

Life With God In Recovery

RELATIONSHIPS THAT BUILD UP



Elsie Quick and Evelyn Leeburn

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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

RELATIONSHIPS THAT BUILD UP

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THE RELATIONSHIP AT THE FOUNDTION

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 in our lives, 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. In our 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 actually know how to live in relationship. We must bring a heart willing to 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, in that safe relationship, 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 and a willingness to make the necessary adjustments. The changes we make will then become 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?"

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.

saves me. The Lord will work out his plans for my life—for your faithful love, O Lord, endures forever. (Psalm 138:6-8 NLT)

We can't ask for God's help to remove our shortcomings just once and expect to be done with it. We must be persistent and ask repeatedly as the need arises. The work of removing whatever shortcomings are revealed is a process which will continue until we become more like Jesus in all our ways.

Ask and keep on asking and it shall be given you; seek and keep on seeking and you shall find; knock and keep on knocking and the door shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks and keeps on asking receives; and he who seeks and keeps on seeking finds; and to him who knocks and keeps on knocking, the door shall be opened. (Luke 11:9-10 AMP)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. Where am I recognizing stubborn pride that reflects my old ways of coping and surviving?
2. When difficulties arise, how am I learning to respond in a positive way rather than reacting from an injured ego?
3. In what situations is it easy for me to neglect God's way and default to behaving out of my character defects?
4. How am I learning to "live and let live" when others are unwilling to correct their mistaken perspective and continue to behave in negative ways?

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your commitment to remove my defects of character as I willingly surrender my will and my life into your care. Forgive me for the many times I've arrogantly gone back to my own agenda when I've experienced disappointment and hurt from others and tried to sort things out "MY" way. Forgive me for the mess I made of it all. Help me behave as the person You say I am, rather than in response to the flawed accusations of others. Give me grace to keep on asking for wisdom in all my ways. Help me to release others into your care and let them live their own lives. Thank you for the comfort and care you give me today. I open my heart to receive Your healing and unfailing love for me. I am forever grateful that You care. AMEN

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 of us come to recovery longing for a new way of life in relationship with God, family and others. In the first three steps we acknowledge our powerlessness, our need for a higher power, and even begin a life of surrender to God as we understand Him. Life appears to be going in the right direction but then the challenges begin to surface as we consider making an inventory of our 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 and others will shock us by how different God's view of life in relationship is from what we've known. A searching, fearless, and moral inventory that is structured by God will challenge us, both in terms of what we must now do, and what we must no longer do.

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 of our flawed 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 both what we did, and why we did it. This may cause us pain as we uncover what we have tried to cover up, but 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 carefully remove those things that have hindered us from living a satisfying and pleasing life and not damage what is healthy and good.

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 how wonderful life is when we inventory our behaviour in the light of God's word and begin living accordingly.

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. Do I believe God can change me so I can have a loving and meaningful relationship with Him?
5. 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 according to Your word. I want to be completely honest 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 Jesus did on the cross for me. I want to be attentive to You and Your plans. Change me from the inside out. I surrender myself into Your care and trust in your unconditional love for me. I choose to follow You in all my ways. Amen

When God says to forgive others for what they have done to us, we need to pay attention and do what He says. When we continue to hold a demand on someone to "make a wrong right" with us, we are making our forgiveness conditional. We are, in fact, asking the person to earn their forgiveness. Stubborn pride considers that those who hurt us are not worthy of our forgiveness and the real desire of our hearts towards them is that they receive justice instead of mercy. In our conceit we set ourselves up as judge and jury over them. God's way of mercy and love is very different from our patterns of reacting out of an injured ego.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. (Romans 12:16-17 NIV)

Humility enables us to stand together with God when hurt and injustice happen, and invite Him to strengthen us as we walk with Him through the difficulty. Those who negatively impacted our well-being may continue on a destructive path and never care about the hurt and harm their wrongs inflicted on us. God still promises to work out His plan for our lives in a way that demonstrates His unfailing love for us. If we truly want to build a purposeful life, it is necessary to come to God with a humble heart, particularly in challenging situations such as these, and willingly follow the directions He has given in His Word.

Don't bad-mouth each other, friends. It's God's Word, his Message, his Royal Rule, that takes a beating in that kind of talk. You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it. God is in charge of deciding human destiny. Who do you think you are to meddle in the destiny of others? (James 4:11-12 MSG)

How do we know when we are living in humility rather than in stubborn pride? 1) When we are willing to obey God's Word and walk in the path of righteous living. 2) When we leave the opinions and misunderstanding of others with them, comfort and strengthen ourselves by telling ourselves the truth, and act in ways that demonstrate we believe that what God says is true. 3) When we rely on God to protect our hearts and are willing to receive healing and comfort as we let go of anger and hurt.

Though the Lord is great, he cares for the humble, but he keeps his distance from the proud. Though I am surrounded by troubles, you will protect me from the anger of my enemies. You reach out your hand, and the power of your right hand

STUBBORN PRIDE

You rebuke the arrogant; those who wander from your commands are cursed.
(Psalm 119:21 NLT)

Our former strategy for surviving has not worked and yet we are, to some extent, unwilling to submit to the methods God says work. We need to give up the arrogance of neglecting God's instructions when our own desires pull us in the opposite direction. Repeatedly in the Bible, God tells us that he resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, showing them His ways.

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. 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 faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:2-3 NIV)

Pride is evident in our lives when we think negative, angry, or victimized thoughts. Pride enables us to believe that we know best what to do when we have been harmed, or are offended by someone, or when other problems arise. Through pride, we resolve to use our own solutions, which are fatally flawed, and so end up basing our actions on stinking thinking. The result is that instead of solving problems, we become slaves to destructive dependencies, which give us only temporary relief from pain and injustice. Pride helps us believe that we do not have a problem. We justify our dysfunctional behaviour by blaming it on negative events that have impacted our lives. Pride says "I will do it MY way" regardless of the consequences.

God's word in the Bible has some things to say about pride. ***Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. A fool's mouth lashes out with pride, but the lips of the wise protect them. Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.*** (Proverbs 13:10; 14:3; 16:18; 29:23 NIV)

When we accept the fact that we have shortcomings which contribute to our powerlessness over our dependencies, we arrive at that place where we know we need to humbly ask God for help. God is willing to support us and guide us into the healing and restoration that we need. However, we must acknowledge that only God, in His infinite wisdom, has correct solutions for dealing with our shortcomings.

SHOWING RESPECT

When some folks were asked on a blog what makes a person worthy of respect they listed qualities such as: integrity, trustworthiness, adhering to a code of honour, goodness, decency, being respectful of others. Most of us would agree that qualities like these would be evident in people to whom we would show respect. However, even in our new life in recovery, we find ourselves behaving in ways that are just the opposite. We believe we have good reason why we do not treat some people with respect. Politicians, church officials, and other leaders make faulty decisions or behave badly, and we reason they don't deserve respect. People may do things that hurt us, frustrate us, or make us angry and we react with disrespect. In so many ways, we justify our disrespect even though God says to respect everyone.

Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king. (1 Peter 2:17 NLT)

Respect shows high regard for authority, other people, self, property, and country. We show respect by treating others as we want them to treat us. All people have value as human beings, regardless of their status or behaviour and we commit ourselves to living that way. Showing respect and being worthy of respect matters to God. The "Ten Commandments", ^(Exodus 20:3-17) given by God to His people, were instructions which empower God's people to honour God, and live respectfully with each other. The first four commandments were given to help people know how to respect and honour God, their creator. The following six were given to help them show respect to their parents and live morally and in peaceful harmony with their neighbours.

People who despise advice are asking for trouble; those who respect a command will succeed. (Proverbs 13:13 NLT)

It is God's will that we be respectful of our parents, people in authority, people around us, and their property. This is difficult when we face those who have harmed us. Some of us may attribute our low self-esteem or addictive lifestyle to the disrespectful ways others have behaved towards us. However, no matter how badly others have treated us, this does not nullify the commandments of God.

It is God's standard that, as we forgive those who have been disrespectful towards us, God will forgive us for having spoken and acted in disrespectful ways toward others. Forgiveness breaks our bondage to the events that caused

us to stray from being the person God created us to be. God is a righteous judge and He can be trusted to judge the other person's harmful actions. That person is accountable before God unless they also repent.

Servants, respectfully obey your earthly masters but always with an eye to obeying the real master, Christ. Don't just do what you have to do to get by, but work heartily, as Christ's servants doing what God wants you to do. And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving the orders, you're really serving God. (Ephesians 6:5-7 MSG)

The book of Genesis in the Bible tells us the story of a man named Joseph. Joseph was loved by his father but not by many others, including his own brothers. For more than 13 years Joseph suffered unfair treatment – including being sold into slavery, imprisoned on a false accusation of rape, and broken promises for a fair hearing of his case before Pharaoh. No matter what situation Joseph found himself in, he honoured God and respected those around him. (Read the story in Genesis 39-42)

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27 NIV)

Joseph must have felt frustrated by the undeserved harm that others caused him by their character defects. He was sold as a slave by his own brothers and justice failed him for doing the right thing when his master was absent. Joseph may have had some pity-parties over the impact of disrespectful people and unfair events that seemed to happen repeatedly but, even on the darkest days, Joseph continued to honour God and respect those around him. In God's timing, Joseph was honoured and raised up to be a leader over the very people who had unfairly treated him. In the life plan that God had for Joseph, he was in the right place at the right time to rescue many people from starvation. God's plan also worked in an amazing way to restore the relationship between Joseph and his family.

But now the Lord declares: 'Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.' My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me. (1 Samuel 2:30, Psalm 62:7, Psalm 50:15 NIV).

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".

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. When I am feeling lonely, do I look to God or others first?
3. Self-pity and loneliness are close companions. What positive truths do I need to remember and reaffirm when I feel worthless and lonely?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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

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 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

We have all heard the saying, "actions speak louder than words". This is extremely important in the matter of giving respect to others around us and over us. As God has been kind and merciful to us, he commands us to be kind and compassionate towards others – all others. God's standard is not, "some of the people some of the time". God's standard is, "all of the people in all circumstances". It seems an impossible standard and, without God's grace and forgiveness it is. But with God's grace and forgiveness, we will be able to treat others with honour and respect in all our affairs. When we honour God with our lives, we can expect that, just like Joseph, God will honour us before others.

Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12 NLT)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION and DISCUSSION

1. In what situations am I challenged to show respect?
2. When and how do I justify my disrespectful words or behaviour?
3. What would it take for me, in "less than perfect" situations, to practice ongoing respect?
4. What changes do I need to ask God to make in me, so I can honour Him in all my affairs?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I ask you to give me the will and the desire to obediently follow Your way in whatever circumstances I am presented with. Your word says, both riches and honour come from You and You hold strength and power in the palm of Your hand. When hard times come, help me to remember that You are always with me and I am choosing to walk in Your plan for my life. Help me to honour and respect you not just in what I do, but also in my thoughts, motivation, and desires. Strengthen me and help me to show respect to each person I meet, even when I may disagree with their ways. I am forever grateful that You love and care for me. 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

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.

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)

one. Are we willing, like Jesus was, to look towards the welfare of our family, our friends and those around us? How can we honour them? God is willing to help us be the person He created us to be – a person who experiences honour as we honour Him and others.

“The Lord says, ‘I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.’” (Psalm 91:14-16 NLT)

Questions For Discussion And Reflection

1. Honour begins in my own heart. In what ways do I honour the precious person God has made me to be?
2. When no one is looking am I still living honourably or am I cutting corners on what the right thing is to do?
3. In what ways have I purposefully tried to honour those around me?
4. Are we willing, like Jesus was, to look towards the welfare of our family, our friends and those around us? How can we honour them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, You created me to be a person of dignity and honour. Help me to see myself and others as You see each of us. Help me to receive Your love for me today until my heart is full so I can live in love with others and honour them. We are all fragile human beings and we need Your help to live with respect and offer that to others. Help us to treat others as we would have them treat us. When necessary, help us to lay down our rights and honour others. At the same time, help us to make and keep healthy boundaries so we all can reflect Your grace to each other. 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

even one.” (Psalm 14:1-3 NIV)

When we set our minds to believe that God is real and loves us with an all-embracing love, it will begin to reflect in our behaviour. There is no way we can receive all the love that God pours out on us and not have it spill over into loving others around us. God commands that we honour our Father and Mother. This command may also be applied to our primary care givers. The honour we are to give to our parents is not based on their parenting skills but on their position of authority over us. When married we are told to honour our spouse and to keep the marriage bed pure. God knows how adultery and sexual immorality harms us and His desire is that we fulfill our commitment to our spouse in order that our own purity is preserved. With regards to others, we are instructed to love one another and to honour others above ourselves. Integrity in these disciplines will be achieved when we first find respect for ourselves in the grace that God so generously pours out on us.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Exodus 20:12; Hebrews 13:4; Romans 12:10 NIV)

In our life without God we may have retaliated in anger and caused strife when we were not treated with the respect we thought we deserved. In our mind our worth had been devalued by what was said or done and we felt that our dignity had suffered. We saw ourselves as deserving more respect. We retaliated by trying to “set the person or persons right” about the honour they should have given us. While fighting for the honour we thought we deserved, were we prepared to treat them with the same honour that we expected to receive from them? Would we be willing to even give up our perceived rights and honour them above ourselves?

“How blessed the man you train, God, the woman you instruct in your Word, Providing a circle of quiet within the clamor of evil, while a jail is being built for the wicked. God will never walk away from his people, never desert his precious people. Rest assured that justice is on its way and every good heart put right.” (Psalm 94:12-15 MSG)

God wants our lives to reflect His image. Jesus said that anyone who had seen Him had also seen His Father. He reflected His Father's character when He went about doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the evil

LIVING AS HONOURABLE PEOPLE

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10 NIV)

God created us to live as honourable people – honouring God, honouring others, and experiencing the joy of living as a person of dignity and honour. This is the life with God in recovery that is truly satisfying and meaningful. Anything less leaves us dissatisfied and vulnerable to unhealthy ways of living. How can we find this good life?

BELIEVE RIGHT: What we believe will cause us to act in an honourable way towards others and in so doing preserve our personal honour. When we believe in the Loving God of the Bible as our Higher Power, then we are guided by Him and live accountable to His laws. God, our creator, knows the best way for His creation to live and as we read the Bible we find out what that life looks like. One of the Pharisees' religious scholars asked Jesus which of the commandments in all of God's laws was the most important. He answered and said that there are two laws on which all of God's laws are based and that is to love God and love your neighbour.

“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)

If we are unsure if God exists or believe that God does not exist then we think we determine our own behaviour and are only accountable to the laws of the country in which we live. If we break a law, and get caught, then we pay the penalty set by that law for our behaviour. Governments add to, or remove laws, in the belief that the laws will cause the community to honour one another and protect property. However, today's society seems to be on a collision course with the law and appears to be more interested in their individual rights rather than in the common good of society. Life, without God in it, does not lead to society honouring one another above themselves.

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not

HEALING BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships matter. While on earth, Jesus demonstrated how to live in a loving relationship with His Father as He consulted with Him about everything He did. Just like Jesus, having a loving personal relationship with God, and consulting with Him about everything we do, is the foundation for our life as believers and persons in recovery. When we experience the love and peace that this intimate relationship with God brings, the desire for our earthly relationships to be renewed and restored will be stirred within us. For most of us though, when we think of the things that have been harmful in our past interactions with others, this may sound like a big undertaking and, in early recovery it may seem overwhelming. Perhaps for a long time some of our relationships may have been the focus of our frustration, our heartbreak, and our confusion. At first glance, restoration of these relationships may seem impossible. However, we are coming to know and experience that, with God, all things are possible.

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. 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 2:1-4 NLT)

With God's help, we can choose to seek restoration of any relationship that is in need of healing. This process may be undertaken as follows:

1. **ADMIT THAT WHAT I NEED MUST FIRST COME FROM GOD:** Our relationships often go wrong when we have unrealistic expectations of others. Just what do people have a right to expect from each other, anyway? In 12-Step programs of recovery we learn to accept ourselves as people who are highly valued by God as He gave His only son Jesus to die on the cross, in our place, to pay the price of our sin. When we receive Jesus into our lives and become spiritual children of a loving God we become people who belong. We believe that God, in His great love for us, wants us to feel secure, accepted, cared for, and appreciated. Our value and peace must come from God. However, many people in recovery bypass this primary relationship with God and end up demanding security, acceptance, love, and appreciation from others. Haven't we all heard, "I have a right to be" Many things go wrong in relationships when we approach others with "rights" and "expectations". No one owes us anything, and what they may give us, or refuse to give us, does not change the God given value and security that is ours as

beloved children of God. We are cared for by His comforting and sustaining Spirit every moment of our day.

2. GIVE UP UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS OF OTHERS: We continue the process of healing broken relationships as we give up the expectation that others must appreciate, accept and care for us. Such care would be nice to experience and we need to continue, with God's help, to seek this type of safe and caring relationship with a healthy person. However, we will never find full peace of mind and heart from another person and will continue to live in ongoing frustration if we carry this kind of unrealistic expectation in our relationships. Healthy relationships will only happen when we stop seeking to build those relationships based on our needs. God's way is that we come together with others to first bless and share God's goodness together. As God generously gives to us, we will be able to give to others without expectation, and surprisingly, we will in turn, receive blessings from others in return.

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3 NLT)

3. IDENTIFY AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF INTERACTION: A healthy circle of relationships includes a number of different levels of sharing and interaction. We have acquaintances with whom we simply "meet and greet", casual friends with whom we share some events and meetings, closer friends with whom we may share the issues of our hearts and perhaps have some mutual support, wise persons we may seek out for counsel, and maybe just one or two persons with whom we share the deepest things of our heart who may be our spouse or perhaps a life-long friend. We often bring problems into a relationship when we expect a person to provide a level of support and care that is more than what that relationship is intended to bring. With God's guidance and perhaps the help of a wise person, we can experience peace and give thanks for each relationship as we recognize, honour, and allow that relationship to simply be what God intended.

4. DEAL WITH BREACHES OF TRUST: Broken promises, lying, cheating, stealing, betraying, etc. are breaches of trust and this behaviour and the underlying issues need to be sorted out if restoration of the relationship is to be achieved. Before we go to the other person and attempt to sort out what went wrong, we need to deal with our underlying issues before God. We need to establish if resentment or a sense of entitlement has fueled our behaviour. We need to be honest about our part in the

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)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What obsessive thoughts are lurking within me that have, in the past, made me vulnerable to relapse? How am I hiding that vulnerability?
2. 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?
3. What positive action am I taking to get past the feeling of being empty and vulnerable? What action am I avoiding taking today? Why?

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 to 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 Yours as you lift us up and take us forward in our recovery. We are forever grateful that you care. AMEN

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 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

breakdown and seek input as to how we can make it right. Our purpose must always be to seek restoration and not to establish blame.

And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5 NLT)

5. APPROACH WITH BLESSING AND SHARING RATHER THAN NEEDING AND GETTING: We build toxic relationships because we are needy. We carry within our being a deep need to be loved. God created us that way. God's nature is giving and blessing and we need to establish in our hearts and minds that He made us in His image. God's intent is that we love each other as He loves us. His plan is that we approach each relationship with the qualities of giving and blessing rather than needing and getting.

Question for Reflection and Discussion

What needs to change in me as I seek to relate to God and to others as God intends?

Gracious God, You know where healing is needed in my relationships. Help me to let go of unrealistic expectations I put on others. You are the one who meets my deepest needs and I've been trying to force others to do that. It's impossible for them to do what You alone can do. Please give me understanding to know what kind of relationship I'm meant to have with others. When things do break down, as they will in every relationship from time to time, help us to deal with what's going on, forgive one another, and make a fresh start at doing things well. Help us to love one another as You love us. AMEN

CO-DEPENDENT NO MORE

The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. (Isaiah 58:11 NLT)

Co-dependency is a relationship addiction which touches many lives. People who are co-dependent often form relationships that are one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive. The co-dependent person bases their identity and personal value on who they perceive themselves to be in a harmful relationship. They interact with the other person in ways that are detrimental to their own well-being.

Characteristics of co-dependency include:

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to “love” people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don’t recognize their efforts
- An extreme need for approval and recognition
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others
- Fear of being abandoned or alone
- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy and/or lacking boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty
- Poor communications
- Difficulty making decisions¹

We are living co-dependently when we are looking to another to affirm and maintain our value. The person we are looking to has limited ability to understand us, or to provide for our needs. When another is co-dependently looking to us, we also face these limitations. That’s why we do such a poor job when we try to rescue or prop up another person. God wants each of us to come to that place where we first identify with Him and acknowledge who we are in Christ. Contentment in life does not come from trying to control another

VULNERABILITY – RUNNING ON EMPTY

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)

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.

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

so they will meet our needs or, by trying to please someone so they will like us and meet our need to feel secure.

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)

Fullness of life and real freedom from co-dependency can only be found when we are first rooted in a relationship with our Heavenly Father. We need to acknowledge that God made us in His own image and we have great value in His sight. When we base our worth and identity around this truth, rather than on the opinions of others, we will begin to experience peace, freedom and security. What does God say about who we are and why He actually created us?

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Ephesians 1:4-5 NLT)

From God's perspective, these things are true about me:

1. I am a loved person. I do not have to earn love. Jesus loves and values me. God says: ***I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.*** (Jeremiah 31:3 NLT)
2. I am a chosen person. I have nothing to prove or accomplish in order to be chosen, wanted and accepted. God has already chosen me. ***Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself.*** (Romans 8:3 NLT)
3. I am a forgiven person. There is no sin too evil for God to forgive. The blood of Jesus cleanses all sin. ***God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.*** (1 Peter 1:2 NLT)
4. I am a person of love and power and wisdom. God lives in me and blesses me with new life. God gives me power to make wise choices. ***For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*** (2 Timothy 1:7 NLT)
5. Although I am a limited human being, I belong to the God who has limitless power and unconditionally loves me and those I love. ***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.*** (Psalm 33:6-7;18 NIV)

God is committed to walking with us while we learn how to live well in relationship with Him and with others. Life will become satisfying as we learn to relax in the acceptance of God's unfailing love for us. When our self-worth is not based on our success or failure, we will move away from a lifestyle of co-dependency. ***Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.*** (Isaiah 41:10 NLT)

We need to abandon the impossible expectations we put on others. Another person cannot love us enough or touch us deeply enough to satisfy the longing in our hearts. Only God can truly satisfy those longings. As far as it depends on us, we need to understand that we have only limited responsibility for another's happiness. We have our own desires and dreams and we need to let others have theirs. We make our own mistakes and others will make theirs. We need to forgive ourselves and others and determine to learn from the mistakes we have made. God is active in our lives and, as we seek Him, He will teach us His ways. We will build healthy relationships with others when we pursue God first.

¹<http://mentalhealthamerica.net/co-dependency>

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What aspects of co-dependency do I battle with?
2. Why is building a healthy relationship with God more important than holding on to a co-dependent relationship with another person? Why do we so easily choose the wrong way in this situation?
3. In what ways do we sometimes behave in a co-dependent way with God?
4. How does knowing and affirming God's view of me help me avoid co-dependent behaviour?
5. What have I learned that challenges me in my relationships?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for caring for me and for those I am in relationship with. I ask You to show me the way to live in a healthy relationship. I acknowledge that I need to begin with my relationship with You. Help me to believe and put into action what You say in Your Word. Forgive me for the times I have chosen to be co-dependent with another. Help me to love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. Help me to love and care for others with the same love and care You have shown me. Teach me Your ways that I may live according to Your truth. I am forever grateful to be loved and accepted by You. 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.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN ONE ANOTHER

One of the characteristics of life in addiction is isolation from others and doing things on our own. The life God created us to live, and which we seek to recover is one where we come close to God and others and allow relationships to grow that help all of us live better.

Can we remember a time when someone encouraged us to have hope, to keep going, to do the right thing? What did that person do that felt encouraging? True friends help us become the people we were born to be. Sometime it's as basic as encouraging each other to be our best in daily activities, daily decisions, and spiritual growth. At other times, it's helping us discover our gifts and moving forward to use them for good.

People loved to spend time with Jesus. Everywhere He went, Jesus told people that the kingdom of God was available to them. Jesus taught that anyone who was part of the kingdom of God was a citizen with dignity, a worthwhile servant of the King, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Jesus called people forward to be the wonderful gift God created them to be. We will grow in our own recovery when we practice encouraging others in their journey.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 NIV)

Friendship is based on shared values and goals. At one level people can be friends just because they enjoy the same games or crafts. However, lasting friendship happens when people share their deepest and most important values with each other. A passion to see wrongs made right, for example, can bond friends together no matter what they have to face. If each friend sees the other and believes in the other as salt and light, that encourages and strengthens the person so they become more than they could have been on

their own. Knowing God is with us and with our friend is a cord that binds us together in His love.

A real friend helps us carry our burdens, encourages and builds us up, helps us move toward restoration from a challenging experience, and spurs us on to love and good deeds. A real friend doesn't climb into a dark and complaining place with us. A good friend stands with us as we face what comes our way and helps us find God's plan in it.

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. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (From Galatians 6, Hebrews 3, and 10)

Many of us struggle with self-acceptance. Sometimes we compare ourselves with others – their looks, their gifts, their achievements. However, true friendship means seeing ourselves as peers, encouragers, and cheerleaders in each other's lives. We affirm one another for a job well done, and we open doors for each other to try new things and take healthy risk. We air our feelings out loud without fear of rejection and know that with God's help and our friend at our side, we will get better and better at sorting out the pieces in the puzzle of life.

Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family. (Proverbs 18:24 MSG)

Here are some things friends do to bring out the best in us:

- Friends stimulate our faith walk with God. They pray for us.
- Friends ask questions. They laugh and cry with us.
- Friends encourage us to try new things
- Friends affirm our strengths and are not threatened by our successes.
- Friends remind us of hope when we feel discouraged.
- Friends challenge us to take a healthy risk.
- Friends stick with us when everyone else gives up on us.
- Friends notice and compliment us on a job well done.

In our recovery, today, we would do well to watch for an opportunity to be a friend to someone, to carry a burden, to encourage and build someone up, to spur someone on to love and good deeds. As we respect their uniqueness, we can ask ourselves, "What would feel encouraging to this person? What would motivate this person to fulfill their calling? Is there anything this person needs? How can I be a supportive friend to this person?"

Someone has said, "A simple friend thinks the problems you whine about are recent." A real friend says, "You've been whining about the same thing for years. Get off your duff and do something about it."

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I being a friend?
2. How am I reaching out to include the joy and wisdom of friends in my life?
3. What happens that moves me away from friends towards isolation and makes me vulnerable for relapse?
4. Comparing – why do I get caught up in it? What am I doing to change?
5. How deeply or how honestly am I letting myself be known by others?
6. What might I do to improve as a person who "brings out the best" in others?

Dear Jesus, I admit that I struggle with the notion of being a true friend. Please help me take my eyes off myself. Help me to look around at others and truly care about what is going on in their lives. Help me to be friendly towards others as I would be to a beloved brother or sister. Each person I meet could be a potential friend. Help me to be as salt and light to those around me. Help me to learn from You. I am forever grateful that You are a true friend who cares for me. AMEN