

EXPANDING THE TWELVE STEPS

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ISBN: 1978329474

ISBN-13: 978-1978329478

DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my Mom, Elizabeth Lafaut, who first encouraged me to examine my life's journey in the context and framework that the Twelve Steps provide.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge Jeff for getting me into a NOVALCO Twelve Step group when we first met. Our paths have not crossed for a long time. Still think about you in my prayers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Many people would like these questions answered:

1. How can we be freed from bad habits, or addictions?
2. How can we be healed from spiritual/psychological wounds?
3. How can flaws in our character be removed? and
4. How can weaknesses be turned into strengths?

First off, there are no “real” quick fixes for any of these necessarily! Building a life or doing renovations takes much time, and at its best and healthiest it is observably gradual. When a sin has a single root, then God can uproot it quickly together with our cooperation. But when things are messy, tangled, knotted, hard, not flexible, and without movement; without play then more than one maxim, more than one medicine, more than one strategy is needed to undo, heal, and purify us.

There is always a path beneath our feet to take for spiritual healing: it’s always a journey; but we must learn to search for the healing, and in the process we will grow in faith, hope, love, patience, humility, and healthy relating.

So what makes a journey a healing one? One answer is to respond in humility to the little “t” truths that the Creator speaks to us daily which we can tune into if we know how. By humility I mean being teachable.

Asking the Holy Spirit a question, and listening for an answer can be very straight forward when we know the promises and

principles found in the Scriptures and believe them. When one comes into God's presence one shouldn't do so lightheartedly, otherwise one won't take God's answers seriously, and one won't be as discerning concerning whose voices we are listening to.

We can test the source of the communications in our minds that we hear after having asked a question to the Holy Spirit within us by simply asking the source: "Is this the flesh or the Spirit speaking?" If it is the "flesh" then we reject the message; if it is "Spirit" then we can further test the content we are sure the Holy Spirit has spoken to us. The book by Brad Jersak called *Can You Hear Me?* provides a lot of practical wisdom on how we can go deeper into two-way prayer and I highly recommend it.

Mark Virkler's book on two-way prayer through journaling called: *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* is also very helpful. The keys are meant to give structure to the process of journaling. They are:

- key 1). Quiet yourself,
- key 2). Tune into vision,
- key 3). Tune into spontaneity, and
- key 4). Journal.

They help one to listen, remember and reflect on what "actually" is said by God in a non-judgmental, non-attacking, and less skeptical fashion. He provides biblical tests to discern what is written and is well worth the read and practice.

Both authors writings have been foundational to me arriving

at the contents found in my books.

Once one has a grounded faith in hearing God's voice, then strategic structures like my book *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* and this book can be good locales, backdrops, structures or methods that can spring board us into healing processes with God's help.

What Kind of Addiction Do I Have?

An addiction can have more than one root that causes it, so we shouldn't peg our hopes on only one medicine or one approach when we seek relief or hit blockages to recovery. However, not giving it our best shot when working a strategy means we never gave the strategy a healthy chance. We owe it to ourselves to walk with the God who can make the Steps work. Going deeper until we find the truth that sets us free to practice self-control and to also love people more deeply is what is needed.

Here are some possible roots to addictions:

- a) Spiritual wounds such as un forgiveness, holding onto judgments, or nursing hatred and desires for revenge (are dealt with in this book).
- b) Marring of the personality with strongholds such as fear, pride, envy, judging, greed, meanness, anger, negativity, self-pity, lust, sloth, and gluttony... along with visible sins, are dealt with in my book: *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*.
- c) Believing lies that the devil, and the world speak to us that put us in bondage are dealt with by practicing

two-way-connecting-prayer in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Meditating on the Bible and learning to counter lies with little 't'-truths that God will bring into our lives as we search for the ability to love God, people, and self, healthily.

- d) Trying to fill that God-shaped-vacuum for peace within us with idols such as sex, porn, food, junk-food, cigarettes, soda pop, alcohol, exercise, people, gadgets, cars, homes, property, clothing, shopping, gambling, experiences...etc. These idols can be like magnets that attract us relentlessly but ultimately they offer no lasting relief. Yet, such can be broken by redirecting one's spiritual thirsts and hunger to God where they belong, with strategic and intense heartfelt prayer. I discuss this issue in detail in my book *Dismantling The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil So Love Can Thrive* (and in the last two chapters in this book.)
- e) The last two are (i) the herd instinct, and (ii) familiarity or habit. Being in the wrong crowd, having the wrong friends, being in an unhealthy relationship, living in the wrong parts of town, or having the wrong kinds of jobs can all contribute to catapulting oneself into the throws of addiction, desperations, and heartbreak. Choosing to love God above all else is the only way out...and He will lead us out if we walk in faith, listen to Him and obey Him when He asks us to leave behind our Egypts for the Promised Land.

Concerning weaknesses and character flaws. There is no finite system of principles that will bring about complete restoration in everyone. Certain little "t" truths will help one person and not another and visa-versa; but the source of

these truths is always the BIG “T”-Truth: Jesus. This is because we believe different lies, and we need the correct corresponding truths to set us free from the lies we have believed. We won't see everything at once or by ourselves, but Jesus does, and He wants to help us. Our hearts are mysterious. But if we have a tenacious faith like the tenacity of a mustard seed we will win through as we struggle and search for freedom to love and learn how to care more deeply for people. Maybe not immediately, but observably gradually.

Also, a healthy enough relational connection with God, understanding certain truths, a commitment to LOVE, awareness of spiritual hunger, and caring for people; need to be in place solidly before healthy positive change can really start to snowball, be felt, and be built deeply into our lives. Healthy thinking must also take a priority.

Analyzing our beliefs and way of life by ourselves alone will not go far enough. We need a living spiritual Light to guide us, to give us strength, to carry us through the spiritual tearing down and building up processes within each of us. We also need to renew our minds and attitudes through a growing healthy two-way relationship with God. He wants to be the friend and Love that will bring healing and peace to us. Real change is a process that can go all over the place at times.

“The Twelve Steps” found in this book, are a deepening of the usual Twelve Steps used in traditional AA groups or other communities that try to help those with addictions. If you are a person who practices “The Twelve Steps”, then I think this

book might bring more freedom from addictions and enable you to love people more deeply in your spiritual journey. It can help with many of the problems mentioned above. But don't be too sold out on this method alone to solve all of your problems. The heart is a very hidden thing. All little "p"-principles have their limitations, and so do "The Twelve Steps" in this book. Sometimes not focusing on spiritual self-help literature for a period of time will clear the head and mind, and enable God to communicate with us better and lead us into more freedom elsewhere within.

There are different personality types: analytical, intuitive, touchy-feely, out of the box, visual imaginer, as well as the differences that male or female-ness bring into the picture. We also absorb new information in different ways: verbal, touch, visual, or written. Some do so with the help of repetition, others latch on quickly. Some go mostly by what they know, others mostly by faith.

Faith focused people go farther than those who are purely knowledge focused. Those who go by faith are open to revelation, usually ask enough questions and obtain the promises by taking risks and using imagination. Whereas, those who are knowledge focused are usually limited in perspective, don't take chances, are more closed-minded, and go nowhere new any time soon.

When encountering dilemmas sometimes telling oneself: "I don't know what to do" is unhealthy. A better strategy to use is to ask oneself: "What do I believe I should do?" This second strategy opens up the mind to creativity, humility, and

teachableness instead of caving into despair because one doesn't know certain supposed absolute truths. Fact is, we don't have absolute truth, only God does.

Analyzing one's situations repeatedly all by oneself, and being alone in the driver seat, is not as useful as fellowship with God. If we have believed any lies that brought bondages it is because we saw the lies as a truth...and no amount of self-analyzing will uncover the lies as false. Only light exposes things for what they are: Jesus is the spiritual Light of the world. Listening to God and inspired people is more useful than analyzing.

Every person see things differently (some significantly and other less so). So, others see what we often don't, and this can be very helpful. God sees everything, and does speak directly to us, but often He likes to speak to us through others in case we get spiritually proud and begin to look down on what others have to say because of our "direct connection" with God. God does speak in a multitude of different ways and we need to respect this. The spiritual journey we embark on in working the Steps is one where we grow dependent on community and on our Higher Power through faith and commitment to caring.

As I discovered the power to change that the Most High God grants to those who practice the Steps I eventually realized that I ought not confuse the Steps with my theory behind these same Steps. If these Steps bring you closer to God, help free you from some compulsions, then fine... hooray! If not, then swimming on the surface needs to be abandoned by

going deeper and deeper into the heart of our situation.

God's presence is: PEACE because He is more than just a mind (whose principles or insights we can agree with and profit from); He has an infinitely rich personality (He wants relationships with all of us and to be enjoyed, loved and heard), He has a heart (full of desires to be close to us, and to love us), He has emotions (like joys, and sorrows), He has likes and dislikes (being for good (spiritual health), and against evil (spiritual sickness)); and He has power together with understanding to heal our hearts and minds.

God cares for each of us, and He wants to lead each of us to the places He has prepared for us. Those who want to rule over their own lives alone, making their own decisions acting like they are a "god" without consulting the true God will find working the Steps very challenging if not very difficult. We all have this tendency to varying degrees within us and we have to give them up with God's grace one step at a time in prayer.

If one does not want to be free, then don't bother attempting to practice these Steps (Cf. step 6) because they usually only work for those who "really" want to be free. The Steps talk about putting one's faith in a Power greater than oneself.

Jesus is my Higher Power. If you don't know Him, or are skeptical about His claims and promises because of the hypocrisy of and hurts inflicted by some of those who claim to follow Him. Please don't shut Him out of your life for this reason alone. Go to the source. Get yourself a copy of the New Testament and read for yourself all the wonderful things He did in His earthly journey. If you are going to reject Him,

reject Him because of who He is and not because of the stink belonging to some of those who claim to follow Him.

The path (to becoming free) described in this book may help some people jettison restrictive baggage from their past, but because the heart is a mysterious thing other helps will likely be in order too. I have listed a few other approaches (or books) at the end of this book that have helped me (some in small ways and others that have helped me in BIG ways).

I highly recommend an approach to relationship with Jesus that is based on the solid promise that those who believe in Jesus do know His voice. As one grows in being able to recognize God's voice there will eventually be less guessing, less frustration (less hitting one's head against walls or doors), less putting pressure on oneself, and less trying to use one's own wits alone to figure out the next step to be taken for healing and renewal. If you do see bad fruit in your life, then ask God what the roots are and He will eventually in His time show you what to repent from in prayer. This might seem difficult or even impossible; but with Brad, Mark and Patti's books it will follow naturally.

If you won't give up then Jesus will make a way for you into freedom from compulsive/ sin strongholds if you let Him (probably not immediately, but gradually in an observable time frame as you go deeper)! Even when plagued with confusion and doubt, Jesus is here with us. He will lead us through our confusion when we commit to following Him despite the pain, guilt, poverty, and shame we may be experiencing. We are not left as orphans. We have God with

us, to help, protect, and save or heal. Let's become dependent on God through faith, trust, and teachableness.

If you do find some freedom from working the Steps below, don't think you have it all figured out. There is so much hidden from each person, so none of us see the whole of reality. We all have at least a few hundred things that need to be dealt with in our relational selves. Enough work to last us until our journeys comes to an end. God is the great physician: let Him be in charge. Don't go ahead of Him thinking you know what needs to be repented from, but do search. Real change comes only when repentance in certain areas of our lives is okay with God and coincided with His timing. If God wants us to repent, then He will let us know how as we search things out, and when needed, God gives us the power to change. Self-righteously going ahead of Him is doomed to failure and won't help us fight through the blockages, bondages, pressure, lies, frustrations, confusion, coldness, and darkness.

Those people who have faith, not so much faith "in faith", but in God will conquer the battles and embrace the fruit of God's promises in life when they search things out in the context of their relationships with God. Waiting on (searching in a patient, wise, and caring way with) Him to deal with all the shit in your life one thing at a time is wise. For this to work, don't rush things. For this to work: hearing, recognizing, understanding, knowing God's voice, and searching where He leads is of utter most importance. He is the key, the light, and the balm that brings hope, direction, and healing.

A sturdy foundation is necessary to build a house (or a relationship with God and a stable life) that will celebrate a wholesome joy and stand the tests of many storms or hardships. The Steps offer a structure that can be used to humbly renew our attitudes, and to become free from our addictions.

When I first renewed my walk with Jesus, I had some pretty silly ideas on how real change was to occur. I felt like a new creation because of the joy and meaning I felt back then. But in reality, I had so much dead wood in my heart taking the place of love, and blocking my eyesight (impairing my conscience) that I didn't know about. On one hand, I thought I had high morals, and in some ways that was true, but on the other hand I had no idea about just how far short I fell from God's moral standards in many areas, or how unhealthy spiritually my heart and mind actually were.

Later, when my Dark Journey began, my mother strongly suggested that I needed to practice The Twelve Steps in order to get healthy again. She gave me an AL-ANON booklet that I attempted to read, but I found it very disagreeable because of my "narrow fundamentalist" ways of looking at things back then.

But eventually, I would come to see that working "The Twelve Steps" can be crucial for real change in some areas of our lives. Many Christians think that all the changes necessary in one's life will occur through saying the Sinner's Prayer. But Holy Scripture indicates that we can and should go deeper in our relationships with God. In doing so God can bring much

healing, peace, and the ability to bear much good fruit. In some cases, God uses (discipline) or suffering to help create meaningful change (in order for this to work we need to have faith in Jesus/ God and His goodness and to tenaciously persevere). Some of the times we will need to have debilitating lies (that may have had some truths in them) that we somehow began to believe in our pasts exposed by Jesus (and replaced with His liberating truths).

Lies bring bondages; truths bring freedom. Sometimes we will have to forgive others and our selves for freedom to come our way again (as we can lose it in bumpy or turbulent situations). We also need to learn how to think in healthy ways. Believing truths can set us free, but won't if we don't think correctly about those truths, even though we may have those truth stored within us.

Idols also bring addictions and need to be replaced with God's presence in our hearts/ souls/ spirits/ and minds. At all times one will have to "abide" in Jesus and welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives in order to pursue, get free, and remain free from addictive behaviors. Abiding is a simple thing. It requires from us to remain teachable and to follow Jesus wherever He leads us to. We get strength when we abide in Jesus by humbly believing that Jesus is with us, won't forsake us, and we aren't in this alone. To abide in Jesus, we need to believe in His goodness, nurturing our ability to hear His voice, and being committed to doing what He asks us to do in the present. Real freedom is the ability to do what is right. By abiding in Jesus we experience a growing peace and out of

this peace we will conquer compulsions and we will also bear much good fruit.

Since these Steps do focus on sins or wrong doing (and unhealthy attitudes), I have learned that my correcting - focus needs to be on my life and not so much on other people's faults, and that I am not called to convict or point out anyone else's sins. Yes, people have sinned against me. But the Steps in part are meant to get me to deal with my sinful reactions to those people and their sins because that is where my bondages usually have been.

Those who come to God do so because they desire and hunger to be loved and to love. This also means we start caring for those who hurt us in the past.

In practicing these Steps our aim ought to be: healthily loving others as ourselves for this is the goal that makes, in part, these Steps complete and helps to uncover the little "t"-truths necessary to set us free in our daily living.

I am including in this book as much helpful truth that was fashioned in the furnace of my experience with the backdrop being the Twelve Steps. I have learned stuff from reading the Bible, self help books, theology books, Twelve Step groups, and listening to the body of Christ. I don't know where I'd be if God did not wisely bringing people or books into my life at the right times with wisdom that helped to conquer the darkness in my heart. Here are the Steps that have worked for me in certain troublesome areas in my life:

2 THE TWELVE STEPS

Here are the official Twelve Steps¹ from Al-anon:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

[The spirit of step 8 means to further embraces these healing actions: Make a list of all those people I am

- I. Holding judgments against,
- II. Having hateful attitudes towards,
- III. Plotting revenge against, or
- IV. Holding resentments towards.

Even though I possibly did not act out my hostility against these persons, and become willing to forgive

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and love them, and give up the hatred and desire to hurt them. If I have never embraced my anger against those who wronged me I need to do so.]

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

[The spirit of step 9 asks to do the following in the light of what is asked in step 8. With God's help:

- I. Give up my judgments towards the people I hold them against,
- II. Give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the person(s) I had problems with.
- III. If I am nursing or toying with vengeful thoughts I give them up, and
- IV. Forgive those people who hurt me]

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. 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.

How I interpret the Twelve Steps:

Step 1. I admit that I have very serious addictions, compulsions, or insensitivity in my life that have become

unmanageable.

Step 2. Come to believe that there is “a” good-ness (named Jesus) somewhere in the universe who is so good that it is willing to help me back to sanity.

Step 3. Next, I turn my life and my will over to Jesus, as I understand Him for now realizing that the farther I travel with Him the more differently I will see and experience Him. This Step for the Christian is called: “Learning to Abide in Jesus the True Vine.”

Step 4. I do a fearless moral inventory with the help of Jesus.

Step 5. I confess to God and another person the “exact” nature of my wrongs. God will forgive these, and promises to cleanse me from them as I continue to work these Steps.

Step 6. Become entirely ready for God to remove all my defects.

Step 7. Humbly ask God to remove all my shortcomings.

Step 8. Make a list of all those I have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all, because I acted out my selfishness or my anger in unhealthy ways (for instance by hurtful words, stealing or taking my revenge). Also make a list of all those people I am

- I. Holding judgments against,
- II. Having hateful attitudes towards,
- III. Plotting revenge against.
- IV. Holding resentments towards

Even though I possibly did not act out my hostility, and become willing to forgive and love them, and give up the

hatred and desire to hurt. If I have never embraced my anger against those who wronged me I need to do so. Then proceed to next step.

Step 9. With God's help I make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. Further, I'm asked to do the following. With God's help:

- V. Give up my judgments towards the people I hold them against,
- VI. Give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the person(s) I had conflict with.
- VII. If I am nursing or toying with vengeful thoughts I give them up.
- VIII. I forgive those people who hurt me

I will show how to do these in the next two chapters.

I don't need to confess and repent from my anger about injustices, only my anger that I self-righteously try to use as a tool for changing other people as well as myself. I need to own my anger, respect its place and process it healthily. It can be a warning bell or alarm that something is wrong. If I say my anger is morally wrong in this context, then I am denying a place in me that senses injustices, or hurt (and these won't be dealt with; the denial of anger or justice will bring about many negative emotions that will lead us to hurting people and growing compulsive behaviors). Anger about injustice is usually good, but if we don't process it healthily, then it leads to judgments and resentments, and then the resentments need to be dealt with. If we have resentments then these rob

us of our joy and happiness and we will eventually nurse this negativity with our addictions.

Usually, anger is an emotion, not a moral wrong. We are allowed to be angry, but we ought not sin in our anger.

The Twelve Steps don't address being addicted to judging. My book *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* deals with this and many other important topics thoroughly.

Step 10. I continue to take personal inventory and when I am wrong promptly admit it; seek forgiveness and repent in prayer when needed, and dispense mercy through the grace of God and regularly ask Jesus so I can abide in Him by renewing my mind with truthful thinking.

Lies feel like truths to those deceived by them. Lies put people into bondage. Real truth sets people free to love. Therefore, relationship with God, and growing in being able to hear the voice of God is the next step:

Step 11. I seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for my life and the power to carry it out. Truth and grace set people free.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I try to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles in all my affairs. Once free from an addiction certain truths will protect me when tempted. But focusing on the Great Shepherd and following where He leads me to is pivotal to getting out of traps, temptations, and snares.

The above Steps are a set of practical principles that can be taken for freedom to come observably gradually in many cases.

If you have resentments, hatred, and desires for revenge and want change stick to the Steps above for as long as God requires it. If you want ideas on how to forgive or want theories on why I think the Steps work, then look below.

But remember God is interested in relationships, not obsessively pursuing principles or focusing on dirty laundry all the time. Working on fixing ourselves solely by independently exerting brute force, pride, control, angry-pressure, self-pity, analyzing or problem solving, blindly knocking on door after door is very time consuming as well as a painful way to tackle life. Jesus offers a healthier way.

Jesus is our Spiritual Doctor², if we would have Him. Getting to recognize His voice allows us to ask Him questions that He will answer (and if He doesn't do so immediately there may be very good reasons for it) that will lead us to renewal in our stagnant minds and hearts leading to healthier behaviors and with His help bring peace, strength, and freedom from addictions and hopefully more freedom to love people.

Brad Jersak's book called, *Can You Hear Me?* lays a very good foundation that will help us build our relationships with God in ways that will help us grow spiritually, and it will help our prayer lives to no longer be boring. Mark and Patti Virkler's books on Journaling will help in the same way to build on

² Luke 5:31

Brad's book.

These Steps are good as far as they go, but how do we give up judgments, resentments, hatred, seeking revenge?

3 PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

There is no one way to forgive. But there can be blocks to forgiving people too. These blocks are holding judgments, having pride, and being conceited. Conceit means we fear not being respected and implement unhealthy ways of getting respect and honor. Forgiveness the easy way involves prayer. For example we can pray something like:

Lord Jesus, I give up my judgments
towards: “ _____ ” with your help,
and I give up my conceit in this area too with your help;
and I therefore now forgive: “ _____ ” with your help
in faith for what they did to me when “ _____ ”
and I give up my wishes for revenge against them now
with your help in faith;
I give up the darkness and hatred in my heart,
and I set this person free
and myself too with your help Lord God through faith.
I choose to love them with your help Jesus,
because this brings peace and happiness to me.
Thank you for healing me
and helping me to say “yes” to loving this person instead!
Amen!

When we humans choose to forgive some body, we are jettisoning our bad energy towards the person and choosing good energy towards them instead. This is what it means to have a pure heart. We don't even have to use the words: “I forgive you” with them, but we can just decide to give up in

faith with Jesus' help the hardness, give up the blackness, give up the coldness, give up the judging, give up the ungrace, give up our conceit, and give up not loving the person in our hearts. And, instead saying "yes" in faith with Jesus' help to loving the person with clean energy and refusing to bring up the past because we have forgiven them from our hearts.

Our related baggage from our pasts don't influence us negatively anymore when we forgive from the heart. This is based on living out the Golden Rule together with grace. Because we want unconditional love (i.e. grace); we grant the same grace to everyone. When it comes to judging someone, who did us wrong, then we need to invite grace, otherwise we will stay wounded forever. We forgive for our own sake. If we don't forgive people who piss us off, it won't necessarily affect their destiny nearly as much as ours. I choose to forgive others because it is healthy for me, and because I "really" want to care for all persons. I can't be a healthy person if I cut off my love from any particular person.

We can't be friends with everyone (and not everyone wants to be our friend). Yes, we are called to forgive everyone who sins against us, but if they are toxic, unkind, self-pitying, negative, judgmental, and uncaring and basically rub us the wrong way (with friction), then a friendship just is not practical. We get to choose our friends; we don't have to be friends with someone just because they want it. Forgiveness: yes, but friends not always.

Moreover, sometimes it seems impossible to forgive no

matter how much we wrestle with doing so, I have found that when this happens the issue is not un-forgiveness, but to repent in faith from my conceit, pride, and/or judgments made.

Forgiveness is not minimizing the transgression, or denying the transgression exists. People tend to think that if they “really” focus on the horridness of an evil deed done to them then they won’t be able to forgive. When one attempts to minimize what an agent of one’s hurt has done then one will have problems forgiving the agent. If this is the case, then one is doubtful of one’s ability to forgive and may not know that God wants to help the forgiving process become completed. Forgiveness doesn’t minimize an offense. Forgiveness doesn’t make an evil deed good or acceptable. The more hurtful the evil deed the more power or grace God grants us to be able to forgive. God is BIG enough to help us forgive any evil done to us.

Sin is always wrong. Minimizing or denying wrongs add to insensitivity and lack of caring along with wrongly moving personal boundaries that invites even more confusion in our relationships that opens the door to more hurts and a less positive path or journey.

Most people who we believe to have sinned against us aren’t even aware of what they have done. We ought to forgive them anyways. The only time we ought to tell them they are forgiven is when they ask for forgiveness. If they don’t ask for forgiveness we shouldn’t mention it unless they are a danger

to to themselves, someone else, or society.³

Un-resolved anger makes us feel bad, and if not dealt with will cause addictions, depression, insanity, or insensitivity. Forgiveness means to no longer see myself as a victim, but as an overcomer.

Some people believe that God only forgives those people who repent and further believe that this is the way it should be with how we forgive. God has never sinned so He doesn't have to forgive like we have to who have sinned. God is love not anger. People who believe that repentance is necessary for them to forgive the agent of hurt, define forgiveness differently than I do.

Clearly, if one is not willing to change one's behavior the relationship will not be what it was or could be. Forgiveness leads to reconciliation when repentance is present. It is God's desire to forgive all. Not all people will or do receive and embrace that forgiveness. In fact, if we don't embrace God's forgiveness through faith, God's forgiveness won't or can't get through to us. God can't force His forgiveness on us.

Forgiveness is more about us than those who pissed us off. It sets us free from chains, flesh hooks, negativity, hurt, pain, bitterness, meanness, hostility, hatred, anger, self-pity, malice and revenge.

³ I am grateful to my wife Sophie for this insight, and to R.T. Kendall for making this wisdom real to me.

“Anger is designed to be a guest, not a life time resident.”⁴ Guests ought to stay only for a short while whereas lifetime residents are continual burdens. Ideally we ought to deal with our anger in healthy ways and once dealt with ought to be gone. However, that anger can come back and knock on the doors of our hearts/ minds, and can even invite itself back into our hearts repeatedly without us consciously being aware of it or realizing what we are doing it each time. Hence, the constant need for awareness, and a Great Shepherd to guide us and look out for all our best interests.

Some acts are either moral or immoral, whereas other acts may annoy us but are neither right nor wrong and so are neutral. All these acts may foster intense anger and can turn into resentments. That anger needs to be dealt with in healthy ways: it needs to be processed.

Forgiving somebody does not involve beating, forcing or making ones' emotions fall in line with kindness, love, warmth, and compassion. Forgiveness is an act of the will done in faith with God's grace in prayer; and when done the emotions either immediately or shortly or eventually fall into line with peace as the weight is dropped and the wound is healed. We don't choose or force how this plays out. I don't have to wrestle my emotions into submission when I get hurt, get angry, or get offended! When I forgive agents of hurt, then the hurt gets healed, and peace and softness of heart return. The hurt is what causes the anger, the anger if

⁴ Gary Chapman, *Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In A Healthy Way*, Northfield Publishing © 2004, p. 85

unchecked helps us to resent those involved, and this causes bitterness, meanness, hostility, hatred, in our hearts, and sometimes can even cause us to possibly murder people.

4 REPENTANCE

Relationships can get very tricky, there are so many pitfalls, so many things we are blind to. What we see as reality is often just our perceptions of reality. We can think we are fine after being rejected or being in a conflict, but we can be totally blind to the consequences of our reactions and decisions.

Many people think that repentance is just seeing you are in the wrong and deciding to do it differently in the future. This can work in some cases, but some maladies of the spirit, require more of God to be involved. True repentance is always done with God's help, and strategic prayer is how it is accomplished.

What is the New Testament meaning of the word, "repent" in the context of salvation?

I think that recognizing one's wrongs, and feeling sorry for them is necessary for true repentance. Repentance is simply changing one's mind on a matter, and giving up a sin in prayer with Jesus' help. We don't repent so God will then love us. We repent because we hunger and thirst for righteousness. We love because God always first loves us.

Most people by themselves can't guarantee repentance all the time, because often they may not know how to. We are human and can make the same mistakes repeatedly as well as compulsively. A righteous person gets up each time she or he falls down. I know that I felt sorry for my addictive sins long before God showed me ways out of committing any of them.

Yet, I had faith and considered myself to still be a practicing Christian while I was addicted or in bondages to such horrible darkness.

Our sins can often seem like smoke and fire. Blowing the smoke won't put out the fire. Some sins are symptoms from seemingly unrelated past sins that I call virus sins. We may be able to control the symptoms for a while if we are lucky. But we will have to take the right medication to get rid of the virus if we don't want the symptoms to keep flaring up over and over again.

Put another way, some sins are bad fruit that come from trees whose seeds were planted in our hearts. These seeds are seemingly unrelated serious sins from our past. We may be able to pull the bad fruit off the tree for a while, but it will keep growing back if we don't uproot the whole tree. If we dismantle and pull the roots of the tree out then we will also get rid of the bad fruit attached to those tree-roots-structure. If we pull the trees out then we will also pull the branches out of our eyes. The eyes I am talking about are our consciences.

I have learned that sins such as addictions or compulsions are usually smoke, symptoms or fruits, whereas the fire, virus sins or bitter root sins have to do with resentments, hate-vows, grudges, seeking revenge, judgments, or un-forgiveness that come from wounds real or imagined that we perceive others to have committed against us. Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive

you”.⁵ With forgiveness comes healing.

The Nature of Good and Evil:

Good and evil as defined in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures have the meanings of functional and dysfunctional. This has to do with how God designed us. Goodness has to do with being spiritually healthy. Evil has to do with being spiritually unhealthy. In fact, evil needs goodness to exist. Evil is like a bad spot on an otherwise good apple. Or rust on a fine automobile. With this view or definition of good and evil humility gets easier to practice, and sin loses more of its power. Jesus called Himself a physician and so affirms this view of good and evil... and in so doing wishes to heal us from our unhealthy spiritual vows, attitudes, sin strongholds, and bad habits.

Hatred Can Lose Its Power:

Hatred can easily come into our lives when we misunderstand the meaning of evil and wrongly judge things to be evil that aren't. So much real conflict has been conceived in this world because people have wrongly hated people who are different or have beliefs or behaviors that are seen as threatening. Who they see as different they may land up calling “evil” in the “popular” sense of the word, and so are hostile towards them. What we see as evil in the popular sense we land up hating. Once we hate that something, then sparks will fly inwardly urging judgments, conflicts, insults, violence or animosity, with possibly revenge and murder. Redefining evil

⁵ Matthew 6:14, RSV

in the Hebrew and Christian sense will help us to see what we previously hated in a new light and will help renew our minds and attitudes and so bring life, tolerance, respect, compassion, and kindness to our relationships. These are the things that lead and draw us to wanting to be good, love, care, and stay away from sin.

Moreover, if we see evil as needing good to exist, then we will realize that all people have some good in them. And that goodness is a preparation for the Good News: Jesus and His supernatural life and love.

If one sees oneself as evil in the “popular sense” just because one sees oneself doing evil acts, then one will hate oneself. But God commands us to love ourselves. So, we can’t be evil in the “popular sense”. When we hate ourselves in this way we invite addictions into our lives. This happens because hatred is negative and makes us feel bad and we weren’t designed to feel negativity all our days. Our negativity needs relief, but often gets nursed with something that feels good. This forms an addiction, unless we are freed from the lie that says, “I hate myself”.

We may be evildoers. But we are made in God’s image; and that image is good. The meaning of evil in the “popular sense” leads to hatred, fighting, and wars. Hatred (and bad definitions of good and evil) can also lead to addictions because we naturally nurse negative feelings with stuff that feels good or pleasurable.

It is natural to hate evil in the popular sense. If we don’t want to hate, then we need to give up believing that evil exists in

the popular sense. Evil in the “popular sense” comes from pride because we may see ourselves as better than those we judge. Evil in the “popular sense” puts people into boxes: it says the box and contents are absolutely depraved, utterly corrupt, beyond cure, with no goodness, no virtue, black, dark, worthy of being cursed, condemned, judged, stamped out, and sent to the blackest pit: infinite-Hell, worthy of absolute wicked wrath-the kind that hates, punishes, laughs, scoffs, ridicules, hurts, and torments gladly and willingly just to get back at in revenge.

But, God is LIGHT not darkness. God is LOVE not hatred.

It is natural to be compassionate to those embracing evil when we view good and evil in the Hebrew and Christian senses. Too bad so many people don't have a clue about how good and evil are defined in the Bible and so don't apply it to how they read the Bible or how they see the world and themselves. If we did, then compassion would abound through the grace found in Jesus Christ.

Having said all this, we can pray to God to help us give up evil, beliefs, commitments, attitudes, and sins.

A Working Definition (for Repenting in Prayer from some common maladies like hatred):

The word “repent” means to change one's mind. I also use it with the additional meaning of: “to give up a sin.” So, when I use the phrase: “repent in prayer”, I mean: praying to Jesus in clean energy using words something like: “Dear God I change my mind about and give up, in

faith with your help, this sinful attitude of: “_____” (i.e. hatred, pride, conceit...) and these corresponding sins: “_____” (i.e. hostility, meanness, judging, attacking, wanting to get even...etc.) along with my nastiness and jerk-like-way of carrying it all out.” And then to speak to the sin/ attitude, when tempted by it, in faith with clean energy using words like: “I accept that you are in my life, but I don’t need you right now along with the empty promises of “_____” that inspired you, that I wrongly believed.”

The strategy to confront negative strongholds like hatred is to admit they are in our lives, but to say to them we don’t need them right now because God provides for our needs with His grace and peace and then to give them up in faith with Jesus’ help in prayer. All sins are done because we come to falsely believe that they will fulfill our needs. Admitting this in each context, and mourning the losses incurred by the sins because they “really” promise more than negative emptiness, and committing to and connecting with Jesus as Prince of Peace is key to moving on.

We need to do this emotionally besides intellectually. In this way, we count dead previous strongholds of sin, and embrace a fuller life as promised by Jesus. Nature hates vacuums, so we should replace sin with virtues. Virtues come from clean energy, positive thoughts and beliefs, peace, and the presence of God. Asking Jesus to replace intolerance with tolerance, conceit with respect, and hatred with love and caring for people; and to further ask Jesus to replace our

compulsions with self-control helps pave the way to freedom.

5 MY THINKING BEHIND THE STEPS

In finding direction and freedom from bondage in our lives:

There are at least six schools of thought (here are five):

Some people believe that one should attack life by:

(1) Following good principles.

Others think that one should attack life by

(2) Following one's feelings.

Some people think that good character will form by

(3) Practicing discipline,

While others think that

(4) Introspection, analysis, counseling and therapy will bring about real change within.

While others still believe that

(5) Removing damaging lies from our minds and replacing them with what God says about who we are in Jesus will bring freedom.

Now, I think that these principles can or do have their places at times, and that intuition or gut instincts need to be listened to and have their places in different contexts. I also think that discipline is important but won't solve all of one's problems. Being introspective won't always yield results either and often makes us sad or blinds us to what God is saying through others. But God can use all of these to bring inner healing when needed.

So the question arises: How do we know what to do and when to do it when it comes to the directions we take? I think we will a lot of the time not “know” “what, when, and how” things should be done or tackled. Don’t get me wrong: I said, “know” as opposed to “believe” or being “certain of”. Yes, we are endowed with a spirit that can sense stuff about people and our paths but even to access this ability we require a faith in it because it is so easy to dismiss it as subjective.

My guess at how to tackle life is to go by “a faith in Jesus”- that “triggers fellowship with God through prayer that involves confession, repentance, and renewal of our minds, and to grow in dependence on God” as the sixth school of thought. This allows us to process our feelings, guilt, actions, sins, fears, beliefs, desires, attitudes, and thinking and gives God a chance to forgive us and heal us as we receive His gifts through faith and humility. This strategy is fully developed in the book, *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* and is developed in this book to a lesser degree.

Different faiths are like different keys. There are many kinds of faiths, and so many different kinds of keys. One kind of faith will open one door while another kind of faith will open another door. Some faiths will open many doors while other faiths will open fewer doors. Some faiths will knock on doors while other faiths won’t approach just any door. Some faiths aren’t worthy of the persons who are committed to them. Faith in gold, diamonds, money, drugs, pleasures, untrustworthy people, and broken institutions can be

examples of unworthy faiths.

I am no master theologian. I am no dynamic leader. I am no Canonized Saint. But I am a student of life, love, and hope; and I am still learning the ABCs of a healthy life. Yes, I am further along the path to life than when I began to follow Jesus in the summer of 1989, and there have been times when I did not think I'd make it. I still have doubts about much stuff I don't understand, but God is worthy of my trust. One thing at a time I suppose. God is in control.

I don't want anyone to become absorbed and focused on all the shit in one's heart, mind or life negatively because "there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."⁶ Focusing negatively on shit is not the real path to wholeness. One needs to approach bad stuff from a healthy, positive, caring, humble stance, as Saint Paul says:

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellence or praiseworthy — think about such

⁶ Cf. Romans 8:1

things. Whatever you have learned and heard from me or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.⁷

So how does one deal with the past without getting self-pitying, discouraged, sad, depressed, negative, angry, or bitter? Love finds joy in the truth. One needs to focus on learning to handle positively the uncomfortable things in life, and to learn to love gently all the people who cross one's path from the past into the present. Love cares for people, and this means people are the treasures not moral or philosophical concepts, and because we value people we don't focus negatively on their crap, cynically, judgmentally, superiorly, conceitedly, hostilely, or hatefully.

If we need to make amends, forgive, or give up hardness in our hearts towards others then doing so when the Holy Spirit says it is OK is the healthy thing to do. Our aims or attitudes need to be: "I want to love." This isn't a law; wanting to love comes from experiencing God's love; wanting to love is a desire God plants into each of our hearts at our conceptions because wanting to love is a healthy motive. The devils try to steal this healthy deposit of wanting to love. We need to take it back if the devil has stolen our desire to love people.

Wanting to love a person will happen when we care for them. If we care for a person we will find ways to break through the blockages to loving the person in question. This can take time to achieve.

⁷ Philippians 4:4-9

Jesus said that if we find ourselves at the Temple (or church) offering a gift and remember that a sister or brother has something against us then we need to leave the gift at the alter and go and be reconciled with that sister or brother.⁸ So, we need to deal with broken relationships one at a time as much as it depends on us.

If we are focused on a broken relationships negatively, then it will evaporate all the joy that God has given us. Not attacking or judging people and God is the path to health. If we have wounds we can ask God to heal them. But we must not become self-pitying, resentful, and anxious about our situation, instead we ought to rest in the peace and goodness of God, His promises, and be open to hearing His voice and be willing to obey it. Faith and knowing the Good Shepherd's voice are crucial for advancing from beginner status and growing in the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is supernatural love. Dealing healthily with negative and dark energy attitudes is also important.

We are not in this all by ourselves. We have a God who heals, forgives, and builds us up. We need to reflect on this often: God has not left us as orphans. He is here now ready to help in caring ways. He has not left us to ourselves. He pours His grace freely into our love tanks. He gives us peace, consolation, and joy.

⁸ Matthew 5:23

6 A THEORY ON WHY WE LOSE OUR FREEDOM

First off, there are those unfortunate people who are born into sub-cultures or communities, or families where abuse of drugs, alcohol, and people or other immoral ways are accepted as normal and even encouraged. These people can form mindsets and habits that are hard to break. These people start out with a huge disadvantage to the rest of us. This book is not meant to insult or shame or humiliate these people or anyone else for that matter. But having said this there are reasons why people in general lose self-control and healthy relating.

Us people who have lost our freedom to do what is healthy and right can do so for seven general reasons (the details are not so easy to see, and no one sees all of them except God; hence the need to grow in hearing His voice):

1. We don't want God in our lives. We think we know better: i.e. We decide to live life by our selves out of foolishness, hurts, fear and pride.
2. We believe lies that bring about bondages and a negative self-pitying angry approach to life and relationships.
3. We haven't learned to think correctly about life; we don't know how healthy relationships work; how to view others and self and how to refrain from judging others.
4. We don't obey God's kind and gentle command to love our enemies.
5. We have set up our feelings as "lords" over our lives instead of following the Light that exposes things for

what they are.

6. We have idols in our lives that rob us from freedom, peace, self-control, breathe, joy, consolation, meaning, purpose, hope, and healthy relationships. And
7. We disregard God's invitation to go deeper in our relationships with Him by following Him to where He leads (or abiding in Him) so that loving others like ourselves becomes the focus more so over time.

It is my opinion that doing these seven acts of rebellion or folly, can and do start addictions, make us insensitive, and steal our ability to be lovingly assertive. They block any real spiritual growth. Why?

Some have said, and I agree, that there are God shaped vacuums in the hearts of all humans that need to be filled. When we attempt to fill this hole with something other than God, we can become addicted. When we fill it with the Holy Spirit we get the power to participate in self-control and in His supernatural love for others. Obviously a lot of healing needs to take place for the fullness of these gifts to be realized.

Lies usually look true to those who believe them. Hence the need for a great shepherd to gently guide us into truth and freedom through seeking to love God, self and people.

One may believe lies in order to protect oneself from (further) harm. Such a commitment can drain one's energy and requires relief: an addiction can result if God does not replace the lie with relevant truth and fill the hole with Himself. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth, and leads the willing soul into truth when they seek to love people.

Knowing LOVE and TRUTH protect us from bondage and folly when we maintain healthy humility (teachableness).

People who set up their emotions as their gods in their lives will have all sorts of troubles. Fact is, that we don't have to be slaves to our emotions. When ideas move into our minds and imaginations they will immediately cause us to have emotions that can be good (positive), neutral, or bad (negative) even if those ideas are not real or are imaginary. Such is the case with fictional books, or movies, they send us into worlds where we love, hate, feel guilty, want to compromise, feel noble, touched, desire, fear, cry, or laugh. Such is the case with the unknown and the speculative too.

Once we feel certain emotions if we don't know any better we might think that the ideas or judgments that spawned our emotions are true because our feelings are so strong or compelling in certain contexts. Then this will reinforce our emotions which will in turn reinforce the ideas, and judgments; and this will go on back and forth building up a construct in our minds: the construct becomes an attitude and our new "supposed" guiding truth.

Therefore, knowing the truth and being careful about what we believe is so important. That's why God's word is so important and useful: it is truth!

If we go by our feelings in the way described above, then we will lose touch with reality. Un-reality is fertile ground for the snares from the devil. When we feel like crap we might want and seek relief through sex, food, drink, and drugs; and these will seem like helpful answers to dealing with our crap, our

depression, sadness, hurt, anger, meanness, or hatred spawned by our negative baggage.

When we have unresolved anger it creates unhappy feelings in our hearts. And, since it is human nature to want to be happy, it is natural to nurse our unhappiness with something pleasurable. This something will become an addiction and it all depends on which pleasures comes first in our lives: it could be wanting to have sex, taking drugs, smoking, gambling, shopping, eating, drinking (or something else). This kind of addiction is a spiritual addiction. Only God can put a stop to it with our cooperation. And He usually does so through a healthy relationships with Himself by helping us deal with the unresolved anger/ judgments/ bitterness/ and hatred.

There are other kinds of addictions that are easier to get over. People who can quit very easily a bad habit (without being dependent on God through faith) have what I call a biological addiction. These people may congratulate themselves on their great “will power”, and may tell others who are less fortunate that all it takes is a “little will power” or “discipline” to quit. But the reality is that they don’t have anything nearly as difficult to overcome as those with spiritual addictions.

Holding back from doing the will of God when deep down inside our hearts we know it, will create pressures and guilt in our hearts or souls. This pressure and guilt will create unhappiness, and the unhappiness needs to be relieved or we will nurse them through artificial pleasures, if not repented

from. If repented from in prayer through the grace of the Jesus Christ, freedom results in that area of one's life.

There is healthy and unhealthily motivated anger. Both need to be dealt with in healthy ways. Unhealthily motivated anger comes from fear, pride, envy, greed, lust, selfishness, sloth, and gluttony because when we have these vices in our hearts then we are the centers of our own worlds and anything that threatens what they stand for will trigger anger.

Healthy anger occurs when someone trespasses our or someone else's personal boundaries. What matters is what we do with whatever anger we have when this happens. Anger is neither moral nor immoral in such contexts. If the anger we have starts to form into a resentment, then an addiction could form. If the anger we have forms hatred, then more insensitivity, bitterness, or possible violence may result relationally. Insensitivity can show itself in many ways. Like being unable to feel other people's hurts and criticizing, gossiping, and hurting others by what we do and say (many times without knowing it or seeing it as evil and something that needs to be repented from). When our anger is used to create pressure to get things done, then it too is unhealthy and needs to be jettisoned.

When anger comes from injustices, then the anger is not the problem; we need to own it. It is only an alarm, that says interior or exterior matters need to be dealt with. If we do have fear, pride, envy, greed...etc. in our hearts causing

anger, then they need to be dealt with⁹. If it is an exterior matter that triggers our anger, then dealing with it in healthy, respectful, kind, gentle, and caring ways is the path to take. If we are going to hurt people out of our anger, (and remember doing so often) then we need to examine our strategies, and attitudes in resolving conflicts. We might need counseling if we get stuck, but it is a learning curve that will be achieved as we go deeper with Jesus Light, and healing touch.

Minimizing or denying wrongs will bring about insensitivity or intolerance towards others. Forgiveness does not mean minimizing or denying a wrong. Minimizing or denying a wrong makes us move boundaries that God gave us for protection, respect, and security. Minimizing or denying wrongs will take away our ability to be assertive and either we will be under-assertive or over-assertive besides being angry and judgmental or “artificially nice” all the time.

So, how do we rid ourselves from our addictions and insensitivity? How do we become free from the hatred in our hearts again? How do we begin to grow spiritually again?

We must reverse the steps that got us into the mess in the first place. And that is where “The Twelve Steps” as presented in this book come into play.

Generally speaking “The Twelve Steps” address four acts of pride or folly in our lives, by asking us to basically do four important things. They are:

⁹ Cf. my book called, *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* for ideas on how to do just that

- a) If we don't have a relationship with God, we should become open to inviting a Higher Power that has a proven track record: Jesus, into our lives. And to walk and talk with Him and listen to what He says and seek to become obedient to His Holy Spirit in love, grace and not to become legalistic.
- b) With our newly acquired Higher Power's direction remove the lies that keep us in bondages, by replacing those lies with corresponding healthy thinking "truth" and grace. This is a benefit from being in relationship with Jesus when we seek to love people out of caring. Removing the darkness within by replacing it with Light. Jesus is the light, and He comes in more fully after Salvation by believing we are not alone, not left to our own devices, and not orphaned, but is with us to help achieve healthy goals, help counsel us, help grow our love, help give us rest, and share His peace.
- c) If we don't love our enemies both past and present, then with Jesus' power through the Holy Spirit we can start to love them positively and genuinely. Anger can either produce resentments or hatred within us if not dealt with in a health manner. If we have resentments, then we will most likely have addictions or negative-attitudes towards people. If we have hatred, then we will most likely have insensitivity (along with possible addictions too). If we give up our judgments and forgive those who wronged us we will begin to love them the way God loves us and we will become more able to stay away from addictions. When we repent from our hatred with Jesus' help then our insensitivity will slowly vanish as we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives more and more fully and focus on positive non-violent strategies to conflict. But we will have to learn

how to deal with our anger and self-pity in constructive ways in order to love others genuinely or supernaturally where they are at. Once one learns to deal with anger in healthy ways one's under-assertiveness or over assertiveness will dry up too.

- d) Follow Jesus moment to moment to where He leads us day in and day out. This is called "abiding" in Jesus. It involves becoming teachable through a humble faith in Jesus. And desiring God's will above our own enough to say yes to it.

All four of the above commitments, and actions are summarized in "The Twelve Steps". They are in part a path to humility, spiritual growth, and life. And are best worked in conjunction with the teachings from Jesus, but more so: in relationship with Jesus because "The Twelve Steps" were originally taken from the Christian Bible.

"The Twelve Steps" form a healthy way of addressing unwholesome stuff from our pasts with our higher power's help. When things aren't going well in the present no matter how we try to adjust, maneuver, force, or grin and bear it, then stuff from our past needs to be dealt with. Thankfully many people have faced what we struggle with, and yes, the details differ, but the principles, truths, and light they pour into our lives can and do make a difference. "The Twelve Steps" give a structure, or a backdrop to help us process the sour, jaded, and empty decisions we made in the past. They also help to heal our relational wounds.

When "The Twelve Steps" are practiced properly God can use them to soften our hearts towards everyone: including Him,

our family, our friends, our enemies, and ourselves. People who aim to love humbly have soft hearts and assertive minds – they are free to grow in the art of Love. People who don't know how to deal with their anger healthily will either be under assertive or over assertive. If there is hope for me then there is hope for all. We don't have to stay the way we are. Exercise is useful, but relationship with God can allow God to do so much more in us than we can ever hope or imagine.

7 SOME HINTS ON HOW TO WORK THE TWELVE STEPS

No one can exhaust all the reasons or insights behind “The Twelve Steps”. I don’t intend to do the impossible. Focusing on the thinking behind the Steps can be helpful but won’t replace the need to roll up one’s sleeves and work the Steps through the leading from the Holy Spirit (Hence, needing to get to know the voice of God in prayer). That said, here is my thinking behind these Steps:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

In step 1. I admit that I do have very a serious addiction, compulsion, or insensitivity in my life that has become unmanageable.

I need to admit that I am flawed in some real ways. I do this not because I want to be absorbed in my own sinfulness or darkness. Rather, I do this out of hope that real change for the better is possible. This step involves coming to the realization that I have made a mess living life on my own terms.

Here it is important to mention that labels such as alcoholic, overeater...etc. can be helpful if they are diagnostic in nature and meant to help connect us to cures. If they don’t and were used by others as weapons and attacks on our dignity and identity, then they can feel like prisons or boxes. Some have said that we ought to think outside the box. Others say that

we should think without the box. Boxes make us feel bad about ourselves. They push us to feeling shame, self-pity, low self-esteem, angry pressure; and we give them more power the more we struggle with them (which is thinking in the box or attempting to think outside the box). When we think without the box then we jettison the box and so give it no more power to limit us. How each person views a label will be different.

So, where does one begin? One begins at where one is. One slowly journeys from where we are at, where things are observable, on the surface, where we are conscious and aware, and go deeper into the hearts where we “really” are at in relation to where God is. We need to focus on and allow God to change us through prayer (talking and listening) through faith with Him. We are not to forever live on the surface, but to be connected to our hearts in our very center, from our strength: where the Holy Spirit resides.

Principles in and of themselves will do nothing if God is bypassed. Relationship(s) are indispensable. Principles at best are channels of God’s grace. Listening to God about where we are at, and doing what He says about our situations is what is needed to travel forward in hope into joy towards reality, and peace.

This step is also meant for us to realize that we won’t be perfect in this life in the best sense of the word because there is always more to uncover, experience and learn. We can always go deeper. We don’t have to be the perfect child we think our parents wanted. We can disagree with our parents,

we can be angry with our parents, and we can be ourselves in the presence of our parents. We are allowed to make mistakes in our parents' presence. This step is also about accepting our shortcomings to a healthy degree, and not hammering our heads on the Stone Tablets that contain the Commandments of God. God wants our peace. He desires our health and purity more than we do. Real wholesome change comes gradually as we pursue our relationships with God through faith in Jesus with back drop of "The Twelve Steps" and other methods based on grace and truth.

Many people think that God is silent, distant, and uninterested in them. But this is dreadfully wrong! Prayer is more than petitioning God from long lists of wants. It is not too hard to believe that Satan and his fallen angels are involved in attempting to lead us astray, to hurting us, and to harming us. But God is even more involved in pursuing us, wanting intimacy with us, wanting to heal us, to build us up, and granting us hope. But we so often navigate by the nasty instead of the gentle so miss out on Jesus meek or gentle invitations.

There are many types of perfection. We ought to become aware of what we aim for and why. Understanding our motives, methodology and focus for how we landed up where we are at is so important and needs to become a part of our fearless moral inventory (Cf. Step 4). Whatever lies (that come from our flesh, the devil, or the world) try to drive us away from love ought to be processed healthily with Jesus' help in prayer.

We can't stop at this step, for if we do we won't complete the journey to a healthier life, healthier relationships, and freedom to love supernaturally.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

In step 2. I come to believe that there is "a" good-ness (named Jesus) in the universe who is so good that it is willing to help me back to sanity.

This requires growing humility and slowly killing our pride, selfish, and unhealthy independence, and instead to become slowly dependent on our higher power. Some people are so busy competing with, criticizing, attacking or getting angry with others that they don't think that anyone else is better or greater than they are.

Reading the Gospels will show us that Jesus is our only hope. To better practice this step it may be wise to recognize the possibility that one may be angry with God, or our Higher Power. When we are angry with someone we may not want him or her to exist. As far as God is concerned, we may rule out His existence in order to get rid of the guilt we feel when sinning. Or we might try to get rid of our anger against God by pretending that He doesn't exist and so seemingly feel better instead. We will have to give up our judgments, attacks, and resentments against God through His help if we want to proceed to and win freedom from our compulsions and love people more deeply.

God will let things happen to us that normal biological

parents wouldn't dream of letting happen to their children. It surprises me that those who have been given the short end of the stick in this life many times have a strong faith and commitment to God, but that certain intellectuals will point to those short sticks as evidence that God doesn't care for us if He exists.

Another possible blockage to practicing this step is to wrongly project our feelings for our parents onto God. We might see our God as distant and uncaring because that is the way our parents may have treated us. We need to forgive our parents and move on.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Next, in step 3. I turn my life and our will over to Jesus, as I understand Him for now, realizing that the farther I travel with Him the more differently I will see and experience Him (This Step for the Christian has to do with "learning" to Abide in Jesus the True Vine).

Putting our faith in Jesus, as we understand Him for now means that we become open to trusting His goodness enough to learn from Him, as well as to become open to what He asks us to do. This step involves accepting that we aren't perfect, and don't know it all, and that we need input and direction from people who know more in different areas. This step means we become teachable again, and remain so.

Coming out of the darkness, and approaching Jesus' marvelous light will challenge, change, and transform our

beliefs and actions. The way we see Jesus will change for the better as time goes by if we slowly and cautiously discard those worn out ideas we have been holding on to that cause nothing but trouble, burdens, hardness, meanness, self-pity, restlessness, and superficiality.

We need to work at grasping just how dependent on Jesus we are for everything. This creates gratitude and joy that gives us positivity in how we approach life, relationships with people and tasks. We do so by going deeper in prayer and regularly reflecting on all the good God gives to us all.

This step is about deciding to cooperate with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is all about seeking to do Jesus' will instead of seeking our self-pitying, selfish, jaded, anger filled agendas. That doesn't mean it will be easy to stay away from such sin all the time. If all compulsive-sinful strongholds have been dealt with through whatever means, then that doesn't mean we won't experience temptations. We all have an enemy called the devil and leaving him out of our calculations or computations will only bring heartache and failures to stay away from sins.

We also have to realize that we all have a "sin nature" within us. Not having a healthy strategy to deal with it will lead us into giving into temptations if we are not careful¹⁰.

When we depend on idols we are walking in the flesh. When we depend on Jesus we are learning to walk in the Spirit and

¹⁰ I elaborate on this concept in my book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive*.

are abiding in Jesus. Jesus does not leave us to our own devices, He hasn't abandoned us. He never will. He is here to help us, counsel us, and strengthen us. Believing these things (and reminding ourselves of them often) helps us to connect with Jesus, connect with His life, grace, and freedom. It helps us to bond with Jesus and enter into His peace.

It is through a humble faith in Jesus that we abide in Him. If we are expending more and more energy and time to resist temptation in a burdensome way, by trying to say "No!" to the sin, then we are not depending wholly on Jesus.

Jesus invites us to take up His yoke and to learn from Him for His burden is light. The "sin nature" is a false savior. It provides an ugly energy meant to get us to feel instant gratification but often leaves us with guilty consciences because it's displays are often immature, ugly and disrespectful towards other people.

How do we know when we are depending on idols? If we are trying to get peace from the things we are addicted to instead of from God. Pleasure is meant for the body, happiness for the mind, and joy for the heart. The only true joy and peace is experiencing God's life, love, fullness, and presence in the heart and zealously seeking to share it with others.¹¹

Abiding in Jesus involves learning to do things His way in part, through learning to apply these Steps to our lives. We don't keep and focus on rules to abide, rest, and live in Jesus; no, we abide, rest, and live in Jesus to keep the spirit (real intent)

¹¹ These ideas come from Jeff VanVonderen, and Peter Herbeck.

of His rules or commandments; whose end is love. Some of the things that Jesus has said¹² may look like out right nonsense at first glance (these are clues as to what untruths we have accumulated in our belief systems) or we just don't have wisdom and so misunderstand Jesus instead. Jesus' ideas might confuse us. Don't be alarmed, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will we become mature and see things His way in one day. Many of the things that Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount can only be understood and done with His power through the Holy Spirit (don't expect overnight agreement and practice). No two intuitions are exactly alike, so what Jesus says can seem counter intuitive to us often.

Real change comes slowly. We may not be ready to make all of Jesus' ideas a part of the fabric of our lives just yet (don't be hasty, don't be in a rush, don't be harsh; move gradually, gradually, and gradually).

Asking for understanding from God so we don't follow Him blindly is very important to staying healthy, stable, and holy in our attitudes and actions. This way we won't land up hurting more people. Don't put angry pressure on yourself.

Remember that in the same way that you know what's better for your children if you have children, Jesus also knows what is best for you. So, in practicing this step we learn to pray (believing that God will answer) the following prayer:

The Serenity Prayer¹³

¹² Cf. the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew: Chapters 5-7

¹³ By Reinhold Niebuhr

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference,
living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with you forever in the next.
Amen!

We also learn to pray the Abiding Prayer believing that God will answer us when things seem amiss:

Jesus, please let us abide in each other
so, I can love
because it is your idea not mine.
Thanks!

Don't assume that you don't need Jesus when things are going well. If you do: pride goes before the fall. And you will fall. God is in control. The sooner we realize this, the sooner we will have inner peace. So, we pray:

God, you are sovereign and I'm often out of control.
Please teach me how to live healthily (in holiness).
Please lead the way. You alone are self-righteous in the

best possible way. Thank you for being in my life helping me to live with new and positive energy!

If we are attempting to change, but can't control our negative behaviors then we should accept them as things we can't change all by ourselves. We will have to wait patiently for God who is tender, loving, and compassionate towards all, to change us as we follow, abide, and live in Him. In following Him we will practice these steps.

Asking Jesus to "help us trust in Him (and His goodness) because if He doesn't help us then we will be stuck in a bad way" is a way to concretely work this step. This is a desperate prayer that Jesus always answers when we wait on Him and remain committed to the truth (returning to Him each time we go after red-herrings and chalking them up to learning experiences instead of getting angry with ourselves because of our poor performance).

Putting our faith in Jesus means to trust in His unconditional love which is His grace. It means to continue in a relationship with Him because He loves us in spite of our bad behaviors and that we don't have to earn His Love by our own good behaviors. It also means He is with us helping us in our weaknesses, to learn and grow into maturity.

After one has gotten beaten up because of life's tragedies, storms, random acts of violence, denied justice (not necessarily retributive), visited shame, and seeing that life is not fair a lot of the time, then we can become pretty: cynical, critical, and judgmental towards life, people in general, institutions, and God Himself. If we want God to live with us

(fully) then we are going to have to rid ourselves of the attitudes that see God as uncaring, fickle, capricious, or in a bad light with lesser glory than what He “really” has.

God is LOVE, and He comforts those who mourn as a beatitudes promises¹⁴. If we want Jesus to fully live in us then we must jettison our scoffing, ridiculing and critical attitudes with His help and see with the eyes of faith the Christian God who is full of love, comfort, patience and goodness. This doesn't mean we earn God's presence, we don't, but when we humble ourselves God is able to get closer to us. God knows the proud from afar.

Jettisoning negative attitudes is different than just saying “No!” to them, not acting on them, or pushing them under the carpet. When we invite God more into our lives, hearts, and being, He will come making His presence felt by bringing PEACE, perspective, and supernatural grace and love and He will help us deal with our cynicism, judging, hatred, and bitterness towards other people, ourselves, and towards Him too.

God loves us but we can put up walls or unbelieving attitudes that prevent His love from getting through to each of us. Those walls also keep us from loving others genuinely.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

In step 4. I do a fearless moral inventory with the help of

¹⁴ Cf. Matthew 5

Jesus.

This step involves listening to God the knowledgeable mechanic or surgeon of our hearts and taking His sober counsels to heart. If the engine in your vehicle isn't running properly then you will have to look under the hood to see what's wrong with the engine. The engines that need to be looked at in our lives are our hearts where our desires, motives, commitments, loyalties, beliefs, and focuses are, and where our minds (thought and attitude) are at, and the methodologies or strategies we wrongly use to get what we want and the actual wrongs that need to be confessed and fixed or dealt with. That involves listing our bad points, sins and motives and attitudes (and not forgetting our good points because seeing the good and the bad we see the tension between them, and this connects us with our hearts together with God as we pray and walk with God).

As we get to know God better, and see what He has done, does for us, and promises to do for us, He will put His finger on those things He wants us to confess (admit we did wrong, did against love, were uncaring about, take ownership of, and admit our guilt fully with the emotionally equivalence to the weight of our sins) to Him. This includes attitudes of: (resentment, fear, and pride), attractions such as (compulsions, methodology, wrongful desires), inner emotions/ attitudes such as: (envy, lust, gluttony, anger, sloth, and greed), actions such as: (lying, acting out of boredom, laziness, insensitivity, abrasiveness, unforgiveness... not caring, apathy, lack of concern, pointing of

fingers (i.e. shifting blame), using anger to get one's way, irritableness, stealing, indulging addictions (and their histories), hatred, judgments, self-pity, bitterness, unkind words, selfishness, rebellion, legalism, stubbornness, and delighting in our self-righteous performances...etc.) and believing untruths that will need to let go gradually but observably.

Each one of us has a memory; and the Holy Spirit will bring to mind memories from our pasts that God wants us to examine, process healthily by confessing, repent in prayer, and renewing our attitudes with His help.

Jesus is a gentle Shepherd. He is a God who is a generous, and slow to anger. This step isn't necessarily about automatically changing those things that are wrong with us by our own efforts. No, it is about opening our hearts to our Higher Power's searching insight into what is wrong with us, and what is right with us through confessing to and receiving from God's empowering presence. This step deals with diagnosis, not humiliation. Diagnosis leads to healing when we remain teachable with open ears directed towards God in the many ways He speaks to us.

In working this step, we need to with Jesus' help get an idea of what is wrong under the hood of our lives. And because it is often dark under the hood, we need the light (Jesus) to expose to us what is wrong, and what needs changing in our lives.

Do not go on a self-righteous: "seek and destroy", and "mean, cold, mechanical, and merciless" mission (in your own

strength) when it comes to repenting from your sin. Wait for the Holy Spirit's gentle leading (He will speak to you about your feelings, frustrations, through people, through the Bible, and directly in your mind in your thoughts). Wait on God to lead you forward. Jesus is in control not you or I.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

In step 5. I confess to God and another person the "exact" nature of my wrongs.

God will forgive these, and promises to cleanse us from them¹⁵ as we continue to work the rest of these Steps.

Change can occur when we cooperate with God, by doing or working these steps. This step and the one before it is about beginning to take stock of our motives, beliefs, attitudes, focus, and actions over the years up to the present and owning them before God. We will likely only make cosmetic changes to our personhood if we don't admit to God and another person the exact nature of our wrongs, proud ways, and methodologies of carrying them out.

As the past is dealt with we will get lighter spiritually and have our eyes slowly open in ways that help us to navigate our current relationships in healthier ways. We don't have to accrue long lists of sins before we take inventory, confess and deal rightly with the consequences. When we deal with our bad energy or bad attitudes as quickly and wisely as possible,

¹⁵ 1 John 1:9

then we will be kinder, gentler, happier, easier to get along with and less prone to addictive behaviors day in and day out.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

In step 6. I become entirely ready for God to remove all my defects.

The whole of “The Twelve Steps” have been important to my recovery. But this step and step 7 have also been pivotal in making the remaining steps work. Steps 1-5 are about getting our bearings of where we are at spiritually. This step asks us if we care enough to want to change, or if we want to become healthier with God’s help.

Mary before she was found with the baby Jesus, had to say, “yes” to God for Jesus’ humanity to be formed within her womb. Her attitude of giving God permission to do with her what He liked is exactly in line with the spirit of this step and the next one. If we feel sorry for our sins and see them as wrong, we will want to cooperate with God to remove our defects and that is exactly what God desires to do gradually over time.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

In step 7. I humbly ask God to remove all my shortcomings.

Let God lead you to do things in line with His wisdom in order to become clean and free from your defects. He has a plan and a timetable for when He wants things to be removed.

Don't proudly go ahead of Jesus thinking you know what needs to be dealt with and at what time it needs to be dealt with. Rest, abide, and live in Jesus like step 3 asks you to do. Focus on your thanksgiving towards God because He loves to give even more to those who appreciate His gifts with thankfulness. Thanksgiving creates gratitude that kills self-pity.

When we feel sorry for having built structures/ beliefs/ desires/ and methodologies of acting out sin in our hearts/ lives and want God's will in our lives then we choose to practice this step if we want a spiritually healthy life.

Some people are so busy criticizing others that they can't see their own flaws. Judging others is rooted in unhealthy envy and pride. Believing that God is good and rewards those who come to Him because He gives His grace to the humble is key to having our prayers answered. Proud people have no use for God or his spiritual gifts. If you see pride in yourself ask God to remove it instead of you repressing it or bowing to it so much of the time. Then take the medicine He prescribes.

I have also written a more comprehensive treatment on this topic in the book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* and it has been a lifesaver when it comes to me dealing with my pride day after day. This is done in prayer by changing our attitudes slowly, deliberately, and constantly over time with God's help through "renewing the mind" and heart via heartfelt confession, repenting in prayer, among other strategies.

Steps 1-7 are about finding out (diagnosing) where we are at,

getting our bearings, confessing our sins to God, and asking Him to cleanse and heal us. This cleansing process and healing are taking place as we work these steps. The remaining steps are about finishing the job of cleansing and healing done in the area we are focused on.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

[The spirit of step 8 means to further embraces these healing actions: Make a list of all those people I am

- V. Holding judgments against,
- VI. Having hateful attitudes towards,
- VII. Plotting revenge against, or
- VIII. Holding resentments towards.

Even though I possibly did not act out my hostility against these persons, and become willing to forgive and love them, and give up the hatred and desire to hurt them. If I have never embraced my anger against those who wronged me I need to do so.]

In step 8. I make a list of all those I had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all, because I acted out foolishly, or acted out my selfishness, or acted out my desires for some sort of justice in an unhealthy way.

On one hand most of us have harmed others who have never done us any wrong. If so, then we may need to admit our wrongs, and say we are sorry, make possible amends, attempt to live healthier in the future through grace; as we

ask for forgiveness.¹⁶ That is what it means to make direct amends. Sometimes this can't be done because we can't find where the person now lives, they may be dead, or the process might do more harm than good.

On the other hand, we may have done a wrong to another person because we wanted what they had and so we stole from them. We may have lied about or slandered another person because in our pride we envied or hated them. The guilt and shame we feel needs to be put to rest by these steps, and we need to choose a healthier way of relating to people.

If we perceived someone to have harmed us in some way in the past, then we might have taken revenge on her or him too. People who when they get angry with someone for a wrong committed may eventually or immediately retaliate verbally (directly or indirectly), or physically have taken revenge. They have seemingly gotten even all by themselves. Revenge should not be taken into our own hands. We need to make amends where possible. There might also be a lot of unforgiveness or hatred in our hearts because of what happened. We need to move towards forgiveness, and be forgiven.

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

¹⁶ Cf. Gary Chapman & Jennifer Thomas, *The Five languages of Apology*, Northfield Publishers © 2006

[The spirit of step 9 asks to do the following in the light of what is asked in step 8. With God's help:

- IX. Give up my judgments towards the people I hold them against,
- X. Give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the person(s) I had problems with.
- XI. If I am nursing or toying with vengeful thoughts I give them up, and
- XII. Forgive those people who hurt me]

Step 9. With God's help I make direct amends to people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. I also need to forgive. I spoke about how to forgive and give up judgments in Chapter 3 and how to repent the easy way from hatred and revenge in Chapter 4.

We can hold judgments against any particular person, but we must look at possibly holding them against church denominations, world religions, religious leaders and hierarchies; politicians, political parties, organizations, and heads of visible organizations besides parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, and enemies. All judgments need to be given up for freedom to love to have a chance. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching that we judge no person and condemn no person according to the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁷

The lines that go between good and evil do not go between religions, communities, countries, empires, and people, but goes through each fallen human heart. Our judgments can be

¹⁷ Cf. Matthew 5-7

very faulty, error prone, warped, projections, and biased. Our judging is graceless because we don't love fully the people we land up judging or condemning. But God judges with eyes wide open, with love, compassion, mercy, and grace.

We don't need to confess and repent from our anger directed at injustices. We need to own our anger though, respect its place and process it healthily. In this case it is a warning bell or alarm that something was or is wrong in this context. If we say this anger is morally wrong then we are denying a place in us that senses injustice, or hurt and these won't be dealt with and the denial of anger or justice will bring about many negative emotions that will lead us to hurting people even more. The anger here is good, but if we don't process it then it leads to resentment, then the resentment needs to be dealt with. Here the anger is an emotion, not a moral wrong. We are allowed to be angry, but we ought not sin in our anger by using it to meanly get what we want. This last use of anger is unhealthy and needs to be confessed, and given up in prayer through faith.

The extended parts of steps 8 and 9 involve loving our enemies through God's power, and choosing to soften our hearts in prayer with Jesus' help and grace. They are to become former enemies in our eyes, they might have us as enemies in their eyes. Steps 8 and 9 in this context are for people (victims) who got angry with agents of their hurts but may never have retaliated.¹⁸ They immediately absorb the

¹⁸ "The Twelve Steps" don't immediately cover this scenario, one has to go deeper in the spirit of the steps to get to here.

blow but they feel wounded because they don't know how to process the emotional baggage that comes from the wound. Because of what happened, these people also have resentments (un-forgiveness or anger), and possibly hatred in their hearts. They need to deal with the hatred first then forgive, and be forgiven.

The process in dealing with hatred can be as easy as praying the prayers in Chapters 3 and 4, but when the hatred goes deeper one needs to win the "truth vs. lies" game by renewing the mind habits, and heart pathways.

Hatred is something we decide to do. The decision is a product of judging and anger. The judging comes from coveting our freedom from pain. Coveting comes from pride that says I'm the center of the universe and that I need to accommodate everything to get my security. Pride comes from fear of being hurt again or repeatedly. And hurts can come from conflicts or threats.

Confessing and praying through these connections¹⁹ to God is key to routing the stronghold of hatred.

As far as dealing with the anger or resentment, forgiveness means giving up our hardness of heart and to no longer nurse our anger against the agents of our hurts. Forgiveness is a process; and should not be rushed into.

When a person does us wrong we have to live with that

¹⁹ Cf. My book called *Dismantling the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil Within So Love Can Thrive* for strategies on how to do just this.

wrong either way. How do you want to live with it? With negativity, hatred, malice, hard heart, desires for revenge, restlessness, wanting them dead and nursing bitterness? Or, in joy knowing we decided to love ourselves and the agent of our hurt? Which is more life-giving? Healthier? More positive? Forgiveness is more about setting us free (in setting others free we become free). Forgiveness means we take the hooks out of those who did us wrong because it is good and healthy for us, and also for them. We can't love others if we don't love ourselves first. Forgiveness heals us first, and has the potential to heal the agents of our hurts too. God can heal them and us given the chance.

We won't forgive if we are waiting to have feelings to forgive. We won't forgive by minimizing or denying the wrongs done. Forgiveness acknowledges wrongs were done.

I don't recommend contacting each person who wronged you to let them know you have forgiven them. Many times when others hurt us they never intended to hurt us. We can hurt their feelings in such cases, and they may see our desire for an apology as us judging them. When they feel judged they will feel hurt and violated, and may nurse their anger into a full-blown resentment towards us.

With us pointing out possible dirty laundry belonging to them, they might start looking for dirty laundry from us. We may start a war with them and that would go on and on against love, blessing, and peace. And if they don't think they did anything wrong (maybe can't remember or did not intend the wrong(s)), then we might have a real difficulty to forgive them

from our hearts again.²⁰

When we forgive somebody we ought not go about saying to all the people we know or meet that we have done so in detail. If we need to encourage somebody else to forgive by sharing how we forgave, then we need to keep the names anonymous and places unknowable. God says that when He forgives us our wrongs they are as far as the east is from the west. If we want God to not use our sins against us, then we have to be willing to do the same with those who sinned against us.²¹ Do to others as we want them to done to us.

Either you will feel release along with Joy and a new softness in your heart when you forgive, or you will feel nothing. Give your emotions time to heal and come right. If the wound persists, then you are probably trying to forgive the wrong person. The person you may “really” need to forgive is yourself.

This need not be that surprising. We often blame ourselves and hold resentments against ourselves for things we let others do to us. Forgive yourself. Anger against oneself (and others) can creep in at opportune moment. If this is the case forgive again more deeply until completely set free to love.

If we have had a long relationship with some one that we had a major resentment against, then chances are that we have accumulated some pretty destructive attitudes towards them over time. Even if we give up the most devastating

²⁰ I am in debt to my wife Sophie and R.T. Kendall for making these ideas known to me and showing me that they are worth practicing.

²¹ In debt to R.T. Kendall for this reasoning

resentments, we will have to renounce our former attitudes and thinking through the grace of Jesus Christ by working “The Twelve Steps” over and over again.

As far as staying free, one needs to behave like a dog chasing a scent. When the dog has lost the scent he goes back to where he last had it and then continues on his way. So, too with grace and freedom, if we discover that we are losing our freedom we may have to retrace our steps to where we last had freedom, repent and then continue on our way. If that does not work then God is pushing stuff up, we forgot about, out of our subconsciousness or hearts that is connected to our memories. We need to submit to God as humanly as possible as He walks us deeper through it with the purpose to heal and clean us up. It can take a long time to completely walk out this process.

We all make mistakes: Don't be hard on yourself; forgive and move on into freedom to love when possible. Sometimes though, we may have freedom from an addiction for weeks and then it comes back with vengeance. Staying committed to Jesus, realizing that other undiscovered roots may need to be dealt with in God's time for freedom to resume. This process can take years. But if we are seriously committed to love, hope, faith, compassion, and humility then progress although seemingly slow in the present, is in hindsight fast. We are very complex creatures... we have histories that we aren't often fully aware of until the Holy Spirit puts His finger on them and gives us perspective.

“The Twelve Steps” are meant to be a guide that starts

healing our relationships with people and with God through prayer to God. In short “The Twelve Steps” are meant to jump start prayer and help us grow in relationships in order for them to work. Don’t force things. Don’t put angry pressure on yourself. Trust God. God is in control and wants your healing more than you do, and He often works in secret.

There are times when we know we had a blow out with someone in the distant past, but we no longer feel the wound. We walk by faith, in unknowing, and won’t know if our prayers will move God to set us free or not until we have prayed them. If nothing happens after we pray as genuinely, as far as freedom (from vice) is concerned. Then don’t worry. Trust that you have forgiven whomever and no longer have to view yourself as a victim in that case, and so are at least free from victim-hood. Otherwise, God might later land up leading us deeper into the healing process in this particular context.

However sometimes we can invite un-forgiveness into our hearts again after having forgiven a person for what happened in the past. If this is so, then we will need to forgive them yet again by going deeper with what we have learned in these Steps.

Since we might focus too much on the wrongs that others have done to us so that we can forgive them. We might begin to think that those same persons aren’t that nice. But after we have forgiven them and afterwards the Holy Spirit brings nothing more to mind then we ought to re-focus on those same people and look at the good in those same persons who hurt us to have balance. There is always good somewhere in

each person because we are all created in the image of God. People change, people have histories, people have stories, and all people are both agents and victims of hurts. Anger properly processed and directed turns into gentleness, compassion and restorative justice.

When we are aware that something needs fixing in our own lives, we must realize that God gives His grace to the humble, and opposes the proud. This means that we start accepting our crosses, and turning away from our bad attitudes (don't stuff the negative energy). In turn, this means we start believing God is good; start dealing with our anger towards Him if we have any and accepting that God is in control, that He has a timetable for when He wants to accomplish things; and that we need to focus on the good things he has given us. This is a must to advance and conquer the dark within us. We still have requests, but we choose to believe God is in control. We wouldn't be angry with God if we did not on some level believe that we can expect good from Him.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

In step 10. I continue to take personal inventory and when I am wrong promptly admitted it, seek forgiveness, repent from hatred, and dispense mercy through the grace of God and regularly ask Jesus so I can abide in Him and renew my mind with truth and grace.

Lies feel like truths to those deceived by them. Lies put us into bondage. Real truth sets us free to love. Therefore,

working on a relationship with God, and growing in being able to hear the voice of God is the next step.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

In step 11. I seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for my life and the power to carry it out. Truth and grace sets me free.

The Steps are not numbered by how important they are. This is a very important Step! Doubt when it comes to communicating (BOTH WAYS) with God should not discourage us. Doubt can be unplowed ground, but is often the result of demons inserting lies into our heads hoping we will think they are ours to confuse us and discourage our confidence in hearing God's voice.

Doubt is meant by God to show us our room for growth and that we don't have absolute knowledge, and this keeps us humbler. None of us know where we are going. We all need a trustable guide. Learning to discern and know Jesus' voice and being committed to following it is crucial. Doubt is not the same as unbelief. Doubt with perspective, wiggle room, perseverance, commitment, risk taking, walking in faith brings growth through pain. Doubt still has the door open. Unbelief has the door closed. We need to respect the difference.

Prayer to God happens when we speak our thoughts to Him

in faith (sometimes mixed with plenty of doubt). God does respond in many ways to our questions, pleas, and requests. God speaks with us through meditation on His Scriptures: The Christian Bible. God also speaks to us through others, especially our church communities. Being open to whatever way God communicates and taking it to heart is part of what it means to be humble and teachable.

Early on... we will come across things that seem to go against our intuitions, feelings, or “former” knowledge. Chewing on those things that strike us as absurd, ridiculous, and outdated... and asking others who believe how these things can possibly make sense until we find resolution, insight, and revelation is how to work this step. We are not just trying to accumulate knowledge for knowledge’s sake. What we learn is meant to become a part of our conduct through abiding in Jesus like Step 3 asks us to do.

We can’t carry out God’s will all by ourselves. It is not a good idea to put angry pressure on yourself to conform, change behaviors, or do the right thing. Don’t use anger to motivate yourself or others. Don’t be hard on yourself. Endure dryness. Continue to learn how to practice patience even though that can be very difficult.

As we learn more about God’s will, doing further moral inventories more deeply, may expose more dirt in our hearts and minds. Working the steps again and again patiently with God’s leading will result in new freedom from slavery, cowardice, and pride. We will become strong in love, sturdy in faith, and courageous in hope. Don’t give up! When

encountering blockages go deeper into your heart. God will meet you there.

While growing up one will rightly or wrongfully acquire many beliefs that are either based on fact, on fiction or on a mixture of the two. As these convictions solidify they will bring about certain emotions when challenged. After a while one will not look at how these beliefs were formed but only to the emotions they form when challenged. By this I mean that we will eventually think certain actions are wrong or right because they trigger any of the following: guilt, anger, pleasure, compassion, empathy, sympathy, pride, joy, hostility, meanness, impatience, or a sense of justice or injustice within us along with possibly wanting to hold onto our rights when we are asked by God to give them up for the time being. If the process that formed our consciences was flawed, then many of the teachings from the Bible will look ridiculous because our emotions say so. This is where faith is necessary if we want to embrace a real or deeper relationship with Jesus.

Prayer is important, but so is meditation on God's word. Basing our beliefs on truth is where it is at and that is where suffering is so crucial. Truth sets us free. Suffering allows us to re-examine, refocus, and reassess what is important, true, and to be valued by us. When we feel threatened by pain we will often see how we have threatened others with our judgments, actions and beliefs. Ultimately we will find what we are looking for. The beliefs I now have resemble somewhat what I started out with in 1989 after I re-

converted to God through Jesus Christ. But they have been challenged, nuanced, and been corrected in a multitude of ways since then. Love has been my goal. And I have been sorely mistaken by what I initially thought it took to love on many counts.

Even though I prized love, I was often lazy, proud, angry, and judgmental. However, I am making progress because Jesus is leading me on the path to freedom through renewing my mind and heart through: confession, repenting in prayer, meditation, and working into my life what God has been teaching me.

12. 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.

In step 12. After having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I try to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles in all my affairs.

Once free from an addiction certain truths will protect us when we are tempted. But focusing on the Great Shepherd and following where He leads us is pivotal to getting out of traps, temptations, and snares.

Having a spiritual awakening doesn't mean we have become a Canonized Saint overnight if that is what we come to esteem. We are all sinners. We all stumble or fall in many ways. If we can't see any of our short-comings, then we are blind to them. Some people think that being locked up in a monastery in isolation will bring about freedom, purity, and wisdom.

Isolation won't always reveal the sin that we are pregnant with, whereas relationships that require us to love will often reveal to us the exact state of our souls if we take time to notice.

Relationships and Married life are far more challenging than bachelorhood and will reveal to us just how strong our fallen-lives are and therefore how much more we need God.²² "The Twelve Steps" are meant to launch our relationships with God. Don't try to do the steps all by yourself. There may be times when to work and focus on the Steps... and other times when not to work them intensely or focus on them too much. Jesus knows His sheep, and His sheep know His voice. Believe that He hears you... and give Him time to speak and act. He eventually will. Trust in His grace, and live as though grace is there, because it is, and what it means to walk by faith.

²² Thank you Sophie, for this insight.

8 CONCLUSION

God is doing a work in you if you belong to Him. His business is the sanctification of your soul (mind, will, heart, and actions). If one views God as being in charge of changes then the pressure is relieved, and our faith transfers from our own wits end to God's love, care, and power. The pride also gets jettisoned in this area when our trust moves to God from us when it comes to wanting to change. But we have to cooperate with God.

Connecting to the Love of God

Only God can connect us to His love. When the connection seems missing... faith carries us through... when feeling God's presence, we can rejoice. When not feeling God's presence we walk in faith! But when we are connected to God's love the pressure to aim for anal standards falls away. We know we are loved, and it comes naturally to love others. When we are loved we rest in God's love, we give up trying to do it all by ourselves.

Further Along the Path to Freedom:

After having been free from an addiction for many years. One might slip back into the sin again through carelessness. The grace that God gave so freely when we were free of our addictions (in some cases for years) may seem to have disappeared or dried up. The road we were on might appear to have come to a dead end.

Don't be frightened or discouraged or dismayed when this happens. Jesus said that the road is narrow that leads to life. If we hold onto our faith in Jesus, and learn to follow Him going deeper with Him and to abide in Him (like Step 3 from "The Twelve Steps" ask us to) then we can recover the grace to jettison our former addictions yet again, but we have to go deeper. Very definitely there will be other junk in our hearts and minds that needs to be dealt with (like in my case). It might take years to deal with. When they are dealt with then abiding in Jesus will cement our freedom.

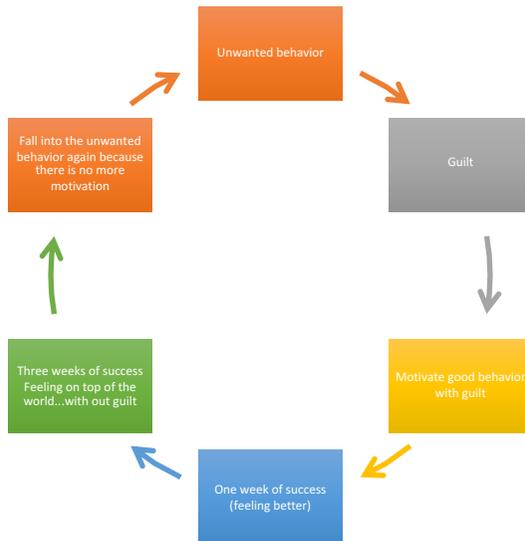
Abiding, living, or resting in Jesus is a mysterious thing. It does not consist of focusing on obeying rules per-say. It isn't LAW focused: It's Jesus Focused. Real change is not demanded but inspired: Love isn't so much that we have loved, but that God first loved us. Paradoxically when we fully abide in Jesus then the law is fulfilled (i.e. we love supernaturally with Jesus' help). Abiding has to do with relationship and making Jesus the central focus of our lives!

PART II

9 CYCLES OF ADDICTION²³

In 1991, I went to a seminar called The Over Flowing Grace Conference with the main speaker being Ken Blue where he spoke about an addiction cycle that looks something like this:

Cycle I



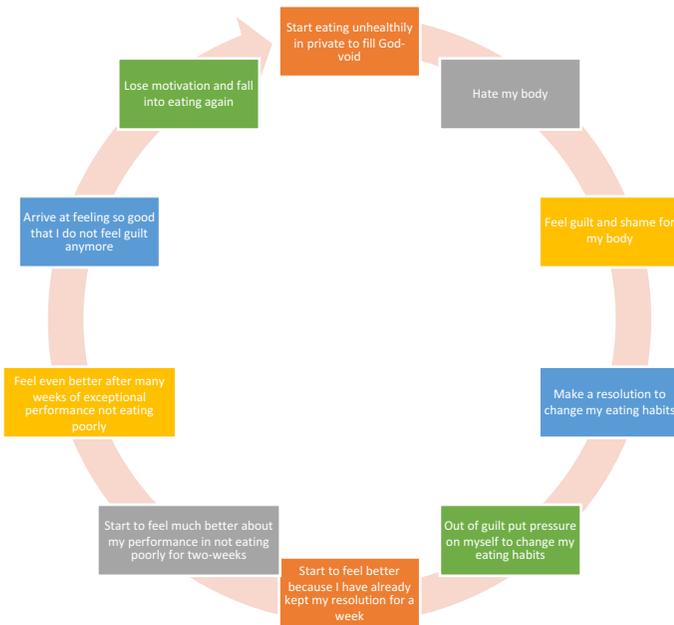
I am grateful for Pastor Ken's observation that when the guilt for unwanted behavior is gone so is the motivation to perform and that leads to doing the unwanted behavior again. He teaches that the way to reverse this cycle is to pray for humility because with it we get grace, and grace means power to not sin compulsively. I agree that such is the first step, but if we don't hear God's voice well, then we won't

²³ Permission granted from Ken Blue's Website

learn from Him how to practice the needed humility to obtain the desired grace. I realized years later that there is so much more one can do to break this cycle of addiction above and the one's below that operate when we try to fill the God-void with idols.

The cycle below is a modification of the one above with a few more “bells and whistles”. All too often when we recognize this cycle is operating in our lives, we may pray for humility, refuse to participate in the cycle, but then just live in sin because we we can't seem to break the compulsion.

Cycle II:



This cycle is the same for a lot of addictions that people experience. The reason the cycle continues repeatedly is because it tries to use guilt, and when the guilt eventually

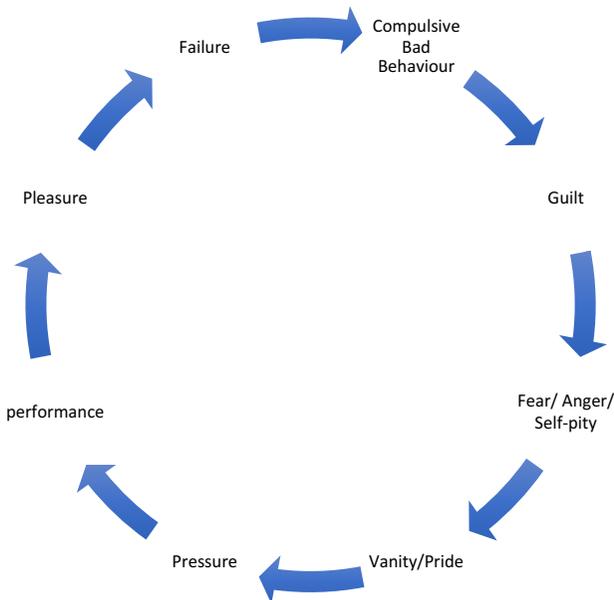
evaporates so does the good behavior because the guilt is what motivated the good behavior. When we use guilt in attempting to change an unwanted behavior it will promote this horrible cycle where we land up using hate, angry pressure, negativity, and shame in a self-righteous performance to somehow do good and stay away from the addiction.

The problem is that God is not invited into the situation. This is very easy to do because we (especially men) compartmentalize things so often. We have God in one box just like we have everything else in their respective boxes. When we attempt to build a part of our lives or solve some of our problems without God, we are unwisely acting in a proud-independent way. Proud ways often use harsh-whip-driven-mentalities to motivate themselves. When we use guilt/ hate/ negativity/ shame/ pride to be a part of our methodology to achieve certain good behaviors (which form a negative foundation) then we will hit ourselves over the head repeatedly until our performances let us get some relief and we feel some pseudo-good so that we eventually forget our guilt and lose our motivation and so fall into the addiction again. The cycle can involve many things such as unemployment issues, bingeing, food, drugs, alcohol, and bad habits...etc. where guilt drives us back and forth or we land up on a treadmill. So how do we invite God in our lives to break this horrible cycle above; and more than that: how do we find healing and cleansing?

Whatever path we take it should be a positive (as opposed to

a negative) one that won't be taxing or hateful to how we are designed to live. It must be a healthy way, that does not hurt us or others and doesn't siphon our strength away. Putting angry pressure on oneself is a sign that we are attempting to take a path that is unhealthy. The path leads nowhere, it is barren, and devoid of life. Going to God in prayer (when we see it crop up in our lives, is the first step to health we can take but we should know how to pray about it). The following is the bare bones of the "bad behavior->guilt-> fear/ anger/ self-pity->pride->pressure->performance->pleasure->failure->bad behavior->... driven" cycle:

Cycle III



Sin is attempting to get a good thing with unhealthy motivations, mechanisms, and tools. We all want to stop the unhealthy behaviors in our lives because that will kill the guilt

if we have it, but if we subscribe to the above guilt-cycle we are using pride to build our lives. So, how do I use the above cycle for good?

If we are not going to use guilt, self-pity and angry pressure to try and change then we must not resort to stuffing the guilt either; it will still affect us in a negative way. If we choose to accept the compulsiveness of the behavior as normal, then we land up rationalizing the guilt away. I did this for some time in certain areas of my life, and I am sure many other people do it too.

For me I automatically used to go to hateful self-pitying angry pressure to achieve my good goals when I lived the cycle, so that is where the battle was most fierce for me. I recommend countering the above cycle-components by praying the cycle that comes after the definitions below (The above cycle won't necessarily go away in one try) but it is necessary to own it before God through genuine, and detailed (not shallow) confession. Next we need to repent in prayer from the cycle. Then to ask the Spirit's help on how to think more healthily in the areas we are struggling with and to be open to what He says throughout the days from any person anointed with meaning that God sends our way. God can speak through anything He has made: animals, any book, any article, any program, any podcast, any situation, and any place. But we also need to fill the God void within with God. This will help to cement the healing and spiritual growth. Growth is not supposed to stop or stagnate.

DEFINITION (for Confession):

♥ The word “confess” means that we admit gently, accurately and emotionally (not acted or forced) our unhealthy attitudes, our sins, and their history to God; agree with God that they are wrong, and say we are sorry for them. We then ask for forgiveness and healing from God; and receive them in faith emotionally and intellectually because God gives good gifts. (cf. 1 John 1:9)♥

DEFINITION (for Repent in Prayer):

♥ The word “repent” means to change one’s mind. I also use it with the additional meaning of to give up a sin. So, when I use the phrase: “repent in prayer”, I mean: praying to Jesus in clean energy using words something like: “Dear God, I change my mind about and give up, in faith with your help saying “No” to this sinful attitude of: “_____” and instead I give it up with your help together with the corresponding sins: “_____” as well as the sinful expectations of “_____” along with my nastiness angry and jerk-like-way of carrying it all out; I therefore choose to humble myself and not pretend that I’m better than what I am, accepting that I’ve been wounded and so I ask you the living God to heal me; please grant me the opposite virtue in place of this my sin” and then to speak to the sin/ attitude in faith with clean energy saying to it when it tries to assert it self: “I accept that you are in my life, but I don’t need you right now along with the empty promises of “_____” that inspired you, and then praying to Jesus saying: “Lord, I give up this sin with your help and grace through faith in you, and I ask for the opposite virtue of this sin instead! Thank

you! The grace given means we are not abandoned, we are not in it by ourselves, and left to our own devices. Instead, Jesus is with us, to protect, heal, and grant peace and these all help kill the addictions and replace them with self-control, that is a gift from the Holy Spirit. ♥

FOUR IMPORTANT POINTS:

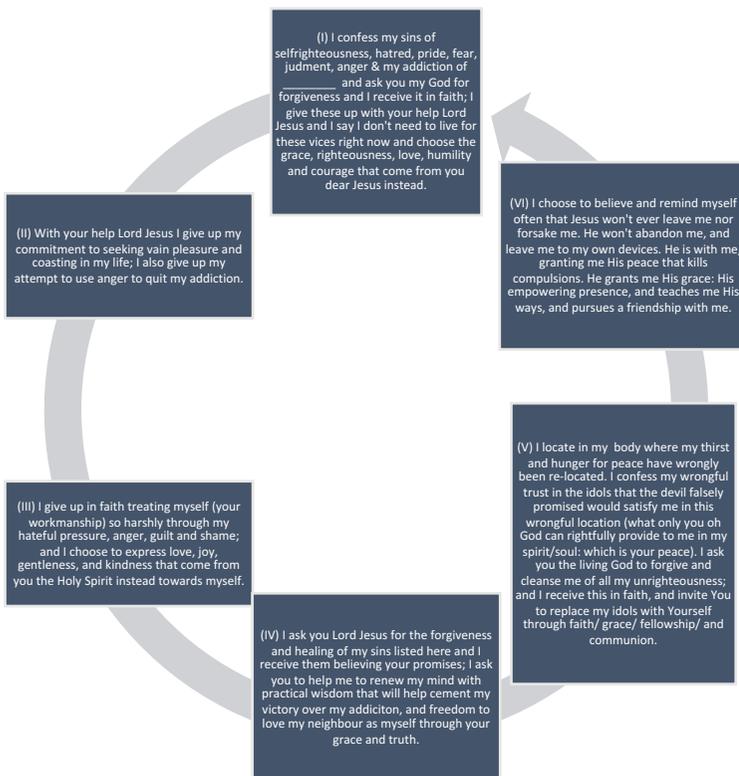
1. Don't assume that doing things that require effort will always become easy through prayer, and that we can coast by through life doing God's will. Going by one's feelings (to feel good alone) in this context is never a good idea when it comes to living life, practicing self-control, doing acts of love, and working in a useful manner. If we do abandon effort, initiative, and caring and instead coast (to feel good), then we negate the strategies found here, and the strategies will become ineffective, "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" within will not die, and the flesh will thrive.
2. When we go to a place of anger each time we start to give into a temptation to the addictive behavior, then the healthiest thing we can do is we need to give up our anger and redirect our thoughts to something more positive, gentle, and caring instead. Using anger to motivate changing stuff is unhealthy. Constant anger needs to be relieved and may start or make an addiction worse. This is because anger is a negative emotion in this context so we will want to counter it with stuff that makes us feel good to help feel happy instead; hence more draw to the addiction if we counter it in an unhealthy way.
3. When we get a handle on the anger we will be able to see more clearly, and this will help us to diagnose

further our conditions to help heal any unhealthy attachments.

4. We have not because we ask not. Ask God for the gift of Himself regularly. Believe that God has not abandon you, and won't leave you even though you have and do sin. Believe that He is with you in the battle. Imparting His peace, joy, and love that curbs the attractions or compulsions towards the addictions.

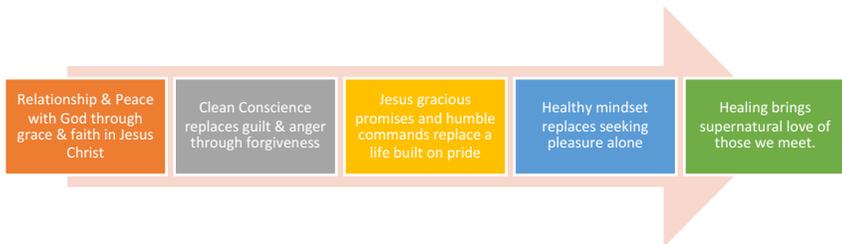
The following cycle can be prayed to help reverse the power of the addiction:

Cycle IV:



Pride is very superficial because it cares nothing about what is healthy spiritually. The key to real change is to not motivate oneself out of pride and guilt/ anger/ and self-pity but through other healthier means that God wants to provide.

God forgives guilt and we ought to embrace the peace that comes from it, experience it, move with it, and live out of it. God replaces self-anger with meekness. God gives humility in place of pride. God gives wisdom (think healthy mindedness) in place of foolishness. God gives Himself instead of idols. God gives healthy goals instead of empty performance. God's way is through a clean conscience, humility, and a healthy mindset that bears a healthy life! This is how we get God more into the picture of our lives:



Taking hold of God in healthy-prayer that focuses on confession, repenting, and renewing the mind are the foundations to healing with God's help. But the prayer can't be feeble/ shallow/ light-hearted or surface and removed from the battle. The prayer can't be a constant monologue. The prayer needs to be two-way. Prayer also needs to involve a healthy community (by that I mean God often speaks to us through others, as well as through circumstances).

For healthy prayer, I highly recommend Brad Jersak's book: *Can You Hear Me?* along with Mark Virkler's books on journaling prayer. Prayer, listening, reading and meditating on what is communicated, in the contexts of our relationships are where God will work out the details in our lives. Each person's details are different. But we can learn from those who have gone ahead of us. Don't mock small beginnings or healthily balanced truth found in the NT, and relationship with God through Jesus.

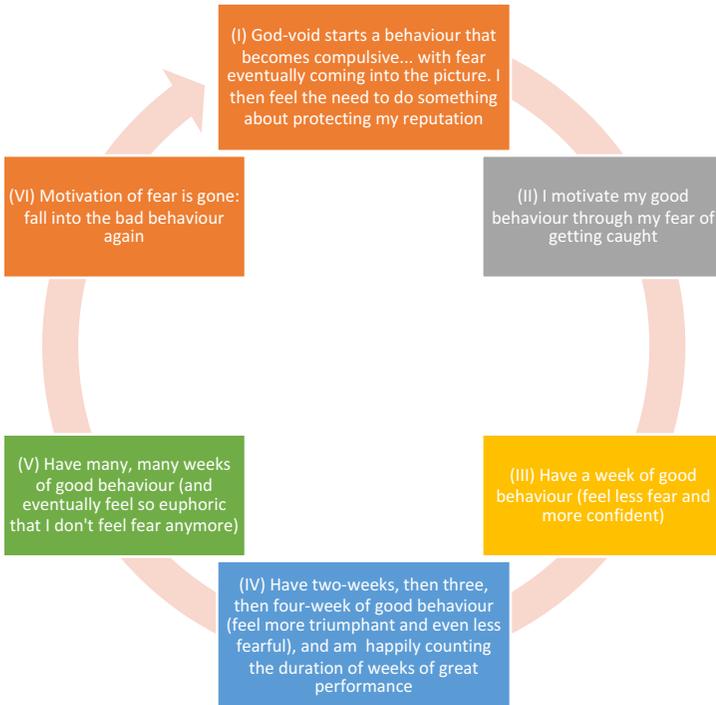
After our spiritual condition slowly improves through the prayers above. A second Cycle closely related to the one above is found in the next chapter.

10 THE FEAR, PRIDE & UNWANTED BEHAVIORS CYCLE

This cycle below can involve many unwanted behaviors such as gluttony (accompanied with putting on visible weight), drinking, drugs, looking at porn, visiting hookers, masturbation...etc., that are thought of as shameful in the eyes of one's culture or subculture and that one's conscience can possibly testify to as well. When a person falls into an unwanted behavior he or she will inevitably ask: What if I'd gotten caught? And this produces fear. They will also only try to do the forbidden behavior when isolated or by themselves because then the odds of getting caught are much less. Even unwanted behavior can be pleasurable. So, if it is eating or drinking then the buying of these products will be embarrassing. If it is going to the red-light district, then the trip will be uncomfortable, nervous, exciting, fearful, and uneasy but easy to get used to.

The fear we have of being caught, or found out is closely linked to conceit/ pride/ and protecting our self-image. This happens because we have believed lies that have taken root in our hearts that threaten our identity but we may think saves it.

Cycle V:



If the person ignores God or doesn't know that God is willing to help, or how to get God to help, then they will use fear to attempt to save themselves from disclosure by all that is at hand. When one's fear is activated along with pride then one will use willpower to stop the unwanted behavior. Usually when one resorts to willpower one will use angry-pressure, or self-hatred; as well as self-blackmail to get the job done. One may say: "I will hate myself more if I fail again." Note that these are "negative/ heavy/ dark/ depressing/ bitter/ isolated/ hurtful/ independent/ and proud" ways to try to motivate the desired good behavior and reputation. When these negatives are present we will seek relief so secondary addictions might precipitate and relief in the undesired

behavior will become compelling causing failure yet again. Thus, the cycle repeats itself.

When God is in His rightful place in our hearts as the true landlord providing peace, then the cycle is broken. Working the steps outlined in this Chapter repeatedly in the areas in our lives where these cycles operate and not giving up is key to bringing about self-control. Self-control results when God supplies us with His supernatural peace. Again, Jesus' peace comes when we believe He is with us, won't forsake us, is here to help us, to care for us, teach us, build us up, and be our friend. Jesus won't leave us to our own devices, we are not in this all by ourselves.

When we have self-control, we have true freedom. We won't feel out of control anymore. We will grow in confidence, feel clean inside, and begin to have victory in our relationships, finances, and feel healthy spiritually inside and healthy physically too. We won't try to use anger anymore to stop the temptation either. The devil will try to steal the gifts given us from God, but we need to submit to God and resist the devil with the tools God has given us to wield.

Cycle VI:



Regularly reminding oneself that Jesus is with us, that we aren't orphaned, that He is in the battle with us is key to embracing Jesus and His grace (which means we are connected to Jesus and are abiding in Him). It is not wise to count the days, weeks, and months one has victory. It leads to measuring, judging, pride, and takes away our focus on building a fuller, richer, humble life based on Jesus' peace and wisdom. Measuring has to do with performance, something that can be intimidating to those who don't know better, something the Pharisees did (with the Old Testament-LAW) in

showing their self-righteousness, when Jesus walked the earth 2000-years-ago.

Living a healthy life takes forgiveness, receiving peace, a commitment to truth, time, hope, faith, humility, wisdom, and love that are supported in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ that overcomes guilt/ shame/ self-pity/ emptiness/ disappointment/ pain/ and restlessness.

Overcoming all our challenges doesn't happen overnight...but is worked out by persevering through "trial and error." Faith, humility, and love will grow in our lives because they are gifts from God that we get when we ask for them and search for them. Relationships with God ought not be primarily sin-focused but be open-celebration-focused. By open I mean that one is honest in the presence of God...with letting it all hang out: the good, the bad and ugly so we can be healed.

God is not like an earthly Ruler that we need to tense up within when in His presence, or be afraid that He will punish us at the slightest annoyance; He is not anal, is not sin-focused; but is love focused. But, He is one with whom we can relax, enjoy, rest in, celebrate life with, find peace in, find refreshment with, and relationship with. He isn't judgmental. But He hates sin. Moreover, when we come into God's presence we are not in a court of law...but in the family living room. We ought to get to the place where we know God loves us more and more...which is also a journey. That doesn't mean that God changes, but it does mean we discover more of who God is as time goes by.

Just because one sees how pride and humility are related

does not mean one understands them all. One only understands parts of them when one practices humility. Realize that the only one who practices it perfectly is God because He is perfect, and not because he is aiming for perfection. He does what needs to be done naturally.

I am always grateful to those who give me more insights on how to grow humility in my life especially the Holy Spirit (who showed me many of these sick dynamics at work in my heart, and provided the cures found in the Bible). Ultimately humility comes from Jesus. Remember this always; otherwise pride will have a foothold in your life that you won't defeat!

9 FURTHER READING

I am aware that the approach formed in this book may help some people, but I am sure that it won't help everyone to become completely free and enjoy life the way Jesus intends them to. Books I'd recommend that touch on topics I missed or glossed over are:

- (1) Can You Hear Me? by Brad Jersak, (ideal for building two-way prayer)
- (2) Battle Field of The Mind by Joyce Meyer, (ideal for learning to think healthily, positively, and maintain it)
- (3) How to Hear God's Voice by Mark and Patti Virkler, (ideal for building two-way prayer)
- (4) Imagine Heaven by John Burke, (ideal for seeing God as love, and non-judgmental...also gives glimpses of Heaven and Hell)
- (5) Living Beyond Your Feelings by Joyce Meyer,
- (6) The Root of Rejection by Joyce Meyer,
- (7) Change Your Words Change Your Life by Joyce Meyer,
- (8) Emotionally Free by Dr. Grant Mullen,
- (9) Waking the Slumbering Spirit by John and Paula Sandford,
- (10) Tired of Trying To Measuring Up by Jeff VanVonderen,
- (11) Soul Repair by Jeff VanVonderen and Dale & Juanita Ryan

- (12) Healing the past Releasing the Future by Frank & Catherine Fabiano,
- (13) Unbound by Neal Lozano,
- (14) The Pressure's Off by Dr. Larry Crabb,
- (15) Freedom From Addiction by Neil T. Anderson
- (16) Breaking The Bondage Of Legalism by Neil T. Anderson
- (17) Winning The Battle Within by Neil T. Anderson
- (18) The Bondage Breaker by Neil T. Anderson
- (19) Freedom From Fear by Neil T. Anderson
- (20) Liberating Prayer by Neil T. Anderson
- (21) Finding God's Will by Neil T. Anderson
- (22) When The Spirit Comes In Power by Peter Herbeck,
- (23) The Twelve Steps: A Spiritual Journey, A Working Guide For Healing,
- (24) Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In A Healthy Way by Gary Chapman,
- (25) Boundaries by Dr. Henry Cloud, & Dr. John Townsend,
- (26) Healing The Wounded Spirit by John & Paula Sandford,
- (27) Becoming A Family That Heals by Drs. Beverly and Tom Rodgers,
- (28) Inside Out by Dr. Larry Crabb,
- (29) Finding God by Dr. Larry Crabb.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I lived my early life in South Africa, but have lived since then in Canada. I am now married to a beautiful woman named Sophie. I have struggled with Schizophrenia since 1992. I have struggled with many addictions and am still fighting the battles.