with that work knowing that any time we begin to trust in our own abilities we will fail. That is where the fear and trembling comes in.

Every time I begin to feel tempted it scares me. The reason it scares me is that I have come to understand that I cannot be tempted by what I don't desire. I have also learned that as long as my will is submitted to the Lordship of Christ my desire is for him and his ways. Therefore, the temptation itself is a warning that I am beginning to lean on my own abilities and my old desires are starting to creep up on me. That scares me. Many have been the times that I have humbly, trembling, come before God and restored that trust relationship with him in the areas of my sinful desires and temptations.

Paul goes on to declare in v13, that it is "God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." We must never forget that, and as long as we are committed to that truth we will be successful in our restoration.

It is at this point that the classic "conversion" experience takes place. It is the point that we come to repentance and accept God's outstretched hand. I want to take a little time to talk about these two words; conversion and repentance.

The conversion experience is simply that we have been converted from trusting ourselves to trusting God for our lives. The conversion results from a decision of the will, but the conversion itself comes from God. We do not have the ability within ourselves to do this. Our self-will, or ego, has been in charge all of our lives and ego must relinquish control for God to become Lord in our life. We can make the decision, but only God can make the change.

24. Do we have the ability to change on our own?

25. Who does the changing?

20. Why should temptation cause us concern?

21. We have come to believe there is a God who cares, What is the next step for us?

22. What is conversion?

23. Do we have the ability to make the decision to change?

26. What is repentance?

27. What is our natural tendency regarding who is in control of our life?

28. What is the result of following our natural tendency?

29. What happens when we take this step too lightly or try to hurry past it?

Repentance is a vital part of the conversion experience. Sometimes we equate repentance with confession and asking forgiveness. These are certainly a part of the process of repentance, but it is much more than that. Repentance literally means to make an about face – That is we make a 180 degree turn. We were going one direction, now we are going another direction.

Our natural state is to follow the course of ego as it attempts to gratify our flesh by answering its call for fulfillment. This is the way that leads away from God. If we are to overcome the effects of the sinful nature within us we must turn from following ego and begin to follow Christ. That cannot happen in our own power because it involves removing ego from its' position of power and submitting control to God. Thus, the need for conversion.

In order to repent, that is, turn from following ego to following God (step 3), we must have a conversion. Conversion will take place as we surrender our will and our lives into the care of God.

Too many times people come to this step in the walk of faith and move through it too quickly, not realizing the depth of change that comes from taking this step.

If we take step three lightly and make a decision based upon anything less than a faith in God's ability to change our lives we will not be changed. We cannot recite a magic formula then go on our way and be converted.

There must be a conscious decision of the will to surrender to the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Then the change comes.

Matthew tells the story of a woman who came to Jesus with a problem that she could not remedy. Her daughter was taken with a sickness that could not be healed by medicine. This story may not be about personal change but it illustrates the place to which we must come to be fully converted.

This story is found in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 15. This Canaanite woman had tried everything for her daughter, but nothing had helped. Realizing that there was nothing else she could do she was at the point of despair. Then she heard about Jesus, a man who was healing many people of disease. She heard and watched until she believed, then she acted.

In humility she brought her need to Jesus. She had made a decision to turn this entire situation over to him. When she approached him his response was to ignore her. In coming to him in a public place, and before all placing her need before him, she made herself vulnerable. When the disciples saw that Jesus ignored her they said, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

Many would call her foolish for making herself so vulnerable. What she had feared, and what others believed would happen, was unfolding before her. Her only hope of saving any self-respect was slipping away, yet she persevered.

30. How does the story of the woman in Matthew 15:21-28 demonstrate Step Three?

a. _____

b. _____

When Jesus did speak, he said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” There it was, out in the open. She was not the kind he was sent to help. Now, at this point her hope was hanging by a thread. Suddenly, she threw herself at his feet and worshipped him, asking for mercy. She was on her face before him, totally humiliated before her neighbors, completely at his mercy, as she cries, “Lord, help me.” And he rebukes her one more time.

Again Jesus speaks, saying, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” First he ignored her, then he rejected her, now he insults her. Yet, she has totally abandoned herself to her cause and in the face of everything that is reasonable she replies, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Jesus could see there was nothing that would deter her. She had tried everything and nothing had worked. If this didn’t work she was finished. Her only hope was Jesus and she held to that hope.

Then Jesus, moved by her commitment to effect this change said, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matthew 15:22-28).

Do you see the point? She had tried everything and nothing had worked. Now, she was turning it all over to God. There was no turning back. Something miraculous happens when we finally turn it all over to him. A conversion takes place.

c. _____

d. _____

31. What caused Jesus to say,
“Woman, you have great faith?”

Restoration from an undesirable behavior cannot happen until we are at the point where we are not only willing to turn the care of our lives over to God but we must be at the point of making a decision to do so. As long as we hold out any hope that we can do it on our own we will not be ready to allow God to do what must be done in order to bring us freedom.

If your journey has gotten you to step one and you realized that you could not effectively change your behaviors on your own, and you came to realize that only God could restore you, then you are only two thirds of the way through conversion. Now you must make the decision to stop trusting yourself and start trusting God.

Many people can trust God for salvation but they have difficulty trusting him in the area of freedom from undesirable behaviors. We must remember that the reason a behavior has become patterned into our life is that we have not been able to change it ourselves; but God can.

32. What must happen before we are at the point of willingness to do what?

33. What is the decision we must make in this third step?

If I can't do it, who can?
