THE EXPANDED TWELVE STEPS

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Chapter One

Introduction

Many people would like these questions answered:

a) How can we be healed from spiritual/psychological wounds?
b) How can we be freed from bad habits, or addictions?
c) How can weaknesses be turned into strengths? and
d) How can flaws in our character be removed?

First off, there is no "real" quick fix for all of these together if we are a mess spiritually! Building a life takes a lifetime. 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 to take for healing to come: it's always a journey.

So what makes a journey a healing one? One answer is respond in humility to the little "t" truths that the Creator speaks to us daily. But how does one tune into or recognize these communications… and what does it mean to respond? Many authors have attempted to answer these questions in healthy ways! I will share the process of change that I have learned in my journey, from God, the body of Christ and other vehicles of meaning. But before I do this we need to ask:

What Kind of Addictions Do We Have?

Any addiction can have more than one root that causes it, so don't peg your hopes on only one strategy or one approach when you seek relief or hit blockages to recovery. Here are some possible roots:

a) Spiritual wounds such as un forgiveness, or nursing hatred and desires for revenge (are dealt with in this Essay).
b) Marring of the personality by strongholds such as envy, judging, pride, meanness, negativity and self-pity… along with fears, (are dealt with in the Essay: Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds, with the link: http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf)
c) Believing lies that the devil, or the world speaks to us that put us in bondage (are dealt with 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).

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. But this can be broken by redirecting one's spiritual thirsts and hunger back to God with strategic and intense heartfelt prayer. I discuss this issue in detail in the Essay: Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds with the link: http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf.

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 closed system of principles that will bring about complete restoration. One little "t" truth will help one person and not another, while different little "t' truths will help a different person, the source of these truths is always the BIG "T"-Truth: Jesus. This is because we believe different lies…and we need corresponding truths to set us free from the lies, and we don't see everything, but He does. Our hearts are mysterious. But if we have a tenacious faith like the tenacity of a mustard seed we will win through the struggles and searches for freedom… maybe not immediately, but gradually, gradually, and then gradually.

Also, a healthy enough relational connection with God, understanding certain truths, commitment to LOVE, spiritual hunger, and caring need to be in place solidly before positive change can be established and built into our lives. Correct thinking must also take 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, and give us strength, to carry us through the tearing down and building processes within. We also need to renew our minds and attitudes through a growing healthy relationship with God. He wants to be the friend and Love that will bring healing and peace. Real change is a process that can go all over the place at times.

"The Expanded Twelve Steps" are a deepening of the usual Twelve Steps used in

AA or other communities that try to help those with addictions. If you are a person who practices The Twelve Steps, then I think "The Expanded Twelve Steps" might bring more growth to your spiritual journey. They 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 mysterious thing. All little "p"-principles have their limitations, and so do "The Expanded Twelve Steps". Sometimes not focusing on spiritual self-help literature for a while will clear the head and mind, and enable God to communicate with us better and lead us into more freedom.

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 the right questions and obtain the promises by taking risks and using imagination. Whereas, those who are knowledge focused usually go nowhere and are usually closed-minded.

Analyzing one's situations repeatedly by oneself, 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 lie as false. Only light exposes things for what they are: Jesus is the Light of the world. Listening to people and God is more useful than analyzing. All peoples see things differently (some significantly and other less so) …so others see what we often don't: this can be very helpful. God sees everything…but often 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. But God does speak one-way, and then another. The spiritual journey we embark on in working the Steps is one where we grow dependent on others and on our Higher Power through faith and commitment and care.

As I discovered the power to change that the Most High God grants to those who practice these Steps I eventually realized that I ought not confuse the Steps with the theory behind these same Steps. If these Steps bring you closer to God then fine… hooray! If not, then stop working them until God says it is OK to work them again if at all. 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 us and to be enjoyed and heard), He has a heart (full of desire for being 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 making their own decisions acting like a god without consulting God will find working the Steps very difficult. We all have this tendency within us and we have to give them up with God's grace one moment at a time in prayer.

If one does not want to be free, then don't bother attempting to practice these Steps (See step 6) because they 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 chapter may help some people jettison restrictive baggage from their past, but because the heart is a mysterious thing other helps may be in order too. I have listed a few other approaches (or books) at the end of this Essay that have helped me (some in small ways and others that have helped me in BIG ways).

I highly recommend two books: one by Brad Jersak called, "Can You Hear Me?" and the other by Mark and Patti Virkler called, "How to Hear God's Voice" because together they bring an approach to relationship with Jesus that is based on the solid promise that those who believe in Jesus 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 see bad fruit, ask God what the roots are and He will eventually in His time show you what to repent from. 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 sin strongholds if you let Him (probably not immediately, but in His time)! Even when plagued with confusion and doubt, Jesus is here with us…He will lead us through confusion when we commit to following Him despite the pain, guilt, poverty, and shame we may be experiencing.

If you do find some freedom from working the Steps below, don't think you have it all figured out. There is much hidden from each of us, so we don't see the whole equation. 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. Real change comes only when repentance in certain areas of our lives are God's will. If God wants us to repent He will let us know, and give us the power to change from the Holy Spirit who issues forth from God the Father and God the Son. Self-righteously going ahead of Him is doomed to failure and won't help us fight through bondages/ pressure/ lies/ frustrations/ confusion/ 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 through life. Wait on Him to deal with all the shit in your life one thing at a time. For this to work, then 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 Him or a stable life) that will celebrate a wholesome joy and stand the tests of many storms or hardships.

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 blocking my eyesight (conscience) that I didn't know what was wrong with me. 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 or how unhealthy spiritually my heart and mind 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 too disagreeable because of my narrow fundamentalist ways of looking at things back then.

But eventually, I would come to see that working "The Expanded 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 relationship with God that can bring much healing and bear much good fruit. In some cases, God uses (discipline) or suffering to 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 past exposed by Jesus (and replaced with His liberating truth). Lies bring bondages; truths bring freedom. Sometimes we will have to forgive others and our selves for freedom to come our way. 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 have truth stored within us[1]. 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 remain free from addictive behaviors. Abiding is a simple thing. It requires a steadfast commitment to learn the secret of remaining in God's love: the Holy Spirit. We abide in Jesus simply by humbly believing in Jesus and His goodness, nurturing our ability to hear Him, and be committed to doing what He asks us in the present. Real freedom is the ability to do what is right in the present and that is where the focus ought to get to. By abiding in Jesus we experience real peace and out of this peace we will 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 other people's faults, and that I am not called to convict or point out anyone else's sins. Yes, people have sinned against us. But the Steps are meant to get us to deal with our reactions to those sins because that is where our bondages may lie. Those who come to Christ do so because they desire and hunger to be loved and to love. Those who persecute Christ do so because they are looking to uncover other people's sins and they are law focused. In practicing these Steps our aim ought to be: loving others as ourselves for that is a goal that makes, in part, these Steps complete and helps to uncover the little "t"-truths necessary to walk in freedom.

I have included in this Essay as much helpful truth that I have uncovered in my readings from God-help books, theology books, novels, movies, and people from Christian traditions. I don't know where I'd be if it were not for God wisely bring people or books into my life at the right times with wisdom that helps me conquer the darkness in my heart. Here are the Steps that work for me:

Chapter Two

The Expanded Twelve Steps

Step 1. We admit that we have very serious addictions, compulsions, or insensitivity in our lives that have become unmanageable.

[1] Cf. Joyce Meyer's teachings and books.

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 us back to sanity. Put another way: come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

Step 3. Next, we turn our lives and our wills over to Jesus, as we understand Him for now realizing that the farther we travel with Him the more differently we will see and experience Him. This Step for the Christian is called: "Learning to Abide in Jesus the True vine."

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

Step 5. Confess to God and another person the "exact" nature of our wrongs, such as:

Having hurt or harmed people

Holding resentments against people

Hateful attitudes towards people

Plotting revenge against people

Proud attitudes like Conceit

God will forgive these, and promises to cleanse us from them as we continue to work these Steps.

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

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

I have included the idea of forgiveness and dealing with judgmental ism in this version of the Twelve Steps because there are at least three different types of people: Those who take revenge, those wanting justice, and those who can't stop judging others out of pride/envy/conceitedness and negativity:

Step 8. Make a list of all those we had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all, because we acted out our selfishness or our anger in an unhealthy way (for instance by hurtful words, stealing or taking our revenge).

Step 9. With God's help made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 88. Make a list of all those people I have

Resented, or held a grudge against

Hated or threatened

at some time in my life (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 Step 99.

Step 99. Here we are asked to do the following:

I. With God's help, I choose to forgive those who victimized or wounded or insulted me.
II. In faith with Jesus' help I give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the persons I had problems with.
III. If I am threatening hatred or un-forgiveness against others or self to promote change, then I give it up in faith with Jesus' help.

Will show how to do these.

We don't need to confess and repent from our anger. We need to own our anger, respect its place and process it healthily. It is a warning bell or alarm that something is wrong. If we say our 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 hurt people. Anger is good, but if we don't process it then it leads to resentment, then the resentment needs to be dealt with. Anger is an emotion, not a moral wrong. We are allowed to be angry, but we ought not sin in our anger.

Step 888. Admit we have fears that lead to pride and coldness, and diminishes our love for others. Admit we have pride that leads to Conceit, judging, hostility, and un-forgiveness.

Step 999. The vices just mentioned in the last step are a little bit more involved to deal with. The Essay:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

goes into depth on how to kill conceitedness/ judging/ envy/ pride/ and fear amongst other bad attitudes and addictions.

Step 10. Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it, sought forgiveness, repented, and dispensed mercy through the grace of God and regularly ask Jesus so we can abide in Him by renewing our minds with truth. Lies feel like truths to those deceived by them. Lies put us into bondage. Real truth sets us free to love. Therefore, relationship with God, and growing in being able to hear the voice of God is the next step:

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for our lives and the power to carry it out. Truth sets free.

Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles [and the resultant truths

that spring forth from our relationships with God as we Understand Him] in all our affairs. Once free from an addiction certain truths will protect us when tempted. But focusing on the Great Shepherd and following where He leads us 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 gradually, gradually, gradually, and then gradually in many cases. If you want change stick to the Steps above as long as God requires it… if you want ideas on how to forgive… or the theories on why I think the Steps above work, then look below. But remember God is interested in relationships, not obsessively pursuing principles or focusing on dirty laundry. Working on fixing ourselves solely by independently exerting brute force, pride, control, intuition, pressure, intelligence, and problem solving by blindly knocking on door after door is a very time consuming as well as a painful way to make progress. God is our Spiritual Doctor. 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 the mind and heart leading to healthier behaviors and with His help bring peace, strength, and freedom from addictions and freedom to love.

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 prayer will no longer be boring. Mark and Patti Virkler's book will help in the same way building on Brad's book.

HOW TO FORGIVE?

In practice to forgive we can pray something like:

Lord Jesus, I forgive: "_____" with your help in faith for "_____" and I give up my wishes for revenge; I give up the darkness in my heart, and I set this person free and myself too with your help Lord. Thank you for healing me helping me to say yes to love!

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 un-grace, 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 baggage or pasts don't influence us negatively when we forgive from the heart. This is based on living out the "golden rule" together with "grace": we want unconditional love (i.e. grace) so

we grant the same grace to everyone. When it comes to judging someone, who did us wrong, this kind of forgiveness is most needed, otherwise we are wounded. We forgive for our own sake. If we don't forgive people who piss us off, it won't affect their destiny, but it can affect ours. I choose to forgive others because it is healthy for me, and because I "really" want to be a good person. I can't be a good person if I cut off my love from anyone.

We can't be friends with everyone. Yes, we are called to forgive everyone who sins against us, but if they are toxic, unkind, judgmental, and uncaring and basically rub us (with friction) the wrong way 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 from my conceited ness.

Forgiveness is not minimizing the transgression, or denying the transgression. 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 God's power 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 adds to insensitivity and lack of caring along with wrongly moving boundaries that invite more confusion in our relationships and so more hurt and less positive directions.

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 don't mention it unless they are a danger to society.[2]

Un-resolved anger makes us feel bad, and if not dealt with will cause addictions, depression, psychosis, insensitivity, or other disorders. Forgiveness means to no longer see ourselves as victims.

Some people believe that God only forgives those who repent and further believe

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[2] I am grateful to my wife for this insight, and to R.T. Kendall for making this wisdom real to me.

that 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 forgiveness 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, hooks, negativity, hurt, pain, bitterness, meanness, hostility, anger, and revenge.

"Anger is designed to be a guest, not a life time resident."[3] 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 yet repeatedly without us consciously being aware of it or realizing what we are doing. Hence the constant need for 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. Both kinds of acts may foster intense anger and can turn into resentments. That anger needs to be dealt with in healthy ways.

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 unchecked causes resentments that causes bitterness, meanness, hostility, hatred, and then possibly murder.

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[3] Gary Chapman, "Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In A Healthy Way", Northfield Publishing © 2004, p. 85

HOW TO GIVE UP HATRED AND MAKING THREATS

This is done through repenting prayer.

Definition (for Repent in Prayer):

The word **"repent"** means to change one's mind. I also use it with the additional meaning of: **"I give up the 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: "_____" and these corresponding sins: "_____" along with my nastiness and jerk-like-way of carrying it all out**" and then to speak to the sin/ attitude in faith with clean energy saying to it: **"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; instead I have accepted Jesus as my Lord, Truth and Peace Giver!"** when the sin/ attitude tries to reassert itself**."'**

The strategy to confront negative strongholds 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. 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 emptiness, and committing to and connecting with Jesus as Prince of Peace is key to moving on. We need to do this emotionally as well as intellectually. In this way, we count dead previous strongholds of sin, and embrace the full life promised by Jesus. Nature hates vacuums, so we should replace sin with virtues. Virtues come from clean energy, peace, the presence of God along with healthy truth.

Repentance:

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 can motivate 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 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. The Righteous person gets up each time she or he falls. 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 great darkness

Chapter Three

SOME THINKING BEHIND THE STEPS:

In finding direction and freedom in life: 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 if

(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 principles have their place at times, and that intuition or gut instincts need to be listened to and have their place at times. I also think that discipline is important at times 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 He sees fit.

So the question arises: How do we know what to do and when to do it? 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". Yes, we are endowed with a spirit that can sense stuff about people and our paths but even to access this ability we require 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/ confession/ repentance/ and renewal of our minds" as the sixth school of thought. This allows us to process our guilt/ actions/ sins/ beliefs/ desires/ attitudes/ and thinking and gives God a chance to forgive us and heal us as we receive His gifts through faith.

Faiths are like keys. There are many kinds of faiths, and so many different keys. One faith will open one door while another faith will open another door. Some

faiths will open many doors while other faiths will open fewer doors. Some faiths will only knock on doors while other faiths won't open any doors. 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 are examples of unworthy faiths.

I am no master theologian. I am no dynamic leader. I am no Saint. But I am a student of life, love, and hope… and I am still learning the ABCs of 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 or negativity in one's heart, mind or life (Because there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus). Focusing on shit is not the real path to Wholeness. One needs to, as Saint Paul says:

> "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
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> "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.[4]

So how does one deal with the past without getting discouraged, sad, depressed, negative, or bitter? Love finds joy in the truth. One needs to focus on learning to love all the people who cross one's path from the past up to the present. Love cares for people, and this means people are the treasures not concepts, and because we value people we don't focus on their crap negatively, cynically, judgmentally, superiority, 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 to do is the path to take. Our aim or attitude needs 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 planted into

[4] Philippians 4:4-9, NRSV

each of our hearts at conception because it is a healthy motive. The devils try to steal this healthy deposit.

Wanting to love a person will happen when we care for them. If we care for them we will find ways to break through blockages to love.

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. So we need to deal with broken relationships one at a time.

If we are focused on negativity it will evaporate all the joy that God has given us. If we have wounds we can ask God to heal them. But we must not become anxious about our situation, instead we ought to rest in the peace and good-ness 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 is crucial for advancing from beginner status and growing in the fruit of the Holy Spirit that is supernatural love. Dealing 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.

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, and alcohol, or other immoral ways are accepted as normal and even encouraged. These people form mindsets and habits that are hard to break. These people start out with a huge disadvantage to the rest of us. This Essay 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. People who have lost their 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) here are some:

a) They don't want God in their lives. They think they know better: i.e. they decide to live life by themselves out of fear and pride.
b) They believe lies that bring about bondages.
c) They haven't learned to think correctly about life; how healthy relationships work; how to view others and self and how to refrain from judging others. (4) They don't obey His command to love their enemies.
d) They have set up their feelings as lords over their lives instead of following the Light that exposes things for what they are.
e) They have idols in their lives that rob them from freedom, self-control, breathe, joy, consolation, meaning, purpose, hope, and healthy

relationships. And

f) They disregard God's invitation to go deeper in their relationships with Him by following Him to where He leads (or abiding in Him) so that loving others like oneself becomes the focus.

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 is a 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 His supernatural love for others.

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 commitments drain one's energy and require relief: an addiction will 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 love. Knowing LOVE and TRUTH protect us from bondage and folly when we maintain healthy humility.

People who set up their emotions as gods in their lives will have all sorts of troubles. Fact is, that we don't have to be slaves to our emotions. Let me explain this more thoroughly. 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 to worlds where we love, hate, feel guilty, 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 that spawned our emotions are true because our feelings are so strong or compelling. Then this will reinforce our emotions which will in turn reinforce the ideas, and this will go on back and forth building up a construct in our mind: the construct becomes an attitude and our supposed 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 will want relief, and sex, food, drink, and drugs will seem like the answers

to our negativity that spawns depression, sadness, hurt, anger, meanness, or hatred.

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 pleasure 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 relationship with Himself by helping us deal with the unresolved anger/ 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 create unhappiness, and the unhappiness needs to be nursed through artificial pleasures, if not repented from. If repented from it in prayer through the grace of 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 Pride/ Envy/ Greed/ Lust/ Selfishness/ Sloth/ and Gluttony because when we have these vices in our hearts then we are the center of our own worlds and anything that threatens what they stand for will trigger anger. Healthy anger occurs when when someone trespasses our or someone else's boundaries. What matters is what we do with whatever anger we have. Anger is neither moral nor immoral. If the anger we have forms a resentment, then an addiction will form. If the anger we have forms hatred, then more insensitivity or possible violence will result. 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).

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 with. See the Essay called, "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" for ideas on how to do just that. If

it is an exterior matter that triggered our anger, then dealing with it in healthy, respectful, kind, 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.

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 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 Expanded Twelve Steps come in.

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

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, not legalism.
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.
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 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. If we have hatred, then we will most likely have insensitivity (along with possible addictions). If we 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. But we will have to learn how to deal with our anger in constructive ways in order to love others genuinely or supernaturally or where they are at. Once one learns to deal with anger in healthy ways one's under-assertiveness or over assertiveness will dry up.

d) Follow Jesus moment to moment to where He leads us day in and day out. This is called "abiding" in Jesus. We need to jettison our idols to fully do this. This is a mysterious thing and takes practice on how to get good. When we abide in Jesus, He will eventually lead us to give up being hard on ourselves if that is our way of life. If we are hard on others it is because we are hard on ourselves. If we are hard on ourselves, it may be because we may see God as being hard on us. Knowing that we are hard on ourselves won't do away with being hard on ourselves. We need to find the roots or the reasons for why we became that way. The reasons why we are hard on ourselves and therefore on others has to do with what we started to aim for when we first became hard on ourselves. Is it to keep oneself from being rejected? Is it to be a supposedly "good" girl or boy? Is it not to get hurt again? Is it to fit in somehow? Is it to become a "canonized Saint" or a "paragon of some miss guided perfection"? Whatever the case may be the behavior of being hard on oneself started for at least one reason to begin with. And may have snow balled thereafter.

All four of the above commitments, and actions are summarized in "The Expanded Twelve Steps". They are in part the 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.

C.S. Lewis said that when one comes to a fork in the road and travels down the wrong path for some distance, one should not take off into the wilderness when one recognizes the error. We'll all get lost that way. One must go back to the beginning where the initial mistakes were made, and then go in the right direction.[5] God can use "The Expanded Twelve Steps" to help us go back to the forks in the road. This is different than going on a "seek and hunt" process when it comes to examining our past mistakes; Jesus is the leader, and we are His followers. When "The Expanded Twelve Steps" are practiced properly God can use them to soften our hearts towards Him, 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 unassertive or over assertive. If there is hope for me then there is hope for all. We don't have to stay the way 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.:

Chapter Four

[5] Cf. C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Published by Simon & Schuster New York, ©1980, p. 36

SOME HINTS ON HOW TO WORK THE EXPANDED TWELVE STEPS:

No one can exhaust all the reasons or insights behind "The Expanded 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 leading from the Holy Spirit (Hence getting to know the voice of God in prayer). That said here is my thinking behind the Steps:

Step 1. We admit that we have very serious addictions, compulsions, or insensitivity in our lives that have become unmanageable.

I need to admit that I am flawed in some real ways if that is the case. 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 we have made a mess living life on our 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 help connect us to cures. If they aren't then they are like 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 self-pity and low self-esteem…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 ignore the box and so give it no 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 on the surface of our consciousness and into the heart where we "really" are at with God. Focus on and allow God to change you through prayer (talking and listening) with and faith in Him. We are not to forever live on the surface, but in the heart from our very center, from our strengths, where the Holy Spirit resides. Faking it is not where it is at... CS. Lewis and the path metaphor is helpful here... Principles in and of themselves will do nothing if God is by-passed... 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 move on with Him in hope into joy... 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. We don't have to be the perfect child we think our parents want. 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 healthy degrees 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 relationships with God through faith. 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 see that Satan and his fallen angels are so involved in attempting to lead us astray, hurting us, and harming us. God is even more involved in pursuing us, wanting intimacy with us, wanting to heal us, to build us up, and granting us hope.

There are many types of perfection. We ought to become aware of what we aim for and why. Understanding our motives/methodology for how we landed where we are is so important and needs to become a part of our fearless moral inventory (Cf. Step 4). Whatever drives us away from love ought to be abandoned with Jesus' help in prayer.

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

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 us back to sanity. Put another way: come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

This requires humility and killing the pride of selfish independence from our higher power. Some people are so busy competing with, criticizing, 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. A difficulty to overcome and better practice this step is 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 resentments against Him through His help if we want to proceed to and win freedom. 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 block 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.

Step 3. Next, we turn our lives and our wills over to Jesus, as we understand Him for now realizing that the farther we travel with Him the more differently we will see and experience Him. This Step for the Christian is called: "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, as well as 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 someone who knows better.

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, restlessness, and superficiality. We become dependent on Jesus for everything. In particular: His gift of the Holy Spirit. We do so in prayer.

This step is about deciding to cooperate with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It is all about abiding, resting and living day in and day out in Jesus by asking him regularly for this privilege that His Holy Spirit makes possible. That doesn't mean it will be easy to stay away from sin all the time. If all compulsive-sinful strongholds have been dealt with (through these Steps) … 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 some "sin nature" within us… and not having a healthy strategy to deal with it will lead us into giving into temptations if we are not careful. I elaborate on this concept in the Essay called, Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds found in the "Insights" page from this Website.

"When we depend on idols we are walking in the flesh. When we depend on Jesus we are walking in the Spirit and abiding in Him. It is through a humble faith in Jesus that we abide in Jesus. If we are expending energy and more and more time to resist temptation in a burdensome way, trying to say no to the sin weakly, 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 instant peace or gratification but often leaves us with a guilty conscience. How do we know we are depending on idols? If we are trying to substitute joy and peace for happiness or pleasures, then we are depending on idols. 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."[6]

If we are glorying (taking pride) in earthly things, then when they are damaged, removed, stolen, or soiled we will lose our reputations and our life (so are humbled). If we are glorying (taking unhealthy pride) in our self-efforts, expected behaviors, rule keeping, or reputations, then we will either become self-righteous or defeated depending on our performances. If we glory: "delight" in Jesus He won't disappoint us. If we aim for this life only, then we may eventually lose it all. If we aim for the next, we will have all we need in this life and bounty in the next life.

We need to be able to hear Jesus' voice as He guides us through the pits of darkness found in our hearts. Jesus is the Light we need to walk through the darkness. Abiding in Jesus involves learning to do things His way in part, through these Steps. 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) of His rules or commandments; whose end is love. Some of the things that Jesus has said[7] may look like out right nonsense at first glance (these are clues as to what untruths we have accumulated in our belief systems) or just not having wisdom and so having misunderstandings 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). 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). Don't put pressure on yourself. Remember that in the same way that you know what's better for your children if you have children, Jesus knows what is best for you. So in practicing this step we learn to pray believing that God will answer the following prayers:

> The Serenity Prayer[8]
>
> 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,

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[6] These ideas come from Jeff VanVonderen, and Peter Herbeck.
[7] Cf. the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew: Chapters 5-7
[8] By Reinhold Niebuhr, (emphasis mine)

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 are or aren't going Jesus' way:

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 in control of my holiness and my ability to love. Please lead the way. You alone are self-righteous in a good way. Thanks!

If we 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, or live in Him. We follow Him in part by practicing 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). Putting our faith in Jesus means to trust in His Love. It means to enter into a relationship with Him because of His mercy (not receiving what we do deserve) and grace (receiving what we don't deserve). There is more to working this step than at first glance. Walking with Jesus or abiding in Him (as the True Vine) is what this Step is about. See the end of this Essay for concrete ways of working this step. Do not go on a "seek and destroy" mission (in your own strength (don't be self-righteous or harsh with

yourself)) when it comes to repenting from sin. Wait for the Holy Spirit's leading. God knows better than we do because He designed each of us and wants to complete the work He began in us.

What Gives abiding in Jesus structure and foundation? Consider a three-legged stool.[9] The seat from the stool represents where we abide or rest in Jesus. The seat is supported by the first leg: called the church and what she collectively holds as the mind of Christ; supported by the second leg: the Word (The Christian Bible), and supported by the third leg: the inner witness, voice, presence, and grace (strength) from the Holy Spirit. What is the glue that holds this abiding-chair together? The glue is our humble attitude of faith in and commitment to God and His way or will. We need to make the Jesus' truth our truth to rid us from sinful strongholds. Strongholds can be resentments (unresolved anger) but can also be half-truths that grow into lies that rob us of our identity. A major stronghold is unhealthy pride and as far as thinking is concerned is best dealt with by the link:

http://www.fabsharford.com/6-weapons-to-kill-pride/

Dealing with the root or sickness of pride it is best to check out the link:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

When all the strongholds are dealt with then our obedience to Jesus will become real and will be a result of abiding in Him which takes humility (humility is a gift of God that we need to act on). The three-legs are very important to getting us free from lies, deceptions, bondages, and the lone-ranger mentality. The Holy Spirit will lead us into the Truth who is Jesus; and especially remind us of Him crucified to the cross because of our sins out of His love for us.

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… we can become pretty: cynical, critical, and judgmental towards life, people in general, institutions, and God Himself. If we want God to abide in 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 one of the beatitudes promises[10]. If we want Jesus to fully abide in us then we must jettison our scoffing and critical attitudes with His help and see with the eyes of faith the Christian God

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[9] I am grateful to Brad Jersak for the idea as found in his book "Can You Hear Me?" that I am merely giving a Catholic twist to.
[10] Cf. Matthew 5

who is full of love, comfort, patience and goodness. 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. God loves us but we can put up walls or unbelief that prevent His love from getting through to each of us. Those walls also keep us from loving others genuinely. Give it a try… lower your walls and let the King Of Glory in… you won't be disappointed.[11] Walls are lies the devils speak to us. Jettison the devils' lies about how God treats us, what it is like to be in God's presence, and what to expect in our Quiet Times with God. Time with God is good, healthy, and joyous!

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

This step involves listening to God the mechanic 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 (desires/ motives) and minds (thoughts / attitudes) and methodologies on how we wrongly 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).

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, take ownership of, and admit our guilt fully with emotional equivalence to our sins to God) such as attitudes of: (pride, envy, insensitivity), attractions (compulsions, methodology, wrongful desires), inner emotions: (fear, pride, envy, lust, gluttony, anger, sloth, and greed), actions: (lying, acting out of boredom, laziness, insensitivity, abrasiveness, un forgiveness… not caring, lack of concern, pointing of fingers (i.e. shifting blame), anger, irritableness, stealing, addictions (and their histories) hatred, judgments, self-pity, bitterness, unkind words, selfishness, rebellion, stubbornness, and delighting in our self-righteous performances to correct them…) and believing untruths that will need to go.

Each one of us has a memory; and the Holy Spirit will bring to mind memories from our pasts that God wants us to confess and eventually repent in prayer from with His help.

But Jesus is a gentle Shepherd. He is a God who is slow to anger. And He is a giving

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[11] I am indebted to Tom & Donna Cole for the idea in this paragraph from their book: Pure Heart: Restoration of the Heart Through the Beatitudes, Xulon Press © 2008.

God. 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 confessing and receiving God's empowering presence.

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/merciless" mission (in your own strength) when it comes to repenting from your sin. Wait for the Holy Spirit's leading (He will speak to you in your thoughts/ 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.

Step 5. Confess to God and another person the "exact" nature of our wrongs, such as:

Having hurt or harmed people

Holding resentments against people

Hateful attitudes towards people

Plotting revenge against people

Proud attitudes like Conceit

God will forgive these, and promises to cleanse us from them as we continue to work these Steps.

Change often occurs 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/ attitudes/ actions over the years 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/ pride/ and methodologies of carrying them out.

After the past is dealt with, we ought to practice these steps in the moment when we fall short of healthy relating as outlined here. 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, then we will be kinder, happier, easier to get along with and less prone addictive behaviors day in and day out.

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

The whole of the Twelve Plus Four 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, and become healthier.

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 in His time.

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

Let God lead you to do what to do 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. Focus on your thanksgiving towards God because He loves to give even more to those who appreciate His gifts through thankfulness. Because we feel sorry for having built structures /methodologies of acting out sin in our hearts/lives and want God's will in our lives we practice this step).

Some people are so busy criticizing others that they can't see their own flaws. Judging others is rooted in unhealthy pride. Believe that God is good and a rewards those who come to Him because He gives His grace to the humble. 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. God led me to the website (which is short and to the point about how to kill proud thinking by renewing the mind):

http://www.fabsharford.com/6-weapons-to-kill-pride/

I have also written a more comprehensive treatment on this topic on this Website called "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" and it has been a lifesaver when it comes to me dealing with pride day after day. This is done in prayer and changing our attitudes slowly, deliberately, and constantly over time with God's help through heartfelt confession, repenting in prayer, and renewing the mind.

I have included the idea of forgiveness and dealing with judgmental ism in this version of the Twelve Steps because there are at least three different types of people: Those who take revenge, those wanting justice, and those who can't stop judging others out of pride/envy/conceitedness and negativity:

Step 8. Make a list of all those we had harmed and become willing to make amends to them all, because we acted out our selfishness or our anger in an unhealthy way (for instance by hurtful words, stealing or taking our revenge).

On one hand most of us have harmed others who have never done us any wrong.

If so we may need to admit our wrongs, and say we are sorry; that we are going to attempt to do better in the future: we ask what we can do to make it right; and we ask for forgiveness.[12] 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 un-forgiveness or hatred in our hearts because of what happened. We need to forgive, and be forgiven. See Steps 88 and 99 below for how to forgive.

Step 9. With God's help made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step 88. Make a list of all those people I have

Resented, or held a grudge against

Hated or threatened

at some time in my life (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 them. If I have never embraced my anger against those who wronged me I need to do so. Then proceed to Step 99.

Step 99. Here we are asked to do the following:

I. With God's help, I choose to forgive those who victimized or wounded or insulted me.
II. In faith with Jesus' help I give up my hatred (and the criticism that grows out of that anger) for the persons I had problems with.
III. If I am threatening hatred or un-forgiveness against others or self to

[12] Cf. Gary Chapman & Jennifer Thomas, The Five languages of Apology, Northfield Publishers © 2006

promote change, then I give it up in faith with Jesus' help.

Steps (I, II, and III) are done through the explanations given in Chapter two.

We don't need to confess and repent from our anger. We need to own our anger, respect its place and process it healthily. It is a warning bell or alarm that something is wrong. If we say our 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 hurt people. Anger is good, but if we don't process it then it leads to resentment, then the resentment needs to be dealt with. Anger is an emotion, not a moral wrong. We are allowed to be angry, but we ought not sin in our anger.

Steps 8, 88, 9, and 99 involve loving our "former" enemies through God's power, and choosing to softening our hearts in prayer with Jesus' help. They are former enemies in our eyes, not necessarily their eyes. Steps 88, and 99 are for people (victims) who got angry with agents of their hurts but may never have retaliated (the ordinary Twelve Steps don't cover this). They immediately absorb the blow but they still feel wounded. Because of what happens, these people also have resentments (un-forgiven anger), and possibly hatred in their hearts. They need to deal with the hatred first then forgive, and be forgiven. This process is outlined here:

Consciously acknowledge that I may be hating the agent of my hurt if that is what I am doing,

Change my mind and give up my hatred with Jesus' help in prayer, and discover that I care for the agent of my hurt,

Locate the focus of my anger,

Processing my anger using "I"-statements instead of judging. These statements use the formula: "I feel… when you… because… and therefore I'd like…" and are meant to be non-judgmental, non-accusing, and non-name-calling; to be simple, honest and done with gentleness. We don't always have tell these statements to the people we had or are having problems with. There is something called tolerance and grace.

Take constructive action: forgive in prayer the agent of my hurt, or do something constructive to bring peace to the situation.

When we choose to love our enemies we no longer consider them as our enemies. They might see us as enemies but that is another matter

Forgiveness here means giving up our hardness of heart and no longer nursing our anger against the agents of our hurts. Forgiveness is a process; and should not be rushed into. In this section I will tell anyone how to forgive. If you are aware of

some un-forgiveness towards someone in your heart let me tell you how to forgive that person only if you “definitely” want to be free.

If you do have somewhere within an energy or attitude to hate, or desire to find retributive justice, or to take revenge, or the commitment to remain hostile (these attitudes spring from pride or conceit), then these need to be prayed through separately: see Step 888 below for how to deal with this.

Recap on how to forgive:

First ask God to heal your wounds in His time. Then to the best of your memory recall what that “particular” person did to you. If you can feel your wound(s) in your heart, then that is excellent. Feel each wound separately. As you feel each wound, recall what they did to you. Then at the same time call on God for His power to forgive. Next as best as you can, pray something like the following words with faith (along with the doubt that accompanies the faith) with as much meaning, clean energy and honesty as possible:

> I choose to have mercy on this person and forgive (give up my anger towards, and take my hooks out of them) through your power O Jesus (and so, in setting them free, I become free), and I give up in faith (i.e. with your help Jesus) anything ill I wished on this person. Jesus, I am wrong and sorry for having hardened my heart against this person so please forgive me my sins as I need forgiveness too.

Repeat these words as often as is needed (as an act purely from your will/ mind/ heart and with God’s helping hand and grace) while feeling the hurt that was inflicted. These words are to be directed towards God, and oneself. It is not wise to find the person we have forgiven to tell them they are forgiven unless we know they are sorry for what they did. In this step we are with God’s help uprooting our former commitment to wanting to take revenge on or demand punitive justice from those who have committed evil deeds against us.

When a person does us wrong we have to live with that wrong either way. How do you want to live with it? With negativity, hatred, malice, desires for revenge, 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 us and them.

If we can't help but focus on our feelings for retributive justice, revenge, or how unfair it actually is to forgive each person and get stuck, then we have fear, pride,

and possibly Conceit. We need to deal with these vices, and a way of doing that is to read my Essay called, “Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds” found in the “Insights” page from this Website. Forgiveness is a process driven by the will and aided by God’s grace and love through faith in Him. 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 the anger into a full-blown resentment. 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 wrong), then we might have a real difficulty to forgive them from our hearts again.[13] When we forgive somebody we ought not go about saying to all 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.[14] Do to others as we want them to do against us.

Either you will feel release along with Joy and a new softness in your heart, 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 any moment. If this is the case forgive again until complete.

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

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[13] 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.
[14] In debt to R.T. Kendall for this reasoning

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 we forgot about out of our subconscious/ heart/ and memories such as attitudes of selfishness/ jealousy…etc. We need to submit to God as humanly as possible as He walks us through it.

We all make mistakes: Don't be hard on yourself; forgive and move on into freedom 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 in hindsight is 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 perspective.

"The Expanded Twelve Steps" are meant to be a guide that starts our relationship through communication with or prayer to God. In short "The Expanded 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 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 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 and so are at least free from victim-hood.

However sometimes we can invite un-forgiveness into our hearts again after having forgiven a person for the past. If this is so, then we will need to forgive them yet again by practicing 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 along with the bad within them. 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 people are both agents and victims of hurts. Anger properly directed turns into compassion and justice 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 know 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.

Step 888. Admit we have fears that lead to pride and coldness, and diminishes our love for others. Admit we have pride that leads to Conceit, judging, hostility, and un-forgiveness.

Step 999. The vices just mentioned in the last step are a little bit more involved to deal with. The Essay:

http://www.brokenintofreedom.ca/PDFs/KILLINGPRIDE.pdf

goes into depth on how to kill conceitedness/ judging/ envy/ pride/ and fear amongst other bad attitudes and addictions.

Envy (is linked to judging), if it is a constant companion it causes depression and negativity which can be so intense that people who have major envy become addicts just so they can nurse/control/negate their depressing and negative attitudes and therefore have some happiness

Roughly speaking, we need to give up with Jesus' help in faith (in order they appear) our Conceit, judging, envy, pride, and fears in the context of not wanting to forgive.

Judging is linked to pride. Jesus taught us not to judge…but for some like myself all I ever did was judge people. The KILLING BAD ATTITUDE STRONGHOLDS Essay (link above) gives an approach on how to tackle this vice and those mentioned in this step. It is very systematic, but should only be worked in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (this will bring freedom) and not as a philosophy/ system/ algorithm/ machine/ LAW/ rules devoid of love and the Holy Spirit. Only the Trinity sets us free from sin through truths.

Step 10. Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it, sought forgiveness, repented, and dispensed mercy through the grace

of God and regularly ask Jesus so we can abide in Him by renewing our minds with truth. Lies feel like truths to those deceived by them. Lies put us into bondage. Real truth sets us free to love. Therefore, relationship with God, and growing in being able to hear the voice of God is the next step:

Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for our lives and the power to carry it out. Truth sets 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 is unplowed ground. Doubt is meant to show us our room for growth and our need of God. None of us know where we are going. We all need a trustable guide. Learning to discern and know His 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. Respect the differences.

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 Mother Church. Being open to whatever way God communicates and taking it to heart is part of what it means to be humble. 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. We can't carry out God's will all by ourselves. Don't put pressure on yourself to conform, change behaviors, or do the right thing. Don't use anger to motivate yourself. Don't be hard on yourself. Endure dryness. Practice patience even though that can be very difficult.

As we learn more about God's will, further moral inventories 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!

While growing up one will rightly or wrongly 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 guilt, anger, pride, joy, hostility, meanness, impatience, or a sense of justice or injustice within us. 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 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. 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 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 have made progress because Jesus is leading me on the path to freedom through confessing/prayer, meditation, and working these steps.

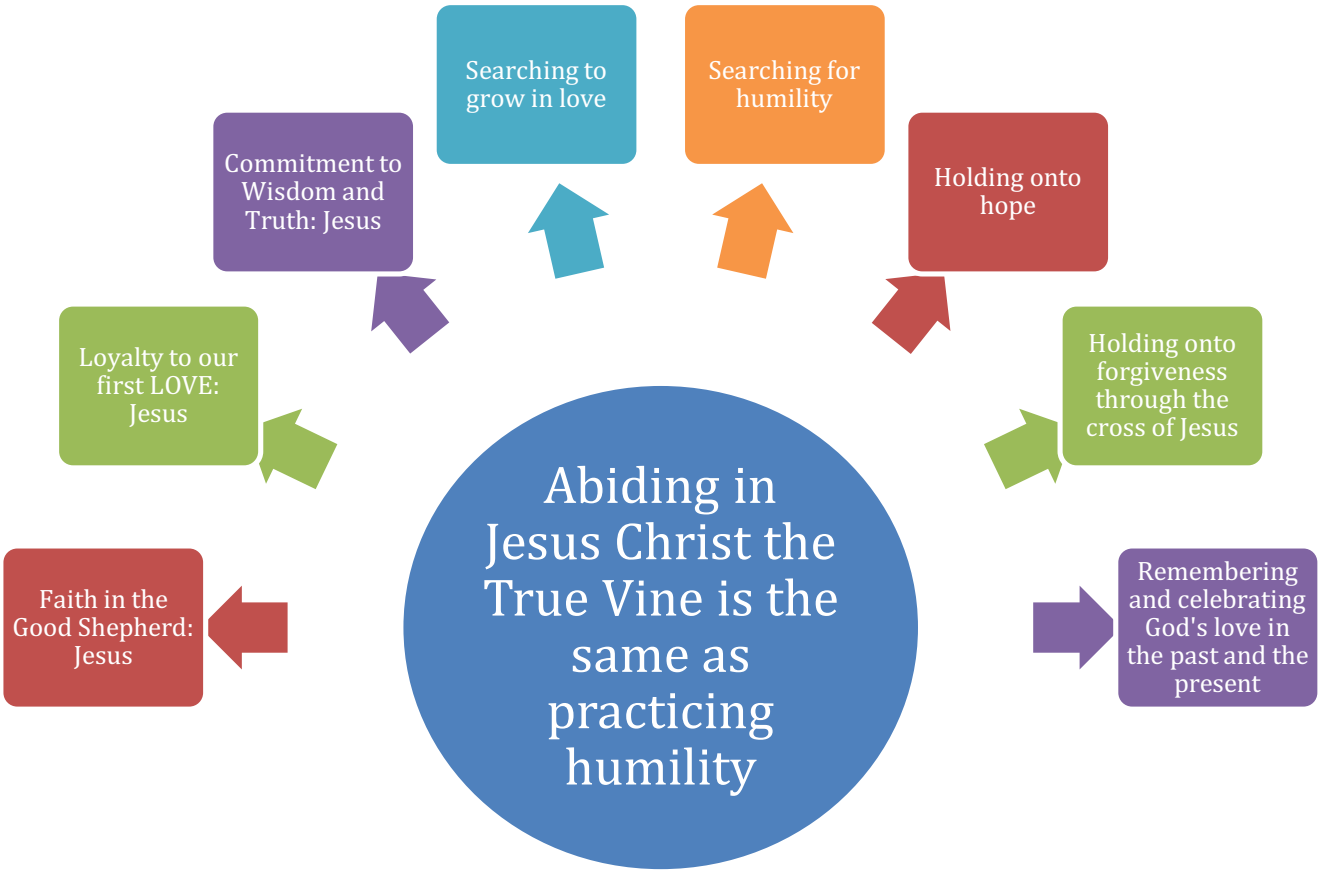
Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles [and the resultant truths that spring forth from our relationships with God as we Understand Him] in all our affairs. Once free from an addiction certain truths will protect us when 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. We are all sinners. We all 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 much 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 and will reveal to us just how strong our fallen-lives are and therefore how much more we need God.[15] "The Expanded Twelve Steps" are meant to launch our relationships with God. Don't try to do the steps all by oneself. 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. Jesus knows His sheep, and His sheep

[15] Thank you Sophie, for this insight.

know His voice. Believe that He hears you… and give Him time to speak and act. He eventually will.

ABIDING IN JESUS LEADS TO:



Jesus is the source of endurance, inspiration, and staying power for these commitments and attitudes.

NOW TO OTHER DETAILS…

Are You Struggling to Forgive?

I understand that to forgive another person can be very difficult, and that is why we need Jesus (the Higher power that has a proven track record). When we consider what others have done to us, it may well seem to us from a human standpoint to be a ludicrous thing to forgive. We may want justice, for things to be restored (things that were lost/ or stolen; or we want healing). Or we may almost certainly want revenge or retributive justice, or death for our enemies. It may almost certainly appear to be crazy to give up our cause and to forgive.

I have found that Pride stands in the way of forgiving, being merciful, and seeking true justice. Humility helps us to forgive. The easier it is to forgive, the less Conceit

we have. If we have Conceit we have pride, if we have pride we have Fear. Fear is dealt with by putting one's trust in Jesus and His justice, mercy, compassion, caring, wisdom, and warmth.

Relating to People in the Present While Angry:

Even if we forgive those who hurt us in the past, we might still start holding resentments towards or start hating those we get angry with in the present because we never learned to deal with our anger in healthy ways. There is healthily motivated anger, and unhealthily motivated anger. The former occurs when a real injustice has occurred. The latter occurs when the anger is rooted in pride /envy/ and jealousy.

Both can be mismanaged depending on our people skills. As far as all anger is concerned, Dr. Gary Chapman wrote a book on the subject called: "Anger: Handling a Powerful Emotion in a Healthy Way" that is very helpful. One part of his book that I find very helpful in relating with people while angry, is the list of five steps that he suggests we take:

1. Consciously acknowledge to yourself that you are angry,
2. Restrain your immediate response,
3. Locate the focus of your anger,
4. Analyze your options,
5. Take constructive action.[16]

These steps often require from us to forgive, re-assess our perceptions of each situation, discover helpful options that we were blind to, and help us to have an understanding for what are small things, and what are BIG things (i.e. help us see things for what they are). The results are that we will become more tolerant, slower to get angry, less annoyed, more compassionate, gentler, and more at PEACE or tolerant with others and ourselves. Dr. Gary Chapman talks about these steps in greater detail in his book. I recommend working the above steps slowly as God will use them to surface things that we might have or may be in the habit of glossing over or burying.

The five steps above deal with relating in the now. But what happens when we have a back log of mismanaged anger incidents, and when we have attitudes that repeatedly trigger anger and ugliness while relating? The back log can be dealt with by the Steps from this Essay, whereas the bad attitudes or ugly energy is best dealt with in the Essay: Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds found in the "Insights"

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[16] Gary Chapman, "Anger: Handling A Powerful Emotion In A Healthy Way", Northfield Publishing Chicago © 1999, 2007, p. 51.

page from this Website.

Are We Attempting To Put Out the Smoke Or 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 they will keep growing back if we don't uproot the whole tree. If we pull the roots out then we will also get rid of the bad fruit attached to those roots. 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 symptoms or fruits, whereas the virus sins or bitter root sins have to do with resentments, hate-vows, grudges, seeking revenge, 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".[17] With forgiveness comes healing.

Flotsam & Jetsam:

"The Twelve Steps" or "The Expanded Twelve Steps" are ideal for those who don't know Jesus personally or in a strong way. They are ideal for those who have not grown up in the church. But like all principles, these steps have their limitations. They won't solve every spiritual malady, but can bring substantial freedom to certain areas of bondage that they address. For those who have relationships with Jesus or have grown up in the church I highly recommend learning about and practicing, "Listening Prayer" as described by Brad Jersak in his book: "Can You Hear Me?" In particular "Listening Prayer" uses the following Steps for Inner Healing (Look Further Below):

[17] Matthew 6:14, RSV

MEETING PLACE PRAYER MINISTRY

Q: Do you want to be free?

1. FIND JESUS IN A "PLACE OF REFUGE"
(a Bible story, familiar place, vision, memory)

A. Intimacy – Ask Jesus for a safe place where you can meet with him. Ask him to identify and remove any blocks that prevent you from hearing his voice or seeing his face.

B. Comfort – Ask Jesus how he sees you and feels about you. Draw near to behold him and be held by him. Ask him for blessings, promises, courage, and strength.

C. Recognition – Ask Jesus to identify issues he wants to address: bad fruit we experience or produce (spiritual, emotional, behavioral, mental, or physical).

2. FOLLOW JESUS TO THE "ROOT WOUND"
(an experience, dream, vision, pre-natal)

A. Confessions – A brutally honest confession of each painful emotion and/or offence (by you or against you) in that scene.

B. Revelation of Jesus – Ask Jesus to show you where he was.

C. Healing – Ask Jesus to heal each painful emotion.
Ask him to expose each lie and answer it with his truth.
Ask him to identify each burden and bear it to the cross for you.

D. Revelation of others – Ask Jesus to show you how he sees each character in that scene (offenders, victims, spirits).

3. MEET JESUS AT "THE CROSS"

A. Forgiveness – Take each character (offenders or victims) to the cross and leave them there to Jesus' mercy.

B. Repentance – Repent and receive forgiveness for any reactive sins. Put to death any ungodly habit patterns.

C. Renunciation – Renounce and cut off judgements, curses, inner vows, and soul ties between yourself and each character.

D. Deliverance – Remove any legal right that unclean spirits have to stay and ask Jesus how he would like to dispatch them.

In the past when I attempted to use Listening Prayer there would be times when it was very profitable, and at other times when it was less so. I have found that when I refrain from putting pressure on myself, and focus on how God best speaks with me, and give Him the opportunity to surprise me He works most powerfully in my life. I don't expect Him to answer me immediately every time. In fact, He may not see a need to answer every question I have immediately. God has used dreams, visions, images, voices, plain speech, thoughts or words to help me grow in my spiritual walk with Him. For a long time now when focusing on communicating with words I get the best results, and when I do focus on meeting God in normal conversations, God often incorporates unexpected images, visions, and dreams here and there when He sees fit to do so. Giving God the freedom to speak in whatever way He decides takes the pressure off from my imagination and me. Using words or plain speech works just fine. If God doesn't answer immediately then either He will take His time to tell me in some other way, or He wants me to move on. In the past when I tried to use the above Steps found in Brad's book in

my prayer life I felt too much desire to see visions, images, and the like and that limited how God could use the Steps above because of my fears, my impatience, the pressure I put on myself, my rigidity, my legalism, my (left brain) rationalism and me trying to make it all work by my own strength. All these factors made me feel overwhelmed and unable to focus on God's messages to me. Struggling with psychosis added other elements to the mix. At the time I thought I was more a word or thought person even though I did and do receive parables, images, inner visions and dreams from God about my life's journey that bear very good fruit. After reading and applying Mark and Patti's book, "How to Hear God's Voice" I felt at home with visualizing Jesus and parables. I am less overwhelmed and don't feel rushed to see something straight away. I am also less distracted and less confused about what to focus on in my imagination, mind, or heart. I no longer have problems visualizing the face of Jesus. He no longer seems distant and hard to get close to. Also "How to Hear God's Voice" answered more questions and moved me further along and closer to God in my journey.

If one has forgotten huge portions (or any portion) from the past, then that is an indication that "The Expanded Twelve Steps" ought to be worked. Moreover, God has His own timetable. Sometimes things we see that obviously need to be dealt with won't get fixed until other things that we may have forgotten about are fixed instead. God's timing is perfect. Don't be surprised that situations, incidences, or sins keep coming to the forefront when doing steps 8, 88, 888, 9, 99, and 999 over and over again. They will eventually be dealt with through perseverance. Also, God will use people in different situations to show us what needs to be worked on. He may also use self-help books from Christian perspectives to show us how to repent from strongholds. And finally He may use your own emotions in reaction to what others do to give you clues about what past resentments need to be overcome by forgiveness. That is we will become aware of the true nature of our attitudes and be led to repent in faith with Jesus' help. God is good – don't give up!

One way to undermine all of the progress received from "The Expanded Twelve Steps" to love and live in freedom from addictions is to continue in judging other, like when one is critical, gossiping, or slanderous; or when one hardens one's heart against another person. Humble yourself, and God will grant you grace. Another way to undermine freedom from addictions is to go for communion without having deeply confessed it as wrong to God, admitted we are sorry and asked God for forgiveness and cleansing and receiving them from Him, after committing a mortal sin.

Also, always own your own sins, and seek forgiveness from God. If we don't own our sins, then we give ourselves an excuse to recommit them repeatedly by blaming the devil for them. Don't give the devil power over you even if you

experience psychosis at times because of a mental illness.

All of what is spoken of above is garbage if we attempt to do it in our own strength. If we are pushing ourselves, are putting any pressure on ourselves, are frustrated, lack peace, and feel far from God then there is a good chance that we are attempting to live the Christian life by our own strength. Cease striving and know that God is God.

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 the physician and so affirms this view of good and evil… and in so doing wishes to heal us from our unhealthy spiritual vows, attitudes, strongholds, and 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 something in people who are different. What they see as different they may land up calling evil in the "popular" sense and so feel threatened by it. What we see as evil in the popular sense we land up hating. Once we hate that something sparks will fly inwardly urging violence or animosity, possibly revenge and murder. Redefining evil 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. 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… 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 one self 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… we weren't designed to feel negativity all our days. That negativity needs to be nursed with something that feels good: hence a possible addiction, unless we are freed from the lie that to hate ourselves is right.

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/pleasurable.

It is natural to hate evil in the popular sense. If we don't want to hate, then we need to give up seeing things as evil 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 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 see the world and themselves. If we did, then compassion would abound through the grace found in Jesus Christ.

Smiling at Inappropriate Moments…

stems from judging others, being conceited, having pride/envy and having chosen to hate and dislike other people for a long time. This can be so deeply ingrained and on autopilot within us that we seem to be powerless over it (it just happens every time we encounter a situation where there is opportunity to judge or hate or be pompous). We can so not want to go here, but still do it.

My strategy is found in the Essay: "Killing Bad Attitude Strongholds" from this Website. We will make progress, but we can fall into it again and again even though it is less frequent than before…dealing with rebellion and legalism in prayer will help us to conquer this habit.

Who Is in Charge?

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

Connecting to the Love of God

Only God can connect us to His love. When the connection is 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 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 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. Jesus said that the road is narrow that leads to life. If we hold onto our faith in Jesus, and learn to follow Him and abide in Him (like Step 3 from "The Expanded Twelve Steps" ask us to) then we can recover the grace to say no to our former addictions yet again. 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 (thanks Dan). 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 center of our lives. When one fully abides in the true Vine: Jesus, then the following will be adhered to out of freedom and not pressure to conform, and our former addictions should have lost their power. Yet we must remain vigilant, lest the devil tempts us and he will tempt us:

Further Reading:

I am aware that the approach formed in this chapter 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.