

Life With God In Recovery

LEAVING ANGER BEHIND



Elsie Quick and Evelyn Leeburn

LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY

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How To Enjoy New Life With God In Recovery

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

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

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

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

If you prayed that prayer sincerely from your heart, God forgives you

JUST FOR TODAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LEAVING ANGER BEHIND

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STORED ANGER

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)

SOME AREAS OF ADDICTION AND DEPENDENCY

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

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

PRAYER FOR HEALING AND RESTORATION

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

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 our lives controlled by fear.

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)

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. Did I seek approval, safety, and care from other people rather than first looking to God? How is that changing?
3. 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?
4. Do I trust that God has unfailing and unconditional love for me?
5. 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?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I renounce the fear of those events of 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 that Your perfect love will cast out all my fear. I desire to do a searching and fearless moral inventory of who I am. 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 for Your love and care for me. AMEN

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.

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

When King David did an inventory of his life 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: **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)

It’s too easy to think 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 numerous 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. Sometimes our actions towards others even mirrored the same painful behaviour that was inflicted on us.

When our personal 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 in the care of God – the God who loves us perfectly, weaknesses and all. We are also called to live confidently in the 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 way of living are something we now need to accept responsibility for, fearlessly record in our inventory, and seek God’s help to change.

To live without fear we must intentionally choose to believe God and receive the kindness and tenderness He is offering 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. Continually we must affirm God’s acceptance and forgiveness of us. We must uphold the truth that God does not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus.

We need to assess how we are growing in our dependence on God rather than allowing our current circumstances to be the measure of recovery. It should also assess our genuine forgiveness of others and our efforts to live in harmony with them.

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, I John 4:18 NKJV)

FACING FEAR WITH KINDNESS

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 trembles 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, our deepest fear is that we will find that the person we have become is someone defective. We are fearful that we will be overwhelmed by shame and guilt and 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)

DEALING WELL WITH STRESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are a number of practical things we can do to help minimize stress.

1. ***Admit we're stressed.*** As long as we tell ourselves we don't have a problem we're not positioning ourselves to seek a solution.
2. ***Make a list of what's causing stress right now.*** There are some things that cannot be changed and others that can be dealt with. We need to sort those out, and taking action where possible or necessary.
3. ***Review our list with someone we trust.*** If it's stress from being too busy, we need to seek help in setting priorities. If there are situations that require boundaries or some other action, a wise person can help us sort things out
4. ***Ask for help from God, family, friends, or co-workers.*** We have a limited amount of strength and wisdom. As we do all that we can, God will give, and bring alongside us, support and help.
5. ***Think about our use of time.*** Maybe procrastination or poor organization is the root of the problem. We can start using a diary or daytimer or talk to a counselor or organized friend for tips on how to use our time better.

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

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiving is not forgetting.
2. Forgiveness is not seeking revenge. It is simply a decision to not hold another's offence against them. It is letting another person off our hook, knowing they are still on God's hook unless they repent. Vengeance is God's. He will repay.
3. Forgiveness is not a "feeling". It is a choice we make, with God's help.
4. Forgiveness means letting go of resentment. We don't heal in order to forgive; we forgive in order to heal.
5. Forgiveness is something we do for our own sake so we can be free. Forgiveness is mainly an issue of obedience between us and God. Forgiving is how one stops the pain.
6. Forgiveness must be given from the heart. How do we do that? We allow God to uncover our mental agony, our emotional pain and feelings of resentment toward those who hurt us. We acknowledge the hurt and hate we have carried in our hearts and ask God to set us free from its bondage. We ask God to touch our emotional core and heal and restore us to new life in Him.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When is it fairly easy for me to forgive someone?
2. When does it seem difficult or even "wrong" to forgive?
3. What excuses do I make for choosing not to forgive?
4. How do I notice God working in my life in helping me give up grudges?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for loving me so much that You sent Jesus into the world as an atoning sacrifice for my sin. Please help me to forgive others their sin against me, as You have forgiven my sin against You. I bring all grudges and bitterness that I have held against others to You and ask You to set me free from the bondage I have formed for myself. I acknowledge that You are the righteous Judge and I am not. Please heal and restore those dark damaged places within me and let me walk in the light of new life with You. I am forever grateful that I can bring all my cares to You because You love and care for me. AMEN

over to God. We don't give up a dispute because someone else is necessarily right, but for the sake of allowing ourselves to be at peace with others and with God.

We can't change other people but we can ask God for the courage to change ourselves. Hanging on to a bitter grudge and seeking revenge only sickens our soul and damages those who are close to us. Bitterness is like a cancer that feeds on our insides and shows itself in outbursts of irritability, anger and resentment. Someone has said, "Holding resentment or bitterness against another person is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die."

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. (Colossians 3:12-13 NLT)

Our unwillingness to grace others, as we have been graced by God, is often the barrier to our letting go of grudges. Our desire for revenge is much stronger than the way of forgiveness. We want to be forgiven for any sins we have committed, but we want others to suffer the penalty for the sins they have committed against us. This is not how the Kingdom of God works! After being brutally beaten and nailed to the cross for all sin, Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.**" (LUKE 23:34 NKJV)

Jesus died for every wrong done to us, or done by us. We are reconciled to our Heavenly Father by Jesus' death and resurrection. As believers, to refuse to forgive someone, will cause us even more pain because we are actually disobeying God. Why not choose to forgive others their sins as God has forgiven ours? Why not take the lingering pain and resentment of offences against us to the cross where they have been atoned for? Why not be guided in all our ways by the love of God?

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1a;3 NIV)

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

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

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

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

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

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

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

ESTABLISHING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. (Psalm 3:3 NIV)

People who struggle with addiction are often those who have been exposed to life altering situations. The events may have occurred when they were children and unable to correctly process or reason why these events happened. Due to the impact of these situations their boundaries were weakened, and they learned a pattern of unhealthy responses when faced with circumstances in life that were similar. Family breakdown, abuse, discrimination, and bullying are examples of situations to which many of us have been exposed. We were forced by others to do things which did not contribute to our own well-being. We simply learned to cope in whatever way we could.

Our Heavenly Father is aware of all the events of our lives and when we enter a relationship with Him through Jesus, He will help us rebuild safe and healthy boundaries. As we receive healing for past hurts, and are enabled to forgive our offenders, we will experience the fullness of life God created us to live.

A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls. (Proverbs 25:28 NLT)

Boundaries help us live respectfully and safely in our relationships. When we define, and uphold personal boundaries, they contribute to our peace of mind. They eliminate resentful feelings which form when we feel compelled to do things that we do not want to do, and which do not contribute to our well-being. How do we follow God's way in the freedom which boundaries provide?

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 NIV)

Two actions that will contribute to a healthy lifestyle are: 1) setting personal limits; and, 2) setting limits on those we are in contact with. Both are equally important for a healthy and happy life.

Personal Boundaries: As we come into a personal relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, we discover satisfying living in a surprising form – life within limits. Imagine how our road systems would be without rules for driving. It would be utter chaos for road users. So it is with personal boundaries. Our

GRUDGE, RESENTMENT, FORGIVENESS

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. (Romans 12:17 NKJV)

We feel hurt when another's unkind words or actions cause our self-worth to be devalued. We feel violated when someone has psychologically, physically, or sexually abused us. They have taken away the dignity of the person we are and left us scars in need of healing. We want an admission of guilt for the harm done to us by the person who committed the offence. We want them to make amends. If, for whatever reason, amends are not made for sustained personal injury, we often carry grudges against the offenders which will cause us further harm.

Unresolved grudges from offences committed against us in childhood, usually show up in adulthood as deeply rooted bitterness. Some of us have carried the grief of offenses for decades, and have tried to relieve the pain and hopelessness we feel with addictive substances or co-dependent relationships. The problem is, we only cause ourselves even more grief by not dealing with these situations before God.

See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:15 NIV)

Forgiveness is the only way to stop the ongoing pain from buried grudges. For some of us who have been victimized, forgiveness is unthinkable. We still feel the pain of the offence and forgiveness rips at our sense of justice. We want the offender to pay; to suffer in return for the suffering they have inflicted on us. However, until we forgive the offender, the offence he or she committed against us, will continue to harm us. The occurrence will fester with resentment in our souls, and the link between us and the perpetrator will remain, due to our unwillingness to forgive. The Bible gives us the following advice:

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, "I will take vengeance; I will repay those who deserve it," says the Lord. Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good. (Romans 12:18-21 NLT)

These Biblical instructions may appear difficult but they are not impossible. We are not called to create peace, only to live in a peaceable state as much as we can. We are not required to say that others don't deserve punishment, only to turn judgment

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 gossip 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 gossip 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.

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. What's my motive when I participate in hearing or speaking gossip?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I ask Your forgiveness for the times I have gossiped about others. I'm wrong to judge. 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 be to be like You. **AMEN**

lives will be chaotic and at risk if we do not follow God's rules. Setting and living within personal limits is essential in helping us build our identity as beloved sons and daughters of God.

Following are some methods we can use to establish or strengthen our personal boundaries:

- ✚ We say "Yes" to those behaviours that God says bring love, joy and peace to our lives.
- ✚ We say "No" to negative behaviours that rob us of the satisfying life that God offers us.
- ✚ We rid ourselves of destructive resentment and buried anger. We find peace through forgiveness and letting go.
- ✚ We say "No" to good desires which are just not wise to pursue at this time.
- ✚ We determine to wait for healthy alternatives instead of gratifying our momentary desires with damaging sinful activities.

Live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit you are free. (Galatians 5:16-18 NLT)

Boundaries With Others: We cannot actually set limits on others but what we can do is set limits on our exposure to people who are behaving poorly. We can't change others or make them behave right. We need to let people be who they are but separate ourselves from them when their behaviour is destructive and negatively impacts us. It's beneficial for all concerned when we do this. We are not being unloving. Separating ourselves from damaging events protects love, because we are taking a stand against those things that destroy love.

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them." (Matthew 22:37-40 MSG)

How do we set healthy limits and separate ourselves from harmful events? We do whatever it takes to honour God in each situation and choose to

wholeheartedly follow His ways. We purposefully choose to live in an atmosphere of safety, blessing, and encouragement. Following are some actions we can take that will help us establish healthy boundaries with others:

- ✚ We name behaviours that are safe and unsafe for us, so our expectations are known to others.
- ✚ We take responsibility for our part in creating a safe and respectful environment.
- ✚ When words become heated or harsh we stop and step away until emotions calm down and thoughts become clear.
- ✚ We take time out to seek God's guidance and ask for counsel from a trustworthy person.
- ✚ We seek forgiveness for our role in any problem.
- ✚ We learn how to communicate and act with love and respect and ask for the same in return.
- ✚ We refuse to gossip and slander no matter how difficult the situation is, and instead entrust the person with whom we are having difficulty to God.

Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:28 NIV)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of these two are harder for me, setting boundaries for myself or setting boundaries for those whose behaviour may impact me?
2. How does God help in my boundary setting?
3. Where am I doing well and where do I need to grow in living with healthy boundaries?

Loving God, I come before You today and present my life, past, present, and future. I desire to live in the safety of Your love. Please bring healing to those wounds in my past that caused my boundaries to be broken down. Help me to forgive those who hurt me either knowingly or unknowingly. I am thankful that your grace is greater than anything that has wounded me. Give me the desire, the courage, and the strength to follow Your principles in all my affairs. Open my heart to receive Your love so that I may love others as You love me. Give me the wisdom to establish healthy boundaries in all my relationships. I am forever grateful that You love and care for me. Amen

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.

GOSSIP – THE POISON OF ANGER

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)

Gossiping 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)

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)

WHY DO I FEEL GUILTY?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATTITUDE CHECKLIST

What kind of attitude should a person living with God in recovery have?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DENIAL

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

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

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

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

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

1. **Avoidance:** We either withdraw from others to avoid talking about addiction or we try to manipulate the conversation to talk about "anything but MY problems."
2. **Arguing:** Addicts easily get into arguments about their addictive behaviour and somehow think that by strenuously denying their problems they will go away.
3. **Complete Denial:** Addicts refuse to admit they have a problem. They believe others have misrepresented their situation.
4. **Minimizing:** The addict will minimize how much or how often they use their substance of choice or how bad the problem actually is. They are unwilling to see

ATTITUDE CHECK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

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

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

that using is destroying their relationships, ability to work, and other aspects of their lives. They may admit a slight problem exists and even attempt to change by their own efforts, but, they will not admit they need help.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In recovery we learn to accept responsibility for our actions. We come to realize that our actions yield consequences. Some of us may have deceived ourselves into

thinking we could escape the consequences of the former things we did. But, with time, we have become aware that God has made accountability a necessary element of our healing, and healthy living.

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

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

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NO ACCUSATION – NO CONDEMNATION

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

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

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

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

DEALING WITH ANGER

Love is patient, Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects. Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a NIV)

We see a lot of anger in our society. We often feel angry and most of us have a hard time dealing with that anger. Some of us have a history of rage. Others learned early in life to smother our feelings to avoid anger. Anger harms our relationships whether we explode or clam up, hold a grudge, or simply let bitterness take root in us and fill us with self-pity.

A searching and fearless moral inventory will help us identify those happenings in our lives that cause us to feel angry. We may have mistakenly attributed our anger to people or situations. As we work through our inventory we will come to realize that anger is a response we choose in certain situations. It may be an ingrained comeback for painful experiences, but it is still our choice.

The Bible has much to say about an out of control angry person. Not much of it looks good. ***Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. People with a hot temper do foolish things; wiser people remain calm. If you stay calm, you are wise, but if you have a hot temper, you only show how stupid you are. A fool gives vent to their anger, but a wise person keeps themselves under control. Don't make friends with people who have hot, violent tempers. You might learn their habits and not be able to change. (Ecclesiastes 7:9, Proverbs 14:17, 29; 22:24-25; 29:11 NIV)***

For most of us the question is not “Do I get angry?” We know we do. Some questions we need to ask ourselves in an inventory about anger should include: “What's the real root of my anger?” “Do I want to get rid of anger?” “What am I willing to do to be free from destructive anger?”

The internet and books are full of coping mechanisms for dealing with anger. It's good to identify anger triggers and build strategies for moments when difficult emotions surge within us. However, the good news is, God doesn't want us to just cope with these rushes of angry feelings, God wants us to be free from them. God's desire is that we get rid of the well of pain and unforgiveness inside our soul that contributes to outbursts of rage.

God says: ***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*** (Ephesians 4:31-32 NIV) God's plan for dealing with anger is to come to Him for healing and forgiveness.

So, with God's will in mind, how do we make a searching and fearless moral inventory about anger? As thoroughly as we can, we make a list of everyone who has wronged us. One by one we bring these individuals to Jesus who died on the cross for their sin – even their sin against us. We ask Jesus to work in us so we can forgive them the wrong they did to us. We choose to forgive them completely, letting go of any need to hold a grudge or get revenge. We ask Jesus to pour healing into our soul so our pain is removed, and we don't stand vulnerable to that same person, or fear the same treatment from another person. We ask Jesus to root out of us any lingering desire for revenge or any record of wrongs that we might want to hold against this person.

For many of us who have been victimized, this kind of forgiveness seems unthinkable. We are in pain. We want the offender to pay. We want justice! However, until we forgive the offender we are tied to this person and to the past. We are only harming ourselves with our unforgiveness. Forgiveness is the only way to eliminate the pain.

The Bible says, ***"If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge. Don't let the sun go down with you still angry – get over it quickly; for when you are angry you give a mighty foothold to the devil. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*** (Ephesians 4:26-27, Mark 11:25 NIV)

If we've truly experienced God's grace, we'll want to pass it on to others. Often the barrier to our letting go of an angry grudge is our refusal to receive healing from God. The ability to forgive and grace others is therefore not passed on. We would rather hold on to our anger than forgive. In His word, God tells us to forgive others as He has forgiven us. Jesus died for all the wrongs done to us and by us. Furthermore, our Heavenly Father has entrusted all judgment to Jesus and He is the righteous judge of all people. We are not! Hanging on to our bitterness and seeking revenge only sickens our soul. Anger is like a cancer that eats us up on the inside and its effect may cause injury to innocent people who never harmed us but happened to be close when we exploded with rage over some triggering incident.

This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. (John 15:12 NLT)

Some Faces of Anger

- Impatience
- Critical thoughts
- Displeasure that leads to withdrawal
- Inwardly annoyed
- Inner tension
- Frustration
- Avoiding someone I do not like
- Lack of acceptance of someone who will not admit their mistake.
- Talking about an irritation without wanting to hear another point of view.
- Cannot forget a wrong done to me
- Feeling discouraged enough to want to quit.
- Overly aggressive in situations that don't merit it.
- Blaming others for my problems.
- Struggling with moods of depression.
- Maintaining an "I don't care" attitude towards the needs of others.
- Speaking sternly or insensitively (sometimes covered up as a joke or sarcasm).

The only antidote for hurt, frustration, and anger is love and plenty of it. The Bible tells us we are loved with an everlasting love. With unfailing love God draws each of us to himself. Will we receive it? Many of us reject Jesus' offer of love. We want love from the people we want love from – whether they are healthy enough to give it or not. Anger can only be dealt with by our receiving love and forgiveness from God and in turn choosing to love and forgive others. We love because God first loved us. All other actions of making amends and reconciling with family and friends are a result of this first love. The foundation for anger management is having an active loving relationship with God and choosing to surrender all our interactions with others to His directive. Anything less will result in fear or frustration and we will find ourselves back in the anger cycle.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What side of anger do I most recognize in me?
2. Am I aware of the real root of my anger?
3. What am I willing to do to be free from the destruction of anger?

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your great love for me. I ask You to help me identify and deal with the root of my anger. You know the situations in my life where I have felt helpless and just stuffed all that I was feeling. Help me to grieve in a healthy way all the events that contributed to my dysfunctional way of thinking and living. Thank you for your grace poured out on me. Help me to grace others in the same way You have graced me. I choose to let go of my old way of handling troublesome events with anger and live by the power of your Holy Spirit in the way You direct me. Please strengthen and help me to do this. Amen