

God Walk - A
Journey of Faith

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Introduction

The Birth of God Walk - A Journey of Faith

Jesus said, "Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). The lessons in this book are about coming to the point where we are ready to die if necessary to change the behaviors that have kept us in bondage. I learned this lesson by living it.

It was Saturday night, one evening in February of 1982. I had just that day been involved with my secret sin and I was depressed. For quite a while now I had wondered how long I would be able to go on like this. I was a pastor, a spiritual leader, yet I was enslaved to a sin that was so secret that the only ones who knew were God and myself.

I used to be bothered by the secrecy of my sin. Always having to be careful to cover my tracks and always have an answer as to where I had been. Carefully crafting lies in my heart just in case someone asked me difficult questions. There seemed to be no end to the deceitfulness that grew out of trying to keep this sin secret.

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No longer was the secrecy and fear of being revealed the thing that bothered me. Now I was depressed because I had finally come to realize that I was never going to overcome this thing. It had me and there was no way that I was ever going to be free.

I can hear you thinking now. You're asking, "Why didn't you pray and fast?" I did and that was one of the reasons that I was so depressed. For years I had prayed and fasted about this thing and I was still caught in it's prison.

While I was sitting there at the very lowest time of my life, my wife walked in. She took one look at my face and said, "You look like someone died." At that moment I realized that I wanted to change more than anything else in the world and I was going to try something I had never tried before; I was going to tell another person.

I answered her, "Someone has died. Sit down I have something to tell you." Then I proceeded to spill out all of the sins that I had been committing in secret. Our lives were forever changed from that moment forward.

When I took that step forward and confessed to another person, something was unleashed inside me that I had never felt before. Suddenly, there was nothing to hide. I was now ready to work on being restored.

Introduction

The lessons in this book grew out of the work of restoration and reconciliation that I have gone through. I discovered these principles as God was leading me on a journey that would change me forever. I learned to apply the principles of change that are found in the 12 Steps and in the scripture. Once I became committed to what I now realize is a life-time process of restoration and reconciliation there was no turning back.

Over the past 10 years we have built a ministry that has literally helped hundreds of people discover these principles of change and begin the process of restoration in their lives.

My prayer is that you too will become committed to this lifetime process of restoration and reconciliation.

You may have come to the conclusion that you are hopelessly trapped in behaviors that you don't want, but take heart; many of us have been there and we have discovered that there is hope – not in our ability to overcome on our own, but in the power of God released to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

This book will guide you through the process of restoration. It is not a 30 day guide to success; it is a set of instructions that will guide you in the life-time process of being reconciled to God, renewed in your inner person, and restored to the person God intended you to be.

Part One:

Realizing Where You Are

There are three parts to this book. The first part is “Realizing Where You Are” and is about discovering your condition. The second part is “Cleaning Out The Well” and is about what you do when you discover your condition. The third part is “Keeping The Well Clean” and is about how to maintain the freedom you have found in your walk of faith.

Most of us have concluded that life is one long journey. As with any journey there must be a starting point and a destination. Sometimes we will use a map to help reach our destination and sometimes we will just rely upon landmarks along the way to guide us. There have been times for most of us when we thought we knew where we were in relation to where we were going and discovered down the road that we had been going the wrong direction. That also happens in the journey of life.

It seems that all of us are in the process of trying to find ourselves and figure out how we fit into the greater scheme of things as we make this journey. It has occurred to me that the only

way people can find themselves is if they realize where there are. You can't get to where you want to be unless you first find out where you are so that you can plot a course to get there.

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Most of us have a pretty good idea of where we want to go and a very poor idea of where we are. As a result we find ourselves frustrated because we never seem to be able to find the magic formula that picks us up from our immediate miserable circumstances and sets us down in the luxury of where we want to be.

This lesson is about realizing where you are and what you have to do about that to get to where you want to be.

As we begin our God Walk, one of the first things we need to realize is that God's plan for us is restoration.

Jesus came to "Preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18-19). That was his purpose for being on earth. God created man to be in harmonious relationship with himself and the rest of creation, but man broke that relationship. The result of that broken relationship is poverty, disease and oppression. Jesus came to restore mankind to

Part One: Realize Where You Are

harmonious relationship and to remedy the effects of having a broken relationship with God.

If we are still poor, blind, in a behavioral prison or oppressed we have not yet realized God's fullness for us. Accepting Christ in faith and repentance is the beginning of restoration. It appears that many people have begun the process of being reconciled to God and being restored in relationship to him but they have not moved into the renewal that was made available in Jesus Christ.

One of the first things we need to realize is that God's plan for us is Restoration.

God's plan for each one of us is that we would be prosperous, successful and that our lives would be abundantly full. If we live with less than that we need to find out why.

One verse that reveals God's plan for us is Joshua 1:8, "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." Here God is telling Joshua, and by extension, anyone who will consistently apply the principles he gives, that he will give success and prosperity. That is his desire.

God wants you and I to be successful in all that we do and he gives us a pattern to follow to reach that success. The core of what he was saying is to keep the law in our daily lives;

continue to study it and meditate upon it because it holds the secret to success and prosperity.

God has revealed that his plan for each one of us is success, prosperity and health. If you are in poverty you are either on assignment (if that's the case, quit complaining about your poverty) or living far below what God has planned for you. Success is no accident. It comes as the result of consistently applying principles that have been proven to work.

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In Joshua 1:8 God instructed Joshua as to the value of his revealed will. God told him to continue speaking his word and to meditate upon those life principles both day and night. There are several principles revealed in this instruction.

First, there is value to repetition. The likelihood of remembering something increases with repetition. The more times we repeat something the more likely we are to remember it. Repetition embeds information into our memory.

The second principle introduced in this instruction is that meditation engrafts information to our psyche. We will look at this a little deeper further in these lessons but for now just remember that consistently meditating upon a godly principle or idea will draw us into living out that

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principle or idea as it is engrafted into our psyche.

The principle of engrafting is similar to the process that is practiced in agriculture. A tree that bears one type of apple can be adapted to produce another type of apple by cutting off a branch and attaching a branch from a different variety to the place where the other branch was cut off. This is called a graft and when the process has been completed the tree then produces a different kind of apple.

When we meditate upon God's revealed will his Spirit in us will draw us toward behavior that is consistent with his will. This is both a natural law and a spiritual law.

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Just a note: Almighty God, who instituted these eternal principles, is not going to shake the universe and make exception for us just because we "speak the truth" if we are not "living the truth." You and Jesus don't have your own thing going. If your relationship is not according to God's revealed plan you are deluded and are under the influence of the one whose purpose is to steal, kill and destroy. Many today are under the illusion that God understands their circumstances, therefore he will excuse their behavior. That is a mistake and will end in disaster.

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Jesus was addressing this very issue when he said, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life... to the full" John 10:7-10.

First Jesus said that he was the "gate" to the place of safety. Then he reminded us that there have been many imitators that make empty promises to get us into the safe place, but they are all thieves and liars. They are just after what you have to give them.

Every behavior in your life that separates you from the blessing that God has intended for you was born in the idea that you could provide for yourself better than God could. God is offering peace, blessing and prosperity, and these blessings cannot be obtained by taking another path.

Do not be deceived, the devil's plan for you is "to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10a). He will try every trick he can to convince you that going his way will give you what you really want. Many young people, disillusioned with the hypocrisy of the adult role models around them, have succumbed to the offer of sexual fulfillment, ecstatic highs and life as a never-ending party – only to find out in the end that the price

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for this party was their very life, and too often their very soul.

That is just the opposite of God's plan for your life. Jesus said that he had come "That they [you and I] may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). God planned from the beginning to give you a full and abundant life. But, just as in all of his creation, the abundant life is based upon eternal principles. As we walk with God he opens the doors of heaven for us; as we walk away from him he withdraws his blessing and abundance from us.

Jesus is the gate. It is through him that we gain entrance to safety and find his blessings released into our lives.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

- John 10:10

The problem that Jesus has as the shepherd is that we are sheep that do not come easily into the fold. We have our own ideas and our own way. Inevitably our way leads to disaster.

Do you remember the story that Jesus told about the prodigal son? This young man thought he could do better by taking his inheritance early and going out to the world to enjoy life. He spent all of his money on partying. The day came when he was broke and couldn't even buy a meal. The only work he could find was feeding the hogs on a hog farm.

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This was his bottom. He was raised in a culture that considered hogs unclean and they were not even allowed to touch them. Now here he was, in the hog pen sharing slop with the pigs.

The abundant life is based upon eternal principles. As we walk with God he opens the doors of heaven for us; as we walk away from him he withdraws his blessing and abundance from us.

Then Jesus said, “*when he came to himself...*” When he finally realized what his lifestyle had caused he remembered his father treated his servants better than he was treated.

The prodigal ran home and found his father waiting for him. It should be noted that the father did not visit the hog pen to bring food to his son. He didn't track the boy down and put money in his pocket. No, he waited for his son to “*come to himself*” and come home. If the father had gone running after the wayward son making compromises it would have been unfair to the son who did not leave. To continue feeding a lifestyle that was contrary to all that the family stood for would have been wrong.

The point is this: The father did not compromise his principles because of his love for his wayward son. He continued to love and hope until his son came home where he could once again enjoy the abundance that was in his father's house.

God faces a similar problem today as the father in the story of the prodigal. He loves his

wayward children and he desires to bless them, but he cannot break his own laws in doing so. He cannot step across the line that he drew himself.

David discovered a principle that demonstrates this truth. He wrote in Psalm 66:18, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” As long as he harbored and cherished his sin he was cut off from the blessing of God.

In another passage David talks about what it was like having sin in his life and not confessing to God while all the time he was presenting himself as a man of God. He writes, “When I kept silent, my bones

When we are not honest with ourselves and God about what is going on inside us he will not listen to us.

wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer”(Psalm 32:3-4). When we are not honest with ourselves and God about what is going on inside us he will not listen to us.

David learned the hard way that God not only sees our behavior but he also knows the intent of our heart. Even when our behavior is all right, if our heart is wrong, God still withholds his blessing from us. Again David writes in Psalm 44:21, “Would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of our hearts?” Everyone else is watching the show we put on to hide the stuff we have inside us while the only

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one who can really make a difference already knows and is waiting for us to come clean with him.

Sin is common to all of us. Apostle Paul wrote, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). None of us have escaped sins grasp. Whether we have sinned openly for all to see, or secretly behind closed doors; God has seen and knows exactly what we have done. Our sins may be hidden from man, but God reads our heart and knows what things lay hidden there. God cannot come to our rescue as long as there is unrepented sin in our hearts.

Learning To Seek God

Solomon was the son of David who followed him as king. Solomon had seen the blessing upon David's kingdom, and he had seen God withhold his blessing when David did wrong. He was familiar with the law that prescribed an ever-tightening noose of judgment upon the people if they turned away from God and persisted in their rebellion. Knowing this, when Solomon was dedicating the temple he had built he prayed, "When they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin – and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy... and if they have a change of heart... and repent and plead with you... and say, 'we have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul... then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you."

Later, when Solomon had finished the dedication of the temple and gone home, the Lord spoke to him in the night. God said, "When I

shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people; If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

God never abandons his own law simply because someone thinks he should.

It is interesting that God did not send out a blanket policy saying, “All right, I’ll just declare an amnesty and forgive everybody. Starting today all of the curses are lifted and there is no obligation on your part.” Here he sure knocks the idea in the head that says, “God understands me and I know he’ll come through.” God never abandons his own law simply because someone thinks he should. And, it should be said also that his law always makes provision for repentance. That is what this passage is about.

Whether our sins have come from a weakness and a temptation caught us unaware, or we have just willfully chosen to sin, it is all the same. Sin separates us from God and He has made a provision by which we can deal with the sin in our life.

In this passage God sets the standard by which he will grant repentance and restore blessing. First, the beneficiaries must be His people;

people of his name. Then they must humble themselves and that must be followed with prayer. Not just a “now I lay me down to sleep prayer,” but a seeking the face of God prayer. Finally, there must be a turning from the wicked ways. Then God says he will forgive their sin and heal their land. Let’s take a closer look at the qualifications God gives for restoration.

God has not given promise that he will heal and bring prosperity to just anyone; only those who are HIS people.

“If my people who are called by my name”

Solomon was asking about the Jewish people specifically and at that time they were the only nation that could claim to be God’s people. They were people of His name. Today God has broadened that definition to all who have believed upon Jesus Christ and have taken his name. There are many promises in God’s word to people of his name; and people who are not of his name are not qualified to be recipients of the promised blessing.

Who are the ones to whom this promise is given? They are people of God, "When my people." God has not given promise that he will heal and bring prosperity to just anyone; *only those who are HIS people*. These are people who not only know his name but are recognized by his name and are called by his name.

In the Christian era we know that “God’s people” refers to anyone who calls on his name from a sincere heart. The New Testament declares, “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

“If my people... humble themselves”

*You must
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We must come in humility. How do we do that? Coming humbly to God is more than being sorry that you got caught. It is more than just trying to change the circumstances. It is coming to God knowing that you have messed up and there is absolutely nothing you can do on your own to make it right. You must surrender your ego and go to God, who alone can answer your need. This is stripping ourselves of any ego or self. It is about becoming empty of ourselves. A good example of this is the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15.

Matthew records the story of a woman who came to Jesus with a great need that was beyond her ability to answer. She had a daughter that was very sick. She was desperate for a solution. She was so desperate that she literally put herself into the position that if the Lord did not answer her request she would be totally humiliated. Here are the elements of the story:

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- First when she came to Jesus he ignored her. He acted as if she wasn't even there (v23). But she persisted.
- Then he told her he had not come to help her kind (v24). And she persisted.
- Then he insulted her, calling her a dog (v26). Still she persisted.
- Finally, on her face before him she cried, "Lord, but even the dogs get the crumbs from their masters' table" (v27).
- What was The Result of humbling herself? Jesus granted her request (v28).

"If my people... pray and seek my face"

Most of us know how to pray; we learned as toddlers. We learned to pray beside our bed before we went to sleep. We learned to pray before we ate. Some of us even learned to pray the Lord's Prayer. But the praying mentioned here goes beyond those prayers. This praying is elevated to the idea of seeking His face. What does it mean to seek God's face?

The idea of seeking the face of God speaks to the concept of surrendering ourselves to the care of God and totally depending upon him for the outcome. In that process we are humbled before him, knowing that only he has the answer, and with that understanding we seek him. Jesus gives us an example of seeking the face of God in Luke 18.

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This story tells the plight of a widow woman seeking justice from an unjust judge. Not all of the aspects of this story parallel the relationship we have with God, but the key elements do. First, there was a person offended and she was demanding an answer. Then when the answer did not come in a timely manner she continued to pester the judge. Finally, her daily coming to him convinced him that if she didn't get her answer she would continue coming until the whole community would know of his hardness to her, and he granted her request.

Jesus concludes this story by saying, "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? I tell you he will see that they get justice."

This passage demonstrates the concept of seeking the face of God. There was the element of desperation: The judge was her only recourse, if he didn't answer there would be no answer. She was persistent: She continued to come before the judge until her answer came. She had a legal right: She knew the law and she knew the law said that she would be vindicated. She was seeking the face of the judge every day until her answer came.

When we seek the face of God we go before him, humbly seeking favor. We know that there is no other way, we have exhausted our resources and we know that we cannot do it on our own. We thrust ourselves at his feet and are commit-

ted to finding his favor regardless of what we must do. And we keep coming before him until our answer comes.

“If my people... turn from their wicked ways.”

A primary test of sincerity is whether our need drives us to change our behavior. Seeking the face of God includes confession and asking forgiveness, but it also includes repentance which is turning away from our unacceptable behaviors. People are often confused on this issue. They will come to God confessing and asking forgiveness but they lack the resolve to turn from their sinful ways.

All of the people I have known who have overcome behaviors that were controlling them have had to come to the point where they realized that if they did not change they were going to be destroyed by those behaviors. They knew they had to change their lifestyle.

In common terms today we call this *behavior modification*. God is saying here that we can go through the entire process up to this point, but if we don't surrender our behaviors to him we will not receive the blessing we seek.

We must go through behavior modification; "And turn from their wicked ways." None of the above is of any value unless we are willing to complete the repentance process by turning away from our wicked ways.

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The process of growing in faith and overcoming unwanted behaviors requires us to determine where we want to be, discover where we are, and finally to plot a course to get there.

We are talking about the God Walk – A Journey of Faith. The purpose of this book is to give believers guidance on their journey of faith. It is my hope that reading this book will give you insight into a lifestyle of overcoming undesirable behaviors and building new patterns of behavior.

One of the ideas I try to instill in people is that this journey of faith is not just about a magic moment when we “get it.” It is about becoming committed to a lifetime process of reconciliation, renewal and restoration.

How We Develop Behaviors

Behavior development begins from the time we are born. When we are born we are like a newly assembled computer; our memory bank is empty. Just like a computer, all we know is the data that is put into our memory bank.

Almost immediately after birth we begin to gather information, or data, that becomes the basis of our behaviors. God has built into us systems by which we gather information. He created us with five ports of entry for data. They are what we have identified as the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. As we begin to explore this new world that we are born into we develop the ability to use our five senses to gather data.

God has also given us the capacity to evaluate the data that comes through our senses and test its value. We call this process thinking. It is important to notice that, at least in the formative years, the only material we have for thought is the data that has entered through our senses.

We use the information we have gathered as "food for thought," using it to develop thinking patterns. From those patterns of thought we

begin to develop our belief system. It is our believe system that is the basis for our behaviors. We act according to what we believe about ourselves and the world around us.

Regardless of what we say, or try to convince ourselves that we believe, our true belief system is the basis for our reality. Our belief system is actually an accumulation of the data our senses have gathered and how we have used that data to develop thought patterns.

The process is like this: The data we receive through our senses is the material we use for thought; What we think upon is what we actually come to believe; What we believe is sorted out in our thought processes as our belief system. Now there is one more step in the process: behavior. Our behaviors reflect our belief system.

This may sound a bit simplistic but it really is just that simple. Data is brought in and processed as thought, which becomes the basis for our belief system, which in turn becomes the catalyst for our behaviors.

The only way there can be lasting change in our behaviors is to change our belief system. And that cannot be done by just deciding that we now believe something else. In fact, one of the greatest hindrances to our spiritual development is trying to convince ourselves that we believe something that we have not yet internalized into our core belief system.

How We Develop Behaviors

There can be moments of great, and sometimes miraculous, strides forward in the process, but the process must be continued to effect lasting and permanent change. The principles that make up this concept will be more fully explained and better understood as we move along in this book.

The journey of faith is a building process. We are actually growing in faith and understanding as we move along in this journey. Remember, it is a lifetime process.

Finding Where We Are in Our Journey

In the beginning of this study we mentioned the idea that we must know where we are in order to get to where we are going. There are so many of us going through life, at least in a spiritual sense, with just a vague idea of where we want to be. And, to add to our frustration, we have no idea of where we are; as a consequence we no idea of how to get to where we want to be.

This section explains the stages we go through as we discover where we are in the journey of life. Many of us are, or have been, caught in the web of undesirable behaviors and haven't yet realized it. We can't gain freedom from a task master that we do not realize exists.

This chapter is directed towards those who have a problem that everyone sees but them. They are in need of a wake-up call. The next chapter will deal with the second stage which is realizing the need but not feeling the urgency of it. The following chapter deals with the third stage which is realizing the need and feeling the urgency of the need. That is when we are ready for lasting change.

THE FIRST STAGE: HAVING A NEED, BUT NOT REALIZING IT

"I don't have a problem with anger," he yells as he punches his fist through the door. Have you ever seen this person? Have you been this person? This attitude is classic among those who have not yet conceded to themselves that they have a problem. In his mind, the only problem this person has is the people around him that keep making him do these things.

Anger is not the only controlling behavior that people are not aware of having. There is also the drinker who has to "unwind" after work by tipping a few with the boys; the "recreational" drug user that uses a little to calm her nerves; the sex addict who thinks he's just being a man. The list of life controlling behaviors people deny having is long.

People who are wrestling with life controlling behaviors are often being driven by unresolved issues. Until they come to the realization that they have a problem they are going to continue to blame other people, and they will not be healed.

Another factor that complicates the process is that for every person who is dominated by unacceptable behaviors there are at least two or three enablers who agree that the problem is

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not them but circumstances, or other people, or just that the sun came up today. They will agree that the problem is not the perpetrator, but problem is with the world that doesn't understand them and that drives them to these behaviors. In their mind the perpetrator becomes the victim.

The sickness of the enabler is that he/she needs approval so badly that they perpetuate the sickness of another to answer their own need for acceptance. Enablers are co-dependent people who are afraid to test the strength of their relationship with confrontation, therefore they continue to make it possible for the person with unacceptable behavior to continue in denial.

Poverty has less to do with things than it does with an attitude of life. If you live with a sense that you are in need then you are in poverty

Whether it is the enabler or the person with the behaviors, both have issues that need to be resolved and healing that needs to take place.

When Jesus began his public ministry he read from Isaiah 61 and Luke quotes this passage in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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Jesus was actually presenting his mission statement. He had come to deal with poverty, sickness, mental and physical oppression and spiritual bondage. His authority to do this was that he was sent by God and empowered with the Spirit of God to bring an era of favor, or grace, to mankind.

Bondage is not just chains and bars - it is being held in a pattern of unacceptable behavior and not being able to get free.

Many years ago, when God began to bring this passage into focus for me, I took a look at the church and realized that the purpose for the coming of Christ has only partially been fulfilled.

Countless people have received repentance and salvation. Their sins have been forgiven and they are freed from their past sins, but they are not free from the effects of the past sins in their lives. The evidence of this is that they have not yet fully entered into the favor of God. They are still bound by their past.

There is still poverty among believers. Blindness and other maladies are still common among believers. Mental and emotional oppression are prevalent in the church. Behavioral bondage is all too often found in the church. Why is this true? The complete answer is fairly complex, but the simple answer is that an overwhelming number of believers have not taken

advantage of the grace that is made available in Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself told us that we would always have the poor among us, but he didn't say we had to be poor. Something to remember is that poverty has less to do with "things" than it does with an attitude of life. If you live with a sense that you are in need then you are in poverty.

The problem with sin is that it promises what only God can give and requires what God has given as the price for it's emptiness.

Some feel that poverty is a curse, and there is an application there, but often poverty is actually the result of unresolved issues that have led us to establish behaviors which adversely affect our lives. In other words, our lifestyle has contributed to our circumstances. Jesus came to remedy lifestyle poverty through the favor of God that is gained when we bring our lives into his order.

Remember the prodigal son? When did his circumstances change? He changed when he came to himself! When he realized that it was his own lifestyle that landed him in the pig pen, and that things were better in his father's house, he was then ready for change.

All too often we are enslaved to behaviors that adversely affect ourselves and others because we have not yet "come to ourselves."

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Bondage is not just chains and bars; it is being held in a pattern of unacceptable behavior and not being able to get free. Jesus said, "I have come... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners." Freedom from addictive and unacceptable behaviors is offered to us by Jesus Christ.

Some say, "Well, I understand all that, but we all sin a little every day and this is just my sin." The person who lives with that attitude not only limits the power of grace in his life but he is in bondage to sin. Proverbs 5:22 tells us that "The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast." If we are still sinning we are in bondage.

The apostles Peter and John came across an interesting situation in Samaria. There they met a sorcerer by the name of Simon. Simon saw the apostles laying on hands and the people receiving the Holy Spirit. He saw the profit potential there and offered to pay Peter and John quite well if they could confer upon him that ability. Peter's response was interesting. He said, "I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:23).

There must have been more to this story than is revealed here, but Peter realized that the cynicism Simon had developed about spiritual things was influenced by unresolved offenses that had become bitterness. That bitterness was holding him captive. Unforgiveness and bitterness become prisons that isolate us from the

peace of God. That is a prison from which Jesus came to free us.

Just a few pages back you read how behaviors become habits in our life. As we give ourselves to a behavior, that behavior begins to take over our lives. Apostle Paul wrote, "Don't you know that when

Denial is not a river in Egypt: It is the state of not being able to see ourselves as others see us.

you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16).

The problem with sin is that it promises what only God can give and, in exchange requires what God has given as the price for its emptiness. Apostle Peter writes, "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him" (2 Peter 2:19). The one who has come to rob, kill and destroy (John 10:10) will never reveal his true intentions.

The only way for us to know the abundance that God is offering through Jesus Christ is to confess who and what we are, humbly come before him, seek his face and turn from our sins. Then we will receive his favor.

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It is time to open your eyes and see yourself as God sees you, and as others likely see you. If you are a volcano ready to erupt, you have a problem. If you drink to excess, even occasionally, you have a problem. If you misuse prescription drugs, or use illegal drugs, you have a problem. If you can't see a nicely dressed woman without wondering what she looks like undressed, you have a problem.

Some years ago I was in a sales meeting and the manager was analyzing the results, or lack of results, of the sales staff. One of the men was having a problem getting people to buy. The sales manager suggested the salesman had irritation in his voice when he was closing the sale and came across as angry. He turned red in the face, his voice raised to a high pitch and I thought he was going to attack the sales manager as he said, "I am not irritated and I do not have an anger problem." It was probably true that he didn't feel he had a problem with anger, but everyone around him had a problem with it. That is what we call denial.

Denial seems to be the wrong word for this condition. For a person to deny something he has to have an awareness of it. When a person is in denial concerning their behavior they are blind to their actual condition. It is not that they know the truth about themselves and are denying it. It is that there is a condition in their psyche that will not allow them to acknowledge the effects of their behavior. What is frustrating to others

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is that the people in denial do not see themselves as having a problem – they are literally blind to it. Often they will transfer responsibility to others shouting, “You have a problem.”

In 1996 Jane and I founded New Hope Community, a life restoration program. We worked primarily with homeless families in a programmed, residential setting. Many times we counselled a member because they had been smoking marijuana, or using another drug. It was the rule that if they used any illegal substance they would be suspended from the program. That meant they would have to leave our facility and move back out onto the street. We worked with families, so if one adult in the family was put out he usually dragged the whole family with him.

Jesus realized that a great cause of pain and suffering is denial... If you do not have awareness on the inside then your eyes also are in darkness and they cannot see what is apparent to others.

It was interesting that we would often hear this; “I don’t know what you’re upset about. I don’t have a problem with drugs. There is nothing wrong with occasionally using.” Our answer was always the same; “You say you don’t have a problem, but you risked the security of your family and you were willing to put them on the street so you could enjoy your occasional indulgence, and you don’t see that as a problem?” And usually they didn’t. They couldn’t make a

causal connection between their usage and their family being on the street. That is called denial.

As long as people love darkness the light can not penetrate their darkness.

Jesus realized that a great cause of pain and suffering is denial. He didn't use that term for the condition but he did address the issue. He said, "If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). What he was saying is that if you have darkness on the inside, or if you do not have awareness on the inside, then your eyes also are in darkness and they cannot see what is apparent to others.

What frustrates the people around the one who is in denial is that it doesn't make any difference how much light is shown on their problem, the darkness within them prevents them from seeing it. It is like John wrote, "The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it" (John 1:5). Until a person is ready to allow God's light to shine inside them they will not see with their eyes and understand with their heart and be healed.

Many years ago while working in a county jail I was visiting with a heroin addict. Steve had been addicted since he was a teenager but had been clean for the year he was in jail. I asked him what he was going to do with his life

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now that he was clean of drugs. Steve said, "I'm going to get loaded as soon as I get out." I couldn't understand that. When I asked him why, he said, "It is like being in love with a beautiful woman, you just want to be with her." His drug use was affecting his life. He had just spent a year in jail, and this wasn't his first term, but he still looked forward to his next fix.

I had witnessed to Steve and shared the gospel with him on several occasions, but I never saw a light come on inside him. As long as people love darkness the light cannot penetrate their darkness. The Apostle John summed it up very well when he wrote, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Until the pain of being who they are and doing what they do becomes greater than the pleasure of doing it, people will not change.

It is like their minds are veiled from the light. They can sit in a meeting, and even say amen, but in their mind the speaker is talking about others. Apostle Paul was talking about this very idea when he wrote, "Their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:24). After all is said and done Jesus Christ is the only answer. It is only when we fully submit to his Lordship that our restoration and renewal can come.

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The problem of being in denial and continuing in sin is not a phenomenon of this time. Apostle Paul felt the need to admonish the church at Ephesus to “no longer live as the Gentiles do” (Ephesians 4:17-18). If they were living in victory over the sins he mentions he would not insist that they “no longer live” that way. Paul could see their tendency to drift back toward the way of the world, but they couldn’t. Paul realized this problem of denial when he said in this passage, “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God.” Sin and unacceptable behavior separate us from God. His gift of love and life cannot be released into our heart until we are willing to turn from our sin and change our behaviors.

The road of denial leads to losing spiritual sensitivity and bit by bit giving ourselves over to sins and every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more. “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more” (Ephesians 4:17-18). For the unbeliever the sins and lifestyle are more obvious, but for the believer all too often the problem is complicated by hiding the sin. Hidden sin is partner to denial.

Jesus was walking with his disciples to Galilee. Usually they went around Samaria because the Samaritans were a mixed people and Jewish custom prohibited any unnecessary interaction with them. On this occasion the Bible said, “he

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had to go through Samaria” (John 4). He had a divine appointment with a woman at the well of Jacob at Sychar. We don’t know her name, but we learned about her life because Jesus chose to meet her at the well.

When he met her, he did the forbidden; he asked her for water. Now, she was not a princess, or the wife of a dignitary. Far from it. She was a woman of bad reputation who had no doubt covered her lifestyle with years of self-justification. She had that veneer of one who had hidden much and endured even more in her life. Now this Jew was asking her, a Samaritan, for water.

She was not too concerned because he didn’t know her. As far as he knew she was the mayor’s wife. So she began to debate him about the law, worship and other religious matters. Finally, Jesus cuts to the chase and says, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

A light begins to come on as she realizes this is no ordinary man standing before her. Moved by his words she cries, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” She is beginning to believe, but she is still thinking in terms of the flesh. She was not living in the awareness of

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how her lifestyle had separated her from relationship with God, she was only thinking about the water she had to carry every day. But Jesus had more for her.

Suddenly, Jesus shocks her by opening her life and reading it to her like a book. “You have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband.” You can imagine the things that went through her mind as she digested the fact that he knew her. She didn’t know how he knew, but he knew. The light inside her grows brighter as she cries, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.”

The secret is out. The shame is opened. She openly confesses and recognizes that God had sent a prophet to rescue her. Her life was changed, and now free from her sin she goes to her neighbors saying, “He told me everything I ever did.” She heard, the light came on inside her, and she slipped from denial to deliverance in a moments’ time.

It is really interesting that the life that had been shame to her just a short time ago was now her badge of redemption. She was overwhelmed to think that he knew her, with all that she had done, and he still offered his grace.

God has that same gift available for all of us as we allow his light to shine into the dark places of our heart.

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The only thing that would hold him back today would be our unwillingness to acknowledge our need and turn to him.

Realizing the Need, But There is No Urgency

Stage Two: Realizing the Need – But Not Feeling the Urgency of it

"OK, I have a problem, but it is my problem and not anybody else's business. I can handle it."

Part of denial is not seeing how our behaviors affect other people. Often as people begin to slowly open the door to reality and are becoming aware that they have a problem, their reaction to that awareness is to isolate the problem area from the rest of their life. It becomes their problem and their problem alone. No one else has any business getting involved. Their problem doesn't involve anyone else, therefore it doesn't affect anyone else, so everyone else just needs to get out of their business.

The family, friends and associates of the person who has taken this first step out of denial may be suffering from the effects of his unacceptable behaviors, but he is not really aware of it. He has not yet acknowledged that the tension that enters a room with him is connected to his behavior. He still feels that the way people react

to him is their problem and he is not concerned with it.

Another way that people deal with their behavior problem in these first steps of awareness is to transfer blame. When God was confronting Adam in the Garden of Eden he asked, “Have

Another way that people deal with their behavior problem is to transfer blame

you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” Adam answered, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Genesis 3).

Adam conceded that he had done wrong, but it wasn't his fault. First, there was God who gave him the woman (how many times have men who have a problem with sexual lust said, “God made me this way?”). Then there was the woman herself. You see, it is easier to acknowledge the behavior than it is to take personal responsibility for the behavior.

A third way that people deal with their unacceptable behavior is to rationalize their problem. The attitude, “I've got a small problem, but everyone has problems” is a way of rationalizing your behavior. Another common attitude is, “Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.” While the statement may be true the attitude of self justification for continued unacceptable behavior is not acceptable.

Realizing the Need, But There is No Urgency

As long as we feel like “that is just the way I am,” or, “It’s not as bad as the things other people are doing,” we will not be restored.

Support groups have redefined insanity. They say insanity is doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. That is a way of life for the person in denial. To continue the same behavior while transferring blame to someone else and not taking personal responsibility is insanity. It doesn’t work, and if you are doing that you will not overcome the behaviors that have become established patterns in your life.

God was speaking through Jeremiah when he said, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water"(Jeremiah 2:13). Here Jeremiah is talking about people who still think they can do it on their own. First there is the sin of thinking we don’t need God. Like the popular singer of years ago we believe we can do it our way. The reality is that our way is broken, it doesn’t work and it is insanity to keep trying it our way over and over again expecting that by some miracle it will work this time. To use a colloquial term, “It ain’t gonna happen.”

My mother owned a little land in Missouri. It was only two acres, but she wanted to have a cow and a couple of calves. She knew she would need water for them so she hired a man to bring

in his tractor and dig out a pond. When it rained the pond would fill up and for a few days her livestock would have water. The problem was that the pond couldn't hold water. They tried everything. They seeded the pond with algae that was supposed to make it hold water. It didn't work. They tried seeding it with grass, hoping the root system of the grass would make it hold water. Finally they gave up. They realized there was nothing they could do to make that pond hold water.

A person is nearing readiness for restoration when he can say, "I have a problem that is affecting my life and the lives of those around me, and I need help."

I have known many people who couldn't give up hope that someday they would discover the magic formula and fix their brokenness without turning to God. It just won't happen. There comes a time when all rational thinking says, "Give it to God." The result of doing it our way is broken cisterns and being cut off from God's blessing. The result of doing it God's way is healing and restoration.

We used to sing a chorus long ago that said, "When you have tried everything and everything has failed, try Jesus." That is a hope. When everything else fails you can turn to Jesus with sincerity and he will come through for you.

But my question is, "Why wait?" There are still hundreds of solutions to try that have been

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proven ineffective for others, so why try them?
Beat the rush – try Jesus now!

Some people move out of denial into restoration in one giant step, but many more take several steps in coming to full awareness of the urgency of their behavior. A person is nearing readiness for restoration when he can say, “I have a problem that is affecting my life and the lives of those around me, and I need help.” When a person can say that with conviction he is ready to move into the next stage in the restoration process.

Feeling the Urgency of the Problem

Stage Three: Feeling the Urgency of the Problem

"I know I have a problem, but I feel trapped. I feel helpless; I can't do this on my own."

The first big step a person takes on the journey of faith and restoration is realizing he is helpless to change on his own and must turn to a power outside himself.

David was King of Israel, God's people. He was called "a man after God's own heart." But he was also guilty of terrible sins. One of the great stories of failure and restoration in the Bible is the story of David and Bathsheba.

When David should have been in battle with his warriors he was at home. From the roof of his palace he saw a beautiful woman bathing nearby on the roof of her own home. He was moved with lust for her and sent his servants to bring her to himself. They began an affair that would lead to murder, deception and the death of a child.

Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word to David. Immediately David called Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, home from the front lines. His plan was to give him a little R&R and send him home to his wife so that David's sin would be covered. But Uriah, ignorant of the whole situation, would not go home. He slept the night on the steps to David's palace. Uriah, being of the highest integrity, would not go home to his wife while his men were risking their lives on the battlefield.

David felt that he had but one option left. He sent Uriah back to battle with a sealed message to Joab, his general. The message instructed Joab to put Uriah in a position where he would be sure to be killed. In just a few days David got word that Uriah was dead and he married Bathsheba, feeling that he had given legitimacy to the child she was carrying.

David thought he done a thing so secret that only he knew it. He thought everything was taken care of and that it was going to be O.K. Then one day the prophet Nathan came to visit and told him a story.

Nathan talked about a poor man who had but one sheep. It was a precious sheep to him because it was all he had. The poor man had a neighbor who was much better off. The neighbor had many sheep. One day a visitor came to the neighbor. Needing to feed his friend he went to the poor man's house and stole his sheep. He

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could have used one of his own but he chose to take the only sheep that the poor man had. After the prophet told the story he asked David what should be done to such a man.

David was enraged. How could anyone be so cruel and thoughtless. David cried out, "The man who did this deserves to die" (2 Samuel 12:5).

Then Nathan, the prophet said, "You are the man!" Reality hit David like a ton of bricks. Suddenly, he stepped out of denial into the reality of the seriousness of his behavior. He had offended God. He had offended Israel. In his blind lust he had offended the sensibilities of any reasonable person. The awareness of all of this brought David to his knees.

*Reality hit
David like a ton
of bricks.
Suddenly, he
stepped out of
denial into the
reality of the
seriousness of his
behavior*

In brokenness David cried, "I have sinned against the Lord." David begins to feel the urgency of his situation. In Psalm 51 he writes of this time in his life. Read how he was affected by the realization of the effects of his behavior, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." All at once David felt that God had rented every billboard in Jerusalem and had written upon them his sins. He was humiliated, humbled and broken.

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In Psalm 51 we see the depth of David's realization of his sinfulness and what it had cost him. First, the one who had known God from his youth realized he was defiled and needed cleansing (v7). He had lost his joy (v8). The one who was said to have a heart after God was now guilty of a defiled heart (v19). He felt a sense of God's Spirit being lifted from him and he had lost the closeness of God's presence. In repentance he cries, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me" (v12).

David had stepped out of the darkness of denial into the light of restoration.

David had become victim of the human condition. No other writer in the Bible addresses this condition better than Apostle Paul in the book of Romans. In this writing Paul addresses the issues of ego dominance, behavioral habits, bondage of addiction and finally, the cause of the whole problem; the attempt of man to establish himself as the convening authority.

In Romans seven, versus 18-24 Paul explains the dilemma of the human condition. He writes, "I have the desire to do good." Isn't that true of us all? I have never met a person (at least an emotionally and mentally healthy person) who didn't believe that they were basically a good person just trying to do good and cope with the difficulties of life. Having the desire to good is not the challenge. He follows that statement with

the conclusion, "...but I cannot carry it out." Therein lies the dilemma of the human condition.

We begin each day with the best intentions, but somehow, as the day wears on we just don't have it in us to hold up. Part of the frustration of this dilemma is that everything that we know we should not do appeals to the appetites of our flesh, and our

I know that 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. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord! - Romans 7:18-25

flesh is a very powerful force within us. Paul expresses this frustration as he writes, "What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing." He was telling us that in his natural person he was helpless to be the person he desired to be.

Faced with this dilemma Paul begins to try figuring out how to deal with it. He identifies the problem as being an internal conflict; mentally he has the knowledge of good, but from his emotional side that relates to his soul, he is driven to fulfill the desires of the flesh. From this internal dichotomy he develops the following concept: "If I do what I do not want to do, it

is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

Everything that we know we should not do appeals to the appetites of our flesh, and our flesh is a very powerful force within us

From this concept he comes to understand a principle: “When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” This is the challenge that man has wrestled with from the beginning. One person said, “I can resist anything but temptation.” Our call is to do good, but our challenge is that even as we begin to do good the opportunity to do evil is right there.

Then Paul is led to the next principle in this sequence of thought; “I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” It is this principle that leads him to his deepest despair. If this is truly the human condition, then is there any hope?

At this point you can hear the agony of helplessness as he writes, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Experience has taught that this is exactly the place to which a person must come to fully realize the power of God to bring restoration. Paul realized that he did not have the ability to change on his own. He desperately

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wanted to but he had finally realized that he couldn't. So what is he to do?

Paul answers his own question with this great truth, "Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ my Lord!" That's it. We can't, but he can. Our impossibilities are his opportunities. This is the hinge upon which the door leading to of restoration hangs. God is saying that what was lost in Adam is found in Christ.

I needed help and I was becoming desperate to be free.

When we finally realize the futility of trying to restore ourselves in the power of the flesh, and we are willing to consider God as our answer, then we are ready to move into restoration. We conclude with Paul, "I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (v25). We make a conscious decision to surrender to God and his ability to deliver us from sin.

Now we are in the final stage of realizing where we are. We are lost, alone and helpless with our unacceptable behavior. There is no longer any hope in our ability. We are at the point where Paul cries, "Oh, what a wretched man I am" (Romans 7:24).

I remember a time when I had wrestled with a recurring sin in my life. For years I followed all the things I had been taught, yet I was defeated in this sin. I prayed and fasted, yet this

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sin had its tentacles so effectively wrapped around me that I could not gain freedom. I can remember the frustration like it was yesterday.

For a long time there was a lot of guilt and I would confess to God, promising to never do it again. Then, I would succumb to the temptation once more. After much time and many failures I finally told God I wasn't going to promise that I wouldn't do it again, I just asked for deliverance.

After a period of time I concluded that everyone sins a little and this was just my sin. After all, everyone has a cross to bear and this was my cross.

There came a time when the guilt and shame became so great that I felt like I couldn't go any further. I remember that it was a Saturday night and I was preparing to preach the next day. My wife walked into the room, took one look at me and said, "What's wrong with you? You look like someone died." Looking up I said, "Someone did. Sit down I've got something to tell you." That was the beginning of my restoration from this sin.

I finally got to the point that I admitted to myself that it was hopeless to keep trying in secret to deal with this sin that was affecting my life. I needed help and I had become desperate to be free.

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I have become convinced that the very reason Jesus came to earth was to free people from unacceptable behaviors. When he began his public ministry he read from Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Prisons of addiction and undesirable habits are the workplace of the spirit.

Prisons of addiction and undesirable habits are the workplace of the Spirit. That is where he fulfills his purpose in coming to earth. In Matthew 9 we read that when Jesus saw the people he was moved with compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. There is hope because Jesus has compassion for us in our wretched condition.

Step one in the process of restoration is admitting to ourselves that we are powerless over the sin that has separated us from God, and that our lives in this area have become unmanageable. Our healing and restoration begins when we take this first step.

The idea of our inadequacy and our inability to overcome deeply patterned behaviors seems on the surface like a cop-out. It flies in the face

of everything we are taught by those who would try to convince us that we are basically good and we have the environment in which we were raised to blame for our difficulties today. They tell us that if we try this formula, or that program, we will be able to get our life in order. The truth is that any formula or program that is based on the ability of man to extricate himself from the morass of sin that he has gotten himself into will not work.

*Step One:
Admitted we
were powerless
over the sins that
separate us from
God - that our
lives have become
unmanageable in
that area.*

It was the belief that we could handle our lives ourselves that got us into this mess. Our ego, born in the act of rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden, is the culprit. It constantly drives us with the idea that we are in control and we can do it. The reality is just what Apostle Paul wrote, "When I want to do good, evil (that is my ego driven desire) is right there with me" (Romans 7:21).

"O.K! I concede. My life is out of control in this area. But what do I do now?" It is at this low point, when we are inches from the brink of despair, that we are ready for the next step in our journey toward God.

Look at the progressive steps Paul is taking in Romans 7:24-25. First, he declares, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" and then follows with

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the question, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” He had come to realize that the end of life led by ego is death. He had given up hope of being free of this death sentence on his own and he cries out for someone to help him. It is this crying out for help that changes the course of his life. In his despair he found the answer, “Thanks be to God – Through Jesus Christ” (v25).

Some time back when my wife and I were working with drug addicts a young man came to us with his father. Now, we had a policy that when a person was brought by a parent, spouse or friend, they were probably not ready for recovery, so we wouldn't bring them into our program. So, here was John sitting there with his dad.

I asked, rather bluntly, “John, what are you doing here? Why did you even come here today?” John answered, “I woke up in the gutter a week ago and realized that what I was doing was killing me. I called my father and promised him that if he would give me just one week and allow me to come home long enough to get cleaned up I would check into a program. It's been a week and here I am.”

John was ready for change. He had reached his moment of despair. He had realized that if there was help it was outside of himself, and he was reaching out. He had a basic faith and realized that God was his only hope and when he finally gave up on himself he turned to God.

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Paul came to the same conclusion in verse 25. In answer to his own question of “who will rescue me” he answers, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

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.

*STEP TWO:
Came to believe
God could
restore my
sanity.*

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?”

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?

Jesus breaks the cycle of trying the same things over and over again – he restores our sanity

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 preach-

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.

The law only deals with do's and don'ts – it gives no remedy for the condition of being a law-breaker.

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.

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.

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].

If I Can't Do It - Who Can?

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?”

Hearing the message is not just about the words being spoken with reach of our hearing. It is about hearing the message that is carried in the words

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.”

***STEP THREE:
Made a decision
to turn our will
and our lives
over to the care
of God.***

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.

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.

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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.

To confess that Jesus is Lord of our life is to proclaim that our own self-will no longer dominates our life.

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.

God Walk - A Journey of Faith

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.

*We can
make the
decision,
but only
God can
make the*

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.

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

If I Can't Do It - Who Can?

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.

The conversion experience is simply that we have been converted from trusting ourselves to trusting God for our lives.

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 illus-

trates 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 had tried everything and nothing had worked. Now, she was turning it all over to God. There was no turning back.

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.

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.

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.

The Bridge Story

In considering the concept of being at the point in our life where we have realized that only God can help us I was inspired with an example that illustrates the point. I call it the bridge story. It goes like this:

As youth all of us have a lot of ideas of how life is going to be for us. Those ideas usually include accumulating a lot of stuff and going to exotic places. There are a lot of hopes and dreams wrapped up in these great ideas. For a few people, a very few people, these hopes and dreams come true. For the rest of us we see these hopes and dreams diminish day by day.

It seems the affairs of life begin to drain the hope from us from the time we are children. The first problems of life we often become aware of is the problems in our home. There may be problems with mom and dad, or too often there is the absence of either a mom or a dad.

Many times abuse becomes a factor. The most common abuse to children is verbal assault and just behind it are physical and sexual abuse. Abuse of children is the most common destroyer

of hopes and dreams. It leaves scars in our emotions that are very difficult to heal.

The behaviors we develop to compensate for our sense of loss become primary factors in our lost hope and dreams.

Then there is the poverty factor. Children in a home that is struggling with finances become aware of those difficulties at an early age and are affected by it.

All of these factors and more begin to drain the hope from our dreams as we grow from children to adolescence. And all of these factors have an affect on the way we approach life. For too many of us the effect is that we develop behaviors to compensate for the sense of loss we have over the dreams that seem so far from being fulfilled. These behaviors seem to always promise something that is lost when the thing is done.

The ironic thing is that the behaviors we develop to compensate for our sense of loss become primary factors in our lost hope and dreams. The more we compensate, the further away our hopes and dreams become.

As we go along we begin to give up hope on our dreams on by one. Finally we find ourselves settling for so little that we begin to wonder if there is any use going on. It is like standing on the edge of a cliff and not being able to go any further. I can see my hopes and dreams far away,

The Bridge Story

across the canyon, but there is no way I can reach them.

Here, at the edge of the cliff, we stand; frustrated and desperate. We are wondering if there is a way that we can make it to the other side and realizing that it is not in our ability to do so.

When we look into the chasm separating us from our dreams we see the things that have made the separation.

When we look into the chasm separating us from our dreams we see the things that have made the separation. There are hurts that have not been healed; relationships that were broken; anger, addictions, legal issues – they are all there. All of the things in our life that have had a negative affect upon us are there.

Desperate, without hope, with all of our emotional resources exhausted, we ask, “Is there a way?”

The answer is yes there is. There must be a bridge to cross the chasm of our life that separates us from our dreams. We can't build that bridge, but someone can. In fact, someone did. Two thousand years ago when Jesus died on the cross he became the bridge that will take us from despair to hope.

A most exciting discovery to make is the vision Jesus has of us. His vision is that our hurts

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are healed, our hope is renewed and our dreams are fulfilled. All that he did in his life, his death and his resurrection was directed toward his dream and hope for our restoration.

God wants to be your Bridge today and all you have to do is ask him. Tell him about the things you have done that you know he would not like. Ask him to forgive you. Declare to him that you believe and that he is Lord of your life. When you do he will take you by the hand and begin a journey of restoration with you.

Your renewal and restoration begin the moment you ask him to become your bridge and continues as long as you walk with

The journey you begin with Jesus is the God Walk – a journey of faith. Your renewal and restoration begin the moment you ask him to become your bridge and continues as long as you walk with him.

Many people who have been in the same circumstances that you face have placed their confidence in the bridge, Jesus the Christ, by simply reciting what is commonly called the sinners prayer. If you would like to begin trusting Jesus to be the bridge to take you from despair to hope, healing and fulfilled dreams I invite you to pray this prayer now:

“Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I have done things that I am embarrassed and ashamed of. I confess that to you and ask that you forgive me

The Bridge Story

and make me clean. Take away my sin. I want to be born again; born to live and not to die, born of your Spirit.

“If you receive me I commit to you that I will follow you and trust you as you guide me through my life. In Jesus Name, amen.”

If you pray this prayer with sincerity a miracle will take place in your heart and you will be forever changed. Do it now!

Part Two: Cleaning Out the Well

Genesis 26 records the story of Isaac reclaiming the land once held by his father Abraham. He had been in Gerar, the land of the Philistines for some time. There he had been very prosperous. King Abimelech became concerned that Isaac would become more powerful than himself, so he asked Isaac to move on.

Isaac moved on to the “Valley of Gerar” and settled there. He found that the Philistines had filled in all the wells that his father had dug in the past and he knew that if he was going to have water for his livestock and household he would have to dig out the wells. All of the dirt and contaminates had to be taken out of the well before it was fit for use.

Our lives are like that. It is not enough to go through the initial steps of confession and repentance; we must dig out the wells of our lives and clean ourselves of all the contaminates that have accumulated there.

This next step on our journey is about self-examination. It is about getting ready to clean

out our well. The wellspring of our life becomes contaminated by the things we allow to get into it and soon becomes so polluted that there is no good coming from it. There comes a time when we have to stop and clean out the wells.

The fourth step in our journey is that we take a look inside ourselves and make searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. The first three steps took us to the point of conversion, now we are beginning the process of restoration.

STEP FOUR:
***Make a searching
and fearless
moral inventory
of ourselves.***

Earlier we talked about finding out where we are so we can plot a course to get to where we want to be. This step deals with finding out just where we are in many areas of our life and from there plotting a course of recovery and restoration.

Step Four: *Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.* This step is about looking inside to see what things we have accumulated that keep us from becoming the person God has intended us to become. It is about discovering just how our lifestyle has affected ourselves and others.

Jeremiah the prophet wrote in his lamentations, "Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord" (Lamentations 3:40). Jeremiah realized our need to come clean with God and ourselves. He knew that as long as

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we go along through life without making a serious inventory of what we have become, we can never have confidence with God.

The Apostle Paul brings this concept into our Christian walk when he writes, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

You have begun your walk of faith in God and you are making progress. You realized your need, then realized that you couldn't do it alone, so you asked God to help you make it. Those are the first three steps. These first steps are vital to beginning the journey, but they are only the beginning of this journey of a lifetime. In fact we call this walk of faith a lifetime journey of reconciliation, renewal and restoration.

You have just come through the reconciliation phase of the journey. Hopefully you have done a complete job on steps one, two and three and have been united in relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is now time to move into the renewal and restoration phase of your walk. The work of this step is taking inventory of our lives to see what needs to be dealt with.

This step begins the "work" of restoration. We are now building a bridge of transition from trusting ourselves only to trusting God only. We begin to look inside to see what we are really

like. If we are honest we find that our "heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind" (Jeremiah 17:9).

The Scriptural, and historical, account of mankind is that we are sinful. We are sinful in

If we are honest we find that our heart is deceitful above all things and beyond

our very core. For many of us our sinfulness has taken a course that is obvious to the world, and for others of us sin has been more subtle in our lives. But for all of us – we are sinners.

Those of us sinners who have chosen to change now must look inside to see what things need to change. This introspective look is called fearless because by nature we are fearful of what we are on the inside. That is why we so often mask what we fear to be with behaviors that inadvertently show the world just what we didn't want them to see.

To be effective this look inside of ourselves must not only be fearless but it must be searching; we must become totally honest with ourselves and be willing to see what we really are.

There are certain behaviors and attitudes that are common to most of us and these need to be faced. The Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:19-21 gives a list of sins of the flesh. They include sexual sins, witchcraft, attitudes and a party lifestyle. Read the list:

Part Two: Cleaning Out the Well

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like.”

We must make an inventory to discover what sins we need to be restored from.

This list may not be complete but I think you can see that all of us find ourselves in at least one of those items mentioned. It is not enough just to say, “Yes, I’m a sinner” and go on. If we are to be effective in our restoration and recovery from sin we must make an inventory to discover what sins we need to be restored from. We also need to discover what our primary sins are.

Our primary sins are the ones that we most often find ourselves involved with. For some it may be drunkenness, and that includes drug use; for others it may be sexual immorality; still others may be selfish, or angry, or greedy. Just where do you fit in? I can’t make that list for you. You must do it yourself, but here are some suggestions on how to get started.

When you look at this passage in Galatians you can see some basic categories of sins. They are; sexual sins, God-substitute sins, attitude sins and lifestyle sins. These categories become the foundations for sin in our life. Let’s look at each one of these a little closer.

Sexual Sins

This inventory is about coming clean with yourself and God about the lust that has affected your life.

I think Paul put this category ahead of the others because it seems to be the most common. Somebody said that everybody is either involved in a sexual sin or is thinking about it. This is a good place to start your inventory.

You can start your inventory by asking yourself the question, “How have my sexual actions and attitudes affected others? And how have they affected me?” In case you are wondering just what is a sexual sin the answer is real simple. A sexual sin is any sexual activity outside of marriage. Jesus even went a step further to equate lust in your heart with the act itself (Matthew 5:29).

Some of you are already saying, “Wow, this is going to take some time.” Let’s just put a little definition on the process. This is not a recording of all your sexual escapades. It is about coming clean with yourself and God about the lust that has affected your life. If you have had illicit relationships you don’t have to list every act. The idea is to see what you have been and prepare to have the issues dealt with.

God-substitute Sins

You may be asking, “What in the world is a God-substitute sin?” It is anything that takes the place of God in your life. Paul called it “idolatry and witchcraft.” Whatever you allow into your life that becomes more important than God is a God-substitute sin.

Paul uses idolatry and witchcraft as examples of this sin but you don’t have to bow before a carved image to commit idolatry. And you don’t have to visit a witchdoctor to become involved in witchcraft. In fact, the prophet Samuel told King Saul of Israel that rebellion is the same sin as witchcraft (1 Samuel 15:23).

Think about it; Idolatry and witchcraft are both substitutes for God. It is turning to something else to get the solace or answers that God has promised to give. It is not too hard to grasp this concept, but to stretch it just a bit further to rebellion is a little more difficult.

In order to understand how rebellion is a God-substitute let’s consider the meaning of rebellion. It is the act of rejecting established authority. When our parents told us not to leave the house and we sneaked out anyway we were in rebellion against their authority. When God gives ten commandments to follow and we choose to do our own thing instead, then we are replacing God’s will with our own will; we are in rebellion against God.

This problem of rebellion is so prevalent that Paul wrote in Romans 8:7, “The sinful mind is hostile toward God.” It is the natural state of man to be in rebellion against God.

Resolve offending issues when they take place and don't let them fester into bitterness and ultimately hatred

As you are continuing your moral inventory into this category, list ways that you have resisted God in your life.

Attitude Sins

The sin of attitude comes from the way we are reacting to the environment and circumstances around us. The attitude sins are hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. Let's look at each of these individually for just a moment.

Hatred. If you have a deep-seated resentment toward another person you hate them because that is a definition of hatred. Where does this resentment come from? Somewhere along the way this person may have offended you, or at least you took offense at this person. Instead of dealing with the issue and clearing the air you just stuffed it inside and brought it out every once in a while to think about how this person had treated you.

When you carry an offense toward another person, that offense sows a seed of bitterness in

your heart. This seed of bitterness grows into hatred. The irony of hatred is that when this process is at work in you the person who offended you gets off Scott free, but you pay the price of carrying hatred in your heart for another. That is probably why the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Ephesians 4:26) What Paul was trying to say is that we are to resolve offending issues when they take place and don’t let them fester into bitterness and ultimately hatred.

Discord. This is an interesting word. It comes from the Greek word *dichazo* which means to cut apart or divide in two. This particular sin is about trying to cause division through word or deed. A person who gossips would fit into this category. When we give out information about someone else that could be detrimental to them we are sowing seeds of discord and division.

Jealousy. The intention here is not that it is a sin for us to have jealous feelings when we see someone giving inordinate attention to the one we love, but that we are not to be controlled by fear and suspicion. Jealousy is defined as being apprehensive of rivalry, anxiously fearful and careful. It is about living with the fear that someone is going to get there first or that someone is going to unseat you from your position.

Jealousy will drive us to do things that will hurt another person's chances of success. It is about undermining another. You may not actually do an evil act but you do the best you can to arrange the circumstances so that another will fail, giving you the advantage.

People who are dealing with uncontrolled anger, or rage, have unresolved issues that are hindering their restoration process.

Fits of rage. Have you ever said, "I couldn't help it – they just made me mad"? We have probably all said that. Those times reveal that we have unresolved issues that are rolling around loose in our heart; someone touched on

one of those sensitive issues and we came unglued.

People who are dealing with uncontrolled anger, or rage, have unresolved issues that are hindering their restoration process. We call this type of person a rage-aholic. When rage-aholics are pressed beyond their comfort zone and feel threatened they move into the defense mode of rage. Rather than be hurt or abused in any way they will make a preemptive action of raging anger.

Selfish ambition. When the desire to get ahead becomes so strong that we are willing to do whatever is within our power to achieve it, without consideration of how it affects others, we are guilty of selfish ambition. This is not about having to work long hours to provide for

the family, it is about working long hours in neglect of the family under the guise of, “I’m just trying to give my family the best I can.”

The sin of selfish ambition is that we are trying to do more for ourselves than we can trust God to do for us.

The sin of selfish ambition is that we are trying to do more for ourselves than we can trust God to do for us. Jesus said in Matthew 6, “Seek first the kingdom of heaven and all these things will be given to you.” What are the things he was talking about? He had prefaced this instruction with the promise of sufficient food, clothing and shelter. Anything we seek beyond that must be measured by the affect it has on our family, our relationship with God and our community.

This category of sin is less about what we are ambitious to achieve than it is about *why* we are ambitious to achieve. If we are in right relationship with God, family and community then our motivations will be others directed rather than self-focused.

Dissensions. We are not too familiar with this word because it is not used often today. We are familiar with dissent which means to stand against a prevailing opinion or the position of another person or group. Knowing that we can understand that dissension is the act of pulling away, forming another movement, or standing in rebellion against others.

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The sin here is being out of order and in rebellion against what has already been established. All of us have known people that seem to stand against anything and everything. You take a side and they will take the other side. They are never submitted to any order and they are always trying to convince others of their cause.

Factions. The King James Version translates this word “heresies.” The Greek word is *hairesis* and means, “that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth and leads to division and the formation of sects” (Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). The meaning of factions is similar to the meaning of dissensions but it is most often used in the context of religion.

The sin here is being in rebellion to the truth and trying to establish a religious ideal or movement that accommodates our own will rather than submit to the truth.

Envy. Have you ever wanted something that someone else has so much that you wished they would have some hardship so you could get it? That is envy. Envy is the feeling of displeasure that you have when you witness or hear of the prosperity of others. The core of envy is selfishness. It is wanting things for self and feeling bad toward those who are able to get what we cannot.

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The sin of envy is loving self more than others. Love is having great affection for others, or considering others first. The opposite of love is selfishness. Selfish people have great affection for themselves and consider their own desires before the needs of others.

Lifestyle Sins:

I call this category of sin lifestyle sin because these sins grow out of repeated behaviors. The description, “drunkenness, orgies and the like” refer to behaviors that have become habitual, or common occurrences in the life of an individual.

Sin comes as a stranger, stays as our guest, then becomes our master.

A preacher I once heard explained that sin comes as a stranger, stays as our guest, then becomes our master. Another way of saying it is; first the man takes the drink then the drink takes the man.

Most sins that become habitual started as a lark or just an experiment to see what it would be like. As youngsters we smoked that first cigarette out of curiosity or because we wanted to be accepted. Many alcoholics took their first drink at a high school party because “everyone else was doing it.” Name any destructive habitual behavior and it can usually be traced back to just such a beginning.

Not everyone who takes that first step goes on to develop the habitual behavior, but many do. The next step is beginning to repeat the behavior because it feels good or gives some pleasure. This stage of forming a habit is difficult for many to see because they feel in control. The common statement that is made in this stage is, "This is only recreational use, I can stop any time I want." At this point the behavior is still the guest.

At some point the pleasure of recreational use gives way to the need to have it. Now the behavior has become the master. We have become servant to the thing we once enjoyed. That is lifestyle sin.

The pleasure of recreational use gives way to the need to have it. Now the behavior has become the master.

We have just explored the basic categories of sin as given in Galatians chapter five. The foundation for these sins, or behaviors, is found in our sinful nature. Every deed that comes from our sinful nature comes from one or more of these foundations of sin.

As we make this searching inventory of our behaviors we will find that there are things we have done that were motivated by these foundations of sin in our sinful nature. When we discover these sins we

must find out the root sin causing the behavior and submit it God and put it on our inventory list.

An example of dealing with the root sin is we discover that we have irrational anger toward an individual. Anger is the behavior, or sin, but there is a root to that sin which is driving us to the behavior. The root to the sin may be envy, or jealousy. If we do not deal with the root sin we will have difficulty dealing with the manifested behavior of irrational anger. And, if we do successfully control our anger there will be other behaviors manifested until the root issue has been dealt with.

Taking Inventory

Have you found yourself being described as you read about the categories of sins we've listed? If you haven't you might take another look, or go back and read the section on denial. I have not found anyone yet who can honestly say they have not been involved with sin in one or more of these categories.

It is time to take inventory. Many feel that it is best at this point to begin making a list of your offenses. For many of us a complete list of every offense might be a bit overwhelming, so I suggest that you use this breakdown of categories to discover areas of your life in which you need to be restored.

Be careful of ego at this point. Ego will drive you to justify your behaviors and transfer responsibility to someone else. Ego tells us this lie: If the blame rests on others then it is not a part of our inventory.

Be careful of ego at this point. Ego will drive you to justify your behaviors and transfer responsibility to someone else.

Jeremiah the prophet wrote, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure, who can understand it” (Jeremiah 17:9). On every occasion our heart will attempt to deceive us into believing that it is alright to continue in some of the behaviors of the past, just not the bad ones. After all, everyone sins a little. Besides I’m this way because of the way I was raised.

We must remember that it is the job of ego, which is seated in the heart, to protect itself. While we are making the inner inventory ego is fighting us all the way telling us we can’t live without this or that. He tries to convince us to give up the process and leave things as they are.

Don’t listen to your heart or your ego. You must fearlessly and honestly make a searching inventory of your past behaviors. You must discover where you are so you can make it to where you want to be.

Confessing Our Faults

Admitting our faults to ourselves is hard, but once that is done admitting them to God isn't as hard; admitting them to another person and forming an accountability with that person is the biggest challenge.

STEP FIVE in our journey of faith is admitting to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Remember our little talk about ego a few pages ago? Be aware that ego will do all that he can to keep you from completing this step. The last thing our ego wants is to be exposed before another person. Our ego tells us there are just too many reasons why this should not happen.

**STEP FIVE:
Admit to God,
to ourselves
and to another
human being
the exact nature
of our wrongs.**

Ego tells us that if someone else knows what we have done they will lose respect for us. When they find out just what we have done they will reject us and our friendship will be over. And besides, if one person knows he will tell others

and soon everyone will know and I can't face that.

Many people have stopped at step four because they could not conquer their ego and go on. They somehow convinced themselves that they could handle this thing alone. The tragedy is that they can't. None of us can.

There is a leap of faith that requires surrender of ego to take our restoration to the next level – confession.

It took us some time to get to the place that we realized we were unable to be free of the behaviors that control us by ourselves. We came to God and confessed our need of him. Now we are ready to progress further in this step. There is a leap of faith that requires surrender of ego to take our restoration to the next level – confession.

Scripture instructs us to confess your sins to each other and pray for one another. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). That doesn't mean that we are to get a loud speaker and broadcast it all over the country, but it does mean that we should find a responsible spiritual leader and talk to them about our inventory issues.

Our journey of faith has been leading us to repentance. We have taken several vital steps in the process; realizing our need, coming to a point of faith, confessing our need and making a

Confessing Our Faults

commitment of trust, confessing our sin, asking for and receiving forgiveness for our sin, and finally, walking in a new path.

A very important aspect of this path is establishing accountability. It is being responsible to another person concerning our behaviors. If we have successfully completed the steps of realizing our inability to gain control in

An important aspect of this path is establishing accountability and being responsible to another person concerning our behaviors

our lives and have turned that process over to God, then taking this step of confession and accountability is not so difficult.

If we have left ego alive and still have some idea that we will be able to do this in our own way then this step becomes very difficult. We cannot over-emphasize the value of surrendering our will (ego) to God and committing to the process of restoration that he has established. That includes confession to God and another responsible person.

One of the great drivers of compulsive or addictive behavior is shame. Shame is simply guilt that has not been properly faced and dealt with. Shame grows out of guilt when guilt is denied and the behavior is kept hidden. As long as our behavior or attitude is hidden it cannot be healed. As guilt grows heavy and we continue to hide our sin, then shame begins to take over. We

then start ordering our lives around protecting our guilt.

One of the games that ego so often plays is that if we resist the devil strongly enough we can overcome him without anyone else finding out. The lie is that there is power in ourselves to resist evil. We must *first* submit to God (James 4:17). This means bringing guilt out of the closet and releasing the shame from it.

David wrote Psalm 51 in repentance for his sin. In this beautiful story of repentance he was not only confessing his sin to God but to the whole world through his writing. David explains what happens when guilt is brought out of shame's closet; "Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered... When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord - and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:1-5).

The confession and repentance that David did in Psalm 51 took an incredible amount of trust. He first had to trust that God would receive him. Then, because he was writing a Psalm that would be read by others in the kingdom, he had to trust that the people of Israel would receive him and grant him forgiveness.

Confessing Our Faults

Trust is a key factor to being able to share your inventory with another. Early in our recovery process we realize that we have lost the confidence of God and others and particularly of ourselves. In fact, full restoration depends on us coming to the place that we cannot trust ourselves to do the job.

Trust of God, others and ourselves has been broken and must be restored. First, your relationship with God must grow to the point that you trust his love for you. Second, you must find someone who you can trust to be a channel of God's love and acceptance. Finally, you must trust the commitment you have made to change.

Getting Ready to Let Go

The next step after confession is becoming willing to allow God to remove our defects of character. Some think that confession and asking forgiveness is enough for them to get over the behavior. The fact is that confession and forgiveness just prepare us to ask God to remove the root of the behavior. Repentance cannot be complete until we become willing to release the sin and quit the behavior.

Many years ago while preaching a revival the pastor's wife asked me to come and pray for a young lady in the congregation who seemed to be oppressed by an evil spirit. While praying for this young lady I sensed her problem and began praying specifically for that issue. When I prayed specifically for that issue, the spirit that she had yielded to began to manifest itself and argue with me about leaving her. Finally, through much prayer, she was set free.

A few days later she came up for prayer again for the same problem. She had been involved in the sin again. I asked her why she wanted prayer now and she indicated that she had been bothered by depression. I asked if she was willing to give up the sin and she said she

wasn't ready to but she just wanted free of her depression.

This young lady was prepared to confess, and she was even willing ask forgiveness, but she was not yet willing to give up the behavior that she enjoyed, she just wanted freedom from the depression she suffered.

STEP SIX:
***We're entirely
ready to have
God remove all
these defects
of character.***

Complete repentance includes becoming willing to have God remove our defects of character. This is not hard if we have followed the process of confession to God and another person. It is really difficult if we do not become accountable.

The next step in our journey of faith is that we must become entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. This is a real challenge to our ego. First we admitted that we were wrong and powerless, now we are turning completely to God and trusting him alone to do the thing we could not do. The Apostle James wrote, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." (James 4:10). We are at that very difficult step of submitting to the will of God, humbling ourselves and trusting him to remove the root of our sin from us.

Getting Ready to Let Go

Get yourself mentally prepared for this part of the work of restoration. God is going to do some spiritual surgery on us and we need to be mentally prepared for what he is doing.

In 1 Peter 1:13-14 the Apostle writes, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."

- 1 Peter 1:13-14

Peter is instructing us concerning three necessary elements to effect the kind of change that we are making in order to receive restoration from God. First he says, "prepare your minds for action." Then he writes, "be self-controlled." And finally, "set your hope fully on the grace to be given you." We'll look a little closer at each of these.

Prepare your minds for action. Have you noticed the look on an athlete's face when they are about to perform? Whether they are boxing, swimming or running if you can see their face and eyes you see that they are focused. They have a look of concentration about them and you can tell that they are preparing their minds for action. This is very similar to what we must do if we are to continue making progress in our journey of faith. Doubt and negative thinking

must be put out of our mind. We must become focused upon what we are committing to God.

Be self-controlled. A part of preparing our minds for action is maintaining self-control. As desire for past behaviors rise up within us we must use our will to take that desire to God. There are times of resisting and times of surrendering, but at all times we must be in control of which way we go. If we first surrender to God, then resisting becomes much easier (James 4:7).

As we complete this step of becoming willing to have God remove our defects of character we must take charge of our mind and submit it to God.

Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you. We must transfer our hope from ourselves to Christ before this step can be complete. As long as we still have some hope that we can do it on our own we will not fully release God to do it.

When we are convinced that God is our only hope, and that hope is realized through Jesus Christ, we can then trust him to remove the root of sin from us. We are ready to be restored from the sin that has controlled us.

One of the real issues of becoming willing to have God remove the sin from us is that we still enjoy the sin therefore we still have a desire for it. We must realize the need to change the things

Getting Ready to Let Go

that delight us, or that we desire. In Psalm 37:4-5 David wrote, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this.”

The Transformation

Now comes the step of transformation. This is where we ask God to perform surgery and cut away these sins and defects of character and allow his Glory to grow up in us as we take a quantum leap forward. ("ever increasing glory..." - 2 Corinthians 3:18)

STEP SEVEN in our journey of faith is that we Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings. This is the step that produces the effect of Repentance. John, the Apostle is referring to this process when he writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

STEP SEVEN:
***Humbly ask
God to re-
move our
shortcomings.***

A Prayer for Times of Temptation

When you are not only willing to have God remove your defects, but are determined to have him remove them *and* you have walked through steps one, two, three and particularly four, five and six - now you are ready to ask him to remove your defects.

God Walk - A Journey of Faith

Everything we have done until now has been preparing us for this step. We have been convinced of our sinfulness; we have confessed our sins to God; God's faithfulness demands he forgive us; He then takes away our unrighteousness. This is repentance. We were walking in our unrighteousness but now God removes that unrighteousness from us and our walk takes a new direction. Instead of walking away from God we are walking toward God. We have been granted repentance and now we walk in his grace.

What we could not do in the power of our natural man now becomes doable as the new man is empowered by God.

There is work to be done yet in our journey, but now we work as the new creation we have become. We are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What we could not do in the power of our natural man now becomes doable as the new man is empowered by God.

Often people who have gotten this far in their journey of faith are surprised by the temptations they face. They felt that once they asked God to remove their defects of character that they would not be bothered again, but the temptation continues to arise inside them. When God removes the sin from us our spirit person has been changed, but our mind is still filled with memories of our past, and it is those memories that arouses the desire that produces the temptation.

The Transformation

Be aware that in your journey of faith you may still be bothered with a lot of temptation. In fact, it is not at all unusual for temptation to return with a vengeance after you have been cleansed from your past sin. It's almost like a new battle has begun for your life. You must prepare yourself for this battle.

Too often this new round of temptation catches people unaware. They feel so good after receiving the cleansing of the Holy Spirit that they are just not prepared for the evil one to come against them so strong.

We have written a prayer for those who are serious about restoration. If you desire to be free from the temptations that tend to plague you this prayer is for you. It grew out of my own experiences in overcoming my primary temptation. This prayer is given below and is followed by an explanation of each point in the prayer.

The Temptation Prayer

Father God, I come to you in weakness today. I am being tempted by _____. I cannot tell you that I desire you above this thing, but I desire this thing. If I did not desire it I would not be tempted, because James wrote, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (James 1:14).

God Walk - A Journey of Faith

I now make a conscious decision of my will to surrender this evil desire to you. Your Word says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Even though my desire is for evil, my decision is to submit to you. I now surrender my will to you.

I ask you to take this evil desire from me. James also wrote, “You have not because you ask not” (James 4:2). I am asking that you take this desire from me.

You have said, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). Just know I am asking, seeking and knocking at your door. Receive me into your presence and take this desire from me in Jesus name.

Now I praise and thank you for answering my prayer. Paul told us “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). Therefore I am giving you praise and thanksgiving for what you are doing for me this very minute.

The Transformation

Father God, I am thankful for your help. Thank you for answering this prayer. Thank you for receiving me. Thank you for the peace I am feeling just now. Thank you for caring friends and family. I give you praise for all things, in Jesus name, amen.

Examining the Temptation Prayer

“I come to you in weakness”—we are acknowledging our inability to overcome this temptation alone. (God’s power is made perfect in weakness.)

“I cannot tell you that I desire you above this thing, but I desire this thing”—This is being honest with God. We honestly do not desire him when we are tempted. We may know that we should desire him, but we must confess that we desire the object of our temptation at that moment.

“I now make a conscious decision of my will to surrender this evil desire to you”—This vital step is important because we are making a conscious decision to surrender our will to God. This step is absolutely necessary if we are to live in victory over our undesirable behaviors.

“I ask you to take it from me”—This part of the prayer implies that you have already become willing to have God remove this desire. Though you want it, you have, by a choice of the will, decided to surrender it to God. This is simply the asking part. God waits for you to ask so he can do what he does so well.

“You have said”—When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness (Matthew 4) he said repeatedly, “It is written...” When we bring our petitions to God with his word it not only restates his promises, but it shows our commitment to him and his word.

“Now I praise and thank you for answering my prayer”—As we begin to praise God for his goodness and mercy His Spirit begins to bring our hearts back to him. All at once we realize that the thing we desire is him, and that the other thing is not a temptation now.

We have done our part by sincerely making this prayer to God: Now He will do His part as scriptures teach he will do.

Ezekiel 36:25-30 explains what God does at this point.

"I will cleanse you from all your impurities... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees, and be careful to keep my laws... I will save you from all your uncleanness... so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of famine."

- Ezekiel 36:25-30

First God will "cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols" (v25).

The Transformation

Then he will "give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (v26).

Having affected your soul (new heart) and your spirit (new spirit) you now have a different desire; "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (v27).

The result of this process is that prosperity returns. First: He reiterates that he has cleansed them (v28-29). Then He will bless their crops (v29-30).

Restoring Relationships

In order for our growth in grace to continue we must begin to make amends for the wrongs we have done. It is difficult to become willing to make amends until we have dealt with the issues that drove us to commit the offense (see "Cleaning out the well"). Sometimes we have to revisit the self-examination phase to see if we have actually resolved the issues of our lives that set the stage for our poor performance.

It is difficult to become willing to make amends until we have dealt with the issues that drove us to commit the offense.

STEP EIGHT is next in our journey of faith. This step has two parts. First, we make a list of all the people we have harmed and Then we work on becoming willing to make amends to them all. Most of us want to make it right with the people who have been affected by our lifestyle, but too often it seems to be a formidable task and it makes us feel uncomfortable just to think about it.

It is vital to our restoration to work on this step. If we are the offended one and the person who has offended us was getting their life in

order we would appreciate them coming to us to make amends. Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Luke 6:31). His instruction applies to this area too. If we know that it would be good in restoring a relationship to make amends to us, it would also be good for the person we have offended.

**STEP EIGHT:
Made a list of all
persons we had
harmed and be-
came willing to
make amends to
them all.**

Jesus felt so strongly about making amends with people who have been offended by our behaviors that he connected our own forgiveness with asking others for forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23-24 he says, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Remember, this step is not about making things right but *becoming willing* to make things right. You can't rush quickly into confrontation until your own heart has been humbled before God. We must be careful that our desire to make amends is genuine.

The next step is about making things right in past and present relationships, but don't be concerned about that just now. Making amends is the next bridge to cross, but now we are focusing upon becoming willing to make amends.

Restoring Relationships

In the process of becoming willing to make amends we must become humble before God. We must get past justification of our actions and making excuses for our behavior. It is time to surrender our will to God in this matter.

This step is not about making things right - it is about becoming willing to make things right.

Here is a short prayer that others have found helpful at this point. There is nothing magical or sacred about its form or wording so feel free to make a surrender of your own if you are more comfortable doing so. This Surrender Prayer is given as an example of how to surrender your will to God.

The Surrender Prayer

“Father God, I have not only wronged you but I have wronged others also. My pride and ego have kept me from becoming willing to make amends with those I have harmed. I ask you to grant me the grace of surrender, that I may surrender my will, ego and pride to you on this matter.

“Just now as I am following the instructions of Jesus by asking, I am also seeking your face and knocking at the door of heaven for your grace. I believe that you hear me now and accept by faith that you are doing your work in me. In Christ's name, amen.”

God Walk - A Journey of Faith

Making things right with others takes a lot of humility along with the Spirit of God (Matthew 5:23-24). To do this properly we must have a pure heart. This will usually require us to go

"We are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit

-2 Corinthians 2:18

through steps 4-7 with each case; uncovering the character flaw that produced the behavior that became the offense; confessing the character flaw; becoming willing to have it removed; then finally asking God to remove it so that we can

become transformed by his ever increasing glory.

As we continue the process of restoration we are progressively being transformed into His likeness and we are reflecting the ever-increasing glory of Christ in us.

Making Things Right

Once we have become willing to make amends we are ready for the next step in our journey of faith. Step nine is about making direct amends to the people we have offended wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Jesus did not give us the option of choosing whether we are going to make amends, but we are under mandate from him to make it right with those who have something against us. Remember Matthew 5:23:24?

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. It is vital to the process of our own restoration to make amends with others.

STEP NINE:

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

How important is this step? Jesus at least implies that as long as we harbor feelings about others, or know that they have things against us, he will not receive our gift. If we are not willing

to give and accept forgiveness then God cannot forgive us (Mark 11:25).

Some things to keep in mind when working through this step:

1. It has taken you many years to accumulate the wrongs you have done and the people you have offended and injured; do not get in a hurry to get it straightened out. It is usually difficult and uncomfortable to approach people we have offended. Because of that we may be anxious and seem in a hurry when talking with the person. Make every effort to present yourself as sincerely trying to make amends and not just trying to get through this thing.
2. Make each and every name on your list an issue between you and God. In prayer talk it over with him. God knows the best way and the best time to make amends. Develop a sensitivity to his leading so that you can sense when it its time to approach the people on your list.
3. If you feel compelled to go out and conquer it all at once then you are probably being led more by zeal than by God.
4. Remember the God Walk – Journey of Faith process is lifetime - you must remain committed to the lifetime process of restoration and reconciliation. This step may be ongoing in your life as opportunity comes to make amends with people you have lost contact with.

Making Things Right

5. Finally, don't let fear and indecision keep you from starting on your list. The longer you wait to start, the longer it will be until you are healed in these areas.
6. Making amends is a very important component in your full restoration. Reconciling broken relationships is very difficult and requires much care. A proverb says, "An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city" (Proverbs 18:19). We should not attempt to mend relationships until we have spent much time in prayer and are sure that we are taking the correct approach. If we are successful in making amends, the relationship will be restored. If we are careless in our approach the relationship can be further damaged.
7. One last thing to remember. If we have been careful in our attempt to make amends properly, and our attempts have been rejected, then we can't try to force the issue. We have done our part and the rest is up to the other person.

Part Three:

Keeping the Well Clean

Steps 10, 11, and 12 are in this final stage of the recovery process. Step 10 is making a daily inventory to protect ourselves from being sidetracked from our journey. Step 11 is gaining maturity in our walk through prayer and meditation. Finally, step 12 is about sharing this entire process with others.

When I was a freshman in high school I lived with my aunt and uncle on a farm in Texas. We had electricity but we didn't have indoor plumbing. Not only did we not have a bathroom in the house, but neither did we have any water. We did have a well though.

Our well was the old fashioned type that was lined with rock and had a bucket and rope on a pulley for getting the water. In dry times animals would be attracted by the smell of water and come looking for a drink. Occasionally an animal would fall into the well and drown. Shortly afterwards we would draw the water up and find hairs, or other evidence of an animal being in the well.

When we discovered that something had fallen into the well we had to clean it out because if we didn't the water would become polluted and it would be dangerous to us. We had a grappling hook that we would attach to the rope. The hook would then be thrown into the well and it would grab the thing that had fallen into the water. After the animal was taken out we then had to draw all of the water out that was there at the time so new water could come into the well that was safe to drink.

Until we all reach unity in the faith in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

– Ephesians 4:13

Our lives are similar to this well story. As we journey through life things come to us, just through our interaction with the world that begins to pollute our mind. If we do not deal with those things on a regular basis then they contaminate the very thing that was meant to be life to us. When we

discover this we must take action to “clean our well.”

This phase of our journey of faith is about maintaining our growth in grace and continuing to mature (Ephesians 4:13). If we do not continue the process of self-examination and dealing properly with the seeds of sin that continue to be sown in us, we will find our "wellspring of life" becoming contaminated.

Part Three: Keeping the Well Clean

We must learn to diligently guard our hearts as the writer of Proverbs writes, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

The biggest part of the New Testament was written to explain the Christian way of living and encourage people to walk in a manner consistent with their faith. When we follow the instructions given in the scripture we will be continually purging ourselves of the attitudes, temptations and behaviors of our past.

STEP TEN: Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong promptly admitting it.

This next step in your journey of faith emphasizes the importance of making a daily inventory of our lives. It is about examining ourselves to see if anything has entered our mind or our spirit that would begin to drag us back into our old life.

STEP TEN: Continue to take personal inventory and when we are wrong, promptly admit it.

Personal Inventory: Take stock of your life and lifestyle - look into the well of your life and see what is there that will pollute you and delay the work of restoration.

Long before these steps had been formalized into a practice that many thousands have fol-

lowed and are following today, Paul the Apostle addressed this issue of daily inventory. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 he writes, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith, test yourselves.”

When he said to test yourselves he was not talking about putting ourselves into a place of temptation to see how we will respond. Rather, what he had in mind was that we would not only look for the obvious but that we would also spend time in prayer diligently seeking God to would reveal any areas where we are beginning to be in danger. That is what step ten is about.

There are three kinds of inventory in the step ten process. There is 1)the spot-check, 2)daily inventory and 3)periodic extended inventory. Each one of these inventory processes are vitally important to our continued restoration.

There is a passage in scripture that warns of the little foxes that ruin the vine. It is true of these “little things” that creep into our lives. We’ll take an in-depth look at each of these types of step 10 inventory.

Three kinds of Step Ten inventory

1. Spot - Check

The spot-check is what we do daily, and in fact we will often do the spot check several times throughout the day. When we realize a recurring thought or idea that is unacceptable we

Part Three: Keeping the Well Clean

must take the time to stop and do a quick inventory.

We should live with the consciousness that the old life is like a crouching tiger ready to pounce upon us in a weak moment. Any time we allow thoughts or ideas of the past to linger in our minds we are giving the crouching tiger an opportunity to strike.

That is why it is so important to guard your thoughts, being careful not to dwell on those things that will draw you away from God and delay your restoration.

Have you ever felt that you were doing pretty good in the area of your primary weakness when all at once, *wham*, you're hit with an overwhelming temptation that throws you for a loop? Even if you don't fall to the temptation the event leaves you shaken and you think, "I thought I was over that." What happened? The Apostle James explains that to us.

In James 1:14 the Apostle writes, "each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." That is it in a nutshell. Temptation comes from our own desires. But where do our desires come from?

The process of developing desire involves many things but the core of it is our thoughts. We think about something that is pleasant to the

flesh and the flesh begins to desire it. The desire produces temptation and we become trapped.

Remember the story of Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden? The serpent talked to Eve about the forbidden fruit and she began to think about it. As she thought about it she “saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable” (Genesis 3:6). Eve should have done a spot-check on her thinking.

Something else that we should do a spot-check on is our mouth. What kind of things have we been saying? Have we been speaking negative, doubt-filled words?

We must look at ourselves honestly in the mirror and ask, “Am I true to myself, God and others? Or am I motivated by issues that I am not willing to face?”

Have we been talking about things that we have been forbidden by scripture to indulge in? Jesus Said, “Guard your mouth, for out of it flow the issues of life and your words can bring forth life or death” (Matthew 12:33-37). These are important words to remember as you consider what you have been speaking.

Finally, we must look at ourselves honestly in the mirror - am I true to myself, God and others? Or am I motivated by issues that I am not willing to face? Freedom only comes when we face the truth and act upon it appropriately. James 1:23-25 says, "Do not merely listen to the

word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.”

2. Daily Inventory

You should have a time of introspection every day. Set aside time to come before a mirror of inner reflection to be certain that your motives and actions of the day are on track with a consistent God-Walk.

A daily inventory can be at the end of a day or the beginning of a new day. Some people are alert and do their best thinking at night. That doesn't work for me. I am best in the morning so my morning routine has become habitual. When I first get up I put on the coffee pot and get that first cup of coffee. I sit down with my coffee and the Bible and begin my step ten daily inventory. In prayer and meditation I ask God and myself if my attitudes have been right. I ask if I have been listening to thoughts that reflect the old life. I make a conscious decision to think right and act right in this new day.

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It is amazing how God will bring things to your mind as you are praying and meditating. All at once you will think of a seemingly insignificant thought or thing that happened the day before and realize how your old nature is beginning to creep up on you. When that happens, acknowledge to yourself and to God that you need to re-submit your will to Him. Ask him to receive your confession and restore your strength. He will hear and answer your prayer.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

- Ephesians 4:26-27

The Apostle Paul addresses the issue of making a daily inventory in Ephesians. He admonishes us to not "let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26-27). He is not only giving good instruction on keeping our relationships in order, but he is laying down a pattern for us to follow in every area of our restoration.

Anger is just the example, but the problem can be greed, lust or any of the other sins of the flesh. The answer is the same for all of these issues; don't let the sun go down before you get things straightened out with God, yourself and others.

Jesus also dealt with this matter of making a daily inventory. He may not have used the term, "daily inventory," but the instruction he gave made the same point. He instructed, "Settle

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matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny" (Matthew 5:25-26).

Unresolved issues put you in a prison that will not release you until you settle the matter. A thought, or a deed done by ourselves or another, sows the seed that has the potential to get us off the path of restoration and grow bitterness, fear and doubt in us. We must deal with these issues on a daily basis.

Unresolved issues put you in a prison that will not release you until you settle the matter

Examining Ephesians 4:25-28

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need."

- ***"In your anger do not sin"*** - If you are being moved by temptation don't submit to it; Instead of submitting to temptation submit to God. James wrote, "Submit your-

selves then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

- ***"Do not let the sun go down"*** - Take care of your business today; don't *wait* or it becomes a *weight*.
- ***"Do not give the devil a foothold"*** - When we carry today's issues into tomorrow we give the devil a weapon against us. We then have a whole day to rationalize why we haven't taken care of the situation.
- ***"Each of you must put off falsehood"*** - or any failure. You must take the time and make the effort to rid yourself of anything that hinders the blessing of restoration from working in your life.

3. Periodic Extended Inventory

In the Gospels there are many accounts of Jesus leaving the disciples and going to a place of prayer. Sometimes he would pray all night long and sometimes he would pull away and spend the hours of the day in prayer. Jesus is our example in spending extended times of being before the Lord and asking him to examine us to see if there is anything happening that inside us that needs to be worked on.

I was raised in the holiness tradition and heard many sermons on righteous living. Those sermons were usually coupled with the admonition to live righteously and emphasized the need to “pray through” to get the power we needed to live right before God. I value those times that I

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was drawn to an altar by a spirit of conviction over some area of my life. There were many times I spent extended periods of time at the altar on my knees examining my heart.

Too many people today do not progress in their God-Walk because they neglect to set aside periods of time when they are alone with God and his word. It is in the quietness of this personal time with God that he is able to show us things in ourselves that we cannot see.

There were many times I spent extended periods of time at the altar on my knees examining my heart

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 the Apostle Paul was teaching about receiving the Lord's Supper. In verse 28 he tells us that a man ought to examine himself before he partakes of the Lord's Supper to be sure that he has no unconfessed sin. It is not only important for progress in our journey of faith to examine ourselves but it is also important for the purpose of being accepted before God to be prepared to receive the ordinances of the church.

The practice of self-examination was so important to the early leaders that in 2 Corinthians 13:5 we are instructed by Paul to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."

Set aside a day, or at least several hours, when you are alone with God. Work through your life doing an inventory in every area. Stay with it until you feel that you have completed the process.

Whether it is your primary sin that is tempting you or that you are beginning to feel ego try to take control, the temptation prayer is effective

There will be times when you are plagued by your primary temptation. That is when it is good to practice the temptation prayer. Your primary temptation is about the sin that you were most often involved in and are most often tempted. Most of the people I have talked to have a sin that is their primary temptation.

Practice the Temptation Prayer in your daily inventory. It is not uncommon for ego to begin to creep back into our decision making process after we have made significant progress in our journey of faith. Ego will tempt us on two fronts. On one front he will tell us that we are strong enough to make it now, we don't need an accountability partner and we can let down our defenses a little. Then when we have slipped just a little ego tells us that we can't tell our accountability partner because he'll lose confidence in us. That is why the writer of the proverbs wrote, "Above all else guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

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The temptation to allow ego to come back into the driver's seat of your life is much more subtle than the blatant temptation of our primary sin, but it is just as effective in destroying our relationship with God if it is not dealt with properly.

Here is where you use the Temptation Prayer. Whether it is your primary sin that is tempting you or you are beginning to feel ego try to take control of your decisions, the Temptation Prayer is effective. Practice using it in every situation where you feel tempted to take even one step back in the direction you were once headed.

In Proverbs 4, after admonishing the readers to guard their heart, the writer goes on to instruct, "Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil" (verses 25-27). He was saying to pay particular attention to your daily walk and do not allow anything to get you off track.

In 2 Corinthians 10 the Apostle Paul tells us that we have divine power to tear down every argument that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (that's what ego does). Then he tells us to bring every thought into captivity and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

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When we make the daily effort to keep our thoughts and actions consistent with what we confess in our walk with God we will see growth in our lives.

Deal with any unruly thought and bring it into captivity before the thought becomes a desire.

A Thorn in the Flesh

We mentioned briefly what we refer to as our primary sin. As we have already said, our primary sin is that particular sin that we most often participated in when we were not walking with God. It is the one thing that you have been tempted by more than anything else. And, if you have fallen back at all it is this sin, or category of sins that has been your downfall. It is your recurring sin or recurring temptation.

I first began to see this concept of the primary sin, or temptation, in a passage in 2 Corinthians. The Apostle Paul is writing about a “thorn in the flesh” that had bothered him for some time. He isn’t specific about what the thorn was and there is much speculation about it.

This thorn in the flesh has caused much discussion among believers. In fact I was speaking in a church and making reference to this whole concept of the thorn in the flesh being our primary temptation and one of the elders of that congregation took issue with me. To him it was perfectly clear that the thorn in the flesh was the church itself and the way that Paul had been mistreated.

Some have taken the position that this thorn in the flesh was a physical malady. They believe that it was a recurring sickness or perhaps he had bad eyesight that plagued him.

"There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me....For when I am weak, then I am strong.

-2 Corinthians 12:7-10

I believe you can make a case for either of these positions, but I extend the application of this passage a step further. I make the application of the thorn being a recurring temptation. That may or may not be the main point Paul was trying to make, but the application certainly applies. The behavior that has been patterned into your life to the point that it has become habitual is

certainly a thorn in your side when you try to break the habit.

What got my attention on this issue of the thorn is that Paul said that he prayed about it three times then God answered him (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Now, I don't believe Paul just mentioned this thing at night when he was doing his "now I lay me down to sleep" prayer. It seems to me that on three separate occasions he set aside an extended period of focused prayer for this particular need. This thorn was certainly

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either something that was constant in his life or it was a recurring problem. In any event it was bothersome enough that he seriously prayed about it.

God's answer introduces some interesting ideas. God did not say, "Alright Brother Paul, I'll remove the thorn." Instead He said, "My grace is sufficient for you." It is interesting that His answer was that He was not going to grant your request. That wasn't His complete answer, but it was the first part. It looks like God was saying to Paul, "Look, you're just going to have to trust me on this."

The second part of God's answer to Paul was, "For my power is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9). So, what is he saying? He is saying that he was not going to remove the thorn but he was going to give Paul the ability to deal with it. When we look at the application of a primary temptation we can see that God would be saying, "OK, I know that you have a weakness in this area and you are often tempted by it, but I am telling you that if you trust me I will give you my power and you will have my strength and you can overcome."

Paul understood this because he concluded his thoughts on this subject in verse 10, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

Paul understood that the very thing which made him weak gave God the opportunity to display his power.

Paul was the master of paradox. How can weak be strong? How can this contradiction in terms reflect a consistent truth? Paul understood that if he would recognize his own weakness, and trust God alone for strength, then the very thing that made him weak gave God the opportunity to display his power.

The Value Of Our Thorn In The Flesh

First: It serves as a reminder of the sin that once defeated us and the grace of God that keeps us free.

Second: It serves as a spiritual thermometer. When we begin to be tempted by our primary sin it means our desire for God is becoming weaker and our desire for the flesh is becoming stronger.

Third: It is a wake-up call from God. It is his gift to us to remind us of our constant need for him. We are reminded of the weakness of the flesh and our need for his power.

Make your accountability partner part of your daily inventory. The mistake many make is that they do not continue with being accountable to another trusted person. Once the tension of guilt is relieved and they have confessed to God

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and another person they no longer feel the urgency to continue that depth of relationship with the person to whom they confessed. Because they don't feel the urgency, and because ego is always waiting in the wings to take control of our lives again, we begin to think that we can make it without accountability. After all, God has forgiven me and all I need to do is talk to him about my issues.

There is truth in the idea that God will take care of our issues when we bring them to us, and he will continue to forgive our confessed sin, but we are still in need of accountability with another human being. The Apostle James wrote, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other," (James 5:16).

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. - James 5:16

There is power in confessing to another person (James 5:16). When we are accountable to another faithful believer, and we have a prayer partner on these issues, we are restored from ill effects they have on us and freed from their bondage.

The 24 Hour Life And Your Daily Inventory

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery and today is a gift - I guess that's why they call it the present.

*One thing I do:
Forgetting what is
behind and straining
toward what is
ahead, I press on
toward the goal to
win the prize for
which God has
called me heaven-
ward in Christ Jesus.*

- Philippians 3:13-14

One of God's great gifts to man is that he gave us life one day at a time. Think of the horror of life being one long day. That would be so depressing that I don't think any of us could possibly make. But God, in his mercy, has given us life one day at a time, and that day is just 24 hours long. It is not only what we do with

today that affects our tomorrows, but our tomorrows are also affected by our yesterdays. But our yesterdays can only affect our tomorrows as much as we allow them to.

Among the great trials of our life are our memories of yesterday that we carry over into today. If our yesterdays were less than perfect, then today we feel less than perfect. An example of that idea is given to us in Philippians chapter three. Paul speaks to desiring perfection but falling short of it. He writes, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of [it]" (verse 13).

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Paul seems to be saying that he is trying to make it, but when he looks at his performance he realizes that he didn't do so good yesterday. It is his yesterday that gives him problems. Every time he looks back at his performance he feels the pressure to do better because his past was not good enough.

Our past creates a real dilemma within us. If we did our best yesterday, and that was not good enough, how can we do better today? Paul expresses this dilemma in Romans 7:24, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Yesterday will kill us if we just give it a chance.

Among the trials of our life are our memories of yesterday that we carry over into today,

Then the Apostle Paul begins to let us in on a little known secret. Yesterday can only affect you if you are looking back. Yesterday's failures can only make you feel like a failure if you look back at them. When Paul realized that truth he made the decision not to look back. He continues in Philippians 3:13, "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." How important is this idea of not looking back? Paul said "*one thing I do*". Not these two or three things; this one thing I do.

What was the one thing he did? He quit looking back at his failures and he pressed on. He took care of his shortcomings in proper order, not letting the sun go down on his failures before he made them right. That way he got up to a new day every day. Every day he got up enthused about pressing toward the mark of heaven because he was not burdened by yesterday.

Paul Said, "One thing I do." Not these two or three things, this one thing I do.

Then a very strange and interesting thing happens. The Apostle Paul found perfection in taking the position that yesterday is behind me so I'll forget it and press forward. Verse 15 of this same chapter in Philippians reads in the King James Version of the Bible, "Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded." In verse 12 he was not perfect; in verse 15 he is perfect. What made the difference?

There was only one thing he did in between verses 12 and 15. That is, he forgot those things that were behind him. He dealt with his failures and he let them go. He purposed to channel his thoughts and his efforts into the walk for today. He had set a mark. He was pointed toward heaven and intended to stay on course until he got there.

When we forget our failures and live in repentance, turning away from yesterday and turning toward Christ, we are perfect, not in our

A Thorn in the Flesh

righteousness, but “in that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” (Philippians 3:9). What a concept. We can be perfect today, regardless of our yesterday, by the power of God through our faith in Jesus Christ. Hallelujah.

Let us remember to live in today alone – trusting in the righteousness of Christ in us. Yesterday's failures will discourage us and its successes will make us over confident - living in the present with a repentant heart will give us perfection in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Growing in Maturity

Colossians 3:16 says, "So let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This phase in the process of growing in grace is about maturing in the faith. We are continuing to study, meditate and engraft the scriptures and their meanings as well as their applications to us. It is in this step that we develop consistency in our journey of faith. This is the growth and maturity step.

Step Eleven is about how we grow in grace and mature in our walk. In this step we seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. We have a lifetime of being programmed to act and react according to the ways of our old sinful nature – now we must input a new set of data that influences our life to reflect the values we are acquiring in our journey.

Remember the chapter early in this book where we talked about how behaviors are developed? The same process is used to change behaviors as was used to form them originally. The difference now is that we are not an empty com-

puter but one that is full of things that we need to get out.

Early in the growth of popularity of personal computers people were having difficulty making them work properly. Computer programmers and technicians coined a phrase to deal with people who were having a problem operating their computer. The phrase was GIGO; garbage in – garbage out. That phrase applies to our lives as well. What we have been acting out in our lives is the response we are making to the data that has been put into our central processing unit.

Step Eleven: Seek through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out

Jesus was making reference to this concept in Luke 6 when he gave the analogy of good fruit and bad fruit: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Jesus seemed to be saying that the thing which makes you what you are is what you have in your heart. If you have good things inside

you, good things will flow out from you. If you have bad things inside you then bad things will flow out from you. How often have we heard someone say, "I couldn't help it. They just made me mad." That person spoke the truth. They couldn't help it, not because of what someone else did though. They couldn't help what flowed out from them because that was what they had inside of them.

You can only bring out what you have put in: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart." GIGO; garbage in – garbage out.

Jesus seemed to be saying that the thing which makes you what you are is what you have in your heart.

Where did all the stuff that is inside of us come from? It is the accumulation of all the data that we have collected and responded to in our life. We have been affected by the world around us all of our lives. In the process of life we have gathered data that we have used in developing patterns of thinking. Responding and acting based upon the information we have acquired from the world has become the patterns of behavior in our life. We did not develop those patterns in a few days and we cannot change them overnight.

In this chapter we are dealing with ideas that will build a foundation for long term change. For

most of us that means that we must exert long-term effort to produce long-term results.

We are on a lifetime journey. Reconciliation, renewal and restoration is a lifetime process and requires a lifetime commitment.

As we mature in our walk God will continually be showing us imperfections that he is ready to work on in our life. That is why Paul talked about *being* transformed into his likeness. He used the word being to mean “in the process of,” that is, we are in the process of being transformed into his likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). He concludes that verse by referring to the ever-increasing glory that God is revealing in us. Step eleven is about maturing into the glory that God has intended for us, his children.

We are on a lifetime journey and our commitment to reconciliation, renewal and restoration must be for the long term.

When Joshua was about to cross over into the land of promise the Lord gave him some very specific instructions. Israel had 400 years of living in Egypt to get worked out of their hearts and forty years in the wilderness had not accomplished that. God was looking to Joshua to set the pattern that would change him and ultimately Israel. While this instruction is specifically for Joshua the concept applies to Israel and all who will apply it to themselves. Here is what God told Joshua:

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their fore-fathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 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."

- Joshua 1:6-8.

This command to Joshua incorporates the principles of prayer and meditation that are in step eleven. Let's take a closer look at this passage and see how we can apply it to ourselves.

Applying Joshua 1:6-8

"Be strong and courageous." God was telling Joshua that he had a massive task ahead of him. This task was going to take everything he had to give to get it done. Strength and courage would be necessary to effect the change that was vital to success in the promised land.

Strength and courage are necessary in our own experience to effect the changes that are essential to take us from the wilderness of our own life into the promised land of God's bless-

ing. Any worthwhile cause demands full commitment and effecting change for the better in our lives is not different. You must be committed to change to move out of the wilderness.

"Be careful to obey." God had carefully laid out a pattern for success and nothing less than following his pattern would produce the desired result. That is why Joshua was instructed to *be careful to obey*. He was being instructed to pay particular attention to; be cautious; proceed with caution – *BE CAREFUL*.

I cannot tell you how many people that we have ministered to who have wanted to live free of their addictive behaviors but they didn't want to commit themselves to the principles that would free them. They always wanted to do it their way. They would only follow closely those principles that didn't run counter to what they wanted to do. Everything beyond that they would do their way.

The admonition to be careful to obey is as applicable to us as it was to Joshua. To be finally and completely free of our past behaviors and desires we must become diligent about our life. We must be careful about what thoughts we allow to remain in our mind. We must be careful of the desires we allow to grow up in ourselves. We must be careful of the voices we hear that tend to influence us. We must be careful of the choices we make. In short, we must be careful to obey.

"Do not turn from it to the right or to the left." Joshua was no stranger to people with other ideas. He was among the original 12 spies sent into Canaan to check out the land. Joshua and Caleb returned with the message that there were mountains, walled cities, giants, fields and orchards and that they were well able to take the land in the name of the Lord. The other ten spies (what were their names?) returned to say that there were mountains, walled cities and giants in the land and we would be slaughtered if we tried to go capture the land.

It was the argument of the voices contrary to the ways of the Lord that influenced us and kept us wandering in the desert of unacceptable

What set Joshua and Caleb apart from the other ten spies is that they understood their source. The ten spies were only looking to their own ability; Joshua and Caleb were looking to the Lord God as their source.

Joshua was being called to stay focused on the source. Don't let anything on the left or on the right distract you. Stay focused on the goal and trust the one who has called you.

It is easy to apply this principle to our own lives. It was the argument of the voices contrary to the ways of the Lord that influenced us and kept us wandering in the desert of unacceptable behaviors. We must quit listening to thoughts and ideas that are not consistent with what God

tells us in his Word. Stay focused on the Word of God. Let no thought, or person, or circumstance distract you (Proverbs 4:20-27).

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth." Joshua was being told to confess only the truth of God's word. Only speak what God has said. The wisdom of this world will keep you in the wilderness, listen to the voice of the Lord and never stop speaking and remembering what he has said.

Moses had instructed Israel to, "keep the word ever before you" (Deut 6:4-9). He was giving the same instruction to Israel as God had given to Joshua. Continue to speak God's word, think God's word and meditate upon God's word.

Joshua had to wash his mind of everything he had learned through his experience with the world

Jesus was having a problem with disciples who would start to follow him then turn back. At one point Jesus asked the twelve disciples, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Then Peter answered his question with the truth that we must realize if we are to effect lasting change in our lives, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:66-69). We must realize that the only place where life can be found is in Jesus Christ.

“Meditate on it day and night.” Not only was Joshua supposed to continue to speak the word of God but he was also to continue to think about the word of God. He was being instructed to give careful thought to the word until it became a part of his inner person. He was to meditate upon the commands of the Lord until he began to live out what the word was saying to do. Joshua had to wash his mind of everything he had learned through his experience with the world and keep only what was consistent with God’s laws.

Doesn’t that sound a lot like the process of cleaning our mental system of all thoughts that are contrary of the faith walk? We program our thought processes by imputing new material for thought. As we meditate upon the principles and words that are consistent with a godly life those principles and words become a part of our inner person.

Through prayer and meditation we deepen our walk and our understanding of God’s will for us.

“Then you will be prosperous and successful.” Joshua knew that the success of his venture into the promised land of Canaan, where there was much prosperity just waiting to be taken, depended upon his obedience to the laws of God. If he paid close attention to the command to meditate upon God’s law until it becomes internalized, the hand of God would be upon him to insure his success. If he did not follow this

command he would be on his own and God would not bless him.

That is the same message to us today. A wonderfully blessed life awaits us in Christ Jesus. Jesus told us that he came with the purpose of giving us a full and abundant life (John 10:10). He has told us that he will give us anything we ask. In fact there are hundreds, even thousands of promises just waiting to be fulfilled. The only catch is that these promises of God are opened to us as we walk faithful in his way.

We renew our mind by putting into it the powerful words of promise and the ways of God that release those promises to us

Internalizing the word of God is vital to our continued restoration. In Romans 12:2 Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. How do we renew our mind? We renew our mind by putting into it the powerful words of promise and the ways of God that release those promises to us.

In the first Psalm David writes about this concept. He lays down a formula that will release the blessing of God to strengthen us and cause us to be like oaks planted along a river bank. He writes, "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. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers" (Psalm 1:1-3). When we walk in God's counsel our life becomes stable and we begin to become prosperous.

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." This is the person who no longer listens to the voices of the old life but has made a conscious decision to travel the road of faith. All of that was important to him in his old life; friends, position, influence, pleasures. All of these things are his past. He has turned away from them. He does listen to their counsel or even consider walking in their way.

Georgia (not her real name) sat in my office telling me about her most recent failure. She said, "Pastor Paul, I don't know what happened. I was visiting with an old friend and as we talked he pulled out a drug rig and began to fix some dope. I thought I was strong enough to stand but something just came over me and I could not say no." This is the story I have heard over and over.

*If we continue
in the counsel
of the ungodly
we will reap
the conse-
quences.*

I asked, "If you knew this person was a user, why were you even there?" Unfortunately, this particular woman never has quit the drug lifestyle for any long period of time. Her downfall

is that she doesn't see why she can't visit her friends.

If we continue in the counsel of the ungodly we will reap the consequences. That is why we are to cut off all fellowship with those who once influenced us to do evil.

"Or stand in the way of sinners." This part of the passage does not mean to get in the way of sinners. It means that this man does not go where the sinner goes, think the way sinners think or do what sinners do. The person David is describing is found among those who are living

This man does not go where the sinner goes, think the way sinners think or do what sinners do

in faith, not among those who are walking in their own way. The blessing of God cannot be released upon those who insist upon doing it their way. Their way has not worked before, why should they expect it work now?

"Or sit in the seat of mockers." If you go where sinners go, and listen to what sinners listen to; how will you stand when they mock what you claim to believe? If you sit among those whose lifestyle contradicts the principles you claim to believe you will soon begin to violate your own principles.

The only way to protect your mind and heart from the deceitfulness of the world system is to not participate in their revelry. If we allow

ourselves to be entertained by their mockery of the things we believe then we soon will be believing them.

"But his delight is in the law of the Lord."

The secret to this persons' success is that the way of the Lord has become a delight to him. He does not sit and daydream about the way it used to be, or about how it would be now if he could just do some of the things he used to. Rather, he looks forward to living out the word of God in his life. He searches out what the Lord has said and seeks the grace of God to follow in those paths.

Ezekiel was writing prophetically when he wrote of a day when God would do an absolutely new thing with people. He said that God would give people a new heart and a new spirit, and their desire would be for the laws of God (Ezekiel 36:24-32).

We can only effectively change our sinful nature by having a spiritual encounter

We can only effectively change our sinful nature by having a spiritual encounter. We can bring a measure of discipline into our life through the power of the will, but the very nature that drives us to do things that we know we shouldn't do can only be affected on the spiritual plane. God must give us a new heart and a new spirit.

And he does just that. Our spirit is washed clean and renewed by His spirit. Paul wrote in Titus 3:5, “He saved us by the washing of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” That’s it in a nutshell. When we appeal to God he responds by re-birthing us. We become born again, born of his spirit. We are fundamentally different on the inside – our motivation has changed.

One reason many fail in their attempt to overcome undesirable behavior is that they have not submitted to the birth of the Spirit of God within themselves. They have tried many programs and the latest ideas but they just don’t seem to have what it takes to change. They are, however, willing to try the next new idea that comes along.

“And on his law he meditates day and night.” This chapter is about using prayer and meditation to strengthen our faith and develop a consistency in our God-Walk.

When we have come this far in our journey of faith, and we have consistently applied the principles we have learned, we are already developing consistency in our life.

The process of restoration continues as we learn to apply God’s word as a cleansing agent. In Ephesians 5:26 Paul writes, “cleansing [the church] by the washing with water through the word.” Continually washing our mind with the Word of God begins to internalize his word.

When the Word of God becomes our primary data source then it becomes our food for thought. What is our food for thought, or the things we think about, becomes the things we believe. What we believe is what we become. As we internalize the Word of God we become the expression of the Word and our life consistently reflects the glory of God.

That is why the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind” (Romans 12:2). Once we have been conformed to a pattern of living, or a lifestyle, then there must be a renewing of our thought processes in order that we can be transformed in our thinking, actions and lifestyle. We do that through prayer and meditation on the Word of God.

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- Romans 12:2

Confession and repentance are just the beginning of our walk. That is the “being reconciled” stage. Once we are reconciled to God through our faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:27-20) then we are renewed in our spirit by His Spirit (Titus 3:5) and we are ready for the process of restoration.

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The restoration process is accomplished through prayer and meditation. These vital elements of growth cannot be ignored or our growth is not complete and we do not mature into the fullness of the stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

The Apostle Peter realized this when he wrote, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" 2 Peter 1.

Spread the Word

When we have had a spiritual awakening it is only natural for us to become aware of those who are struggling with their lives and have not yet begun their journey of faith. We also see some people who have started their journey but have stalled along the way because they haven't yet learned the process. As we mature, we have the responsibility of leading others into the freedom we have gained in Christ.

The twelfth step in the *God-Walk, a Journey of Faith*, is about our responsibility to others after having a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps. We carry this message to others as we practice these principles in all our affairs.

Those among us who have gained much by applying these principles have a responsibility to share them with someone who is still struggling with undesirable behaviors in their life. Paul instructs in Galatians 6:1 that we are to look with compassion, not judgment, upon those who have fallen. Our responsibility is to use everything we know to open them to restoration. *We must be our brothers keeper.*

The Apostle Paul is dealing with this subject in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. He first speaks of the day when we must face the judgment and the fearful respect and awe we have toward God and his ways. Then in verse 11 he writes, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." Because we have been restored from the behaviors that had put us at war with God and know the consequence of those behaviors we are mandated to warn others with love.

STEP TWELVE:

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

We who have been restored are to be ambassadors of restoration: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Do you remember the passage in Matthew chapter 28 where Jesus is commissioning his disciples to go into the world and preach the message of Christ and kingdom of God? You may know this passage as The Great Commission. It is a mandate to us today.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of

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the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

This passage is our marching orders as it were. We are given the option of saying no; it is a direct order. Let's look a little more closely at what this passage is telling us:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" - Authority; the *right and obligation*. Authority always carries with it the responsibility to carry out what one has been authorized to do.

"Therefore go and make disciples" - Using the authority Christ had been given he has commissioned those who have been reconciled and restored to carry out the mission he began.

Authority always carries with it the responsibility to carry out what one has been authorized to do.

"Therefore go..." - Mark records this statement as, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." The "Go and preach" command places upon us the mandate of Romans 10:14-15; we who have heard, received, and believed have no choice - we must carry the message.

"...and make disciples" - The process of making disciples is ongoing and lifelong. We are

commanded to go, preach, find those who will listen, convert them then make disciples of them.

What is a disciple? A disciple is one who is learning from another. There must be a teacher and a learner to complete the process. Our restoration is not complete until we are making disciples of others.

There are many passages in the New Testament that speak to the idea of our responsibility to give ourselves in the service of others. We'll look at only two; they are Mathew chapter 25 and Revelation 3.

Jesus gives three parables about serving in Mathew 25. It is the third parable that very closely resembles what we are talking about. This is the story of separating the sheep from the goats. Jesus presented some very new interesting insights in telling this story.

This is a lesson about the end of time, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left" (Matthew 25:31-45). The disciples began to wonder; who were the sheep and who were the goats. Jesus gave us some interesting insight as to who they were.

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While the people were standing there wondering about who were the sheep and who were the goats, Jesus began to explain it. In verses 34-36 He said the king will say to the sheep, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

He wasn't looking for excuses, or reasons why they couldn't serve; he simply said do it

The sheep all looked at him and asked, “When did we do these things to you?” And he answered, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” That is the attitude Jesus has. He wasn't looking for excuses, or reasons, why they couldn't serve; he simply said do it for them because in doing that you will be doing it for me.

This is a most amazing parable. Jesus is separating people based upon how they served. It should get our attention to learn that Jesus values the most needy among as if they were himself. And it is alarming to read what is going to happen to those who ignore those who need us most.

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Those who were left, the goats, who had no understanding of their responsibility for those who were still in dire circumstances, received an astonishing judgment. Jesus said, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment." Do you get the idea that Jesus thinks it is important to share with others what we have been given?

The second passage that we referenced earlier is Revelation chapter 3. In that chapter the Lord is addressing various churches and speaking to their strengths and weaknesses. Beginning in verse 14 he is addressing the church at Laodicea.

The church at Laodicea was wealthy. They had gained acceptance in the community. Their members were prosperous. Their worship was good and their doctrine sound. They had arrived and now they had need of nothing. At least, that was what they thought.

What God saw was a proud and arrogant people who had no idea of their purpose and what they should have been doing. Then in verse 20 we are given a verse that is often used in evangelism. In that verse Jesus is standing at a door and says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." We have applied this verse to inviting the unconverted to open the door of their heart

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to allow him in, and that is a good application. But that is not the primary application here.

Notice he is addressing a church and in that context he is standing at the door asking to come in. He is asking to come into the church. Get the picture; he is outside the church trying to get in. How can that be?

Remember Matthew 25. He was speaking about the needy; the hungry, the sick, the naked, and those in prison. Then he astonished everyone by saying, “When you have served these you have served me.”

Is it possible that the Jesus that was standing outside the door of the church at Laodicia was the beggar from the corner? Or could he have been the young single mother needing someone to reach out to her and give her hope? Maybe he was that drug addict that has no one to offer him life.

Do you beginning to understand the message here? We have been given a mandate to share the good news of Jesus, the savior of the world, with people who are the most in need of that message.

The pattern that was established in the New Testament was common concern for the believer and unbeliever alike. In the book of Acts we find references to people selling their property to share with the poor. In Ephesians 4:28 Paul instructs, “He who has been stealing must steal

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no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

The Apostle seems to be saying that when we have come into the faith we should no longer do the things that kept us in bondage but rather become productive. What was the purpose of becoming productive? To share our blessings with others who are in need.

We are commanded to become committed to productive activity. When your change has come about, then invest your time, talent and treasure to help others whose needs are the same as yours.

Find others who have had the same problems as you and show them how to be free.

Remember this; Jesus did not have to leave his throne in heaven to come to earth. He chose to serve man in that way.