

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION



Book One

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY

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BOOK ONE

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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How To Enjoy New Life With God In Recovery

God created us to have a wonderful life. In love, God planned for us and carefully put us together. God has always been calling out to us to enter into a relationship of love with Him. He doesn't force us but He invites us. Many of us have learned what a painful and confusing wreck our lives become when we try to live independently from God. Today is a good day to begin to live the full and rich life God intended for us. Nothing in our past can keep us from this life, if we want it and choose for it.

The 12-Steps remind us that our lives are unmanageable without the loving care of God and that we can get to know and come to believe that He is a power greater than ourselves. As we turn our will and our lives over to God's care, we find a solid foundation upon which to build a new life.

When we confess our sin and brokenness to God, repent and turn towards God, He gives us new life. When we invite God to come into our lives we find that He is ready and waiting for us. A simple prayer like the following, offered sincerely, establishes this new relationship with God that will last forever.

God, my life is unmanageable without you. You created me to live in relationship with you. There really is no good way to live on my own. Forgive me for not including you. I turn from my independent ways and surrender my will and my life to you. Thank you Jesus for dying on the cross for my sins and making a way for me to have new life and be filled up with Your Holy Spirit. Come into my heart and wash me clean. Teach me to do your will. Transform my way of thinking. Strengthen me to obey You in all I do. Amen

If you prayed that prayer sincerely from your heart, God forgives you and receives you. God makes you His son or daughter. God wants to show you how to live well and give you strength to do that every day. We would love to provide you with some information to support you as you move forward in your journey with God. Please contact us. You'll find our contact information on the front cover of this booklet.

JUST FOR TODAY

Just for today I will try to live in conscious contact with God praying only for knowledge of His will and the power to carry it out.

Just for today I will strengthen my mind. I will take a few minutes to read and meditate on God's word, seeking God's perspective for my life today. I will take note of one helpful thing God is saying to me and seek to behave accordingly.

Just for today I will be joyful, optimistic, and grateful. I will take time to notice the gifts in me, in others, and in my surroundings and let the rest go.

Just for today I will adjust myself to what is and not try to adjust everything else to my desires. I will trust that God is working all things for good in my life.

Just for today I will be agreeable. I will not criticize, not find fault, and not try to improve or control anybody except myself. I will pray blessing on one person with whom I struggle to relate.

Just for today I will have a quiet half hour all by myself to relax and enjoy all that God is giving me.

Just for today I will be unafraid, believing that as I trust in God with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding, He will lead me along a good path.

Just for today I will seek to serve others with kindness, doing what is right, and walking humbly with God.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 NLT

RELAPSE PREVENTION BOOK ONE

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RELAPSE PREVENTION: ATTITUDE CHECK

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it ... Do all things without complaining and disputing. (Psalm 118:24, Philippians 2:14 NIV)

The story is told of two young boys who decided to play a prank on their sleeping grandfather. They crept into his bedroom and smeared blue cheese on his moustache. A short while later he awoke and declared, "This room smells!" He went into the kitchen where grandma was baking some chocolate chip cookies. But he couldn't smell the baked goods. "This room smells too," he exclaimed and headed to the porch at the back of the house. As he stood on the porch he sighed, "The whole world smells!" This story demonstrates how a bad attitude, like the smelly cheese, can influence our perception of everyday life.

Have you ever said to yourself, "If I just had more money I would be happy," or "If I had done things differently I'd be happy?" or "If this person or that person would change, everything would be fine." The error in this thinking is that external factors have very little to do with our contentment. In life we will all experience trials. Things will go wrong. Unfortunate circumstances will happen. Experiencing difficulties will either harden us to life or soften us to become more caring. At some point in life, we will need to decisively choose how we will respond to unexpected happenings. If we seek God, He will help us.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28 NIV)

In the Bible, we read the story of God's people as they left slavery in Egypt and moved towards the land God had promised them. When they bumped into difficulties on their journey they repeatedly grumbled and complained. God was clearly leading them by day and by night yet they doubted. They quickly became fearful when they faced difficult challenges. However, one man was different. His future, and the future of his family, was forever changed for good because he had a different attitude and wholeheartedly trusted God

But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land. (Numbers 14:24 NLT)

Choosing to remember God's promises and His goodness, is the foundation on which we build our confidence and maintain a positive attitude.

SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

For a variety of reasons, many of us have an underlying structure of disorder that is damaging us and others. We invite God to show us the truth about ourselves so we can personally receive God's forgiveness to set us free and healing to make us strong.

<p>SUBSTANCE ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Alcohol Caffeine Injected or smoked substances such as: Crack, Crystal Meth, Heroin Marijuana Prescription Medications Sugar Tobacco</p>	<p>BEHAVIOUR ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Anger/Rage/Bullying Cutting Crime Eating Disorders: Bulimia, Anorexia, Binging, Obesity Gambling Hoarding Sex/Pornography Verbal Abuse: Gossip, Lying, Accusing Blaming, Condemning Violence (physical, verbal, cyber)</p>
<p>SOFT ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Digital Use: (Time or Content) TV/Phone/Tablet; video games, Social Networking; Cyber-bullying; Online shopping; Gambling, Pornography Exercise Food (See Eating Disorders) Isolating/Sleep Money: Debt/Fraud Religion Shopping Sports Work/Achievement</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIP ADDICTIONS:</p> <p>Abusive Relationships: Includes: Intimidation, Isolation, Domination, Blaming, Humiliation, Withholding, Forcing acts against one's will Approval dependency Attention Seeking Codependence/Rescuing Power/Control</p>

PRAYER FOR HEALING AND RESTORATION

Loving God, Thank You for rescuing us from the dark power of Satan and bringing us into loving relationship with Your Son, Jesus. We ask for wisdom and understanding from Your Spirit in order to live as people who honour You. Heal us. Make us new. Make us strong followers of Christ. Root us deeply in Your love. We place our trust in Your power that can do far more in us than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

work and support one another in community. God has prepared a lifetime of adventure for us as we support and bring hope and healing to one another.

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

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

When we question our worth, we need to remember who God our Creator says we are. A one-hundred-dollar bill whether it is in prime condition, or is crumpled and dirty, is still worth what the creator of the bill has determined. God, our creator, has clearly demonstrated the value he puts on each person by giving His beloved son to die for us. In our relationship with God, do we see Him as a loving Heavenly Father and ourselves as His precious children? God's word says:

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

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

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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

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

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2 NIV)

Our attitude and perspective in life can be like medicine that heals or like poison that kills. When we look at our circumstances, is our instant response positive or negative? When we look at those around us, do we first see their gifts or their faults? Are we cynical? The cynic trusts no one and is suspicious even of the best intentions of others. There is no doubt we will face problem people along life's path, but if we will seek God, He will give us discernment in handling situations that we are uncertain about.

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT)

What do we do when we find ourselves struggling with a negative perspective or bad attitude?

1) We need to recognize that a bad attitude comes from negative thinking that impacts our responses. The Bible teaches: ***Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*** (Ephesians 4:22-24 NLT) Even though someone may trigger a hostile response in us, our attitude is our own, not theirs, and we need to submit it to God.

2) When we have harmed someone by our negative response we need to make amends to that person. ***Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*** (Matthew 5:23-24 NIV)

3) Together with God, we need to make every effort to uncover the root cause of our bad attitude and receive healing and release from its bondage. ***Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.*** (1 Peter 3:8 NLT)

ATTITUDE CHECKLIST

What kind of attitude should a person living with God in recovery strive to have towards the following?

GOD: *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' Humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* (Mark 12:30, James 4:7 NLT)

SIN: *"This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he says, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.* (Hebrews 10:16-18 NLT)

INJUSTICE: *Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.* (Romans 12:19 NLT)

MISUNDERSTANDINGS: *Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.* (Colossians 3:13 NLT)

LEADERS: *Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.* (Hebrews 13:17 NLT)

GOVERNMENT: *For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.* (1 Peter 2:13-14 NLT)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What effect does my attitude have on my quality of life?
2. When am I most likely to have a bad attitude? How might I prepare in advance for this person or situations?
3. When I recognize I'm holding a negative or cynical attitude, what can I do about it?
4. As the challenges of life confront me, what would it take for me to be like Caleb and have, "a different attitude than the others have"?

PRAYER: *Heavenly Father, Forgive me for my bad attitude towards You, towards others, and towards life in general. I confess that I have not loved You with my whole heart and I have not loved my neighbour as myself. Help me understand the underlying root of my bad attitude and self-centered thinking so that I may be set free from its bondage. Lord Jesus, create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. I am forever grateful that You are faithful and will complete the work You have begun in me. I am forever grateful that You care. AMEN*

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

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

Self-esteem can be rebuilt. How?

- 1) We need to find out the facts – those things that God says about us such as: "You are forgiven. I, the Creator of the universe pay attention to you when you pray. Nothing can separate you from My love. You are created to do good work. My plan and purpose for your life is to give you a future with hope."
- 2) We need to inform our hearts and minds of these truths until our negative thought patterns are reshaped and painful feelings are healed and settled in God's comfort.
- 3) As beloved children of God, we need to listen to and do those things which please God. Fear and insecurity lead to self-absorption and addictive lifestyles as we feverishly try to cover-up, or cope with inferiority feelings. When we focus on what God says works and put that into practice, we begin to experience a life that is good, satisfying and meaningful.

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

God has given us gifts and talents to share with others. In the same way that hands and feet and eyes co-operate in the body, God planned for all of us to

DEALING WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM

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

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

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

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Psalm 139:13-14 NIV, Ephesians 2:10 NLT)

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

OVERCOMING A VICTIM MENTALITY

In our society, and particularly in the world of addiction and recovery, a victim mentality is quite widespread. People with a victim mentality struggle with emotional intimacy in relationships, and often have no idea why. They repeatedly sabotage life and relationships by their way of thinking and believing.

God created each person with a need for intimacy, both with Himself and with others. The life God wants us to recover includes the ability to overcome a victim mentality.

The Bible tells us: ***whatever is in your heart determines what you say.*** (Matt. 12:34b NLT)

A victim is a person who has been abused or hurt or oppressed, and was without power to change their circumstances. They developed a way of thinking and interpreting life that comes from unresolved offences, grief, and bitterness. Even though physically the abuse is no longer happening, in their minds they live and behave as though it is. As a result, the person now believes that the experiences they suffered left them so marred that they are unable to take responsibility for their life. They blame others for what they are experiencing today.

God says, ***I have swept away your sins like a cloud. I have scattered your offenses like the morning mist. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free.*** (Isaiah 44:22 NLT)

Instead of embracing the solutions God is offering, victims remain obsessed with the pain and injustice of the past. Some isolate and live behind high walls. They complain and blame. Others live with frustration and are prone to get angry. Some bury their feelings, opinions and desires. Some allow others to control them and tell them what to do, believing they are unable to break free. Some believe that others "make them" live as powerless victims in their current circumstances and their life can only improve if someone else fixes what is wrong. They expect others to rescue them and take on their responsibilities.

How does one with a victim mentality break free? By asking God to help us let go of the fear and insanity that resulted from events in the past, and by

embracing healing and restoration through the renewing of our minds to the truth of God's word.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep." No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (Romans 8:35-37 NLT)

These verses name several difficult, challenging, and very painful situations. While our experience of pain may not be specifically mentioned here, the intent of the writer is to tell us that whatever injustice and trouble we have suffered, God's word applies in our situation. As amazing as it sounds, God promises us that we will not just survive and cope with what life has handed us, but we will thrive and live with great victory. Our future success has not been stolen by the events of our past. God offers us abundant life today and Jesus has made a way for us to have that life. No one and no circumstance can rob us of that life. Our lives and well-being come from God, not another person.

Jesus suffered and died on the cross to take away our sin and enable us to have life with God forever – a life that is full and satisfying. Jesus dealt with all sin and injustice on the cross. Jesus assumed all the evil and victimization of sin and injustice, so you and I could be free. His death in our place covers sins done by us and injustices done to us.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6 NIV)

God's way for us is to live in love and not in fear and God asks us today, "Do you want to get well?" Implied in this question are two promises:

1) I know all about your trouble but my love in you can overcome it. ***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*** (John 16:33 NIV).

4. A sponsor is there to encourage one to work through recovery principles at one's own speed.
5. A sponsor attempts to model the lifestyle that results from personally working the steps.

What are the Qualities to look for in a Sponsor?

1. Does he/she have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and demonstrate the character of Jesus in their life?
2. Does their walk match their talk?
3. Does the person express the desire to help others on the road to recovery? (Helping others find help versus trying to fix others)
4. Does he/she show compassion, care and hope but not pity? (I don't need someone who is simply going to feel sorry for me.)
5. Is the person a good listener?
6. Is he/she strong enough to confront my denial or procrastination?
7. Can the person share his/her own current struggles with others? (Openness, vulnerability, transparency)

Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Why are we strongly encouraged to quickly find a sponsor and listen to the advice of people who've been in the program a while?
2. What am I doing these days to seek wise counsel from trusted individuals?
3. What obstacles am I facing in my search for a counselor?
4. What am I doing with feedback I know is good for me?
5. What am I doing with feedback I don't like?
6. Where am I avoiding counsel and resolving to keep issues?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, Thank You for pursuing me with Your love and for sending Your Holy Spirit to give me counsel and to help me come to the knowledge of all truth. Give me ears to hear what You say. I commit to lay down my pride and seek help from other wise counsellors. Keep me honest. Help me walk in the light of Your presence and follow the path of recovery to new life in You. I am forever grateful that you care. AMEN

life's stories, these people will inspire us to receive healing for past traumas that hinder our recovery. They will also have worthwhile suggestions on how to cope with the changes we need to make. When we surround ourselves with wise, dependable counselors, we are building a solid foundation for recovery.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14 NKJV)

Good counsel can come from many sources, the Bible, pastors, friends who know and live for God, or books and media that honour the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It may also come from a professional Christian counselor who understands addiction and recovery. Knowledgeable people we encounter on our journey may also encourage us by sharing the Godly wisdom they received when dealing with issues similar to those we are currently experiencing.

Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down the other can help him up. But if someone is alone ... there is no one to help him ... Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 GNT)

We need help from everyone who can enlarge our vision and broaden our perspective. We need to share honestly about the temptations we are experiencing. The family of believers understands temptation because they continue to experience it. We are not unique! We need to pay attention to what God and others are saying to us. We need to respond in humility to honest feedback others are giving us, and, foundational to all other counsel, we need to seek the Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth.

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17 NIV)

The founders of AA and the 12 Steps were aware of Biblical principles and based on these, they structured the program to include counselors whom we call sponsors. If we haven't done so, it's probably time to prioritize the involvement of wise counsel into our lives. Following is some helpful information to consider as we prayerfully seek a sponsor.

What is the Role of a Sponsor?

1. A sponsor may discuss, in detail, troubling issues that are too personal to share, or would take up too much time, in a group meeting.
2. A sponsor is available in times of crisis or potential relapse.
3. A sponsor serves as a sounding board by providing an objective point of view.

2) If you will trust me with your life, I can make something good out of everything that has happened. ***And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*** (Romans 8:28 NLT)

What's my part in overcoming a victim mentality?

- 1) Held safe in God's powerful protection I will take responsibility for my life today
- 2) I will quit blaming others for not protecting me or meeting my needs.
- 3) I will work with God to resolve my grief, anger, resentment, and roots of bitterness and trust God to forgive and heal me.
- 4) I will renew my mind and describe myself as God sees me: I am an overcomer, not a victim.

Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. In what ways do I recognize a victim mentality in me?
2. What does Jesus' death on the cross have to do with the injustices I've experienced and their impact on my life?
3. How is God's unfailing love changing me from being a victim to an overcomer?
4. In what areas do I still need to surrender to God's truth?
5. What step can I take today to make progress in letting go of a victim mentality?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your word. I ask forgiveness for the times I have rejected Your word in favour of my own self-pity. Help me to reject my stinking thinking and acknowledge that Your word is truth. Please comfort me as I seek to overcome my victim mentality by the renewing of my mind. I want my life to reflect Your love and saving grace. I ask that You work everything together for my good and Your glory. Thank You for Your love and care for me. AMEN

MOVING FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

All our lives God has pursued us with His love but we were often too busy living life our way to stop and listen. Sometimes it's only after a season of dysfunctional lifestyle and addiction that we are willing to listen and respond to the plan God has for us. Because of our slowness to respond to God's direction we often spend large chunks of time surviving when we could in fact be thriving. To transition to a meaningful life requires the discarding of our self-centered ways and welcoming the path God wants to lead us into. As we intentionally seek God's will for our lives, we will find that it is God's desire that we thrive and not simply survive in recovery.

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV)

As we allow God to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves, a new and pleasing way of life will come about. We can fill our hearts and minds with the hope of this new way of life, even though it may currently seem impossible to achieve. God will make everything beautiful in our lives as we continue to seek Him in all our ways.

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV)

Humans beings are unique from everything else God has created because they have a spirit. God wants to bring our spirit to life so that every other part of our human experience is authentic and blessed. It's in our spirit that we experience God's goodness, and find safety, security, love and caring. Out of that place of being loved and protected by God, we make life-giving choices that result in healthy behaviour. God is prepared to come and give life to our spirit today if we will simply invite Him in and let Him show us this new way of living. This is what we were created for.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:15-17 NKJV)

SEEKING GOOD COUNSELORS

When we enter a recovery program, why are we strongly encouraged to quickly find a sponsor and listen to the advice of people who have been in the program for a while? It's not a new concept introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous. For thousands of years the wisdom of God, as recorded in the Bible, has been reminding us that we need wise counsel if we are to succeed in recovery, and in living life to the full.

I'm absorbed in pondering your wise counsel. Yes, your sayings on life are what give me delight; I listen to them as to good neighbors! (Psalm 119:24 MSG)

Jesus knew his disciples would experience deep grief as they observed His suffering and death on the cross. He was concerned for them, and is equally concerned for us when we go through grief and severe trials. When Jesus' time had come, He gathered His disciples around Him and spoke with them about the future. He asked them to show their love for Him by doing those things He had taught them. He also said that He would ask His Father to give them a wise counselor who would be with them forever. Jesus wanted His friends to be cared for. He wanted them to receive guidance as they moved forward in life.

Jesus told them, ***"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.*** (John 14:15-18 RSV)

We live in difficult days. Jesus knows what we need. His prayer for us today is that we too would seek and find wise counsel to help us on our journey to life and peace. Jesus is always present with us in the person of the Holy Spirit and He is the wisest counselor that anyone could have. As we seek Him for guidance in every area of our lives, He will show us what is truth in all circumstances. Jesus said, ***"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"*** (John 8:32 NIV)

In recovery, we must find new direction for our lives, new ways of responding to issues and new guidelines for making decisions. Our old pattern of thinking and behaving brought us to where we are today. As we establish new and healthy boundaries and actions based on God's Word, God will support us through the power of His Holy Spirit. He will also bring us together with human counselors and trustworthy people who are walking with Him. We certainly need help from people who continue to walk the path that remains unfamiliar to us. Through sharing our

In recovery we learn to accept responsibility for our actions. We come to realize that our actions yield consequences. Some of us may have deceived ourselves into thinking we could escape the consequences of the former things we did. But, with time, we have become aware that God has made accountability a necessary element of our healing, and healthy living.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8 NIV)

The good news is that God will be with us as we face the things we need to deal with. God will show us His life-giving ways to resolve the issues with those we have harmed. We often fear the humiliation and pain of admitting the truth about our shameful past. However, when we confess and receive God's forgiveness for our sins, we will experience a deep peace within us, because the truth will set us free. Deceit and denial lead to bondage and death. Revelation and truth lead to freedom and life.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When challenged, do I tend to deny the evidence associated with my actions?
2. Have others tried to help me face reality? What denial techniques do I use to maintain the lie that I don't have a problem?
3. How does God's presence in my life help me overcome denial and walk in life-giving truth?
4. In what way do I allow God to search me and name any thoughts, motives, or behaviours that are offensive to Him? What do I do with what God reveals?
5. Have I noticed peace in my life while living in truth rather than denial?
6. What lingering problems with denial do I still struggle with?
7. What action do I need to take so I can live in the freedom that God promises?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I confess that my heart is deceitful. Forgive me for the times I have sought to escape responsibility for my actions through denial and other devious measures. Please draw me close to You and comfort me. Tonight, I acknowledge the truth that denial of my actions has had a harmful impact on those around me. Please fill me with the courage and strength I need to do what is necessary to make amends to those I have harmed. My desire is to live in the truth of Your word. Purify me with Your truth. Strengthen and uphold me as I choose to follow You in all my ways. Thank You for Your unfailing love and care for me. AMEN

One of the slogans we hear often in recovery is, "progress not perfection". Learning to be grateful and appreciate all we have is one area where we can practice this principle. There will always be some things that are right and good in our lives and some things that are yet to be sorted out. Some days we will wake up feeling energetic and other days we'll wish we could just pull the blanket over our heads and turn over. Things aren't so different around us each day but what makes life full and rich is that we are conscious of the grace that God is pouring into our lives day by day. It's a good practice to intentionally record in a journal or speak out our gratitude for life's daily blessings. This discipline will help us see our life in recovery as thriving, rather than just surviving.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever. The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me? (Psalm 118:1,6 NLT)

Someone has said, "You look the best when you wear your smile. There is no beauty like the one that comes from inside you." Mother Teresa got it right when she said, "A joyful heart is the inevitable result of a heart burning with love." Joy is a gift from God. Joy results when we surrender every part of our lives to God and entrust every detail to His care. Joy bursts forth when we know we have no confidence in ourselves or anything else, but wholeheartedly trust in the Lord. Joy is a sign that a person is thriving rather than just surviving.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him! (Psalm 34:8 NLT)

It's up to us to call on God when we are in trouble so that we can move beyond surviving to thriving. Even in times of illness or hardship, God is our refuge and strength. Giving up on God should never be an option. God invites us to live in dependence on Him, resting in the ultimate security that He provides. People are joyful when they follow the instructions of the Lord and live a life of integrity. There is nothing to dull their spirit when their faith is in God alone.

We often get discouraged when things do not work out as we think they should. We find ourselves unable to communicate with God, to hang in there, to believe God, to trust, to hope, to grow. At times like these we need to stop what we are doing and ask ourselves, "How is God teaching me to thrive in this situation? When we acknowledge that God is still teaching us, we will be assured that He is at work in the thing that concerns us, and our peace will return.

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world. (Psalm 46:1,10 NLT)

In order to move from a lifestyle of surviving to one of thriving we must empty ourselves of anything that keeps us from living totally dependent on God. We have to peel back the layers that might include denial, deceit, unfaithfulness, lying, cheating, stealing, anger, impatience, hate, lust, and self-pity. True joy and satisfaction comes when God looks down and says: "Well done, my child. You have not just survived but you have thrived."

Questions For Discussion and Reflection

1. In my daily life am I thriving or just surviving?
2. What difference does the word of God or the advice of caring friends make in my thriving?
3. How am I practicing the principle of being grateful?
4. Do I make space for joy even in imperfect circumstances?
5. What do I need to let go of so that I may thrive with God regardless of my circumstances?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for inviting me to live beyond just surviving. You want me to thrive and be filled with joy and purpose. Forgive me for the times I've stepped away from Your truth about a situation and followed my own understanding. I turn to you again and acknowledge that You are the source of life. You are my hope. You know the ongoing direction I need for a rich and productive life. I choose to listen to You. I choose to follow your principles. I turn my will and my life over to Your care and ask You to teach me how to live life to the full. Give me the desire to welcome success in my life. I am thankful for the love You lavish on me and for the fact that You call me Your child. AMEN

4. **Minimizing:** The addict will minimize how much or how often they use their substance of choice or how bad the problem actually is. They are unwilling to see that using is destroying their relationships, ability to work, and other aspects of their lives. They may admit a slight problem exists and even attempt to change by their own efforts, but, they will not admit they need help.

5. **Rationalizing:** Addicts make excuses for their behaviour hoping that their reasons will be enough for them to avoid taking any action. "I can do what I want because I'm not hurting anyone except myself."

6. **Blaming:** Addicts try to shift responsibility for their behaviour to the behaviour of others.

7. **Comparing:** Addicts attempt to show that because someone else's problem is greater than theirs, they don't have a serious problem.

8. **Bargaining:** Addicts often make deals with themselves or others, "I'll just have one more. I'll stop tomorrow. I just need a little to get through today."

9. **Manipulating:** Addicts pretend to take positive steps, hoping others will leave them alone. Addicts may admit they have a problem but do nothing, expecting others to get involved and solve their problem.

When we come to new life in Christ, God will reveal truth in all our affairs. We need to know what is good and helpful for our journey forward. We also need to identify what is foolish and harmful, so those things lose their power to negatively impact us.

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV)

When we seek God's help to confront denial, God will expose where our thinking and perceiving have become confused, and where our ways and His ways differ. God's wisdom and power will help us make changes according to what He shows us.

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12 NLT)

DENIAL

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Romans 7:18-20 NIV)

The first step towards recovery is in recognizing and admitting that we have a dependency on a substance and/or a person. Denial of that fact is the first obstacle we must overcome. When we are in denial, we truly believe that we do not have a problem with dependency, and we don't need help. Others may have communicated that they have observed our dependency, but we continue to deny and maintain that the problem does not exist. We believe no action on our part is required. However, the truth is, things will not remain as they are, they will deteriorate.

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the Lord, search all hearts and examine secret motives. (Jeremiah 17:9-10 NLT)

In an attempt to cover up, we lie to others, even though our addictive behaviour is glaringly evident. Denial keeps us in slavery because we are lying to ourselves. As we become slaves to our addiction, we lose the ability to choose any other way of life. It is only when we break the cycle of denial, when we become brutally honest with ourselves about our bondage, that there is any chance for real freedom.

Denial comes in many forms. How can we identify denial in ourselves or in someone we love?

1. Avoidance: We either withdraw from others to avoid talking about addiction or we try to manipulate the conversation to talk about "anything but MY problems."
2. Arguing: Addicts easily get into arguments about their addictive behaviour and somehow think that by strenuously denying their problems they will go away.
3. Complete Denial: Addicts refuse to admit they have a problem. They believe others have misrepresented their situation.

DEALING WELL WITH STRESS

Stress has become a universal problem and many medical professionals consider it an underlying cause of numerous health problems. In our personal lives, pressure and stress come from a variety of reasons including, family trouble, financial difficulty, job pressure, health issues and many other factors.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)

There are lists that compile stress factors and assign points to each one. For example, the most stressful events are: death of a spouse, divorce, marital separation, a jail term, death of a close family member, illness or injury. These events cause legitimate stress and sometimes require lifestyle changes to be dealt with even while we are still in emotional pain and feeling overwhelmed. These are not times to isolate! These are times to rely on God's promises and seek comfort and help from family members and friends.

Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you. (Isaiah 41:10 MSG)

Some of us obsess over past events which cannot be changed and allow those events to control our present and future wellbeing. In our minds we endlessly replay the unkind words others have said to us or envision painful incidents which caused us shame. Sometimes we are concerned about future events which we feel unable to cope with. Sometimes we are fearful about meeting our own physical needs, or the needs of our family, and feel overwhelmed by our responsibilities.

God says: ***"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*** (Isaiah 43:1-3 MSG)

There are many reactions to everyday stresses. Some people try to ignore or flee from the problem, in the hope that the irritation will go away. Some internalize the pressure, seeking to suppress it. However, the compression usually spills over into

some other area of life. Others crumble emotionally, giving way to despair and depression or addictive behaviour.

One of the best responses we can have to stress is to pray. This one seems obvious, but sometimes it's harder than it seems. Praying requires us to focus on who God is and what God is doing rather than obsessing on the problem.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6 NLT)

God will never permit circumstances to break or shatter us. He knows our frame and will not allow us to be overloaded beyond what we can bear. Rather, He seeks to use our stressful times as opportunities for us to gain His perspective, lean on His strength, and develop perseverance with which to endure the ups and downs of life. God may not change the circumstance that is pressing on us. He may not remove the person who seriously bothers us. He may not heal the condition that daily grates away at our body and soul. But God will dramatically alter our emotions and responses as we turn to Him instead of running or exploding in anger. As we trust in God's power and wisdom to support us and show us appropriate solutions, we gain new spiritual maturity and hardiness of spirit.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3 NIV)

MINIMIZING STRESS

1. *Admit we're stressed.* As long as we tell ourselves we don't have a problem we're not positioning ourselves to seek a solution.

2. *Make a list of what's causing stress right now.* There are some things that cannot be changed and others that can be dealt with. We need to sort those out, and taking action where possible or necessary.

3. *Review our list with someone we trust.* If it's stress from being too busy, we need to seek help in setting priorities. If there are situations that require boundaries or some other action, a wise person can help us sort things out

4. *Ask for help from God, family, friends, or co-workers.* We have a limited amount of strength and wisdom. As we do all that we can, God will give, and bring alongside us, support and help.

5. *Think about our use of time.* Maybe procrastination or poor organization is the root of the problem. We can start using a diary or daytimer or talk to a counselor or organized friend for tips on how to use our time better.

When we are under stress from an event in our lives, we need to take a more focused approach to all that is going on. We need to be careful not to project into

should pray for them and bless them and leave their negativity with them, rather than allowing their problems to become ours.

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)

How do we defeat the discouragement of accusation and condemnation that comes from others? Jesus tells us: ***But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*** (Luke 6:27-28 NIV)

God neither accuses nor condemns those who are in Christ Jesus, so any such words said to us by others, or from our own self-criticism, are simply words we need to let go. God speaks the truth to us in love, and He challenges us to do the same when we speak to ourselves or others. ***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*** (Romans 8:1 NKJV)

As children of God, will we choose to agree with God and ban all accusation and condemnation from our thoughts and relationships? If not, why not?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does accusation and condemnation affect my recovery and make me vulnerable to relapse?
2. God's Spirit convicts us of sin. How is this different from condemnation?
3. In what ways have I prepared myself to face and defeat the evil one's strategies to discourage me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You are the one who knows me. You know how I respond to accusation and condemnation, both from the evil one and from others. You know how condemning words cause me to stumble. When I am discouraged, help me to stay focused on the TRUTH, and proclaim Your word against all accusation and condemnation. Give me wisdom and courage to acknowledge You in all my ways. Thank You that You are working all things together for my good. You are a faithful God and I am forever grateful that you care for me. Amen

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (1 Peter 5:8-9, Romans 8:28 NIV)

Getting us to compare ourselves with others is another way the enemy tries to discourage us. When we don't feel good about ourselves, or when we're feeling shame, he'll be right on our shoulder telling us what a failure we are in comparison with the next person. Rather than keeping our thoughts simple and focused on what God wants us to do, the evil one tries to get us to give our attention to what others are doing or not doing, what they are expecting of us or not, whether they are noticing and appreciating us or not. On and on the evil one goes with accusation and condemnation. How confusing our own thoughts become when we pay attention to what the evil one is whispering in our ear. We begin to evaluate, accuse, and even condemn others based on our flawed thinking. This enables us to quickly get into the "victim mode" and, from there, how easy it is to stumble into relapse.

I am warning you ahead of time, dear friends. Be on guard so that you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing. Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! (2 Peter 3:17-18 NLT)

Is there an area within us that is just too painful to touch? Are we avoiding dealing with pain because the evil one tells us we are a real mess and it would not be wise to uncover hidden things at this time? Jesus said the truth will set us free. Whose voice will we choose to believe?

Have we done wrong? If so, we simply need to repent before God, ask for forgiveness, and be reassured that we are cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus. When we've repented of our wrongdoing and been forgiven, any voice of accusation that we hear is lying and attempting to push false guilt on us. Will we choose to base our recovery on lies or the truth?

We also need to be on guard against thoughts that accuse and condemn others. As soon as we notice such thoughts, we need to do a self-check and find out what is wrong in our own heart. When we observe negative traits in others, we

the situation things that don't exist, but are formed by our worries or fears. We need to look realistically at the whole situation and not let the problem become bigger than it actually is. We need to let go of past events and hurts and accept God's love and grace as He heals our wounds. When old wounds are healed, we will only have to deal with today's happenings. God knows the end from the beginning and has promised to provide everything we need for the challenges we incur in life.

The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" (Lamentations 3:22-24 NLT)

The key to handling stress is to lean on God's power at the initial stage of any problem. God's strength comes as He stabilizes our emotions with His peace, infuses our hearts with His joy, and provides us with His all-sufficient wisdom to deal with any hardship in life. Even in our worst day of trouble we will get through, find the rest we need, and face each new day with fresh resources. "This too shall pass" is a helpful principle to remember. Good days will return!

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-30 NLT)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. In which areas of my life am I particularly vulnerable to allowing stress and anxiety to control my decisions and actions?
2. What strategies am I willing to implement to help me deal with stress in a healthy way?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, When I feel overwhelmed and life has lots of stress, help me to first seek Your perspective on the troubling issues. Help me to be obedient to what You say and rest in Your promise to make a way forward, even when I believe there is no possible way. Lord, I choose to honour You in everything I say and do. Open my heart and mind to receive Your wisdom, comfort and strength. I am forever grateful that You love and care for me and are always there to help in times of trouble and stress. Amen.

RELAPSE PREVENTION: DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1 NKJV)

We often feel awkward about bringing our recurring sins before God. We may be embarrassed by the number of times we have had to deal with the same issues – those things that we don't want to do, yet we keep doing over and over again. What is going on? Why can't we beat this thing that causes us problems? What will it take for us to find solid ground on which to build a firm and lasting recovery?

The slogan - "If nothing changes, nothing changes" - is so true. Each time we find ourselves coming back from the "same old failure" we need to reassess what changes we have made and what we are holding back. We need to use this opportunity to let God take us deeper into our buried pain and allow His forgiveness and healing to change our hearts. We need to ask ourselves what is the resentment, the hatred, the fear, the pain, or the shame that we are seeking to cover with our addictive behaviour. God offers us comfort for our grief and healing for our hurts but freedom requires honesty in what we are willing to reveal and deal with. The truth will set us free. The question remains, are we willing to reveal the truth – the whole truth – about ourselves and our default reaction to situations which cause us to stumble?

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor. (James 4:7-10 NLT)

Relapse happens because we have a divided mind that tries to be loyal to God but also dwells on foolish things. We are told to stand fast on the truth that we are loved and cared for by God but too often, in a moment of pain or frustration, we embrace the lie that "Nobody really understands me. Nobody cares about me. I need to take care of myself." We easily forget that our best efforts at caring for ourselves, by medicating our feelings, took us to places of pain and suffering that we are now seeking recovery from. Still, when we become unsettled in our recovery we often find that we begin to entertain risky thoughts such as the following:

"I need a break": Recovery is hard work. In the past, we always "grabbed what we needed when we needed it." Recovery demands that we spend a lot of emotional time in unfamiliar territory. It requires energy. We get to the point where we simply want

NO ACCUSATION – NO CONDEMNATION

Certain thoughts or words negatively impact us and may contribute to relapse. Few things are more powerful in this regard than hearing accusation or condemnation from others or even from within ourselves. When we take our focus off who God says we are, and allow our thoughts to dwell on condemning words, we begin to believe recovery is too hard for us. We convince ourselves that we are not progressing in our relationship with God or in our life in recovery. We start to believe we are too messed up, it hurts too much, or it costs too much to change. We tell ourselves we are stupid and a failure at whatever we try to accomplish.

The Bible tells us our enemy, the devil, prowls around looking for a way to limit the progress we are making. He lurks around us, just waiting for a chance to "kick us to the curb." One of his favorite tactics is to tempt us to make a wrong choice and then immediately condemn us for being weak and powerless to do the right thing. When we are doing well, he'll try to take away our contentment by reminding us of the times when we failed. When we have joy in following the ways of God, he'll attempt to steal our joy by making us believe we are proud and self-righteous. When we are simply enjoying the satisfaction of doing right in God's sight, he'll tell us that we're not good enough because we're not perfect. His one purpose is to get us so discouraged, so frustrated, or so disheartened with pain and shame, that we simply give up, go out, and pick up again.

"I know that as soon as I'm gone, vicious wolves are going to show up and rip into this flock, men from your very own ranks twisting words so as to seduce disciples into following them instead of Jesus. So stay awake and keep up your guard. (Acts 20:29-30 MSG)

While we can't justify a bad choice based on several good ones, it is still important to **NOT** allow ourselves to dwell on one failure when we've had victory in many other areas. God strengthens us in our areas of growth and encourages us in the areas where we still need to grow. The evil one's purpose is to dishearten us when we fail. God, like any good earthly father, reassures and supports us to keep going. The evil one says, "Failure," but God says, "You are growing more and more like Jesus." How comforting it is to have the assurance that God knows we will make mistakes as part of our growing and maturing.

And when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (John 16:8 NLT)

When the Holy Spirit convicts us of the gravity of our sin, we will hopefully experience remorse over what we have done. Satan may want us to wallow in our guilt, believing we have pushed God's grace beyond its limit. However, God's grace is always much greater than sin and He wants to free us, restore us, and lead us back on the path of righteousness. Restoration is always the intent of the Spirit's conviction. We need to promptly recognize and resist condemnation and false guilt from the accuser. Similarly, we must acknowledge genuine guilt and promptly surrender to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. (Proverbs 28:13 NLT)

The more quickly we confess, repent, and make amends, the more quickly the weight of guilt will be removed from our shoulders. We can then get back on the joyful road of living life to the full.

Walking in Freedom When we are struggling with guilt and are uncertain of the reason for our feelings, we need to ask ourselves these questions:

1. When I tell myself I "should" be doing something, am I secretly hoping that by my doing it God will love me more than He already does?
2. Does guilt drive me into God's arms for mercy and restoration, or drive me away from Him, believing He condemns and banishes me?
3. Is the Holy Spirit convicting me of something I have done today? Is there a command in the Bible that I am disobeying which accounts for my guilty feelings?

PRAYER: Gracious God, You know me inside and out. You know the underlying motive behind what I say and do. When the evil one seeks to discourage me by false accusation, help me to stand firm on Your word and challenge my thoughts with the truth that, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Thank you for dying on the cross so that I can be free from the guilt and shame of my sin. When I have done wrong, help me to quickly repent and receive forgiveness. I am forever grateful that Your grace is greater than all my sin. AMEN

to take a break from dealing with life and just take it easy. We want to feel better for a while and certain habits and relationships from the past seem to offer that comfort. We rationalize that we've worked hard in so many areas and given up so much for our recovery that we deserve "a little something" even though it is harmful. We may be deceived into thinking that because our desire is not in the primary area of our addiction we are safe to indulge. Divided loyalties such as this lead us towards relapse.

"Life around here is unfair": Relapse into recurring sin often results from hanging onto sin --our own sin or the sins of others. Little by little discontent drifts into our thoughts until it seems to fill them. We begin to see all the things that are wrong with others -- what they get away with, how they treat us badly, what they said, the attitude they had, how demanding they are, how unwilling they are to really understand our point of view. We think this or that is unfair. The list is endless. Each of us is responsible for the state of our heart today. While we cannot control the words and actions of others, we are responsible for our reactions. We cannot afford to have a divided heart that contains resentment and blaming. The truth is that if we're honest, many times the real source of our sense of injustice and frustration is actually a failure to face our own inner turmoil that is rooted in our own character defects.

God alone gives us life. It is God to whom we must give account for our life. All other relationships need to be second to our relationship with God. To avoid drifting into active addiction requires that we NOT try to figure out what is wrong in our relationship with anyone else until we have identified and been obedient to what God is saying to us.

O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 NLT)
Single minded obedience to this command from God is the simple formula for success in recovery and in life. How do we comply with this command?

Choose what is right in God's eyes: Our responsibility is to wholeheartedly follow God's way of living. When our thoughts and God's word differ, we need to change our thinking rather than try to bend God's principles to fit our circumstances. God knows what will heal, satisfy and give us true contentment. We need to humbly admit that we do not.

Give and receive mercy unconditionally: No matter what others have done to us, or will do to us, God's standard for us is to act with forgiveness and kindness in the situation. God unconditionally forgives and is kind towards us no matter what we have done. His desire is that we treat others as He treats us. Are we willing to let go of the harm done

to us, and by us, and receive forgiveness and healing, comfort and care from Jesus, who paid the price for all sin?

God's ideas before our own: When we are on the path to relapse we always think we know better than God or the people around us. It is at those times that we are called to be humble and to simply keep walking with God "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." (Serenity Prayer)

Are we willing to turn away from those attitudes and actions that keep our hearts "divided"? Are we willing to accept the forgiveness and healing God gives us for EVERY wrong? Are we willing to turn our attention and our efforts to God and follow His commands? Are we willing to RECEIVE the loving care God provides? This is the road to life and health. There is no easier way. If we follow this simple plan we will find our way OUT of the frustrating cycle of relapse and recurring sin and INTO the fullness of life Jesus came to give us.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What are some ways I live with divided loyalties?
2. Where am I at and maybe feeling vulnerable, to saying "I need a break" or "Life around here is unfair"?
3. When my thinking disagrees with God's principles, why is it important to acknowledge that I am wrong?
4. We want to turn away from obsessive thoughts but find it difficult. What works?
5. If I'm honest, what's irritating and painful in me today and needs to be shared with God and a trusted person?
6. Why is the receiving and giving of forgiveness so important in our healing journey?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, Too often I've gone my own way and sought my own solutions only to find myself drowning in painful failure. I come to you tonight because I need help. I admit that the only way to live is to live in relationship with you. Jesus, I believe You are the way, the truth, and the life. I choose to admit my failures and rely on Your forgiveness and healing accomplished for me on the cross. I submit every part of my life to you. Direct me, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit, give me strength to live for you. Thank you for your unconditional acceptance of me. Thank you that you care. Amen

raised from the dead. As a result, we can produce a harvest of good deeds for God. When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit. (Romans 7:4-6 NLT)

We should encourage ourselves with the words of scripture rather than allowing feelings of inadequacy and lingering guilt to control our thoughts. Action on our part is required to control and bring these thoughts captive to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As we learn to accept that we are united with Christ, forgiven by God, and empowered to do good by the Holy Spirit, we will grow and produce a harvest of good deeds for God. "Progress not perfection" and "Let go and let God" are slogans that remind us that God seeks a heart that is surrendered to Him, rather than a self-driven, guilt-ridden effort to do what is right.

So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. (Ephesians 1:6-8 NLT)

Jesus currently sits at the right hand of God and is our advocate before His Father. He says, "This one is my child! I shed my innocent blood for him, for her." Though we are inadequate in ourselves, we are more than conquerors through Jesus. He has not left us as orphans to live on our own. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to be with us and in us. As we allow ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit, He will guide us out of false guilt and into all truth.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27 NIV)

Conviction of the Spirit Does this mean we should never reflect on guilty feelings when they arise? No! There is a third source of guilt, valid guilt which comes from disobeying God's commandments. The Holy Spirit will relentlessly convict us of sin in our lives until we repent and turn away from it. We would be wise to stop and consider what the Spirit is saying and the consequences of continuous rebellious actions.

WHY DO I FEEL GUILTY?

Many of us are plagued by a nagging sense of guilt with no definable reason why. We feel discontent and troubled but have no idea what we can do about it. Where do these feelings come from? Following are some sources that may enlighten us.

Unrealistic Expectations We crawl into bed exhausted after a hectic day of work frenzied by attempts to accomplish everything on our “to do” list. Our minds drift to thinking about the work we didn’t accomplish rather than the things we did. We think thoughts like, “in spite of all I do, somehow it never seems to be enough” and we live in guilt and discouragement. This misplaced guilt is the result of placing high expectations on ourselves about what we want to achieve and focusing on that, rather than being realistic about what is reasonably possible to do in any given day. In our frenzy, we may miss opportunities to hear how God is directing us.

We need to remember Jesus' words to the people who asked Him, ***“What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent”*** (John 6:28-29 NIV).

The actual work of God is simply to believe in the saving work that Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. It has nothing to do with the many works we may busy ourselves with to prop up our self-image or gain God’s favour. Our belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection for removal of our sins is the only condition for our acceptance by God and the only thing that will remove nagging guilt from our soul. When we have the assurance of forgiveness of our sins, we can then live in the love and acceptance of God. We need no longer be slaves to fear for we are children of God. If we seek God, He will show us those things He has prepared for us to do.

The Accuser When we permit our thoughts to be controlled by any power other than the Holy Spirit, we allow that power to accuse us of our former “deeds of the flesh” and we live in endless guilt. Condemning thoughts flood our minds such as, “You will never really be free from those sins. You will never really be what God wants you to be. God is deeply disappointed in you. How long can you expect Him to put up with you?” These assaults are vicious accusations from the devil who seeks to discourage and devour us.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, this is the point: You died to the power of the law when you died with Christ. And now you are united with the one who was

VICTORY OVER DEPRESSION

He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains.
(Psalm 107:14 NLT)

We all experience times in life when we are feeling down. Under perfectly normal circumstances we can get tired and emotionally drained. Satan will try to use anything for evil against us, including normal “down times”, which are probably indicating the need for rest and renewal. This is particularly true for individuals in early recovery. At low times, and any time, in whatever way he can, Satan seeks to fill our minds with negative thoughts and emotions. He is a discourager. He is the giver of despair and he wants to pull us down and keep us down. But Jesus is our encourager. He knows our weaknesses. He gives strength to the weary. Our lives are guided into righteousness, peace, and joy through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came to earth that we might have life and have it to the full.

The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.....you, O Lord, are a shield around me; you are my glory, the one who holds my head high. (John 10:10; Psalm 3:3 NLT)

Everyone experiences times of frustration and distress when life doesn’t go according to our plans. When hopes and dreams are unfulfilled it is normal to feel disappointed. Memories and all sorts of things may make us feel sad but, for our own well-being, we must not STAY sad. If we do, Satan will take advantage of the open door and push his way into our lives so our sadness becomes discouragement, then disillusionment, then depression, then we end up in despair. God knows that we will experience periods of difficulty from time to time and, in His tenderness and kindness, He invites us to come to the light of His love. As we draw near to Him, we will experience joy as surely as night becomes day by the light of the dawn.

Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.....The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. (Psalm 30:5b; Isaiah 9:2 NLT)

When we do an initial set of steps we often feel overwhelmed with everything we are learning about ourselves. Many people become depressed because they determine they can’t face the truth. However, the God who came to fill our lives with joy is the same God who came to reveal truth. God is a tender loving God who promises to ***“heal the broken hearted and bind up their wounds.”*** (Psalm 147:3 NIV) As we continue to turn our will and our lives over to God’s care, He will heal and bring restoration to whatever we uncover in our step work.

However, avoiding and blaming give the devil's lie a chance to flourish in our hearts. This lie says, "Living with the truth will be more painful than concealing it." We will overcome depression when we quit making excuses and stop blaming everyone else for our circumstances and how we feel. Depression can be the product of suppressed anger. When we acknowledge the truth, and bring the hidden things of our heart to God's light for healing, God will forgive us and help us leave the dark clouds of depression behind.

"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-7 NIV)

When we choose to live in depression, our number one enemy is our emotions. We tend to be led by how we feel, regardless of the fact that feelings are unreliable. Feelings change from day to day and they often don't convey the complete truth. We have needs, including emotional needs. Our emotional state gets depleted for a variety of reasons. When we feel low we do not have to withdraw and believe there is no solution in sight or no source of comfort and strength to draw on. Rather, we can allow these feelings to draw us close to God's heart and let Him embrace us, comfort us, strengthen us, and help us get through these challenging moments.

As for me, I look to the Lord for help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me. Do not gloat over me, my enemies! For though I fall, I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. (Micah 7:7-8 NLT)

Acknowledging to God the truth about any negative feelings we have, and asking for His help, will bring wisdom, healing, encouragement, and blessing into the situation. When we awaken in a day feeling tired or discouraged, we should not tell ourselves "I feel depressed, or, it's too hard for me to face this day." God invites us to look at the very same feelings and say, "God, I feel tired and discouraged so I place myself into your care. Comfort and strengthen me. Fill me to overflowing with a sense of Your goodness. Thank You Lord that Your unfailing love and tender mercy are available to me all through this day."

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:5-6 NIV)

Living with God in recovery does not mean we deny that we have feelings of discouragement and sadness. Sometimes we will have negative feelings, but we can make our feelings line up to the truth of God's Word. This new way of responding takes practice because we are used to reacting negatively to difficult feelings. God will help us as we seek Him to teach us new ways of coping honestly and positively with each situation we encounter.

To find victory over depression the Bible teaches us: ***"we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*** (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV) This is a two-part process. 1) We resist depression and feeling sorry for ourselves because the devil delights in discouragement. ***Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*** (James 4:7 NIV) 2) We fill ourselves with gratitude and focus on how God is working in us, and for us. ***Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*** (Philippians 4:4 NIV) This is not being fake. It's not suppressing the truth. It's bringing all that we are before our caring God for His help, and then trusting His promise to meet all our needs. We can then intentionally shift our focus from our needs to observing and thanking God for all He is doing on our behalf. If we stay filled up with gratitude, there is no room for depression.

We can't control every circumstance that presents itself in our lives, but we don't have to let what happens around us spoil our day and lead us into the darkness of despair. God is with us. God knows all about our struggles. If we seek and acknowledge that God is working for good in all our affairs, we will have victory over depression every time.

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. When am I most vulnerable to feelings of sadness, discouragement, or despair?
2. What familiar negative responses lead me into the darkness of discouragement and depression?
3. In what ways do I seek God's help in times of despair?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, When I feel discouraged, I ask you to draw me close to your heart and fill me with Your peace. You are a kind and compassionate God and I trust You to comfort and strengthen me as I seek You in times of frustration and distress. Help me to recognize the work of the discourager in my life and instead allow You to heal and restore those things that concern me. I am forever grateful that Your presence is ever with me and Your goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life. Amen