

## Healing for Damaged Emotions 5 *“Addressing our Addictions”*

I enter this discussion with some fear and trepidation. I don't know as much about this multi-layered onion called Addiction as I should. It's not that I don't have plenty of personal experience wrestling with my own addictions; but on a clinical level, I'm way behind the curve. Add to that the significant discord and disagreement, even within the medical and social science communities about what causes addiction; and you get a sense of my fear. I cannot stand here and clearly declare why we have addictions or we don't. I cannot stand here and quote the Bible, chapter and verse to address all the variant types, styles, and manifestations of addictions. I can't stand up here and declare the subject is simple, and we'll get it solved in the next 20 minutes!

But would it be safe to say we all have our addictions, at some level? Yes, I think so, because not all addictions are bad, though by definition, an addiction is a “compulsive use of a substance, or engagement in an activity despite ongoing negative consequences”. Not all our addictions produce negative consequences. Someone who reads the Bible everyday might be defined as an addict, but it certainly isn't unhealthy or negative to do that. Someone who exercises appropriately everyday, might be labeled an exercise addict by someone (like me) who doesn't, but there is not a classic definition of negative consequences attached to exercise. Even some who engage in obsessive and compulsive behaviors, which are defined as addictions, are not necessarily experiencing negative consequences. We could debate this forever, but can we just agree that it lays within the soul – heart – mind – and life, of MOST of us fallen human beings the propensity to become addicted, if we are not already addicted to something?

And lest you think the Bible is completely silent on this subject, consider this passage that will engage us today from Galatians 5. Yes, it is from The Message.

*It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable **addictions**; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom. Galatians 5:18-20*

These are strong words describing many of the negative consequences of using addictive substances and engaging in addictive behaviors. As interesting as it might be to explore all the competing theories of what causes addictions, I believe our time better spent exploring how to address, maybe even deal with our addictions. This morning the majority of my message will be borrowed, from a variety of sources; the primary one being the primary tool of recovery being used effectively all across the world: Alcoholics Anonymous. This wonderful peer operated group has morphed into all kinds of groups dealing with all kinds of addictions; Gamblers Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Meth Anonymous, (not Methodist Anonymous – though maybe we should form one of those), sex addicts anonymous, and many many others. I thought it might be helpful to study the successful principles or steps AA have used for over 75 years in their organization. I will add to them from a modern evolution of this group called Celebrate Recovery, which was birthed by Rick Warren and one of his staff leaders at Saddleback Church in California a few years ago. They will provide the scriptural connections for us. I'll also try to simplify or summarize the 12 steps into 12 words to hopefully make them more memorable and descriptive of the Spiritual processes that will help us from becoming what our scripture warns us we certainly will if we don't bridle our addictive human nature. So here are the 12 steps:

**Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) Step 1- We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.**

**Celebrate Recovery (CR) Step 1 - We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.**

*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. Romans 7:18*

### **Spiritual Principle (SP) 1- HONESTY**

You are going to see that there are little subtle differences between AA and CR. Many people have demonized AA as a godless attempt to help someone recover from whatever addiction they face; but I hope you'll see from the comparison of the two that AA is not at all godless.

This first principle is simply being honest as a starting point to recovery. Not unlike our beginning principle in dealing with healing of damaged emotions: we must admit that we have issues, and we must agree we want to be healed. After many years of denial, recovery can begin with one simple admission of being powerless over alcohol – or whatever other addiction plagues us.

**AA Step 2- We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

**CR Step 2- We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:13*

### **SP 2- FAITH**

Remember it is CR that provides the scriptures, but note that each group recognizes this unnamed power which has restorative power for our struggle. I add to that FAITH, which seems to me to be the agency or linkage which connects us with this higher power. It seems to be a spiritual truth that before a higher power can begin to operate; you must first believe, or have faith, that it can.

**AA Step 3- We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.**

**CR Step 3- We made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God.**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.* Romans 12:1

### **SP 3- SURRENDER**

Here we notice the first substantive difference. AA refers to God “as we understand Him”. Again, some have dismissed AA because of what they believe to be a humanistic choice to make God whatever we choose or want God to be. In reading the history of AA, that was not at all their intent. The founders simply wanted this effort, to engage people in recovery, not to be limited to one understanding of religion, or even God. It was not that they were saying we can make up any kind of God we want, they were trying to recognize the validity of others who may look or experience God differently than we do.

I'd be cautious about surrendering my life to a God that was limited by my own ability to understand Him. The principle must not be missed however: a lifetime of self-will run amok can come to a screeching halt, and change forever, by making a simple decision to turn it all over to a higher power; we call that power God – sometimes Jesus – sometimes the Holy Spirit.

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

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

*Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.* Lamentations 3:40

### **SP 4- SOUL-SEARCHING**

There is a saying in the 12-step programs that recovery is a process, not an event. We've talked about this a couple times already in this series. I think it is significant that part of the process of recovery or healing of our damaged emotions, is that we take time to do honest soul searching, and see what we find. Most addictive behaviors meet some need, illegitimate or not.

Not many people drink alcohol to excess because they are thirsty – it meets some other need. In this step we spend time with God, searching for what is missing – trying to find answers.

**AA Step 5- We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

**CR Step 5- We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. James 5:16*

### **SP 5- INTEGRITY**

This step involves confession, and to a certain extent, accountability; and it takes great integrity to reveal your soul to another. When you agree to share with another human being, then you've in a sense pledged to them or asked from them, help to hold you accountable. Sometime we need to experience Jesus – with skin on! This is likely one of the most difficult of all the steps to face; Step 5 is also the one that provides the greatest opportunity for growth. All the steps are important, and pretty tightly chronological, to be done in this order; but this one is huge; when we can finally and honestly admit to another all our screw-ups; we are on our way to health and recovery.

**AA Step 6- We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

**CR Step 5- We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10*

### **SP 6- ACCEPTANCE**

The key to Step 6 is acceptance -- accepting our character defects exactly as they are, and becoming entirely willing to let them go. So many addicts, who fail initial or early attempts at recovery, don't get this step.

It has to do with the honest admission and willful acceptance that we are damaged people; that we have all made mistakes; that we fight powers that when left unchecked rule and ruin us.

**AA Step 7- We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.**

**CR Step 7- We humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.**

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

### **SP 7- HUMILITY**

The spiritual focus of Step 7 is humility, asking a higher power to do something that cannot be done by self-will or mere determination. How many of us get tripped up here? We think that we can and must fix ourselves, deal with our own problems, resolve our own issues. The reality of addiction is; that we are powerless to save ourselves! Thinking otherwise is pride; thinking rightly is humility!

**AA Step 8- We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**

**CR Step 8- We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.**

*Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31*

### **SP 8- WILLINGNESS**

At this point recovery takes a subtle turn, we begin to include how our actions have affected other people. This step might be labeled taking responsibility or becoming accountable for our actions. It may involve restitution or making right; wrongs we've done. Making a list of those we've harmed and the ways we've harmed them might sound simple, but actually making those amends will be considerably harder.

**AA Step 9- We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

**CR Step 9- We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**

*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23*

### **SP 9- FORGIVENESS**

Making amends may seem like a bitter pill to swallow, but for those serious about recovery it can be great medicine for the spirit and soul. Asking for forgiveness is not easy, it involves an admission of guilt and a plea for leniency, compassion, and grace – something we don't do very easily, but must do of necessity.

**AA Step 10- We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.**

**CR Step 10- We continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.**

*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! 1 Corinthians 10:12*

### **SP 10- MAINTENANCE**

This seems redundant and maybe not even necessary, but it is. Addiction recovery is not easy, and maintaining our good habits, learned through this process can be helpful. That's why most all these various groups meet regularly, and why most recovering addicts remain such by regular maintenance, including attending meetings; its part of good maintenance.

**AA Step 11- We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.**

**CR Step 11- We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and power to carry that out.**

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Colossians 3:16*

### **SP 11- KEEPING CONTACT**

The purpose of Step 11 is committing to regular disciplines in order to keep in contact with God, and further, to discover the plan God has for our life.

Sometimes addicts think that removing the addictive behavior is the end; when in reality, most failures and slips happen because we fail to replace the addictive behavior with other healthy behaviors. Prayer, meditation, and I'd include worship, fellowship, giving and service; help us keep in contact with God and God's will for our lives.

**AA Step 12- Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

**CR Step 12- Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore them gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Galatians 6:1*

### **SP 12- SERVICE**

For those in recovery programs, practicing Step 12 is, "taking it to the streets". There will come a time in most every process of recovery, and in most every event of healing of damaged emotions; a time to share what you're learning in order to help another. We hurt our processes of recovery or healing when we jump into this step too quickly, but when we are ready, there will be someone who can benefit from what we've experienced, and what we've learned. Don't be anxious and don't be afraid.

My friends, addictions abound. Maybe you don't have any, and everything you've heard here today was new to you. Good for you. But maybe you were reciting these steps from memory as I read them. To all of us, I want to encourage us to keep going, keep trying, keep humbly surrendering...to God. Amen.

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