

*Life With God In Recovery*

# **STEPPING AWAY FROM DANGER**



**Book 3**

## How To Enjoy A New Life With God In Recovery

*Partners in Hope Recovery Society  
is a Christian community  
outreach organization  
offering hope, support, and healing  
through Jesus Christ  
to victims of  
harmful circumstances and dependencies,  
as they reclaim the gift of their life.*



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*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*

*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 them independently from God. This is a wonderful 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 over to God's care, we find a solid foundation upon which to build a new life. All it takes is confession of our sin and brokenness to God and a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God's loving care. When we invite God to come into our lives we find that He is ready and waiting. 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 filled up 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 filled up with Your Spirit. Come into my heart and make me clean. Teach me your will. Transform my way of thinking. Strengthen me to obey all that you show me.***

*If you prayed that prayer sincerely from your heart, God receives you and forgives 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 helpful information to help you move forward in your journey with God. Please contact us. You'll find our contact information on the front cover of this booklet.*

**Questions For Reflection and Discussion**

1. How have I used a substance or an addictive habit to cope with emptiness, pain, loneliness, or other distress I was experiencing?
2. What obsessive thoughts are lurking within me that have, in the past, made me vulnerable to relapse? How am I hiding that vulnerability?
3. If I desire to live the life I’ve always longed for, then my familiar response of hiding my weaknesses will have to change. How do I do that?
4. What positive action am I taking to get past the feeling of being empty and vulnerable? What action am I avoiding taking today? Why?
5. How am I building a lifestyle of transparency and accountability?
6. How am I activating God’s promise to give me “everything I need for living a godly life”?
7. What healthy risks am I taking to build new relationships with friends and sponsors who can come alongside me and help me grow?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you that you are the same, yesterday, today and forever. I know I can trust you because you are faithful to do everything you promise. When I feel vulnerable and afraid, I can trust you to help me because Your word says you give strength to the weary and increase power of the weak. Thank you that you actually hold us up and support us with your righteous right hand. Help us to put our hand in Your’s as you lift us up and take us forward in our recovery. We are forever grateful that you care. AMEN

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by reading the Bible. 3) We practice "speaking truth to ourselves" rather than simply reacting to how we are feeling. 4) We start to put God's principles into daily practice. As we persevere, we will surely find that peace will come, our emotions will quiet down, and we will begin to experience goodness filling our hearts and our minds.

Where we have previously lived in loneliness, Jesus invites us now to take the risk of building new relationships with healthy friends and sponsors who will come alongside us and help us grow. When we experience feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, God invites us to see this as a signal that something is wrong. We then need to identify the empty place deep within us that needs to be filled and take the appropriate action for our situation. Rather than run away, it's time to see that a breakthrough might be just around the corner. Where we lacked accountability because of the absence of Godly correction, Jesus now invites us to put ourselves under the guidance of a mature and trustworthy Godly person and let them mentor us as we move forward in our recovery. Where we waited for others to come and fix us and drag us out of dark places, we now need to do the reaching out, and by so doing, experience the connectedness and joy of Godly relationships.

**You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.** (Hebrews 10:36 NIV)

Feeling empty and vulnerable, and clinging to thoughts or practices that present us with an opportunity to relapse, are signs that we need to seek help. There is always something we can do that will ease the craving in our mind and body. We must let go of the lie that our substance of choice will best fulfill that longing. We wouldn't be in recovery today if it had. We can fill the void in our heart by telling ourselves the truth. God does care! To those who ask for it, God will give the strength needed to stand firm in the truth of His word. Our choice today is, do we believe what God says and fill up on that, or, do we continue to run on empty until we give into an addictive obsession?

***Now godliness with contentment is great gain. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*** (1 Timothy 6:6 NKJV, 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 NIV)

As we go through life in the recovery process, we begin to trust God to meet all our deepest needs and invite Him, on a daily basis, to fill us up with the power of His Holy Spirit. We intentionally reflect on what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will—which promises to satisfy the nagging emptiness within us. We ask God for understanding of His word and how to apply His principles to our lives. We read the Bible daily and in order to fully understand what God is saying to us, we discuss what we've read with our pastor, sponsor, mentor or other godly persons. This is how a person begins to be "filled up" on a daily basis.

***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)

As we seek to live in God's will each day, we ask God to help us deal with those events in our past which our addiction helped us medicate—feelings of pain and loss, loneliness, frustration, grief and dissatisfaction. How can we ensure these areas of vulnerability are occupied with healthy thoughts and behaviours?

We first have to admit to the presence of these feelings and recognize that they relate to events we have never fully faced. If we desire to live the life we've always longed for, then our familiar response of hiding our weaknesses will have to change. How do we do that? As honestly as we know how we name our vulnerability to the painful events of our past, and trust that Jesus will work all these things together for our good. We ask Him for healing for the deeply wounded areas in our soul and, in faith, receive health and wholeness. It is also helpful to seek out trusted people who are willing to talk and pray with us.

**By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him ... he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.** (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT)

In our lives today, how do we activate "everything we need for living a godly life"? It's not a complicated process. 1) We admit that our addictive desires are corrupt and choose to forsake them. 2) We get to know God's promises

## Partners in Hope LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY MEETING

**THE WELCOME:** We are a Christian 12-Step Recovery Group. We practice the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and welcome individuals seeking healing and recovery from a variety of destructive and addictive lifestyles. The only requirement for membership is a desire to love and be loved regardless of one's current condition in life.

We choose to affirm God, the Creator, as our higher power. We believe He has revealed Himself to us through His Son Jesus Christ, who said, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. I am the way, the truth, and the life."**

We share through stories, discussion, singing and prayer, the experience, strength and hope we have found in relationship with God and with each other. We seek to gain strength from one another in order to carry this message of hope to others who suffer. We gratefully acknowledge God's presence and pray for His guidance and direction in all we do and say.

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.  
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and  
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

**SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY**

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

**VULNERABILITY – RUNNING ON EMPTY**

**Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

In the past, bad habits and negative attitudes played a significant role in our lives. When we felt vulnerable we anesthetized ourselves to what was going on inside us. We used our substance of choice to help cope with the emptiness, the nameless pain, the loneliness or some other distress we were experiencing. Our daily agenda in addiction was entirely focused on meeting our own needs. Now that we are aware that God has promised to meet all our needs, are we willing to let Him do so?

God invites us, ***Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.*** (Psalm 50:15 NASB)

When we admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our life had become empty and unmanageable, we sought a recovery program. We stopped using our substance of choice and began to deal with our vulnerable feelings which previously led us to our addictive lifestyle. In sobriety, how can we actually face these overwhelming feelings, and the pain of loneliness, frustration, disappointment, and even shame, without picking up again?

Life in recovery is about living in truth, and the truth is that on our own, our hearts are empty. That is why we often struggle with fear when we feel vulnerable and powerless. God, and trusted people in recovery around us, assure us that there is a safe way forward for us. Step by step we will come to know and believe in a Power greater than ourselves who will restore us to sanity. We are encouraged to make a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of this powerful God. When we choose to do so, we will find that our dead hearts begin to come alive.

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Does pride born of hurt keep me from asking for what I need from God or others?
2. How has independent thinking served me in the past?
3. Why should I move away from fending for myself and not depending on anyone else?
4. What's the difference between a legitimate need for help and a desire for someone to rescue and co-dependently fix things for me?
5. Where do I recognize the fear in me that God or others can't be trusted?
6. How am I challenging the insanity in me that says addictive behaviours will somehow better meet my needs than asking for help and following sound advice?
7. Isolation, self-sufficiency, impatience, frustration at the slow process – where's the challenge for me in dealing with my pain in a new way?
8. Am I willing to receive the healing God is providing for the complicated and painful need God knows I have? Am I willing to trust God's way?
9. Am I willing to persist in the healing process rather than looking for a "magic wand" or "quick fix"?
10. Today in recovery, how can I live well with God and others even though healing continues to be an ongoing process for me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving and caring for me even when I was in darkness and unaware of who You are. Forgive me for being prideful and for thinking that I could live a joyful life in recovery without You, and without those who counsel and mentor me. Thank You for pursuing me with Your unfailing love and for keeping me in the reality of the truth that You alone give fullness of life. I am forever grateful that You, the God of hope, will fill me with all joy and peace as I trust Your ways to move forward in my recovery. AMEN

### **12 STEPS AND BIBLE PRINCIPLES**

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies -- that our life had become unmanageable.	1. I know nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (Romans 7:18)
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.	2. For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understood Him.	3. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.	4. Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.	5. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16)
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.	6. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.	7. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.	8. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:31)
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.	9. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.	10. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.	11. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. (Colossians 3:16a)
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.	12. Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

The broken places in our hearts did not happen overnight and following God's principles will not fully restore our hearts overnight. Healing, even physical healing, is a process. Our arrogance tends to want God to wave His "magic wand" and give us instant healing right now. Be assured the Holy Spirit is at work. He is speaking to us. Are we willing to listen? He is pouring healing into the hurt within us. Are we willing to receive the healing God is providing for the complicated and painful need God knows we have? Jesus will set us free. Are we willing to humbly surrender and persevere as He works in us, in His way, in His time?

***And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:5-7 NLT)***

God's promise to us is that everyone who seeks healing and freedom will find it. The challenge is for us to give up on our prideful efforts to be self-sufficient. We have to acknowledge that our addiction is only a misguided temporary measure for relief of our pain. God alone has the real solutions in His word as recorded in the Bible. We really don't know what is best for us. Just asking once for help may not provide all the answers we are seeking. We must be persistent and ask repeatedly for help until all the tangled threads of the problem are sorted. When we do this, we can be assured that our loving Heavenly Father will respond by giving us every good and perfect gift from above, leading to freedom, healing and abundant life.

***Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his prized possession. (James 1:17-18 NLT)***

\*Taken from: *The Twelve Steps -- A Spiritual Journey*, ©1988 RPI Publishing, Inc, San Diego, CA



the same place! We must choose a different route and that route is God's plan for healthy relationships where people honour God and care for one another.

***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)

The voice in our heads tells us a familiar lie that no one, including God, can be trusted. When we give attention to our flawed reasoning, we very quickly start to fear and flee into self-protection mode. That lie encourages us to take care of ourselves in the familiar ways of the past.

However, God's Word says, ***Pride leads to disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise. Human pride will be humbled, and human arrogance will be brought down. Only the Lord will be exalted on that day of judgment.*** (Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, Isaiah 2:17 NLT)

How quickly we forget how far we fell when we used our own wisdom to deal with the pain of our past. Which part of disgraceful, angry, shameful, appalling, broken, ruined, out-of-control and violent filthy behaviour have we forgotten? The solutions we thought up got us there. How many additional layers of pain and shame did we add to our painful core experiences when we did things our own way? How many more seasons of arrogant active addiction will we need to bring us to our senses? When will we see that there is another way – a better way -- than our own thinking, to deal with the brokenness inside us?

***Mark well that GOD doesn't miss a move you make; he's aware of every step you take. The shadow of your sin will overtake you; you'll find yourself stumbling all over yourself in the dark. Death is the reward of an undisciplined life; your foolish decisions trap you in a dead end.*** (Proverbs 5:21-23 MSG)

God's trustworthy plan for us is to become whole in body, mind and spirit, regardless of how much pain and loneliness, anger and frustration, dissatisfaction and discouragement we have buried in our hearts. In His time and with our consent, God will completely unravel the tangled mess within us and set us free. Are we truly willing, at this point, to acknowledge as insanity, the belief that a relapse into addictive behaviour will somehow better meet our needs than asking for help and following sound advice? Are we ready to admit that relapse is a prideful choice based on unrelenting pain from hurt?

### **LIFE AFFIRMATIONS:**

- 1. I am loved by God, always. I am loved without condition.***
- 2. My life is of great beauty and infinite value. God has a plan for my life that is meaningful, purposeful and joyful. There is a work for me to do today that will bless others and give me deep satisfaction.***
- 3. God is always with me. I need never face my problems alone. Together with God, any difficulty can be worked out and overcome.***

### **SERENITY PRAYER:**

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

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### STEPPING AWAY FROM DANGER

#### STEP 4



## PRIDE BORN OF HURT

### Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ ...* (Galatians 6:2 NLT)

Our pride often keeps us from asking for what we need. We may have grown up in a family where we were consistently ignored or disappointed. Perhaps our needs were seldom met. Some of us reacted by becoming self-sufficient and resolved that we would never ask anyone for help. In fact, we decided to never need anyone's help ever again!

Jesus, who knows we won't succeed on our own, tells us to not just ask but to keep on asking for help. Only the work of his Holy Spirit in us will enable us to become healthy whole people. He will help us undo our ways of coping which steered us into corrupt ways of living. Jesus said,

***"..I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."*** (Luke 11:9-10 NIV)

When we reached the end of ourselves in addiction we knew we needed help to get ourselves out of our tangled brokenness. We came into recovery and asked Jesus and others to help us get started. However, once we gained a little strength, it didn't take long for that "I can do it on my own" voice to return. In the past we believed no one cared enough to try and understand us and meet our needs. Why would things be different now? Why would the past experiences we need to face receive any better understanding from those around us right now? Wouldn't it be better to just keep quiet, keep it simple, and work it out on our own? According to Jesus, NO!

Independent thinking got us into addiction because independence is based on pride of self which is born out of hurt. Following our self-centered dictates, instead of Jesus' instructions, actually holds us back from seeking and receiving the wisdom and support which God and friends are willing to supply. Sooner or later the independent road we choose to travel will again take us back to active addiction. Common sense says if we go down the same road we will end up at

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What thoughts or behaviours signal to me that I might have an area of soft addiction in my life?
2. Do I recognize avoidance of my intense feelings when I turn to a particular soft addiction? What feelings do I tend to want to avoid?
3. Do I use any activity to hide from difficult and intense emotions?
4. Do I feel compelled to do something, have something, or buy something, even though I know the action will have a negative impact on my health or on my financial situation?
5. Do I get defensive when someone challenges me about a particular pattern of behaviour?
6. What habits that are shameful pleasures do I seek to minimize or hide?
7. In order that I live in God's plan for fullness of life for me, what changes do I need to make in the area of soft addictions?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unfailing love for me. Thank you for pursuing me with your love and exposing those things that hinder my relationship with you. I ask you now Father to mend those broken places that cause me pain. Help me to break the ties of any dysfunctional way I have used the good things you have provided for me. I desire to grow in my knowledge of you and to walk in your ways. Heal me. Make me new. Thank you that you will never leave or forsake me. I am eternally grateful that you care.  
AMEN

## RELATIONSHIP: THE FOUNDATION OF A MORAL INVENTORY

**Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

*Let's take a good look at the way we're living and reorder our lives under GOD. If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.* (Lamentations 3:40; 1 John 1:8-9 MSG)

Our life in addiction was shaped by a controlling relationship with a destructive substance, a habit, a person, or a combination of these. Our behaviour was rooted in self-absorption that was fueled either by a desire to seek pleasure or avoid pain. At some point we began to believe that we were entitled to whatever would give us pleasure and keep pain at a distance. We became focused on ourselves and our needs to the exclusion of every other relationship. We did not know how to love others in a healthy way, and we believed because of our feelings of self-rejection, that we were unlovable. With our chosen addiction we sought to cover the pain of broken relationships with God, with our family, and with others.

*'...no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love. Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head, Doesn't force itself on others, Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle, Doesn't keep score of the sins of others, Doesn't revel when others grovel, Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, Puts up with anything, Trusts God always, Always looks for the best, Never looks back, But keeps going to the end.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-5 MSG)

When we come to God for life in recovery we must humbly acknowledge that we don't know how to live in relationship. We must bring a willing heart in order that we may learn how to receive and give love. We need to allow God to take this broken person that we have become and change

us into the person He created us to be. We need to form a loving relationship with God, and by so doing, learn how to live in wholesome loving relationships with others.

The framework of our searching and fearless moral inventory is identifying how we've missed God's plan for a life of loving relationship. We must be willing to make the necessary adjustments so that a relationship with God becomes our new reality. The basic questions we ask ourselves are, "God what does my life look like to you? How have I strayed from your loving plan for me? What do I need to let go? What needs to become a priority and sought after with everything I have in me so I can really live?"

***So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*** (Romans 12:1-2 MSG)

Many persons come to recovery longing for a new way of life in relationship with God, family and others. In the first three steps they acknowledge their powerlessness, their need for a higher power, and even begin a life of surrender to God as they understand Him. Life appears to be going in the right direction but then the challenges begin to surface as they consider making an inventory of their lives. Who gets to decide what is moral and right and good in my relationships?

It is at this point that the radical nature of a "searching, fearless, and moral" inventory is revealed. Some of God's ways will seem like minor adjustments. At other times we will be shocked by how different God's view of life in relationship is from what we've known. A searching, fearless, and moral inventory that is controlled by God will challenge us, both in terms of what we do now, and what we must no longer do.

***Denial/Rationalization*** If we're defensive or make excuses for our behavior or mood, chances are it's a soft addiction. Typical responses to our conscience or a challenge by others are: 1) "What's so bad about watching TV, spending time on the internet, reading, having a second helping of food?" 2) "You don't know what I'm going through." 3) "I have a right to do this or feel this way because ....." The impulse to deny or rationalize excess in an area of behaviour suggests a soft addiction.

***Hiding the behavior*** Are there some habits that are shameful pleasures we seek to hide? Covering up the amount of time we spend on an activity or lying to others about how we spend our time or our money are signs of soft addictions.

The problem with soft addictions is that they become deeply ingrained in our way of coping with life. By submitting to this way of life we reach the point of being out of touch with who we truly are. We fail to allow God to touch and heal us and meet our deeper needs. We move farther from God's purpose for our life and from the satisfaction of living from our full potential. We find ourselves asking: "Is this all there is?" God offers something better but it requires that we turn from our self-induced way of life and follow the way of God.

The Bible makes this point: ***Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.*** (Romans 6:16 NLT)

In our searching and fearless moral inventory, we have to be radically honest about the underlying root of our behaviours – all of them – not just those that are easily labeled "addictions and dependencies". We need to seek the truth before God about the unmet longings or underlying pain behind the soft addiction. When the root is revealed, we need to confess it before God and receive the peace and blessing that God gives.

***I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*** (Philippians 4:11b-13 NLT)

Are we engaging in a particular activity to enhance our life and our relationships or are we simply trying to numb our feelings and let the world go by? Are we seeking to engage with life or to escape from life? Are we conscious of God's presence in us and around us as we participate in the activity or, are we seeking satisfaction in it, rather than from living in the way of truth? Do we believe we are serving God's purposes with what we are doing or are we substituting this activity for comfort and distraction from feelings of discontent, loneliness or anger? These are issues we need to consider as we determine whether or not the action is a healthy activity or a soft addiction.

***Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.***  
(Romans 12:2 NLT)

The following are some clues to help us recognize if our behaviour or mood is connected to a soft addiction:

*Avoiding feelings* Does a given activity grant us a reprieve from our emotions, especially intense emotions? Four ways we can assess this are: 1) We are trying to numb our feelings by avoiding them. 2) We seek to enhance the feelings we like to the exclusion of others that challenge us. 3) We choose to wallow in one unpleasant feeling to avoid dealing with another. 4) We think and talk about negative and painful things repeatedly and choose to live in that familiar emotional state rather than allowing God to take us forward into something new and life giving.

*Compulsiveness* Do we feel compelled to do something, have something, or buy something, even though we know the action will have a negative impact on our health or on our financial situation? Some indicators are: 1) Although we may find some temporary pleasure in the activity, we often don't feel good about ourselves after engaging in it. 2) We are unable to control the amount of time we spend on a given activity. 3) The behaviour may be accompanied by a helpless, powerless feeling. 4) We persist in following the routine of "doing" and then saying to ourselves, "I will never do that again," only to find ourselves "doing it again."

Jesus said, ***"It is what comes out of you that makes you unclean. For from the inside, from your heart, come the evil ideas which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly—all these evil things come from inside you and make you unclean."***(Mark 7:20-23 GNT)

Our addictive behaviour was rooted in mistaken beliefs about relationships. A relationship with someone in our past may have deeply wounded us and our subsequent beliefs and actions flowed from the painful brokenness of that event. Consequently, a step four inventory that is searching, fearless, and moral must take us back to the foundation or our errant thinking and ask – "What does life in a healthy relationship actually look like?"

***In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.*** (2 Peter 1:5-7 NLT)

Our behaviour is rooted in what we really believe. That is why we must look at not only what we did, but why we did it. This may cause us pain as we uncover what we have tried to cover up, but now we can take comfort in the fact that we take this inventory in the safety of God's love and care. Like a skillful surgeon He will remove those things that have hindered us from living a good and pleasing life.

***No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*** (Philippians 3:13-14 NLT)

We will come to know what real life is when we inventory our behaviour in the light of God's word.

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What does life in healthy relationships look like?
2. What's my experience of life in relationships – more using relationships to meet my own needs or a balanced experience of giving and receiving love?
3. Have I come to admit that I don't know how to live in relationships as God intended?
4. How would I answer these basic inventory questions:
  - God what does my life in relationship look like to you?
  - How have I strayed from your loving plan for me?
  - What needs to go?
  - What needs to be sought after with everything in me so I can really live?"
5. Do I believe God can change me so I can have a loving and meaningful relationship with Him?
6. As I inventory my life and behaviour versus principles written in the Bible, what are the minor adjustments needed and what would be considered more major changes? Are there situations where I would be unwilling to make radical changes?
7. What is the challenge for me as I consider making a searching, fearless, and moral inventory based on God's way of life as revealed in the Bible?

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, I bring my life to You so you can examine and re-order what is in me. I want to come completely clean with You, admit my sin, and receive forgiveness for my wrongdoing. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. I embrace what You have done for me on the cross. I fix my attention on You and Your plans. Change me from the inside out. I commit myself to Your care and trust in your unconditional love. I will follow You. Amen

## SOFT ADDICTIONS

### **Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

**Search me, O 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)

Soft addictions can be habits or compulsive behaviors that seek to alter recurring moods or thought patterns. Their essential defining quality is that they satisfy a surface want but ignore or block a deeper need. They numb us to unfamiliar or uncomfortable feelings. They substitute a superficial high for genuine feelings of accomplishments. Rather than leaning on these temporary supports, God wants us to acknowledge truth in our places of need. He wants to strengthen us and help us and hold us steady with His righteous right hand.

***So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*** (Isaiah 41:10 NIV)

Many soft addictions involve necessary behaviors like eating and sleeping. They become soft addictions when we overdo them and when they are used for more than their intended purpose. Soft addictions, unlike hard ones such as drugs and alcohol, are seductive because they seem perfectly harmless and pleasurable while we're engaged in them. These activities may include reading, watching TV, spending time on the internet, talking on the phone, texting, shopping, physical exercise, eating or gaming. We often don't realize how much time and energy we give to these types of addictions and how they compromise the quality of our lives. Jesus came to give us life to the full and when these seemingly harmless things are used in excess, they rob us of our daily experience of that fullness. The Bible teaches us to check everything we do against the underlying motive for our actions.

***So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*** (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

## FACING FEAR WITH KINDNESS

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In a world that has drifted far from God's plan for loving sexual activity, where do my beliefs and actions line up with God's plan?
2. What is God telling us when he says that sexual sin affects the body more than other sins?
3. How do I overcome the temptation to use people or pornography to gratify my personal desires?
4. What do I do when pornographic scenes or images show up on TV, in movies, or on social media?
5. Do I seek out pornography on the internet or in print? Why?
6. When do I notice impurity in my thoughts, my speech, my desires? When I am aware of this what action do I take?
7. No sexual intercourse outside of heterosexual marriage – impossible standard? Am I choosing to disregard or obey this command?
8. Is sexual purity part of my new life with God in recovery?
9. Do I see the need to repent of impure sexual thoughts, words, and actions? Have I consciously asked God for forgiveness and cleansing?
10. How is God helping me change my perspective and behaviour in the area of sexual purity?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You have called me to be holy because You are holy. Give me the strength to live in sexual purity so that I may honour You with my body. Help me to guard my heart and turn away from all false beliefs I have held in the area of sexual ethics. Help me keep my eyes from viewing anything that would raise lustful passion within me. Give me grace and discernment to walk in truth in a culture that has drifted far from your plan for purity in sexual relationship. May my whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless. I am forever grateful that You care for me and are faithful to complete the work you have begun. AMEN

### **Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

***God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.*** (1 John 4:16, 18 NIV)

Many of us identify a fearful person as a coward, someone who is not assertive, or someone who cowers when intimidated. But fear can also be expressed by unrealistic bravado, excessive talking, work, alcoholism, and lying. Fear reveals itself in cover-ups and phoniness. Fear keeps us from being fully honest about our feelings, prompting us to project false or only partially true images of who we truly are. Fear makes us deny – consciously or unconsciously – that anything is wrong. “It’s all good” is a sure sign that it is not.

Perceived expectations of others cause us to avoid meeting issues straight on. We choose to evade and deceive rather than discuss and resolve. As we continue this pattern our true self becomes obscured. We either withdraw and withhold or get angry and lash out at those around us. In order to inventory our lives honestly we have to look at what causes us to be fearful.

***Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. Our lives were full of evil and envy, and we hated each other. But--“When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.*** (Titus 3:3-5 NLT)

As we peel back the layers and move towards the core of our being we discover that one of our deepest fears is that our inventory will reveal the person we have become. We are fearful that occurrences in our past will cause us to be rejected by those around us and by God.

Even though we are told God's love for us is so great that He sent His Son to die for our sins, we are unsure about this God because we don't know Him very well. Witnesses have told us of God's unconditional love for each of us but because of the deep sorrow in our soul we find it hard to believe that He could care for the hell deserving sinner we have become. We are not convinced that telling the truth will have the power to set us free. God invites us to set aside all our apprehensions and just do what His word tells us, ***Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*** (Psalm 34:8 NKJV)

When King David did an inventory of his heart he exposed murder and adultery and lying and self-righteous pride. He knew he deserved nothing from God. In spite of this, he relied on God's loving kindness and wrote these words: ***Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living.*** (Psalm 27:13 NLT)

When we compose a step 4 inventory we sometimes think first of ways others have let us down. We were hurt or betrayed, attacked or molested, lied to or beaten, stolen from or cheated. Sometimes this went on for a number of years. We came to believe that life was unsafe for us and began to live in fear. Fear caused us to behave in unhealthy ways ourselves. Sometimes our actions towards others even mirrored the same painful behaviour that was inflicted on us.

When our well-being hinges on the actions and opinions of other people, we will continually react in fear because we can never be sure when we might be rejected, criticized or ignored. Life based solely on human interaction is only as secure as the humans we entrust our lives to. Where we experience disappointment with others we will find anger and fear in the face of those disappointments. In order to make a searching and fearless moral inventory we must ask ourselves when we first looked to others for approval, safety, and care rather than looking to God.

We were created to live securely by living first for God – the God who loves us perfectly, weaknesses and all. We are also called to live confidently in the safe knowledge that God will never leave us nor forsake us and will always guide and protect us. ***Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.*** (Psalm 56:3 NKJV). Actions or reactions based on any other

***anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*** (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7-8 NLT)

We need to be crystal clear where we stand. If we are engaging in immoral sex, we are saying "No" to God. We cannot call ourselves followers of Jesus and disobey what He clearly teaches. We are told that if we repeatedly engage in sexual sin we have no part in the Kingdom of God. Many people who enter into recovery seeking victory over drugs and alcohol find themselves relapsing into their addictive lifestyles when they refuse to obey God's teaching on sexual purity. When we disobey God, we give permission to Satan and his cohorts to operate in our lives. The satanic forces of evil will take every opportunity we give them to steal, kill and destroy us.

For those of us not currently engaging in sexual impurity, we are challenged to be careful what we condemn in others while condoning offensive behaviour among ourselves. God includes the way we talk, the way we think, the jokes we tell, the offhanded comments we make. These fit in the category of impurity of mind and God clearly warns us that if we engage in such activity we will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God. We risk eternal punishment.

***Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God.*** (Ephesians 5:3-5 NLT)

Impossible standards? On our own, YES! But God is faithful to do in us what we cannot do for ourselves.

***Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.*** (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 NLT)

Come Holy Spirit, and make our lives holy and acceptable to God.



principals for human sexual relationships. The Bible is quite clear about the issue of sexual activity in its many forms. The most basic rules for a healthy society (The Ten Commandments), were handed down from God to Moses for the people's well-being, and the seventh rule is **"You must not commit adultery."** (Exodus 20:14 NLT) It seems obvious from the need for this commandment that intercourse outside of marriage was happening in ancient times as well.

In Jesus' most important collection of teachings called the Sermon on the Mount, He extended the call for sexual purity to include not just our actions but also our thoughts and feelings.

**"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.** (Matthew 5:27-28 NLT)

We should be aware that looking at pornographic images on the internet and in magazines has a negative impact on legitimate sexual relationships. Viewing explicit sexual content in television programs and in movies is also damaging. This type of viewing often leads to a desire for increasingly degrading sexual activity. It may also lead to a longing for adulterous relationships to fulfill the aroused lustful desires. Adultery is detrimental to the one flesh union that God intended in marriage.

When it comes to murder, everyone recognizes that it is wrong and something to be avoided and punished. Jesus puts sexual sin in the same category as murder. **For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you.** (Matthew 15:19-20 NLT) Jesus says that indulging in sex outside of marriage spoils and pollutes us, ruins and degrades us. In the scriptures we are also taught that those who engage in sexual activity outside of marriage are not just disobeying human rules but are actually rejecting God.

**God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor—not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways.... God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. Therefore,**

way of living are something we now need to accept responsibility for and fearlessly record in our inventory.

To live without fear we must intentionally receive the kindness and tenderness God offers us. We must bring every thought captive to Him and allow Him to renew our minds. We must look to Him to give us peace of mind and the will to forgive. If we lack compassion, we must allow God to fill us with His compassion. Again and again we must receive the acceptance and forgiveness of God. We must declare that God does not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus.

Our inventory should assess how we are growing in our dependence on God rather than allowing our circumstances to be the measure of recovery. Our inventory should also assess how we are letting go with forgiveness and are growing in unity with others.

**For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Perfect love casts out fear.** (2 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18 NKJV)

As we move forward in living our lives without fear, we need to focus on God's kindness and reject our own negative thoughts. This will require changing our current belief system and bringing it into line with what God says. Instead of living life based on "I think" we need to risk believing what God says in His word. We need to come honestly before Him and place ourselves in His care. When we experience God's love we won't want to lash out at others or live isolated in our fears.

**So clean house! Make a clean sweep of malice and pretense, envy and hurtful talk. You've had a taste of God. Now, like infants at the breast, drink deep of God's pure kindness. Then you'll grow up mature and whole in God.** (1 Peter 2:1-3 MSG)

Have we come to truly believe that by relying on God's unconditional love we can complete a **fearless** moral inventory of ourselves?

## Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What fears do I face in my life? How do I try to cover my fears and pretend, “It’s all good”?
2. What’s my biggest fear as I begin to make a searching inventory?
3. Perfect love and fear of punishment. Where’s the error in my thinking around these two realities that seem to challenge each other?
4. During my addiction, what unhealthy ways was fear expressed in my relationships with others? What continues today?
5. How did I seek approval, safety, and care from other people rather than first looking to God? How is that changing?
6. Fear of rejection, fear of criticism, fear of being ignored or discounted – how did I deal with these issues in addiction and how am I dealing with them today?
7. What makes me not trust that God has unfailing and unconditional love for me?
8. Where am I in the journey from a place of fear and unforgiveness, to a place of being comfortable with giving and receiving compassion and forgiveness?
9. How does my friendship and relationship with God impact my relationship with others?
10. Do I truly believe that by relying on God’s unconditional love I can complete a fearless moral inventory of myself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I renounce the fear of things from my past that have kept me in bondage, I ask You now to fill me with Your perfect love and peace. Your word says there is no fear in love and I have come to believe Your perfect love will cast out all my fear. I desire to do a searching and fearless moral inventory. With You as the strength of my life, I have nothing to fear. Thank You Lord that You never leave me or forsake me. I am forever grateful. AMEN

## SEXUAL ETHICS

### Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

God made men and women sexual beings with the ability to recreate their kind. His plan for sexual intercourse was, and still is, that it only be practiced inside the protection of heterosexual marriage. Any other type of sexual intercourse is not in keeping with God’s plan for His creation. Those may be stark and startling words for the majority of people in our society today. However, this is the Biblical direction for sexual relationships between humans. This is certainly not what is taught today in sex education classes in school. It is definitely not evident in the storylines of television programs or movies. It is also not evident in the real lives of people who participate in the TV or movie industry or in society in general.

***Don’t you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don’t fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God.... Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.*** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 18-20 NLT)

The fact that people have engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage for thousands of years is not the issue. What is at issue is that until the 1960’s it was well understood across society that such activity was harmful and wrong. In the last few decades, things have shifted so dramatically that saving sex for marriage now seems an impossible standard to attain and an absolutely unreasonable demand from ancient times.

As Christians, our primary concern is not what other people think or practice, but how we are personally following God’s established

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What does loneliness look like in my life? Isolation? Disconnection? Don't feel understood? Don't feel valued? Abandoned? Unwanted?
2. How has loneliness impacted me in terms of: Relationships? Finances? Self-esteem?
3. When I am feeling lonely, do I look to God or others first?
4. What would it mean for me to draw near to God when I feel lonely?
5. Self-pity and loneliness are close companions. What positive truths do I need to remember and reaffirm when I feel worthless and lonely?
6. Part of loneliness is the isolation from hiding behind walls of self-protection even when we are with people. Am I being real with others so authentic connections can be made between us?
7. Am I hiding myself by staying busy doing things rather than being present to people?
8. When I am feeling lonely, what new ways am I pursuing to help me find a sense of connection? What are others doing that I might try?
9. How does becoming a part of a church or fellowship group enhance my experience of feeling connect with God and others?
10. Reaching out to serve others and being present with them often brings others closer to us. How am I making myself available to God and others as a friend?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unfailing love for me. You have not left me without comfort. You have given me your Holy Spirit to be with me. When I feel lonely help me to remember that I am your child. When I feel disconnected from others help me to remember that you are with me and that you never leave me nor forsake me. Please help me to befriend someone so that each of us may experience a healthy relationship built on the foundation of your word. Thank you that your mercy is new every morning and for being a faithful God. I am forever grateful that you care for me. AMEN

## SELFISHNESS

### Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.** (Philippians 2:3-4 NLT)

Life in addiction narrowed our primary focus to a self-centered vision of what we wanted or what we thought we needed. Life in recovery is a journey of recognizing the familiar selfish ways we have behaved in the past and seeking God's help to teach us how to live respectfully towards others in the future.

The founders of AA were not wrong when they described the selfishness problem this way: *"Selfishness – self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking, and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate. Sometimes they hurt us, seemingly without provocation, but we invariably find that at some time in the past we have made decisions based on self which later placed us in a position to be hurt. Above everything, we must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us!"* (Big Book pages 62-63)

Selfish people have difficulty seeing things from someone else's point of view. Persons in addiction are seldom concerned with what is in the best interest of others. Unfortunately, this mindset does not automatically change when we choose to give up our destructive habits. Unless we intentionally come to know and put into effect a Godly way of living, we will simply act out our selfish mindset in a different capacity. We will merely substitute our former selfish life focus of "me and my addiction" for an equally harmful self-focused life of "me and my recovery".

While it is important to concentrate on our beliefs and behaviours in early recovery, it's more important to seek recovery from God's viewpoint. God's perspective is what we see when we look at ourselves through the mirror of His word. **I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.** (John 13:34 NLT) We learn how to love others by receiving God's love and forgiveness which He offers through the

finished work of Jesus on the cross. As we come to know and live in the security of God's love, we find strength and a new desire to live in unselfish ways.

Stopping destructive practises or abusing ourselves with harmful substances is a great beginning to life in recovery. However, we need to deal with the underlying root that caused us to turn to those habits and addictive substances in the first place or else we may find ourselves doomed to failure over and over again. That's why, in the Bible, the mindset of selfishness is included along with drunkenness as one of the many harmful desires of our sinful nature.

**When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.** (Galatians 5:19-20 NLT)

Selfishness, self-will and self-centeredness are characteristics that run deep in all of us. These traits are clearly evident in our past unwillingness to follow God's principles. They are also the root of most of our sinful behaviour in active addiction. Minus our addictive attachments, where do we see evidence that selfishness might still have roots in our hearts and hinder us from having healthy relationships with others? The Bible gives us the following answers:

**An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends and against all sound judgment starts quarrels. For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.** (Proverbs 18:1 NIV, James 3:16 NLT)

The Big Book continues: *"Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help ... First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life."* (Big Book pages 62-63)

we experience that right relationship, we will be healthy enough to establish loving relationships with others.

***I want you woven into a tapestry of love, in touch with everything there is to know of God. Then you will have minds confident and at rest, focused on Christ, God's great mystery.*** (Colossians 2:2-3 MSG)

Seeking a Godly mentor and developing a healthy relationship with that person is another way of alleviating loneliness. Revealing what goes on inside us to a trustworthy person will help us connect with our innermost being. Joining in church fellowship is another way to feel connected, both with God and with others. Coming to terms with the loneliness we are experiencing is a process and we should not despise small beginnings.

***But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!*** (Jude 1:20-21 MSG)

As long as we look to people, performance, possessions, or events to fill our loneliness, we will remain lonely. We need to welcome the loving presence of God deep in our souls. We need to get to know God so that we can trust Him. As we experience His love, we will know for sure that we are His children, and that we truly are "accepted in the beloved".

***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 NLT)

#### EFFECTS OF LONELINESS:

1. Loneliness can lead to immoral relationships. Sharing life with friends is a natural yearning of the human heart. Often when we are lonely and disconnected, we seek sexual intimacy and use live-in relationships that are less than a life-time marriage commitment, to fill the gap. However, all the physical or sexual contact in the world cannot fill an empty, lonely heart. We long for relationship in commitment. Our hearts yearn to be cared for and to be understood. Close intimacy in a committed loving relationship brings satisfaction and contentment to both participants. Nothing else truly satisfies.

***There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never "become one."*** (1 Corinthians 6:16-17 MSG)

2. Loneliness can impact our finances. Often when we are lonely, we believe that purchasing certain items will give us an emotional lift. We buy things we don't need. We spend money we don't have. The brief pleasure of the items purchased fades into an even deeper level of meaninglessness when the bill arrives. Tools and toys were not designed to meet the needs of our hearts.

***You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.*** (Psalm 145:16 NIV)

3. Loneliness can damage our self-esteem. We doubt our worth to God and others. We feel solitary and hopeless. Loneliness distorts our self-esteem which may have the effect of leading us into bondage to others. Lonely people often try to please others so that they will be accepted. They may even allow others to abuse them just because they want to be in a relationship. God offers us a loving relationship with Himself. When

The Bible gives us the solution to our self-centeredness which the founders of AA referred to: **By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.** (2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT)

Following are some specific principles God has given to help us leave behind self-centeredness and enter into a satisfying way of living:

1. Be Humble: Combating the sin of selfishness requires genuine humility. This means having a true perspective about ourselves in relation to God and to others. **Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.** (Romans 12:3 NIV).

2. Pray and Study God's Word: Prayer and meditation on God's word are necessary to our well-being in recovery. The Bible teaches us to pray: **"Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain"** (Psalm 119:36 NIV).

3. Intentionally Honor Others: As we live with God in recovery our attitude towards others becomes one of genuine care and concern rather than personal approval seeking. **Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.** (Romans 12:9-10 NLT)

4. Give Generously: An unselfish person knows that money and possessions are for sharing not hoarding. A sure cure for selfishness is the practice of giving. **You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**" (Acts 20:35 NLT).

Let's learn from God's word contained in the Bible. Let's also learn from those who've gone before us and whose wisdom is contained in the Big Book of AA. Let's receive the love that God has for us and allow that all-encompassing love to overflow from us to others. Let's look beyond ourselves to loving God and loving others. Let's become the people God created us to be rather than remaining selfish self-centered people.

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Do I agree with the founders of AA that selfishness and self-centeredness are at the root of all my problems?
2. Where do I recognize the damaging effects of self-centeredness during my time in active addiction?
3. Where do I see evidence that selfishness might still have roots in my heart and hinder me from having healthy relationships with others?
4. How am I learning to seek God's perspective in situations rather than concentrating on my own viewpoint?
5. What does it mean to "quit playing God" and live for God's purposes rather than my own selfish interests and plans?
6. What has God given me so I can live successfully in my new life in recovery? How am I using what God has given?
7. In what areas of my life am I allowing God to change my self-centered ways? Where do I continue to struggle?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask forgiveness for my selfish and insensitive ways towards You and towards others. Thank You for pursuing me with Your unfailing love even when my self-centered mindset was far from You. As You have loved and cared for me, I ask that You now teach me how to love and care for others. Please strengthen me with the power of Your Holy Spirit so I can persevere and exhibit patience in every circumstance. Thank You for Your faithful promises to sustain me. Lord, my desire is to glorify You with my life. Please help me to achieve this goal. AMEN

## LIVING LONELY OR LIVING IN LOVE

### **Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

***We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.*** (Hebrews 4:15-16 MSG)

Loneliness is a feeling of isolation which is felt even when others are around us. It's a sense that others have their own agenda and continue to carry on with what they are doing, having no idea or even caring about what we are thinking, or what we are coping with on the inside. Other symptoms of loneliness are feelings of lack of involvement with others or with what is happening around us. Loneliness and loss of hope are often triggered by rejection, tragedy, separation, a sense of abandonment by God and/or others, or a feeling of not being understood. Mother Teresa said "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty".

***God told them, "I've never quit loving you and never will. Expect love, love, and more love!"*** (Jeremiah 31:3 MSG)

There are two primary forms of loneliness that people suffer from:

1. **Social loneliness** – brought on by a lack of understanding in family relationships and/or a non-existent social network.
2. **Emotional loneliness** – the absence of a close loving relationship. Acquaintances may help with social loneliness but emotional health requires love and a committed caring relationship.

God made us to be in loving relationship with Him and with each other. When our relationship with God, our Heavenly Father, is broken we are not being nurtured each day by His unfailing love. When we are starved of the love of God by our own self-will, we are unable to receive love or give love to others. When we draw near to God, and choose to be filled up each day with His love, then we are on our way to being emotionally healthy.

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Why am I afraid to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?
2. When did I start lying to cover up and hide from the truth?
3. How am I engaging with a sponsor or trusted mentor to help me become conscious of the ways I “don’t even realize I’m lying?”
4. Why is it more convenient for me to tell a misleading version of my life or of some incident than to tell the actual truth?
5. What action am I taking to deal with the deception and manipulation behind the lies I tell?
6. Inconvenience and fear of shame or punishment often lie behind our lies. How does making a searching and fearless moral inventory address these issues?
7. The Bible commands us to get rid of secret and shameful ways, and not to use deception or distort God’s word. How am I doing on these issues?
8. Am I making a practice of filtering all of my thinking and believing through the truth of God’s word?
9. Am I willing to make a fresh start today and reject those lies in my thoughts, my mouth, and my actions? Where do I need to start?
10. Do I dare to pray today, “Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life”. (Note: If you sincerely want God to touch you, find a quiet place and pray the above words and then be quiet and listen to what He says.)

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You offer me a life filled with peace and joy when I walk with You in truth. I confess that at times I’ve found it more convenient to act on my own thoughts and ideas than to be guided by the truth of Your word. Too often it has been more convenient to lie both to myself and others than to tell the truth. Tonight I confess that I’ve been wrong. I turn away from telling lies and ask You to forgive me. Please work in me and change me so that telling the truth, regardless of consequences, becomes my way of life. Thank you for giving me the Holy Spirit who guides me into all truth. Please help me to listen attentively to His guidance. I am forever grateful that You care for me. AMEN

## STORED ANGER

### **Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

Anger is an involuntary reaction to a displeasing situation or event. If it is a limited reaction to a displeasing event, it may be considered normal. However, when anger is stored, then it becomes dangerous. Stored anger causes us to be resentful and hostile with the urge to get even. Inner turmoil is the result of not obeying the following advice.

***In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.*** (Ephesians 4:26 NIV)

Unresolved displeasing situations or events may cause us to store anger which, if not dealt with, deteriorates through time into frustration, anxiety, hatred, despair, rage, hopelessness. Carrying feelings like these from childhood into adulthood may result in us trying to control each situation we encounter so we can be in a position to hurt others before they hurt us. We may become people pleasers in order to gain favour and solicit another’s good will. We want to “fit in” and desire to be loved and treated with respect. To help fit in with the crowd we may enter into unhealthy relationships and/or addictions which we believe will fill the emptiness inside.

Unfortunately, all the painful baggage we have not dealt with will accompany us until we actually deal with it. Anger stored inside us erupts and spews into our relationships causing the other person frustration and pain. Addictions we thought would help us deal with our pain and frustration actually push us further into the dark side of hopelessness and the persona we adopt keeps us from being real even with ourselves.

At some point we came to the realization that we needed help to deal with the confusion residing in the deepest places of our being. When we came to know Jesus and accepted salvation through His death on the cross, we became new creations. The old has gone and the new has come.

We are challenged by God to demonstrate this transformation by acting and reacting in new ways. ***“...now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*** (Colossians 3:8-10 NIV)

This is really good advice but how do we change what has become for us a normal way of behaving? We first need to accept the freedom that comes with salvation and understand that we are deeply loved by our Creator.

***“My response is to get down on my knees before the Father, this magnificent Father who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you’ll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.”*** (Ephesians 3:14-19 MSG.)

To resolve stored anger, we need to focus on dealing with the root cause of our anger rather than dwelling on the current problem. People, places and things may trigger anger. Our reflection and prayer must be directed at uprooting any hostility and resentment that supports our attitude and responses. We need to understand the fullness of God’s love for us even in the midst of our past and present experiences. His healing power will free us from anger and we’ll eventually experience His peace in our hearts. As we come to acknowledge the grace and love we have received through Christ, we are able then to forgive and grace others as God has graced and forgiven us.

As we go forward, we can avoid relapse into stored anger by practicing some simple principles.

1) Instead of trying to get others to understand us, we need to try to understand where others might be coming from when they behave in a particular way.

time. Processing our current actions against our former belief system is unreliable. We need to align what we are currently doing and thinking with God’s word. To live honestly in all our ways requires all of our thinking and believing to be filtered against the truth of God’s word.

**The sins of some people are blatant and march them right into court. The sins of others don’t show up until much later. The same with good deeds. Some you see right off, but none are hidden forever.** (1 Timothy 5:24-25 MSG)

In the past we shut out God’s voice and paid no attention to the concerns of those who cared about us. That path led us to a destructive unsustainable lifestyle that caused us to question our sanity. Now we have the opportunity to complete a truthful searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves and look at how differently we have been living from the safe and satisfying way God created us to live.

**Those who let their sinful old selves tell them what to do live under that power of their sinful old selves. But those who let the Holy Spirit tell them what to do are under His power. If your sinful old self is the boss over your mind, it leads to death. But if the Holy Spirit is the boss over your mind, it leads to life and peace. The mind that thinks only of ways to please the sinful old self is fighting against God. It is not able to obey God’s Laws. It never can.** (Romans 8:5-7 NLV)

How willing are we to make a fresh start, to finally be free from the lies that keep us lying in our thoughts, speaking lies out of our mouths, and implementing lies with our actions? God desires that we know truth and that we recognize and reject our untruthful ways. Are we willing to learn what truth actually is, and to follow truth in all our ways?

**Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.** (Psalm 139:23-24 NLT)



***The godly are directed by honesty; the wicked fall beneath their load of sin. We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*** (Proverbs 11:5 NLT, 2 Corinthians 4:2 NIV)

We all know we've been dishonest but are we currently admitting to ourselves the truth about why we lied? Some of our core beliefs are actually false but we have used them to prop us up in our sin and addiction. These core beliefs have to be discovered, exposed, and replaced with truth. For those of us who have cycled in and out of recovery, it's almost certain we have been living under the power of buried lies and are in need of God's help to know and live in truth in the deepest places of our being. As we make a searching and fearless moral inventory we need to acknowledge the underlying lies of our beliefs. To leave them untouched will impact our daily living in recovery and return us over and over again to relapse.

***Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth."*** (John 8:31b-32 NIV, John 16:13 NLT)

Truth and sanity go hand in hand. We need to start exposing the lies that have undergirded our life in addiction. The more honest we are with God, with ourselves, and with others, the better life will be for us. Also, the more honest we are about receiving and implementing advice from sponsors and other trusted Godly people, the smoother our recovery will be.

***Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.*** (Psalm 25:4-5 NLT)

Many of us may encounter opposition in our minds as we begin to understand the truth of God's word and follow His ways. This is because our thinking has been programmed by the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil. An old saying is "garbage in, garbage out". We have built our belief system on how we have been thinking and acting for a long

God's word directs us, ***"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."*** (Romans 12:3 NIV)

2) We'll see positive changes when we practice the "PUT OFF" and "PUT ON" principle:

***"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*** (Ephesians 4:22-24 NIV)

3) Practice looking for God's help and encouragement rather than getting discouraged when things are not as you would have them. Remember that God is able to make you stand firm in Christ.

***"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."*** (Philippians 1:6 NLT)

It's time to get rid of the stored anger that's been packed away in the dark places of our soul. God is ready and willing to comfort and heal us. God is faithful and will show us safe and healthy ways to deal with challenging situations and relationships without resorting to anger.

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How has stored anger been a problem in my life?
2. Where do I notice resentment in me and a desire to “get even” as I reflect on events in my life?
3. What have I done to get rid of expressions of anger such as, rage, gossip, negative talk, complaining, and profanity?
4. How am I addressing the root problem in me rather than the triggering events or people?
5. Three principles are given to help us avoid relapsing into anger. How am I doing in implementing these principles?
  - a. Try understanding the “triggering person or thing” and our outburst of anger in relation to the person or thing.
  - b. Practice “putting off” and “putting on”
  - c. Seeking encouragement and help from God
6. What action can I take to experience more success in not sinning in my anger?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask forgiveness for the times I have reacted in anger and caused harm to others. Please show me the underlying root of my destructive anger. My desire is to have peace in my heart and to treat others with respect. I choose to “put off” anger and rage which hinders my relationship with you and with others. Help me to “put on” my new self which is clothed in righteousness and holiness. Make me more like you. I ask these things in the precious name of Jesus. AMEN

## HONESTLY SPEAKING

### Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

At various times in the process of making a moral inventory of our lives we experience anxiety and fear about what we will find when we uncover what has been hidden in the deep places of our hearts. We are afraid that if we start opening ourselves up to the truth – the whole truth – we will be distressed by what we find.

We know we have been using our addiction to hide from things we ought not to have done and also things we have left undone. We know we have avoided dealing honestly with life’s problems. We started lying a long time ago to cover up and hide from the truth. Some character defects we are not proud of but can manage to share and take responsibility for them. However, there are other areas of pain and shame that we are very reluctant to bring to the surface for fear of what others might think. Each time we make an inventory we ‘tell a little more’ but we find it almost impossible to tell the whole truth. We feel like running and hiding instead of telling the truth and yet the road to real recovery which God offers us is one that is based on truth telling and integrity. What are we going to do?

**Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out.** (Proverbs 10:9 NIV)

The most challenging areas to truth-telling in a searching and fearless moral inventory are actually those areas where we don’t even realize we are lying. Honesty is something we are not familiar with. Avoidance of truth has been our familiar “friend”. It has helped us avoid responsibility for our actions and has enabled us to deceive those around us. We’ve distorted the truth and told the same old lies about what happened for so long we’ve created a version of history that is a mixture of reality and false memories. After having been fooled for so long by our own lies, it’s hard to know how to be honest with God, ourselves, and others. Dishonesty kept us going in the same direction for a long time but now it is time to recognize the deceit and deal with it.

## GOSSIP

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. How has the practice of gossip been destructive to my own growth in recovery with God?
2. How does noticing and speaking about the faults of others keep me from examining my own life as I should?
3. Which forms of gossip am I most tempted to use? Slander; rumours; planting seeds of doubt; complaints; bad-mouthing, back-stabbing?
4. In my daily routine, where and with whom do I gossip? Why do I participate in gossip?
5. What's my motive when I participate in hearing or speaking gossip?
6. Why is gossip a spiritual issue that impacts my relationship with God?
7. What have I done or could I do to stop gossip?
8. Have I used the "3-question test" for wise speech? What impact does it have on what I say or don't say?
9. What does gossip have to do with a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask Your forgiveness for the times I have found fault with others and gossiped about them. Help me to recognize my error in judging others. Only You, Lord are the all-wise, righteous, and merciful judge. I am grateful that You showed me compassion and mercy when my own character defects were revealed. Help me to be patient and merciful towards others when I see character defects in them. I praise You Lord that You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Change my heart, Lord and help me to be like You. AMEN

### **Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

**A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends. Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who rejoice at the misfortune of others will be punished.** (Prov. 16:28, 17:5 NLT)

The practice of gossip is extremely destructive to our growth in living with God in recovery. Not only does gossip breed discouragement among the people being talked about, but it also keeps us from examining our own life as we should. Instead of taking inventory of ourselves, we focus our attention on the lives of others. However, our attention should be fully given to removing the character defects from our own lives before we gossip about flaws we see in others. If we don't, our gossiping lifestyle could cause us to shrink away from our own recovery while also discouraging others by what we say.

Gossip is something we say behind a person's back that we would not say if they were present in the conversation. We all say we dislike gossip, yet so often when we are offered an opportunity to hear or speak it, many of us find it impossible to resist. From God's perspective, even listening to gossip is as bad as speaking it. **Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. Do not stand idly by when your neighbor's life is threatened. I am the Lord. Wrongdoers eagerly listen to gossip; liars pay close attention to slander.** (Leviticus 19:16, Proverbs 17:4 NLT)

The God who loves us and wants a good life for us hates gossip. **I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors. I will not endure conceit and pride.** (Psalm 101:5 NLT) It would be wise to consider how God might respond to us if we continue to engage in gossip. We would be even wiser if we would persistently seek to live in a way that pleases God in everything we think and say. **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you.** (Ephesians 4:31-32 NLT)

Gossip shows up in our lives in many forms. Here are some categories of gossip and what the Bible has to say about them. In which of the following areas are we tempted to gossip?

1. Slander spreads rumors or lies about a person in order to damage them. The written form of this is called libel. The Bible mentions slander many times. **Hiding hatred makes you a liar; slandering others makes you a fool. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.** (Proverbs 10:18, 2 Timothy 3:3-4 NLT)

2. Rumors abound. We hear something and even though it's not confirmed we pass it along and gossip spreads. Harm is done to the person and often to ourselves. **Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything.** (Proverbs 13:3 MSG)

3. Speaking with innuendo and planting seeds of doubt which question a person's character or actions is another destructive form of gossip that the Bible warns us against. **It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.** (James 3:5-6 MSG)

4. It is so easy to complain when gossiping about things that are not perfect or aren't going our way. This "behind the scenes complaining" can cause great harm. **Complain if you must, but don't lash out. Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart do the talking. Build your case before God and wait for his verdict.** (Psalm 4:4-5 MSG)

5. Bad-mouthing, back-stabbing, back-biting. These words seek to describe the harmful practice of speaking negative and harmful words about someone who isn't there to defend themselves. The Bible says: **Don't speak evil against each other, dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize and judge each other, then you are criticizing and judging God's law. But your job is to obey the law, not to judge whether it applies to you. God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power**

**to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor?** (James 4:11-12 NLT)

How can we be a person who stops gossip rather than one who contributes to its spread? We first need to agree with God that the time to deal with gossip is NOW. **But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.** (Colossians 3:8 NLT)

We need to decide that we won't participate in a conversation about another person when the words that are being said would be painful for that person to hear if they were present. **The words of the godly encourage many, but fools are destroyed by their lack of common sense.** (Proverbs 10:21 NLT) If the conversation around us moves towards gossip we can change the subject and talk about something else -- anything else that is positive.

It's unlikely that we will get through too many days without hearing some gossip. However, we can end gossip by simply not passing on any of the words and rumors we have heard. **Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down.** (Proverbs 26:20 NIV)

We can make a point to counter negative things said about a person by expressing positive things about them. We can encourage a gossipier to speak to the person they are gossiping about if it would help the situation. Sometimes if we simply suggest, "I don't feel comfortable talking about this person this way", may help the gossipier to consider what they are saying. However, if a person persists in gossiping, then we are commanded by God to step away from them. He tells us plainly that it is not good for us to keep company with them. **Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. Drive out the mocker, and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended.** (Psalm 1:1, Proverbs 22:10 NIV)

We need to ask ourselves: "When do I find myself engaging in gossip? How many of my words could pass the 3-question test for wise speech? 1) Is it true? 2) Is it kind? 3) Is it necessary?" It's helpful to remember that those who gossip to us will definitely gossip about us. Let's make every effort to stop gossip today.