



The Frantic Cry for Comfort

**Some thoughts on addiction
for the Christian community**

Richard A. Hindmarsh, MD

THE FRANTIC CRY FOR COMFORT

Richard A. Hindmarsh, MD



An imprint of Fractured Resilience Publisher

Copyright © 2020 by Richard A. Hindmarsh. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the author fracturedresilience@gmail.com.

Published in Lebanon, Oregon, by Fractured Resilience Publishing.

Scripture from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Amplified Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

The Passion Translation®. Copyright © 2017, 2018 by Passion & Fire Ministries, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ThePassionTranslation.com.

ISBN: 9798625554947

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 2020905231

Contents

Introduction _____	7
Chapter 1 – Fearfully and Wonderfully Made _____	9
Chapter 2 – The Cry for Comfort and Control _____	13
Chapter 3 - Physical Pain _____	19
Chapter 4 – Emotional Pain _____	23
Chapter 5 – Existential Pain _____	29
Chapter 6 – Pain in Real Time _____	37
Chapter 7 – Addiction _____	41
Chapter 8 – Chemicals of Addiction _____	55
Chapter 9 – Recovery from Addiction _____	73
Chapter 10 – Medication-assisted Treatment _____	88
Chapter 11 – My Loved One is an Addict _____	91
Chapter 12 – First Steps _____	97
Chapter 13 – Encouraging Resilience to Grow ____	101
Chapter 14 – Honesty _____	107
Chapter 15 – Faith _____	111
Chapter 16 – Surrender _____	115
Chapter 17 – Evaluation _____	125
Chapter 18 – Confession _____	137
Chapter 19 – Redemption _____	151
Chapter 20 – Restoration and Reconciliation ____	159
Chapter 21 – Resilience and Sanctification _____	171
Chapter 22 – Service _____	193
Conclusion _____	207

INTRODUCTION

Addiction is enslaving and killing our young people, devastating families, overstressing first responders, and financially draining limited healthcare dollars.

Addiction is a monster that needs to be understood and contained.

Only when you know what it looks like and how it behaves will you have a chance of getting that monster into an appropriate cage.

Do you have a desire to help individuals who are struggling with an addiction? Do you have a loved one struggling with an addiction? Are you struggling with an addiction? What are the weapons needed to fight this beast? What credentials are necessary for someone to work successfully in the field of addiction?

The field of addiction and addiction treatment is controversial. Much of the controversy is present because of philosophical differences and the feeling by some that treatment is often unsuccessful. There are many caring and well-meaning people who work in addiction treatment, but all of their efforts are barely scratching the surface of the immense problem. Honestly, we are losing the battle.

Addiction is a disease of comfort-seeking and not a condition of drug-seeking. The addict seeks comfort as a cure for discomfort. There are numerous causes of intense pain and anguish that can cause or reinforce an addiction. We need to understand the pain if we hope to understand the power behind the addiction. The first part of this book looks at several of the more common sources of human misery and anguish. Pain and agony are very personal, and it is crucial to view the individual struggling with addiction as suffering, even if they are obnoxious or have criminal tendencies.

How are we to treat those suffering from addiction? How do we know what boundaries are appropriate? As people of faith, how should we view this devastating condition?

I have struggled with these issues for the last four decades as a family physician and, most recently, as an addiction medicine specialist. What is compassionate care? What role does my faith play in helping a struggling patient? What can you do for a friend or family member who is struggling with an addiction? Is there hope?

Chapter 1 – Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

The year was 1048 BC, David was the newly crowned king of Israel when he wrote Psalms 139. Now, in 1048 BC, there was not a lot known about the intricacies and complexity of human biology, physiology, or pathology. At this time in history, David, inspired by God, wrote in Psalms 139:14 (NIV), *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”* We have learned a lot since the time of David as to just how fearfully and wonderfully we are made. David may have known what a pancreas was, but he did not know what it did, or that on the surface of the pancreas were Islet Cells that made insulin, and without insulin, we would not survive. The actions of the pancreas are complex but not as complicated as the insulin molecule. Insulin is a complex structure consisting of two amino acid chains with the A chain composed of 21 amino acids, and the B chain made up of 30 amino acids. The shape of this compound is very complex, allowing it to attach to receptors on cells to transport energy in the form of glucose into the cells.

With every advancement in medical knowledge, it becomes more evident just how fearfully and wonderfully we are made. Medical knowledge is growing at an alarming rate, yet there is so much we do not know. One of my esteemed professors in medical school described it this way, “Image sitting in a large hockey arena (I went to medical school in Canada) and there are a thousand miles of thread strung from end to end in the arena. The thread, all one thousand miles of it you cannot see in the vastness of the arena, but it represents what medical knowledge we currently have, and the empty space is what we currently do not know.” We do not recognize just how fearfully and wonderfully we are made.

When my father graduated from medical school in 1957, his class expected that medical knowledge would double every fifty years. Wow, can you imagine, all the knowledge of human anatomy, biology, physiology, psychology, and pathology from the time of Hippocrates in 400 BC to the first implanted artificial pacemaker in 1958 would double in only fifty years? When I graduated from medical school in 1980, the expectation was that medical knowledge would double every seven years. The current projection is that in 2020, medical knowledge will double every 73 days. There is so much we do not know, but it is clear that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” With this knowledge, we expect to gain understanding, and with understanding, we hope to gain power over what causes us discomfort. However, we still are

powerless when it comes to many of the significant plagues that are suffered by humans, like depression, suicide, addiction, obesity, pain, or even the common cold.

Addiction is a disease of the brain that occurs in what is called the limbic system or the reward pathway.

So what does fearfully and wonderfully made look like when we take a closer look at our brains.

The word “fearfully” in Hebrew is “yare,” which means, more amazing than we can understand, causing astonishment and awe, inspiring reverence or godly fear.

We only need to look at the DNA in the neurons of our brain to get a picture of this degree of amazingness that is beyond our understanding.

There are six feet of DNA in each neuron, and our brains contain 86 billion neurons. If you were to take that DNA and stretch it out end to end, it would reach 97 million miles. So how far are ninety-seven million miles?

Ninety-seven million miles is from the earth to the moon six times and then to the sun. That is a lot of DNA. Talk about being fearfully made – this is amazing and beyond our ability to understand.

The Hebrew word for wonderfully is “palah,” which means to be marked out, to be separated, or to be distinct.

If we look again at that six-foot length of DNA in the neuron, five and a half feet of it is the same in all human beings, and less than 6 inches of it accounts for our individuality.

These six inches of DNA accounts for skin color, hair color, eye color, fingerprints. It accounts for all the factors than make every individual unique.

You are both fearfully made and wonderfully made.

The Hebrew word for “knoweth” is “yada ma’od,” which means we have a deep awareness, like a stick stirring a fire, that we are part of a greater universe that we did not make. We all have this burning knowledge inside all of us, a deep awareness that we have a level of meaning and awareness that separates us from other creatures. It is the awareness that we have a purpose beyond self-service. We have a sense of eternity, and there is more than just what we are presently experiencing. We all share a deep awareness of an emptiness that cannot be filled with material possessions or social connections because they are not enough to fill the void. We know what contentment is, but most often experience boredom or restlessness that destroys peace. We are all aware of being fearfully and wonderfully made.

As I will show in subsequent chapters, being “fearfully and wonderfully made” means we have both the makeup that can result in addiction and the mechanism to experience freedom from addiction.

Chapter 2 – The Cry for Comfort and Control

An addiction is initiated and maintained by discomfort. The discomfort can come from many sources, and at times the cause of the pain experience is confusing. The purpose of pain is protection. If you place your hand on a hot stovetop, the experience of pain causes a rapid response; you remove your hand. Pain is a frequent, universal, human experience. You will experience some pain or anguish today, it may be mild, or it may be catastrophic.

Pain comes in many shapes and sizes. All you have to do is look up synonyms for the word “pain.” What you will find is a multitude of terms describing the nature, quality, location, duration, and severity of pain and anguish. What you will not find is an objective means to measure the sufferer’s experience. There are no actual qualifiers because the experience of pain is very personal. What this means is that you will never be able to describe your pain in terms that will be understood by anyone else. A life in pain is a lonely existence; it feels comfortless and out of control. It cries out, “give me comfort, or I might die!”

There are three significant sources of suffering; there is physical pain, emotional pain, and existential pain. Any of these sources can, in the right situation with a vulnerable individual, lead to an addiction. A chapter will be devoted to each of these critical sources. If you want to get a handle on addiction, you need to get a handle on the human experience of pain and torment. Compassion comes from seeing the pain behind the self-destructive and, at times, obnoxious behavior. A painful experience can increase resilience, or it can weaken resilience. Increased resilience allows you to be able to tolerate more anguish in the future, but weakened resilience makes you less tolerant of even the most insignificant struggle. Gaining emotional resilience is much like increasing physical strength. If you want to get stronger physically, you work hard on a strenuous exercise program, and you eventually get stronger. Now, you do not get stronger during the exercise. The running and lifting weights tear your body down. You get stronger during times of rest in an environment of proper nutrition. Exercise breaks you down; you get stronger when you are resting. We can not control many of the factors that rip away at our emotional resilience; they demand a lot and tear us down. We get stronger and more resilient, dependent on where we turn for nourishment and rest. If you lean on an addictive substance for nourishment, you are very likely to develop an addiction.

Painful life experiences are a daily part of our lives. The impact of these painful experiences depends on a lot of factors. Some individuals are more resilient than others. Their increased resilience is part genetic, part upbringing, and part unknown. With increased resilience capacity, there is an increased ability to tolerate painful life events. Another factor that determines the impact of a painful experience is the origin of the pain. Some things hurt us more than others. The pain and anguish caused by existential pain have the most significant impact, followed by emotional pain and then physical pain. Angst about my purpose, meaning, and mortality hurt more than a fractured leg. A single cause of pain from a specific event is more tolerable than pain from several uncertain sources. The impact of painful experiences also depends on the duration of the pain. A brief, but severe pain is more tolerable than a long-lasting pain of less severity. The cry of those in discomfort is the same; "give me comfort." It does not matter if your pain is minor or significant, or if it is brief or long-lasting; all discomfort seeks a solution. Discomfort brings with it a deep sense of loss of control. The element or agent causing the trouble has taken control. Pain demands attention, all of your attention, and it has a booming voice. "Pay attention to me, or I will destroy you." A life caught in addiction is a life of extreme pain with a loss of control. If you are living this life, you know what I mean. If you are observing this life in a loved one or an acquaintance, you see

the loss of control and the irrational thoughts and actions that accompany that loss of control. Unfortunately, it is hard to see past this presentation to see the discomfort.

When we are spinning out of control, trying to gain some comfort, we have several plausible options. We can follow an exercise program, alter our diet, or practice mindfulness in an attempt to increase our tolerance. These practices may help briefly but usually lead to failure. We can try to gain control by partaking in activities that divert our attention. Studies of rock climbers have shown that when they are attempting a challenging climb, they become oblivious to physical pain. This distraction would work well if we could rock climb 24 hours a day. Diversions work, but only briefly. Unfortunately, there are limitless diversions, and most people spend their entire lives moving from one distraction to another. This life is exhausting and frustrating. So, if you cannot effectively increase your tolerance, regulate the pain through diversion or get a sense of control, you can always try to eliminate the pain. If your goal is pain and discomfort elimination, you will end up struggling with an addiction. The addictive substance may reduce the pain for a while, but now you have become dependent on a material that will ruin your life.

So, why is it necessary to have some sense of control and comfort? Lack of control and discomfort is a powerful force that robs our ability to be productive, compassionate, and active. When we are distracted by the chaos and pain of life,

we are not free to grow and develop. We feel stuck because, at that point, we are stuck. Our survival depends on finding a path through the chaos and discomfort that will build us up and not tear us apart.

In the following chapters, we will look at some of the specific causes of life's significant anguish in more detail, then look at how this may lead to addiction, and lastly, look at what we can do about this troubling condition.

Chapter 3 – Physical Pain

The source of pain is either physical, emotional, or existential. The most recognizable type of pain is physical. This chapter is not a thesis on the pathophysiology of pain but will show how the subjective experience of physical pain can lead to an addiction. You fall off a ladder and break your leg; you experience a great deal of physical pain. Prescription narcotics are a blessing in this scenario, but if taken for too long or in a dose higher than necessary, you may end up with opiate addiction. When it comes to human experience with pain, the physical pain is the one that is the most easily recognized and identified. Suffering from a physical source can be named, like headaches, backache, tooth pain, etc. This physical pain has a specific location and quality, and most often, a pathology causing the pain experience.

On the other hand, non-physical discomfort or anguish is often tough to identify or recognize, and yet this is the type of pain that more often leads to addiction.

Physical pain, as a single entity, rarely, by itself, leads to addiction. Studies have shown that the treatment of physical pain can lead to an addiction in about 3 – 12% of individuals

treated with long term opioids. About half the patients I currently see in my addiction medicine practice started with a prescription opioid given for trauma. I was one of those docs trained to believe that patients would heal better if their pain were controlled adequately with opioids. Thankfully the training and practice have changed. We still have a dilemma of what to do with people who suffer from severe physical pain. The field of pain management is controversial and filled with difficulty. Pain is subjective; there is no blood test to evaluate someone's pain score. In the end, we are left with an individual's complaint and limited treatment options.

The experience of physical pain is real and can come from four different sources. The first we are all too familiar with, you stub your toe, and it screams out in pain. This type of pain is called nociceptive pain. Nociceptive is the medical term for the kind of pain that comes as a direct result of physical damage. This pain occurs in the nociceptive nerve fibers when they are activated by inflammation, chemicals, or an injury. This type of pain has an identifiable cause and usually lasts a short period.

The next kind of pain is called neuropathic. This pain is the result of damage or disease affecting the somatosensory nervous system. The cause of this type of pain is often more challenging to determine because it is usually not connected to a specific injury or event. This type of pain can be

continuous or episodic and usually lasts for a prolonged period.

Another cause of physically experienced pain occurs when there is an enhanced pain response. In this situation, the pain-sensing nerves are overactive and send out pain messages even when there is no nerve damage. This type of pain is called hyperalgesia. Individuals who are taking, or have been on opioid pain medication can develop this hyperalgesia as a result of taking the pain medication. In this situation, their pain may be getting worse because of the drug that was prescribed to control the pain.

In the presence of opioid or alcohol withdrawal, an individual will experience physical pain. This type of pain is often severe and constant. This type of withdrawal pain may first show itself when a patient is being weaned from taking daily prescription opioids or when the dose they have been taking is no longer adequate. Do you see the diagnostic dilemma in treating physically experienced pain?

Bob is a 55-year-old mechanic who has had two previous surgeries for lumbar disc disease. The operations failed to control his pain, so he has been on a moderate dose of prescription opioids that have allowed him to continue working for the last five years. Bob has heard about the opioid crisis and would like to get off the medication. He sees his primary care doctor, and they decide to wean him off the opioids. This weaning task is difficult and often takes many months. Two

months into the process, Bob presents back to his physician, complaining that his pain has gotten so much worse he has had to miss days at work and is afraid he may lose his business. The question is; what is the cause of Bob's increased pain experience? Is his pain coming from increased damage in his lower back? Is his pain more pronounced because he has developed hyperalgesia from the long history of taking opioid pain meds? Or, is his pain intensified because of withdrawal now that he is on a lower dose of medication? At the end of the evaluation, it is impossible to explain which scenario best identifies Bob's pain. Bob will need a very understanding, patient, and compassionate physician to explore the options for his care and future. Hopefully, Bob will find a satisfying solution and not be discharged from his doctor's practice because he complains of increased pain. And Bob, do not run to drugs or alcohol, it will only make your problem worse.

If you live with physical pain, you need to live as if you are vulnerable to the development of a possible addiction. Do all you can to find and use other methods for pain control. If you need to be on prescription opioids, then do all you can to limit the dose and duration of the treatment. The brain changes caused by chronic use of prescription opioids are the same changes that occur with ongoing heroin use.

Dealing with the issues of chronic pain or chronic medical conditions that produce pain can be very complex and will require expertise and patience.

Chapter 4 – Emotional Pain

Emotional pain develops because of ongoing mental stress. These periods of stress could be intense and short term or less severe but lasting a long time. Even minimal stress for a long time will wear you down and cause emotional pain. Stress will leave you feeling out of control amid discomfort. These are times of rumination over real or perceived threats to one's person and identity.

Stress is one of those terms that we toss around with presumed conceptual familiarity while we lack necessary substantial understanding.

To get a handle on stress, we must understand what it is and what strategies are effective in its presence. Not all stress is destructive; much stress leads to progress through innovation and invention. Without stress, it is possible to become stagnant. The forms of stress described in this chapter relate to the types of stress that are chronically draining and destructive. The kind of stress that gives birth to emotional pain.

Stress is often deceptively camouflaged as an uneasy feeling in the pit of your stomach, being irritable, having difficulty sleeping, or experiencing a vague headache or a backache. If we hope to take aim and effectively deal with stress, we must first strip away the camouflage, so we know where to set our sites. If we do not learn how to handle stress, it will continue to control us.

I cannot handle it! It is all this stress! If I just had less stress, I would be able to survive! If it doesn't kill you it will only make you stronger – but what about those times when it feels like the stress might kill you!

Would you like to be less controlled by destructive stress? Would you like your resilience to grow even in times of stress? Would you like to have some control over emotional pain?

To get a handle on stress, we must understand what it is and then what strategies are adequate to deal with it. The approaches to control stress differ based on the cause of the stress.

Stress is universal; you will face some form of it today. You will never know how significant or what variety, but you will encounter stress today. Be prepared! The stresses I have observed in the lives of my patients in four decades of medical practice fall in one of five categories.

There is the stress of imminent danger, the stress of threatened identity, the stress of uncertainty, the stress of

covering responsibility, and the stress of transgressions. Resilience and stress go hand in hand. Resilience is needed most during times of stress, and if you handle stress properly, it will strengthen resilience. Resilience is your soul's covering during times of stress; treat it kindly and spend it wisely and do everything you can to foster its growth.

In the book of Proverbs 22:3 (NLT), it is written that: *“A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.”*

We all want to see ourselves as prudent or wise and not the foolish simpleton. We will all receive the consequences of our actions and reactions. You do not want to live the results of stress handled improperly, a life of turmoil, and despair. Ideally, you would like to live a life where stress is dealt with productively. In this kind of life, there is still struggling, but there is peace. There is uncertainty, but you still have a life direction and purpose. This kind of living encourages your resilience to strengthen; it is a life of less emotional pain.

To get hold of stress, to identify it, and control it, you need to pause with your eyes open and be willing to evaluate and ask some critical questions. If you hope to lessen the emotional pain caused by stress, it is necessary to identify life stressors, and once identified, you can put a plan in place to limit their negative impact.

So, what are these categories of external events or happenings that can cause stress?

Firstly, there is the stress of imminent danger. This stress is experienced when you, someone you love or someone you are responsible for, is facing an imminent threat to their life or wellbeing. You are called upon to do something to prevent something horrible from happening. If you don't act, someone might die. The stress calls you to action because of a real threat. This is the threat when faced with a natural disaster, an accident, or illness. It is the call to fight or flight – immediate action is required.

Secondly, is the stress caused when some external stressor alters our self-view. To function in life as a human being with some sense of meaning, purpose, and direction, we all operate from a platform of self-definition. This platform is a form of ego-intactness; it is how we see and define ourselves. As we walk the path of life, this self-definition that we so dearly cling to is frequently challenged. It is challenged most directly by either an experience of loss or experience of gain. A significant change in any form is a threat to our self-definition and is, therefore, stressful.

Thirdly is the stress caused by uncertainty or confusion. There are many times in our lives that we become weighed down by the burden of uncertainty. Life is filled with moments and periods of confusion and uncertainty in areas of great importance; the more critical the area, the higher the

stress. Stress-producing confusion fills our lives in the areas of relationships, health, finance, and security.

Another category is the stress caused by covering responsibility. It is hard enough to be responsible for yourself in this ever-changing, confusing world, let alone to have to be accountable for another who is unable or unwilling to be accountable for themselves. Caring for others who are unable or unwilling to care for themselves is very stressful. This situation is a complex type of stress, often including real danger, an altered self (you are no longer just a son or a daughter; you are now a caregiver as well) and the stress of uncertainty (you never know how someone will react).

The last category of stress occurs when you realize you are the agent of harm or offense to another person. We have all, at some time in our life, caused unnecessary and hurtful offense in others. If we are to grow in our ability to handle stress and become more resilient, we must take time to humbly pause and be honest, first with ourselves, as to how our actions or words have hurt or offended someone else. This encounter with shame, condemnation, and guilt can be very stressful.

In conclusion, take hold of stress – before it takes hold of you. Categorize your stressors. Is your stress caused by the fear or threat of imminent danger? Is it caused by a threat to your sense of self? Is your stress from ongoing uncertainty or

confusion, or are you in the position of caring for someone unable or unwilling to care for themselves? Is your stress because of an offense you have committed towards someone else? I hope that by being able to visualize the elements or categories of stress that it will encourage an ability to get hold of stress, so it does not get hold of you.

What are your emotional stressors? What does emotional pain look like in your life?

Chapter 5 – Existential Pain

The third category of pain is existential pain. Existential pain is a form of intense distress experienced by all humans; it is part of what it means to be a human. It is a form of pain that is deeply troubling and difficult to identify. Henry David Thoreau said: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation and die with their song still inside them.” Is that how you would like to live your life? A life of despair where you bury your potential, or would you like to live your life with creativity and enthusiasm? We have this overbearing weight in our chest, that communicates that something fundamental is not right. This weight has the power to hobble us and prevent personal growth. This weight is experienced in many different ways. It is experienced as intense boredom, the awful pain of loss or failure, or the tension of irresolvable conflict. It can also be experienced as the anguish of inadequacy, the oppressive darkness of aloneness, the despair of hopelessness, the restlessness of meaninglessness, and the angst of perpetual uncertainty. The source of this angst is what is called the existential burdens. These burdens are existential in that they are present in all humans; they are realities that are part of our essence. They

are burdens in that they are a load we must carry, no matter how oppressive or worrisome. No one else can take these burdens for you. Every moment of our lives is pregnant with the potential for an existential crisis. A moment when we become paralyzed by questions regarding our life: does our life have any meaning, purpose, or value. We are at some level deep within our being aware of this potential and the impact it could have. We do our best to keep a lid on this angst through distractions, actions, denial, and superstitions. We live in an age ripe with the potential for an existential crisis, where the man of quiet desperation is not so quiet anymore. If we are to have any hope of living a full and meaningful life, we need to address the following existential issues: the burden of isolation, the burden of meaninglessness, the burden of responsibility, the burden of mortality, and the weight of spiritual emptiness. If we do not address these areas, we will be ensuring our place as one of the people Thoreau describes as living a life of quiet desperation. Yes, we may have fleeting moments of delight, but are more likely to have seasons of despair as our distractions show themselves to be inadequate.

These existential burdens are a powerful force. If left unaddressed, they can lead to despair, greed, bitterness, anger, depleted resilience, and lost potential. If, on the other hand, you acknowledge these areas, and they are accepted

and appropriately addressed, they can be a source of unbelievable energy, creativity, and spiritual awakening.

If we desire to be the vibrant, creative humans that God intended, then we need a plan for dealing with these profoundly troubling issues.

In Psalms 39:6 (TPT), we read: *“We live our lives like those living in shadows. All our activities and energies are spent on things that pass away. We gather, we hoard, we cling to our things, only to leave them all behind for who knows who.”*

Do you feel you are living in a shadow? Do you think that your life has passed? You work hard, consider others, act justly, are compassionate, and empathetic – yet it is all for what? You still feel alone and useless, with no apparent purpose.

We are all aware of this potential for an existential crisis and the impact it could have. Instead, we do our best to keep it caged and live our busy lives disconnected from each other, confused about our purpose and abandoning our potential, feeding our desires, and starving our soul.

So, what are these overwhelming burdens that affect all men? Firstly, is the burden of isolation. Isolation and the reality that even though we live in a world of many others, we often feel, and are, very isolated and alone. You can experience isolation at different levels. There is interpersonal isolation – where you feel physically isolated from others. You can also experience isolation as intrapersonal isolation when in the presence of even loving, positive relationships, there are

areas where secrets exist, and there is a felt distance in the relationship. There is also existential isolation where it is not possible ever to experience the subjectivity of another human being. In other words, nobody knows me, and I don't really know anyone else. We live with a fear of rejection. We need to be aware of this reality, be willing to explore its significance, and accept it for what it is. It is also important to realize everyone else experiences this same sense of isolation. We live in a crowd of isolated individuals.

Another existential issue we struggle with is meaninglessness. Searching for meaning is a reality of human life. What it boils down to is the question, "why are we here, or why do we exist?"

We can pursue meaning on three levels. We can seek false meaning, transitory meaning, or ultimate meaning.

False meaning is a type of meaning or purpose that is often just a pleasant, or unpleasant, diversion. It is the pursuit of activities for immediate pleasure that often are harmful. In the long run, the pursuit of food, drink, drugs, money, power, or any other action considered immediately pleasurable is not connected to any form of lasting meaning. These pursuits can be a diversion from the angst of these existential burdens for a season, but they will eventually be inadequate if they don't kill you first.

Transitory meaning is where the pursuit is not destructive, but neither does it give any lasting meaning or purpose.

Developing skills, achieving success, receiving education, pursuing health interests, may not cause harm: they do keep us busy and distracted but do not provide any ultimate or lasting meaning.

We find ultimate meaning through a relationship with something or someone greater than us. This ultimate meaning transcends the other issues of relationship, mortality, and choice and can put those other areas into a proper perspective. The question is: how do you find this meaning? The burden of free choice is another existential reality. We are in the privileged and yet, the terrifying position of being able to create who we are through the choices we make. The frightening part is that it is our personal and individual responsibility to make those choices. If you abandon your responsibility through living as a victim, with bitterness, fear, or anger, you are also giving up your power and ability to create a new you. It is ultimately your choice, a choice that should be a freedom and not a hindrance.

Another existential reality is the burden of mortality. Our eventual death is an issue all human beings face. For many people, the subconscious anxiety caused by a fear of death is behind a lot of their daily anguish. This fear is a reality we need to acknowledge and accept. It is not healthy to live oblivious to death or to live in constant fear of death. If you value and count your days, you are more likely to use them wisely.

Lastly, is the burden of spiritual emptiness; a self-centered life, disconnected from God and the universe.

Wrestling with how we fit in this complex universe is a significant burden. We, as individuals, are our only experience of the world, and that experience is very inadequate. God's creation is a complex entity of which we are only a small part. No matter how much we study and investigate, much of it remains a mystery. How we fit into this grand design is a cause for anguish. We know there is a designer, and we know we are not that designer. How should we relate to the designer?

These existential realities can either hold us in a pit of despair or direct us to a well of creative energy.

Let's take a little closer look at the impact of these existential burdens.

Back to Henry David Thoreau's quote, "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." Unresolved issues with the existential burdens cause an undercurrent of unrest. This unrest is painful boredom that is unsettling, troubling, and at times feels like insanity.

Even though we may not be able to identify it, we know something is wrong, and we need to do something, anything, to lessen the pain.

This unrest drains our resilience, energy, vitality, and drive. It becomes a distraction from moving ahead with life. We are left carrying a heavy burden, and we are left drained and

discouraged. We abandon our creativity and potential as we must use all our resources to carry the weight.

The discomfort caused by these existential burdens demands a solution, some level of comfort that will allow us to continue living our lives and not remain stuck in an existential crisis. We are willing to gain this comfort with little regard for the cost – our motto becomes “comfort at any cost.” We are eager to spend whatever we must in the passionate pursuit of comfort through distractions like drugs, alcohol, hobbies, sports, entertainment, relationships, or work. But this feverish pursuit never brings us any substantial or lasting comfort. The relentless pursuit of pleasure leads to disaster. We are left drained, disappointed, and in despair.

The anguish caused by this life of quiet desperation can be consuming. It leaves us with no resilience and no desire to move ahead with our lives. At this point, we have lost our creativity, and options for our future seem nonexistent. It is no wonder people in this state, bury themselves in drugs, alcohol, or self-destructive activities.

It is not a big step from consuming anguish to terminal despair – a life of depression, chronic anxiety, psychosis, or suicide. These issues are part of all our lives; they are part of what it means to be human.

Most often, these burdens take us on a path of slow destruction. But as we shall see, if handled productively,

God's way, can have the power to transform us and awaken our creativity and potential.

Chapter 6 – Pain in Real Time

Unfortunately, pain does not present in three neat packages. Pain is more like a stew than it is like easily separable individual ingredients. We never experience physical pain, emotional pain, or existential pain in isolation. All pain contains varying degrees of these three components.

When I was a financially challenged medical student, I wanted every advantage I could gain to keep up with the rigors of having a young family and the school work. I thought that if I were able to duplicate the diet of Daniel's men from the Old Testament, it would help me with what I felt I was lacking. So, into the crockpot went beans, lentils, tomato base, and various spices. Over the years, the ingredients have changed, usually for the better, but the main ingredients have not changed. I now make four crockpots of this stew every 90 days and have enough for my daily lunch. Each item added to the recipe impacts the flavor of the entire stew. You cannot change one element or spice without it affecting the whole dish.

The experience of pain is much like bean stew. The parts of our body and brain that communicate physical pain, emotional distress, and existential pain are all regulated by chemicals

that affect each other. In essence, as human beings, we are a complex bean stew. It is impossible to completely separate the impact of physically caused pain from emotionally caused pain or existentially created pain.

It is more like these types of distress and anguish are layers. We all have a base layer of existential struggle and pain. At times this existential pain is worse than at other times, but to some degree, it is there all the time. On top of the existential suffering, we have waves of emotional distress. These waves are often the results of our circumstances, upbringing, and current environmental stressors. Amid these two layers of pain, we experience physical pain. At times the physical pain is from a bodily injury and at other times from the expression of the existential and emotional elements. The experience of pain is both complex and confusing. The experience of pain also demands action; we feel we must do something to control and alleviate the pain. Pain has a booming voice, and it requires your full attention.

These types of pain are a constant drain on our precious resilience. Resilience is necessary for many areas of our life, but it is essential for dealing with an addiction. To keep our bucket of resilience full, we must do all we can to prevent it from leaking out through the gaps created by these different types of pain and anguish. As we will explore later in this book, there are actions we can take to fill the resilience

bucket, but these efforts are useless if you do not address the leaks.

What to do with pain? How do we deal with pain and guard against the development of addiction?

Firstly, we must recognize the pain and try to determine its source. It will help to know if possible, the impact of the different layers. Ask yourself, what is causing my pain? Take time to consider the source. How much of your current experience of pain is physical, emotional, or existential?

If you can change some things that will reduce pain, then they need to be changed. Why walk around with a stone in your shoe when you can easily remove it? If a lack of physical fitness is causing back pain or headaches, then determine to get fit. And then get moving.

For the things you cannot change, you may need to get help. Support of family and friends is also precious and can be very beneficial during times of extreme emotional pain. You may also benefit from helping others. Do not be afraid to ask the difficult questions that come to the surface during times of existential crisis.

You cannot separate addiction from pain; addiction dissolves resilience and causes an increase in physical, emotional, and existential suffering. This increase in pain drives the cravings for the chosen drug or alcohol. This pain affects the individual addict and their families, loved ones, neighbors, first responders, and healthcare providers. As the addict tries to

gain control of the pain by consuming a chemical, it only increases the pain. Every therapeutic, psychological, and spiritual tool will be necessary to quiet this inferno.

Chapter 7 – Addiction

Addiction has become a prevalent topic. Our media reports daily the tragic stories of the opioid epidemic or the accidental overdose death of a celebrity.

Addiction is enslaving and killing our young people, devastating families, overstressing first responders and emergency room staff, and financially draining limited healthcare dollars.

Addiction is a monster that needs to be understood and contained.

The purpose of this chapter is to take a look into the eyes of this monster.

Why does it have so much power? Why is it so hard to overcome?

The AMERICAN SOCIETY OF ADDICTION MEDICINE'S short definition of addiction states:

“Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by an inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death."

What does this mean? What is the DISEASE of addiction?

Addiction was first classified as a disease in 1987. At that time, "addiction" described a specific group of individuals that were seeking help, and the medical community had some things of value to offer. This disease classification also provided a diagnostic code number to the disease for billing. The disease part of this condition was not well understood, and often, what we do not understand we demonize. The stigma and prejudice around addiction are still present today. If you were to take a survey today – what do you expect would be the answer to the question – What is the cause of addiction?

Some would say that addiction is a lack of moral character. The addict is somehow an inferior human being and does not have the strength of character to say no to alcohol or drugs. If we were honest, this would be a common belief. This prejudice is seen in the treatment of an addict when they present for a primary care office visit, a trip to the Urgent Care

or the Emergency Department, or talked about by misinformed family members.

On the other hand, an addict will often present as someone who lacks moral character. This behavior is a demonstration of the brain areas affected by addiction. The disease of addiction is not a lack of moral character.

Perhaps it is a lack of will power. It takes a lot of will power to overcome an addiction – so maybe it is just a lack of willpower that allows addiction to continue.

Recent studies of how the brain works using functional MRIs and PET scans show that this disease is a lot more than just a lack of will power. These studies show permanent areas of functional and structural brain changes.

Maybe it is a sign of acting out, open rebellion, or defiance. Even if the addiction started as a form of rebellion, is that the cause of the current ongoing struggle?

Is addiction a form of mental illness. Addiction is associated with a lot of irrational thinking – is that mental illness? Is it a chemical imbalance or the result of an inherited mental illness?

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the disease of addiction, a difficulty that needs dispelling if we are to know what to do for our suffering child, parent, patient, or friend.

A “disease” is an abnormal condition that negatively affects the structure or function of part or all of an organism. A disease is a dysfunction of the body’s homeostatic

processes. The body needs to be in balance to function correctly.

The organ of disease in addiction is the brain, particularly the part of the brain called the reward pathway.

Your brain is fantastic; it consumes 20% of your body's daily calorie requirements, yet only weighs a little more than 2 pounds. Your brain is made up of more than 86 billion neurons. The brain does what it does through the movement and activity of chemical messengers called neurotransmitters. These chemicals are tiny molecular keys that lock or unlock cell receptors that then cause a reaction in the neuron. These neurons, in turn, attach in a specific pattern to other neurons through their dendritic spines to form a network. The particular activation of this system will result in a thought, an emotion, or an action.

Classifying addiction as a disease could be used as an excuse to justify ongoing self-destructive behavior and attitudes or a way of avoiding personal responsibility. To use the disease diagnosis, this way, could be fatal.

We must understand what we are dealing with if we have any hope of effectively treating the disease of addiction.

The problem with addiction is that it is locked up in the brain – how do we understand what we cannot see?

What we see are the annoying symptoms of the disease, a presentation that often limits our ability to be aware of the disease.

Medical science has taught us a lot about addiction in recent years – with functional MRIs, tagged neurotransmitters, and PET scans. We now have a much better understanding of the brain pathology in addiction.

We need to understand this disease in terms we can all understand. How is this possible? The answer is the development of memory. If we can understand the formation of a memory, we will have a better understanding of how addiction develops.

Addiction is a strong memory in the reward pathway of the brain.

To understand memory, we need to understand epigenetics. Genetics is the DNA that we inherit, accounting for our hair color, eye color, etc. Epigenetics is how individual segments of DNA get expressed in a cell.

Every cell contains the same DNA. Through the mechanism of epigenetics, cells perform different functions meaning a muscle cell is different than a kidney cell. Epigenetics allows our nervous system to remain adaptable and learn new things. Memory is an epigenetic structural change in the DNA in the neurons in your brain.

Let's take a look at how this works. Firstly, in the formation of memory and then in the development of an addiction. A stimulus causes a release of powerful neurotransmitters that directly impact the DNA in the neurons in various ways that will eventually result in the formation of a memory.

This process of change is called triggered neuroplasticity. Triggered neuroplasticity is the ability of the neurons to change or adjust because of a stimulus. Without neuroplasticity, we would not be able to learn or develop new memories or, as we shall see, develop an addiction.

The most common effect caused by the stimuli is called DNA methylation. DNA methylations lead to DNA exposure. This change in the DNA is similar to the impact a cancer-causing chemical has on a cell that results in it becoming cancer. DNA methylation prepares the cell to change its structure and function.

Also occurring is a process called posttranslational modifications of histones that allows the tightly coiled DNA to uncoil and expose areas of DNA that can then be modified. The DNA is now, no longer a tightly coiled bundle of DNA. The cell structure and function continue to change through modifications of noncoding RNAs that remodel chromatin and facilitate or suppress gene expression – the cell changes – protein manufacture can be turned on or turned off. The neuron has now changed both its structure and its function. Now you have a newly formed memory.

Let's take a closer look at this process in the context of something we can all relate to – the development of different levels or types of memory.

Short term memory formation is the result of a minimal stimulus. This kind of memory extinguishes quickly.

For example, what do you remember about last Wednesday? It was not long ago. The chances are that unless it was somehow a particular day, you do not remember much. You might remember it if it was your birthday or anniversary, but otherwise, you have already forgotten much of what occurred just a short time ago.

If you increase the stimulus, the memory will last longer. This increased stimulus is the effect seen when cramming for exams, or with the memory of significant historical events – such as the assassination of President Kennedy or the first moon landing. How about September 11, 2001. What do you remember from that day? Do you remember what day of the week this was? Do you remember where you were? Do you remember what you did that morning or what you had for breakfast?

If you increase the stimulus, even more, the memory will also last longer, to the degree it may have a lasting, lifelong impression. The event changes you. You may even act differently or interpret the world differently because of this overwhelming stimulus caused memory. What do you remember about what happened in Boston on April 15, 2013? We most likely share very different memories of this day. On this cold, windy day on Boylston Street, my wife and I were standing across the street from the second bomb at the Boston Marathon. I can remember a lot about that day. I can easily relive that moment – from what I had for breakfast to

the sensation of the hot cup of hot chocolate in my left hand as we experienced the explosion across the street. The overwhelming stimulus changed me.

This process of DNA unfolding and changing both its structure and function is how different degrees of memories are formed and stored.

Addiction develops similarly except the area of the brain being affected is the reward pathway of the limbic system, and the magnitude of the stimulus caused by drugs of addiction is more overwhelming than the stimuli that result in the formation of a memory. The structural and functional changes in the reward pathway of the brain have been confirmed with several medical studies. A study on the effects of cocaine on the brains of rats showed that there were 17 DNA changes in 6 brain areas. Another study was done on heroin addicts that had been in confirmed recovery for over nine years. This study showed ongoing significant functional MRI changes when they were exposed to auditory or visual drug stimuli. A study where subjects were given Morphine 50 mg daily for 30 days and then followed with monthly functional MRIs showed that the changes in brain function that occurred because of the morphine exposure did not improve six months after the completion of the study. Changes in these areas of the brain have a prolonged and dramatic effect. Some of these changes may be permanent.

Chemicals that can cause addiction can have their impact in several different ways. They can directly impact the neuron, or they can create a massive increase in the release of neurotransmitters and the reduction in the removal of these neurotransmitters. These actions result in an overwhelming stimulus to the neuron. This stimulus changes the DNA in the neuron. The stimuli cause a flood of dopamine from the nucleus accumbens that sends messages to parts of the brain, saying, “this is good and necessary.” The experience or feeling is something to be desired. You now have a powerful memory of desire and craving.

The impact of the stimulus in the hippocampus enhances the memory of the reward experience. It reinforces the memory that: “This is something I do not want to forget – I should remember as much about this reward as possible – where I got it, who I got it from, the people I used it with, the room I used it in – and on and on.”

The impact on the amygdala is an emotional one. I now feel secure, confident, at peace – I have never felt this complete in the past.

The impact on the prefrontal cortex is to assign a high level of value to this experience. Nothing else compares to this experience – I am willing to pay whatever it may cost to maintain this feeling.

As previously described, different levels of stimulus cause different permanence of memory. Varying degrees of

activation of the reward system results in different levels of formed desire.

If the reward stimulus is low-level, the result is a preference. I like puppies better than kittens is an example of preference, but I don't want to pay for that puppy or pay to take care of it for the next 17 years. I experience a choice. Preferences can easily be changed, especially if you have an issue with your preference or a better preference presents itself. Wait till that puppy chews your favorite shoes.

Increase the stimulus in the reward pathway, and you get what we call a desire. A desire comes from a felt need for a sense of completeness. In other words, I will feel complete if I can get what I desire. This desire area is the zone of operation of the advertising industry. If I can link your desire with a product that I sell, then the sale is easy. If I can sell you the fantasy that an expensive exotic new car can give you a sense of contentment or acceptance, the vehicle is quickly sold.

Unfortunately, the fantasy quickly fades with the first scratch, the \$1,000 oil change, the eventual awakening to the reality that the illusion did not bring the contentment or sense of wellbeing it promised. But we still keep searching.

If you increase the stimulus, even more, you have an overwhelming stimulus. This overwhelming stimulus requires significant brain changes to accommodate, and you end up with an addiction. You are now past mirror preference and

desire, into the world of an intense craving. The chemical has effectively hijacked your neurons.

Your brain is telling you that you may die if you do not get the substance that produced the stimulus. Stimulus caused alteration in the function and structure of brain DNA is the disease of addiction.

So now we have a better understanding of the disease of addiction, but we still have a significant problem. The problem is with the presentation of the disease, the often obnoxious behaviors, and manipulations of the addict. In other words, our ability to see the pain in the disease is clouded by how it presents. The changes in the limbic system not only result in cravings but also causes characteristic, self-destructive behaviors.

One of the significant changes is a problem with abstaining. You may hear, “I want to quit but can’t.” There is a willingness to sacrifice family, friends, jobs, and finances to get more of the drug.

The brain changes also cause irrational thinking that presents in many ways. The thought and belief that the drug is not causing any harm. Or the idea that I can overcome this with ease. Another evidence of irrational thinking is the belief that the addiction is not affecting anyone else.

There is also fanciful beliefs or “magical answers” to life’s problems. This irrational thought shows itself as getting rich quick schemes and irrational beliefs about the future.

When the addiction takes hold, there is impairment in behavioral control, and the addict may do stupid or dangerous things to get the drug at high personal cost.

Another brain change is the painful cry of cravings. The pain is substantial, physically felt pain. It is often experienced as pain that is more significant than any previously experienced physical pain. The pain drives the suffering addict to seek and find more of the drug.

The changes in the limbic system also cause a diminished recognition of problems with behaviors and relationships with the eventual loss of supportive family and friends. The pursuit of the drug is now life's only priority. Trust and family are lost. These changes also cause a loss of standard reward capacity. Now there is only one reward. Reward from social interaction, creative activity, exercise, or good food is gone.

This complexity of symptoms is the major problem in dealing with addiction. The brain changes caused by the drug do not set the stage for a pleasant interaction or productive relationship. The addict has become his own worst enemy. The addict lives in this isolated world of increased physical pain from withdrawal, increased emotional pain from the loss of trust, guilt, and shame, and increased existential pain with complete loss of purpose and meaning.

The individual's presentation blinds the eyes and minds of their family, friends, and health care providers to the underlying disease. There is a conflict between love and trust.

The addict expects you to trust and respect them when they cannot trust or respect themselves. They are hostile to the necessary boundaries that must be put in place to save their life. At this point, they are often very resistant to change.

Picture a cute, quiet baby, sitting in a tub of bathwater. The image is a picture of the dueling realities of addiction. What you have is a precious, little life, like all of us, full of potential and promise. But if you move a little closer, you will find that there has been an accident and the water smells very bad.

One part you desires to nurture this little life, the other part will make you want to hold your nose and run away as fast as you can. Ponder the reality of this picture, and do not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Engagement in a recovery program and living a life of recovery, with a lot of hard work, is highly successful.

Chapter 8 – Chemicals of Addiction

An addictive substance is a non-essential element, meaning it is not necessary to maintain or sustain life. These chemicals can impact the nervous system by producing a sensation of satisfaction as it creates the desire (craving) and need (physiological dependency) for more of the element. With repeated use of the component, the changed nervous system now identifies the item as being necessary for life, as essential as oxygen, food, water, shelter, or relationships. Eventually, this element is seen as being even more critical for survival than any of the other elements, and the addicted individual is willing to sacrifice any of the other elements to get more of the addictive substance.

The Merriam-Webster definition of addiction is “the compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal: broadly: persistent compulsive use of a substance known by the user to be harmful.”

Addictive elements work in several different ways. These chemicals can mimic a natural neurotransmitter and activate a nerve cell directly. They can cause an increased release of

a natural neurotransmitter. They can cause a delay in the removal of a natural neurotransmitter, or they can attach to a receptor and block the action of a neurotransmitter. What they all share in common is that to varying degrees, they all cause an increased release of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens. This release of dopamine labels the element as a reward and facilitates memory of the environment associated with the achieved reward. These characteristics are all shared by the following addictive items: sugar, caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, marijuana, opioids, kratom, cocaine, ecstasy, and methamphetamine.

Why is it so hard to quit? To continue to consume a compound known to cause harm is the definition of addiction. The brain is a delicate organ, designed to function with high speed while maintaining a precise balance. If there is just a little too much glutamate released, the cell dies if too little is released, normal mental function is not possible.

Each addiction has its specific neurological and physical effects, both during the use of the substance and during abstinence. The alcoholic gets anxious; the narcotic abuser experiences pain; the tobacco abuser cannot concentrate. Each of these highly unpleasant symptoms can be enough to encourage continued use, yet there is still another layer of anguish shared by all addictions.

To varying degrees, all addictions cause issues with regulation of glutamate in the nucleus accumbens. The

normal function of glutamate in the nucleus accumbens involves the release of glutamate with rapid activation of the next cell and then the prompt removal of the glutamate by excitatory amino acid transporter 2 (EAAT2). If the glutamate is not rapidly cleared, it can overexcite the cell causing its death. All addictive compounds decrease the effectiveness of glutamate on the cell membrane and reduce the activity of the excitatory amino acid transporter 2. During times of abstinence, this regulation becomes very unstable, causing a sense of severe anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances, poor memory, profound fatigue, poor memory function, and even cell death. Abstinence feels like impending death. The loss of control over mental functions feels like one is losing their mind.

The brain, its delicate balance, and proper function is now the prisoner of the compound. Choosing to consume a known toxic chemical feels like life when, in reality, it is a movement towards a premature death.

To preserve and enhance your resilience and to live a life with less pain, don't get addicted to anything, and if you are addicted, get help immediately – your life depends on it. The following is a list of several of the chemicals known to cause a reaction that could lead to an addiction.

Sugar

Once our taste buds have experienced the taste of sugar, all it takes is to think about the taste and dopamine levels in the nucleus accumbens rise. The brain uses 50% of the body's available sugar energy. This sugar energy is taken directly from the blood because the brain has no effective way to store sugar. The proper balance of sugar is necessary for the manufacture of neurotransmitters and brain functions like attention, cognition, and mood stability. If there is too much sugar in the brain, it has been shown to age more quickly, and this hurts memory and cognition that accelerates memory loss and dementia.

The amount of sugar in our average diet has increased dramatically in the last 100 years. The amount of sugar eaten in a year by my grandfather when he was seven will be consumed by my seven-year-old grandson in less than three weeks.

This increase in sugar consumption not only causes an increase in the risk of diabetes, but it also causes increased inflammatory stress on the nervous system.

There is a delicate balance in the levels of glucose, insulin, cortisol, and serotonin that must occur for our nervous system to function correctly. A rapid increase in glucose will potentially be toxic to the nerve cells, so the body responds by increasing levels of insulin to decrease the brain

concentration of glucose by sending the excess glucose into the cells – most often the fat cells. Cortisol, the stress hormone that prepares the body for fight or flight, also plays a role in decreasing a rapidly rising brain sugar level, and this also causes an increased movement of blood sugar into the fat cells. If the brain level of sugar drops too quickly, cortisol is also active at this time to increase the release of glucose from the liver to ensure the brain has enough sugar to function properly.

If the brain level of glucose rises slightly, it causes an increased release of serotonin – the neurotransmitter that has a mood-calming effect – it reduces anxious thoughts and feelings. This slight rise in glucose makes the experience of pain more tolerable.

If the serotonin levels drop, then the result is often increased cravings for sugary or carbohydrate-rich foods that have a high amount of simple sugars.

In small amounts, sugar-containing foods are not harmful or even very addictive. Still, if there is a repeated intake of high sugar foods in someone genetically sensitive, then a condition can occur where the cells become less sensitive to the effect of the rising levels of insulin. This condition is called insulin resistance and is the cause of type 2 diabetes. People with type 2 diabetes have intense sugar cravings; they have an addiction to sugar. This addiction causes obesity, blood vessel disease, heart disease, kidney disease, and brain

inflammation resulting in memory and mood problems. If there is one primary gateway drug, that drug is sugar.

Caffeine

Caffeine acts as a stimulant in the nervous system, and it does this by the way it works on adenosine receptors. Adenosine's action on the surface of the nerve causes the nerve activity to slow down; this causes drowsiness, dilates the blood vessels, and aids in falling asleep.

Caffeine acts as an antagonist of adenosine. Caffeine attaches to the receptor and does not allow the adenosine to connect to the cell membrane. Caffeine also causes an increased release of adrenocorticotrophic hormone that leads to an increased release of adrenaline that can improve alertness, learning, and memory.

Caffeine can also cause increased anxiety, increased stomach acid, increased blood pressure, fine muscle tremors, and increased urination.

If you consume excessive amounts of caffeine, about 10 to 15 cups of regular coffee, a condition called caffeinism, can occur. This condition combines caffeine's physical dependence with symptoms of nervousness, insomnia, restlessness, irritability, irregular or rapid heart rate, and headaches.

If used in modest doses, caffeine is not very addicting in that it seems to cause very little tolerance. Still, it may cause some physical dependency in 50% of caffeine users who will experience headaches, sleepiness, irritability, and nausea if they stop the intake of caffeine.

Dependency on caffeine is the result of the increased levels of dopamine it produces in the nucleus accumbens core.

Nicotine

Nicotine comes from tobacco products; it can be inhaled, sniffed, chewed, or worn as a patch. Once nicotine enters the body, it goes to work very quickly.

The release of adrenaline from the adrenal glands causes an immediate increase in respiratory rate, blood pressure, and heart rate. If someone has issues with elevated blood pressure, they should not smoke for several hours before having their blood pressure evaluated.

Nicotine imitates the naturally occurring neurotransmitter, acetylcholine. It binds to acetylcholine receptors throughout the body. The three significant activation areas are in the adrenal gland, where it causes an increased release of adrenaline, the cerebral cortex where it mimics acetylcholine, and in the ventral tegmental area where it causes a release of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens shell.

The increased release of dopamine in the shell of the nucleus accumbens causes a powerful and lasting memory of reward. This action in the nucleus accumbens shell is the primary cause of the source of cravings that can occur years after someone has quit smoking. In February 1985, I was attending a difficult and prolonged labor at the hospital I was working at in northern Canada. It was a time of much stress and anguish. The laboring mom was exhausted; the labor had progressed very slowly. It took the assistance of carefully applied forceps to deliver a healthy baby girl. Exhaustion turned to excitement; anguish turned to joy – everyone could take a deep breath. As I walked the half-mile home in the sub minus 20-degree winter morning, the air was brisk, the snow crunched beneath my feet, and the green and magenta northern lights danced in the sky. All was well with the world as I puffed on a cigar that I had just received from the new father. I am not a smoker, and it has now been over 30 years, yet on a cold dark, Thursday morning, when I take my garbage can to the street, I want a cigar. The memories of reward from the nucleus accumbens shell are robust and long-lasting. It is the action of nicotine on the acetylcholine receptor that creates the need for that next cigarette. The acetylcholine receptor activated by the nicotine briefly becomes unresponsive to any neurotransmitter. These neurotransmitter receptor naps become extended with regular

exposure to nicotine. It is like the receptors of acetylcholine go to sleep.

This condition of nicotine tolerance can develop quickly, so now, when the level of nicotine drops a little, those acetylcholine receptors throughout the brain begin to wake up, and they are not happy. It takes about 20 cigarettes per day to keep those receptors quit.

Without the nicotine, the receptors are now hypersensitive to the activity of acetylcholine.

This hypersensitivity results in the experience of irritability, attention difficulties, increased appetite, and powerful cravings. The desperate rush for that first cigarette in the morning functions to put the receptors back to sleep and recreate a sense of calm in the mind of a smoker.

Alcohol

Alcohol absorbs very rapidly and enters the bloodstream quickly, reaching all parts of the body. In the brain, alcohol binds to receptors for acetylcholine, serotonin, GABA, and the NMDA glutamate receptors.

This binding to multiple receptors has a profound effect on mood, memory, personality, alertness, and physical coordination. The most significant impact of alcohol in the brain is on the GABA receptors and the NMDA glutamate

receptors. Glutamate is the most prevalent excitatory neurotransmitter in the brain.

Activation of the GABA receptors causes most of the effects experienced by alcohol, such as sedation, relaxation, less anxiety, and a greater sense of calm with some decrease in inhibitions. Alcohol imitates GABA and inhibits nerve activity more powerfully than GABA. Alcohol also decreases glutamate activity at the NMDA receptor.

Alcohol decreases glutamate's ability to bind to the NMDA receptor causing inhibition of NMDA receptor and glutamate activity. This effect on the NMDA receptor can result in memory blanks. During times of abstinence in chronic alcoholics, the NMDA receptors become upregulated, resulting in enough glutamate activity to kill neurons, cause seizures and hallucinations, and even death.

Over time these receptors accommodate in the presence of alcohol, causing the NMDA receptors to become more sensitive to glutamate and the GABA receptors to become less sensitive to sedating effects of the alcohol. The accommodated state, or new normal in the presence of alcohol, results in a hyperexcitable state during times of abstinence.

The addictive effect of alcohol is enhanced by its effect on dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, where it increases levels of dopamine by slowing down its reuptake.

Marijuana

The active ingredient in marijuana is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC mimics the action of the natural neurotransmitter N-arachidonoyl ethanolamide (anandamide).

Anandamide binds to CB1 cannabinoid receptors throughout the brain and CB2 receptors in the body. CB2 receptors have a role in regulating immune function. CB1 receptors impacts mood, memory, appetite, pain, and cognition.

CB1 receptor activated by either anandamide or THC causes a reduction of neurotransmitter to be released from the neuron, causing a general decrease in brain excitability. This action causes relaxation and change in mood, altered sense of time, impaired memory, difficulty with problem-solving, altered body movements, and altered sense of hearing and sight.

There are no CB1 receptors on the dopaminergic neurons in the reward pathway of the brain. THC and anandamide enhance the dopamine activity in the reward pathway by inhibiting the GABAergic neurons that would generally cause a reduction in dopamine released, with inhibition of the GABAergic neurons more dopamine is released.

With chronic use of THC and an overstimulation of the receptors, the brain compensates by reducing the number of CB1 receptors. Reduced CB1 receptors in the arteries of the

brain cause vasoconstriction with a sustained reduction of blood flow. This reduction in blood flow results in oxygen deprivation in the brain, causing problems with memory, attention, learning ability, and possibly an increased risk of stroke.

Opioids

Narcotics mimic the action of the body's naturally occurring opiate-like substances called endorphins, enkephalins, and dynorphin. There are three types of opioid receptors present throughout the brain; mu, delta, and kappa receptors. Narcotics have most of their effect on the mu receptors, of which there are seven subtypes. The body's natural opioids attach to one or more of these receptor types to regulate hunger, thirst, mood, immune response, and awareness of painful stimuli. In the brain stem, the opioid receptors are active in regulating blood pressure, alertness, and breathing.

When an opiate attaches to a mu or delta receptor in the brain, it reduces the excitability of that neuron, producing a sensation of calm and euphoria. When the opiate attaches to a mu receptor in the ventral tegmental area of the brain, it acts to reduce the excitability of the GABAergic neurons causing less inhibition in the release of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, thus activating the reward pathway.

Ongoing receptor activation by opiates results in several adaptations in the neurons.

When this occurs, more opioids are required to get a previous effect; the neurons have developed a condition called tolerance, where the cell is less sensitive to the action of opioids. The cells adapt by changing their structure to make them less sensitive to opioids, or they can internalize the receptors to make less of them available on the surface of the cell membrane. The internalization occurs by the cell membrane covering the receptor and pulling it into the body of the cell. The cell is now more resistant to the action of the opioid.

A condition of increased sensitivity to painful stimuli can also occur with the ongoing use of opiates. This condition is called opioid-induced hyperalgesia and can present as either hyperesthesia: a situation where there is a dramatic increase in sensitivity to painful stimuli, or allodynia: a condition where the pain is brought about by stimuli that would usually not cause pain. This condition of increased pain is caused by the opiates increasing the activation of glutamate NMDA receptors in the spinal neurons that make them more sensitive to painful stimuli and by increasing spinal cholecystikinin and dynorphin, which cause amplification of painful stimuli presented to the spinal cord.

Kratom

Kratom comes from the tropical evergreen tree *Mitragyna speciosa*. *Mitragyna speciosa* is from the coffee family and is native to Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Kratom consumption is by capsule, pill, or tea. The active ingredients in Kratom are mitragynine and 7- α -hydroxymitragynine. When small amounts of Kratom are consumed, these compounds produce stimulant effects. In large doses, it affects the brain's opioid receptors causing sedation, a sense of pleasure, and a reduction in pain. Kratom has recently become very popular for chronic pain patients who are weaning from narcotics. Kratom is currently legal for purchase, but it is addictive. Patients have reported to me that it has been harder to get off Kratom than it was to get off heroin.

Cocaine

Cocaine works by blocking the channels that usually remove the neurotransmitters dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, with the result being an amplified effect of all of these neurotransmitters.

The increased dopamine action in the nucleus accumbens results in more dependency. The increased serotonin levels result in an increased feeling of confidence.

Cocaine causes an increase in energy by increasing the level of norepinephrine.

The artificial increase in the activity of these three neurotransmitters produces a powerful sense of pleasure in the reward center of the brain.

Chronic cocaine use results in a significant adaptation by the neurons, especially in the reward pathway where the high levels of cocaine produced dopamine results in the cell membrane manufacturing new dopamine receptors, so it now takes more dopamine to provide the previously felt level of satisfaction. If the dopamine level falls to the level of an ordinary, happy, content cocaine naive adult, the cocaine adapted brain will feel a deep depression with intense cravings.

Ecstasy

Ecstasy (MDMA) is the synthetic drug 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine that acts as both a stimulant and a hallucinogen similar to both amphetamines and LSD.

Ecstasy blocks the reuptake pumps for the neurotransmitters norepinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin. The effect on dopamine and norepinephrine is minor; its primary impact is on serotonin, where it causes both an increased release of serotonin and inhibits the reuptake of serotonin. The increase in norepinephrine causes an increased heart rate and blood

pressure. The rise in dopamine causes an increase in energy, activity, and euphoria.

The increased flood of serotonin caused by Ecstasy causes an elevation of mood and a surge of oxytocin release in the hypothalamus. This surge of oxytocin causes an increased sense of well-being, trust, and closeness.

If the rise in serotonin is too high, then a condition known as serotonin syndrome develops that causes agitation, elevated body temperature, increased reflexes, tremor, sweating, dilated pupils, diarrhea, seizures, liver damage, muscle breakdown and possibly death. Serotonin syndrome is easily mistakenly diagnosed as opioid withdrawal.

The surge of serotonin lasts three to six hours, followed by a decrease in serotonin that lasts about a week.

The decrease in serotonin and oxytocin causes irritability, aggression, sleep problems, depression, decreased appetite, problems with memory and attention, anxiety, reduced trust, and a diminished sense of closeness. The ecstasy user is left feeling isolated and anxious for a prolonged period.

Methamphetamine

Amphetamines cause their overwhelming effect through their action on dopamine. Amphetamines cause a dopamine flood, and that is what makes them so highly addictive. Amphetamines cause this flood by mimicking dopamine,

entering the nerve ending by way of the dopamine transporters, causing an increased release of dopamine, blocking its reuptake, reversing the directional flow of the dopamine transporters, and inhibit the action of monoamine oxidase A that is responsible for the breakdown of dopamine. Amphetamines can also increase the excitability of dopaminergic neurons by its action on glutamate neurons. This increase in dopamine results in increased alertness, increased physical activity, a decrease in appetite, increase heart rate and breathing rate, increased blood pressure, altered judgment, and altered decision-making, often leading to increased risky behaviors.

The long-term damage caused by methamphetamine use can continue for years after abstinence.

With long term use, the dopamine-sensitive cells accommodate like described with long-term cocaine use with the result of depression and intense cravings in the midst of what would be typical levels of dopamine.

Chapter 9 – Recovery from Addiction

The drugs and alcohol that cause addiction are powerful. These chemicals impact the neurons in the brain in a way that captivates the addict. The powerful stimulus from these compounds changes the structure and function of the brain DNA in a significant way. Now, with the first indication of discomfort, the pathway to comfort lights up like a Christmas tree. The path leads to the alcohol or drug that was associated with comfort in the past. Is it possible to break free from this rollercoaster of destruction?

Freedom from addiction is called recovery. Successful recovery is a process that becomes a lifestyle. The process is one of learning and practicing new ways to handle life's difficulties. You might not be able to undo the damage done to the neurons, but you can develop ways to break out of this chemically created prison.

A popular misconception is that recovery is nothing more than willpower. Yes, resilience and resolve are essential elements in the recovery process, but it takes a lot more than just "trying harder." Yes, an addiction started because of a wrong

decision, but it takes a lot more to unravel the consequences of that decision than just trying harder.

Recovery is hard work and takes a high level of commitment. The hard work pays off in the long run, but first, you must be ready to change. Being prepared to change is called being in the Active stage of change. James O. Prochaska of the University of Rhode Island, and Carlo Di Clemente and colleagues developed the transtheoretical model beginning in 1977. This model describes the stages people go through on the path to a lifestyle change. The steps are pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, and action.

Pre-contemplation is the stage when there is no intended action in the foreseeable future. These individuals may be unaware that their behavior is problematic. They feel they are bulletproof and do not need to change; they do not want to change.

In the contemplation stage, individuals are beginning to recognize that their behavior is problematic and start to look at the pros and cons of their continued actions. They make statements like: “Maybe I will change in the future.”

In the preparation stage, individuals are intending to take action in the immediate future and may begin taking small steps toward behavior change. They make statements like: “Yes, I see some problems arising and think I should change shortly – maybe next month.”

Next is the action stage, these individuals have made specific overt modifications in modifying their problem behavior or in acquiring new healthy behaviors, and they may say, “I am ready to change” – and they start taking steps to change.

People in recovery need all the resilience possible to continue on this path. Much of the work of a recovery program is to enhance resilience as life’s discomforts continue.

So now, you have an individual who is ready to change. Now What? If that individual is really in the Active Stage of Change, they will change. They will seek input and direction, and they will take advice. They will not need to be forced to make lifestyle changes, but they may need assistance. This advice could come from several sources like sober friends, counselors, church groups, family, AA, or a quality recovery program. At times the primary care will need to occur in a hospital or a residential facility.

What can you expect if a recovery program provides the care? First, a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CADC) will perform what is called an “intake.” The intake is usually a 2-hour interview to determine the most appropriate treatment setting. There are six main areas of evaluation in a complete intake. Firstly, the CADC will be looking for the potential danger of withdrawal from alcohol or benzodiazepines. The assessment will also include the evaluation of possible complicating medical conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension – or medical diseases caused by the

addiction that need treatment or possible hospital or specialist care. Another area of the assessment is looking for significant psychological or psychiatric conditions, such as PTSD, anxiety, major depression, and psychosis because the rate of ongoing psychiatric conditions is very high in people suffering from addiction. Some psychiatric conditions existed before the addiction, and some are the result of the addiction – both need to be appropriately treated.

Another area of the assessment is to determine the stage of change. It is essential to know if the individual is in the Active Stage of Change. If they are not in the Active Stage of Change, they are not likely to engage in a recovery program. The individual will also be assessed regarding ongoing issues with drug use – including marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, and Kratom. This part of the evaluation is essential in that it can help predict the risk of a relapse.

The last area of assessment is the current living environment. Is the home safe and supportive? Are there other drug users in the house or neighborhood? Association with previous drug-using family and friends is a significant factor triggering a relapse. The home environment needs to be safe and supportive.

Recovery requires a bolstering of resilience. Much of what occurs in a Recovery program has the goal of building up resilience and resolve. This process is much more than just strengthening will power. The drug of choice in the past was

an artificial resilience builder – now, new ways need to be found and put into practice.

The therapy provided in a recovery program is both individual work and group work. Overall, group work is a significant part of a recovery program. Group work can provide an opportunity for resilience to be built and practiced. The sharing of stories and struggles by the group members can generate hope. For an individual to be able to share their story can be a way of building confidence. Developing relationships with others who are in recovery, where it is safe to ask for help, in a judgment-free environment, can be very beneficial. In this group setting, new tools are learned to avoid relapses as the individual begins to identify with a new community.

Another necessary part of any recovery program is boundary setting and expectations regarding behavior. Boundaries are life-saving, and increased personal responsibility will be vital for living a full drug-free life. Some of the essential boundaries set by recovery programs include the following: not being late to appointments, no use of marijuana or alcohol, frequent urine or saliva drug tests, no early refills of prescriptions, and an expectation of polite behavior. These boundaries are necessary to maintain order and promote a recovery lifestyle. Every patient is personally responsible for their own recovery. Eventually, every individual must realize they are accountable for their own decisions, actions, and setting boundaries.

The individual who has struggled with addiction for several years has no issue with believing that there is a higher power. Addicted individuals have wrestled with the higher-power of the drug or alcohol for a long time, and that power has won. For someone to be successful in recovery, it is time to surrender to a Higher power other than the higher power of the addictive drug. A more honest appraisal of one's personhood is a critical step in dealing with some of the existential pain issues mentioned in a previous chapter. A self-centered and self-focused life will not lead to a successful recovery. The spiritual qualities of honesty, humility, and thankfulness are necessary for a long-lasting recovery. These spiritual qualities are required for anyone to expect to achieve a satisfying life free of drugs and alcohol.

It is vital for the recovering individual to no longer identify with the community of drug dependency. This new identity formation is another essential step as phone contacts will need to be deleted and boundaries set with previous associates.

The new recovery life needs to be embraced for what it is, a new life, not just a thirty or ninety-day program. Success in a recovery program should be measured like success in a cancer treatment program based on five-year statistics and not just retention in a program for one to six months.

The individual will also need to address issues that can rapidly deplete resilience and lead to a relapse if they are to maintain a life of recovery.

To be successful in recovery, you must no longer see yourself as a victim. A victim is powerless, living in a self-constructed prison. You need to be robust to overcome addiction. You need to be the agent of your recovery and not the victim of your past. There is no freedom or progress while blaming others. The internalization of the victim role only leads to bitterness and the feeling of anger and disappointment. Yes, you may have been treated horribly in the past but to not remain under the power of those who treated you this way by continuing to be their victim. You need to let go to move forward. You need to view others that have caused harm in the past as not owing you anything and that you are not expecting anything from them anymore. If you are waiting for them to correct a previous wrong before you move ahead with your life, you are giving all of your power to someone else, someone who has hurt you in the past and is likely to harm you again.

You may need to deal with anger. Anger is the acting out victim; it is an exercise of pride and hurts and drains resilience rapidly.

Fear is another issue that can prevent recovery. Fear can and is very limiting and is often a source of relapse. It takes courage to ask for help.

Arrogance is another factor that can short-circuit recovery. Controlled confidence is helpful, but pride will lead to rapid relapse. The cocky do not succeed. Humility is a quality that is present in the life of someone living a life of recovery.

At times in the process of recovery, there may be a need for referral to deal with ongoing medical or psychiatric issues. For example, the self-neglect that is very common among addicts means there has been little to no attention to personal health care. Chronic conditions have often been left untreated, and there may be psychiatric issues that require medication.

Uncontrolled cravings are one of the most common causes of relapse, especially in the early stages of recovery. The pain of prolonged withdrawal and intense cravings can be unbearable. Medication-assisted therapy or MAT can be beneficial in controlling cravings and the painful symptoms of withdrawal. Multiple studies are showing the lifesaving value of these therapies.

With time, patience, and a lot of work, studies have shown a success rate of greater than 60% for those in recovery. Like all chronic diseases, there are often setbacks or relapses. Still, with persistence, honesty, and humility, it is possible to live a life of recovery and experience a life free of addiction. Recovery does not mean you get to live out your days in the warm womb of a residential program or intensive out-patient program.

Graduating from a recovery program does not mean you are “recovered.” What graduation means is that now you know what is necessary to maintain a lifestyle of recovery; it will be up to the recovering individual to put together a “long term life of recovery” plan.

Chapter 10 - Medication-Assisted Treatment

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is the primary source of information on the prevalence, patterns, and consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use and abuse in the general United States civilian population, ages 12 and older.

Abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs is costly to our Nation, exacting more than \$740 billion annually in costs related to crime, lost work productivity, and health care. Another recent report estimates that the price topped one trillion dollars in 2015.

Cost-effective treatment is essential, with funds allocated wisely to methods proven clinically to be effective and economically prudent.

Effective treatment of opioid use disorder has been declared a national priority. As a society, we need to reduce the rates and societal costs of individual disability associated with opioid use disorder, the infectious disease burden related to intravenous opioid use, and escalating rates of accidental opioid overdose deaths and pediatric opioid ingestions.

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is the use of FDA-approved medications, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a “whole-patient” approach to the treatment of substance use disorders.

The subject of giving medication, or another drug, to someone with an addiction is an area filled with confusion and controversy. It would not be beneficial to replace one drug with another, and it would not be helpful to ignore intense cravings and the symptoms of a prolonged withdrawal when there are solutions.

What is the goal of recovery? If it is engagement in a recovery program and to begin living a life of sobriety, then MAT has shown to double the likelihood that this will occur.

What is the disease of addiction? If you believe the studies that show addiction to be a disease of altered brain structure and function and not just a lack of will-power, then you will understand the need for MAT to aid in neuronal healing.

Yes, the ideal goal would be for a completely chemical-free life, but studies show us otherwise. In light of all the current data, believing that MAT is just replacing one drug with another is a hazardous belief that stems from ignorance of the existing clinical data and a degree of arrogant turf protection. Our programs are essential but not more important than our vulnerable patients.

On the other hand, indeed, MAT is not recovery. The purpose of MAT is to aid pro-social recovery programs and prevent

relapses and overdoses and not provide another chemical escape.

There are effective medication-assisted treatments for nicotine use disorder, alcohol use disorder, and opioid use disorder.

MAT is recommended for adults presenting for clinical treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD) with physiological dependence where intense cravings and persistent symptoms of withdrawal are significant deterrents to ongoing therapy. It has been shown to significantly augment treatment retention, reduce illicit opioid use, reduce the burden of opioid craving, and, in the case of two of the approved therapies, provide effective relief of the opiate withdrawal syndrome.

Medication-assisted treatment is a stabilizing addition to relapse-prevention counseling and mutual-help groups in that it has been shown to increase the effectiveness of those interventions.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved four medications for preventing opioid relapse and for stabilization treatment of opioid use disorder. The three approved long term maintenance treatments are buprenorphine, naltrexone, and methadone. Lofexidine is approved for withdrawal symptom control for up to 14 days.

Lucermyra (pill form of lofexidine) is approved for use for up to fourteen days. It is appropriate for Office-based, Urgent Care, or Emergency Departments. It may provide withdrawal

symptom control while the individual is getting established with a treatment program.

Vivitrol (naltrexone for extended-release injectable suspension) is a monthly intramuscular injection. Revia (oral form of naltrexone) is given as a pill twice daily. It is approved for use with opioid use disorder but appears to be much more effective with alcohol use disorder. Naltrexone is an office-based, non-addictive opioid antagonist that blocks the effects of other narcotics. It is attractive because it has no abuse potential. It is useful for highly motivated individuals but not for the patient with significant physiological addiction or pain issues. Attempts to pair oral naltrexone with psychosocial interventions aimed at improving compliance and retention in treatment have not demonstrated sustained positive results. Therefore it is not an FDA approved use of oral naltrexone. Naltrexone has few drug-drug interactions and a benign side-effect profile but also has the most complicated induction profile because of the need to be entirely off all opioids for 7-14 days before starting naltrexone to avoid severe opioid withdrawal.

Methadone is available in several forms as a brand name and generic drug. Dolophine (methadone hydrochloride) is the tablet form that is used for chronic, severe pain. Methadose (methadone hydrochloride) is an oral concentrate in liquid form used for opioid use disorder.

Methadone is a clinic-based opioid agonist that prevents withdrawal while taking it. It is available as a daily liquid dispensed only in specialty FDA regulated clinics. The evidence for efficacy both in reducing opioid use and retaining patients in care is most robust for this type of agonist treatment. Methadone maintenance remains the gold standard of care for opioid use disorder.

Head-to-head comparisons are mainly available for buprenorphine versus methadone maintenance, with methadone demonstrating the highest rates of treatment retention in all studies. Still, unfortunately, the reviews were comparing methadone 50 mg daily to a low dose of buprenorphine 5 mg. Another critical factor in comparing the two treatments is that methadone is dispensed daily, and the daily ritual of traveling to a methadone clinic may be helpful. Drug-drug interactions are numerous with methadone, due to many cytochrome P450 isoenzymes involved in its liver metabolism. An advantage of methadone is that it can be started at any time during an overarching course of treatment. A disadvantage, however, is that it takes time to achieve a steady-state dose that is therapeutically effective in opioid use disorder, and this period is one of high risk for treatment dropout and accidental overdose if titration is too rapid.

Buprenorphine is another approved treatment that is rapidly gaining popularity. Buprenorphine is available in several

forms, both brand name and generic. Bunavail (buprenorphine and naloxone) is a buccal film placed in the mouth on the cheek. Cassipa (buprenorphine and naloxone) sublingual film absorbed under the tongue. Probuphine (buprenorphine) implant for subdermal administration that provides a low dose of buprenorphine for up to 6 months. Sublocade (buprenorphine extended-release) is an injection for subcutaneous use that provides a stable level of buprenorphine for up to 1 month. Suboxone (buprenorphine and naloxone) is a sublingual film for daily sublingual or buccal use. Subutex (buprenorphine) is a sublingual film or tablet that is buprenorphine without naloxone. Zubsolv (buprenorphine and naloxone) sublingual tablets for daily use. Buprenorphine is an office-based opioid agonist/antagonist that blocks other narcotics while reducing withdrawal risk. Methadone, on the other hand, does not block the other narcotics. Because of its partial-agonist properties, buprenorphine is considered to be much safer than methadone. It is not associated with a significant risk for respiratory depression; however, in combination with sedatives/hypnotics like diazepam (valium), it poses a risk for sedation and reduced respiratory drive.

Starting buprenorphine therapy requires the individual to be in mild-moderate opioid withdrawal before initial dosing to avoid precipitating severe opioid withdrawal. Relief and stabilization

with buprenorphine are rapid. Stabilization is often achieved within 24–72 hours.

During the initiation of buprenorphine, other medications may be used to control symptoms. Clonidine may be helpful for withdrawal symptom control or to help with insomnia. Trazodone is used at times for sleep or a very low dose for control of anxiety. Gabapentin can be used to control some withdrawal symptoms. Gabapentin is of some benefit for assistance with weaning from buprenorphine or methadone after MAT.

Despite the volume of clinical studies that show a significant advantage with the use of medication-assisted treatment, the belief is still present in the treatment recovery field that MAT is not consistent with recovery. I hope that I have made a case for where it should be considered and appropriate.

Opioid use disorder is a debilitating, costly, and often deadly disease. Our patients, family, and friends deserve the best treatment with the best tools available.

Chapter 11- My Loved One is an Addict

The toll and cost of alcoholism or a drug addiction spread beyond the individual, affecting family, work, and society. The issues facing a family in this situation are enormous. How do you survive, and how do you love and care for someone with the disease of addiction? How do you live with someone whose ability to reason is being negatively affected by the chemical of their addiction? How do you maintain a relationship with someone who cannot be trusted as they proceed on a personal path of destruction?

As a spouse or parent, you are well aware of the emotional toll and the turmoil. Now, what do you do? At times you want to run away; at times, you want to hide your head in the sand. What do you do?

Firstly, do all you can to educate yourself. It will help to know as much as you can about this disease of addiction. Contact the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). They have a beneficial web site, filled with valuable information. Educate yourself about recovery programs and the different levels of care. It is vitally important that the care provided is the most appropriate for

the problem and the individual's illness. Recovery programs do a process called an intake, the purpose of which is to recommend the most appropriate level of care. Do not be offended if they do not share any information with you. They are held to the highest standard of confidentiality and will only share data if your loved one signs a release of information form. Also, do not be offended if they do not take your phone calls to schedule an appointment for your loved one. An essential part of recovery is taking personal responsibility, meaning your loved one needs to make their own appointments.

Learn the steps you should take if there is an emergency like an overdose. You should have Narcan available at home and know how to use it. Narcan can be obtained by a prescription that can be written by a physician or by a pharmacist, or one of your local recovery programs may have Narcan that they hand out for free. Don't be afraid to use it if you suspect an overdose.

Get to know your local Recovery Programs. Many of them will have programs for family members, and they will be happy to help.

It can be beneficial to walk this steep path with peers who are also on that path. The disease of addiction is a common problem, and there is a good chance you already know another family who is experiencing the same difficulties. You may also connect with peers at family support groups or online

support groups. Your local Recovery programs will have some helpful suggestions. Being part of a group that allows you to share freely, ask for help, and provide support to others can be a lifesaver.

Do not neglect yourself. If you see your family barely hanging together, that is not the time for you to be overwhelmed to the point of collapse or becoming physically ill. As difficult and intense as the situation may be, take time for you; it is necessary. Go for a walk, read a book, pet the dog, go for coffee with a friend, and take deliberate time to write a thankful list. Deliberately writing down the things you are grateful for should be a daily exercise that can prevent you from drowning in the pit of toxic despair.

If you have medical issues, make sure they are appropriately taken care of; see your doctor, take your prescriptions as prescribed, and take care of routine health maintenance like getting your teeth cleaned.

Dealing with addiction is a very stressful time for you and your family. If you have personal issues with addiction, take care of yourself, go to meetings, talk to your sponsor, value your recovery.

Be conscientious about your diet; don't stop eating and don't drown your sorrows in carbs.

Depending on the situation, this may also be the time to put away any substance that could trigger a relapse with the addicted family member. It may not be a problem for you, but

to the addict, just a tiny bit of permission with the use of alcohol, marijuana, or pain medication may have the power to trigger a fatal relapse. You should view your home as a recovery home because, to some degree, you are all in recovery and should do everything possible to promote that recovery. You would not think too highly of a recovery clinic that had a liquor cabinet or acted as a marijuana dispensary or passed around oxycodone for any minor complaint of pain. If pain medications are necessary, then they need to be kept in a safe and used as prescribed by a medical professional. You need to learn to set boundaries. You will not be able to treat your loved one with compassion without establishing limitations. Boundaries can be, and often are, life-saving. If you want to generate some sense of peace in your home, you will have to set boundaries in place and stick to them. The best way to establish boundaries is with a well thought out family behavior contract. A contract will take time to develop and should involve everyone in the household. A contract is a way of establishing and balancing responsibilities, rewards, and pre-determined consequences. It will help to eliminate emotionally charged conflicts. The initial groundwork for the contract should be between the authority figures in the home; it will be essential for you to agree for you to be able to carry out the contract successfully. It may also be necessary to get outside help to establish a contract; someone who could act as a mediator like another

family member, a friend, a pastor, a counselor, or someone recommended by your local Recovery program. It can be challenging to set boundaries with a spouse who has a substance use disorder, and this is one of the situations where outside help may be necessary.

Now that you have drawn up your contract and had your family meeting, and everyone has signed the contract, it will be essential to stick to that contract. If you stick to it, it should significantly reduce frustration and anger, allowing discipline to be unemotional. It may be beneficial to have someone else to whom you report regarding the implementation of your contract. It will also be necessary to evaluate the contract regularly. It is your families' contract; you can change it to suit your family. However you change it, stick to it.

There is a lot of shame, guilt, and stigma in our society about addiction and having a family member who is suffering from addiction. Your family situation will impact how you are viewed by other family members, your work colleagues, neighbors, and friends.

Yes, it is a condition that is filled with shame, but please do not let that shame stop you from seeking help. The burden you bare is enormous, and support is available.

Look for help from friends who have gone through the same situation, your church, or your local treatment and recovery programs.

Chapter 12 – First Steps

There are three possible reasons you are reading this book. Firstly, you have a casual interest in the subject and would like to learn more; secondly, you would like to become involved in helping someone struggling with addiction or thirdly, you could be struggling with addiction yourself, and you are looking for answers.

If you are struggling with addiction, this is your time to take action. Today is your opportunity to break free from the bondage of addiction. God is patient, God is kind, and God has provided, through His Son, a path of restoration. God loves you and is wanting to relate to a humble, honest, and thankful humanity. Psalm 139: 5-6 (TPT) is an expression of this kind of love. *“You’ve gone into my future to prepare the way, and in kindness, you follow behind me to spare me from the harm of my past. With your hand of love upon my life, you impart a blessing to me. This is just too wonderful, deep, and incomprehensible! Your understanding of me brings me wonder and strength.”* We do not need to fear the future; God has gone into our future to prepare our way. Even when

things seem dark and uncertain, God has prepared for you a drug-free future. You do not need to be anxious about tomorrow; you need to act today. You do not need to be paralyzed. God has and is protecting us from the harm of our history. We do not have to be controlled by guilt, shame, offenses, past abuse, or injustices. God is a loving God; we can be free from anxiety about the future and the harm from the past and live today with thanksgiving. Take those critical steps today.

If you have picked up this book because of a casual interest, I hope you have learned about some of the many factors in dealing with the subject of addiction. I hope you will pause to consider the pain and struggles that are part of addiction.

If you have an interest in being of help with a friend or family member or the desire to be part of a program or assistance in developing a program, there are several housekeeping things you will want to take care of first. As mentioned previously, get to know the programs already running in your community. How can you help them? How can their expertise help you develop a program? Find out what areas of treatment or support are missing in your community. You will need to know where to send someone who needs residential care or admission for detox. You will need to know the simple steps involved in giving Narcan. If your church is looking at

developing a program, it would be of value to find out if there are programs at other local churches.

Do not forget that we are talking about members of our community, church, and family who are suffering. If you are developing a program, do it with caution. Appropriate boundaries will need to be in place, and the sooner that happens, the better. Get input from members of the community already running successful programs. They will not mind sharing because the problem is much bigger than any single program can adequately address.

There is a great need for programs for families, especially families of those struggling with addiction or who have family members who have overdosed.

Chapter 13 – Encouraging Resilience to Grow

If you've gotten this far in the book, you must have some troubling questions. Considering the brain changes that occur because of the chemicals that cause addiction, is there any hope for the addict? Do recovery programs work? What does it take to live a life of ongoing recovery? What credentials are necessary to help someone struggling with addiction? How can we determine if a recovery program has any value? What can we do to encourage resilience to grow?

In the field of medicine, the scientific method is used in research to determine if a treatment can meet the standard of what is called a recommended "evidenced-based" treatment. In addiction medicine, a program that promotes its program as being evidenced-based is esteemed higher than those that do not support their practices as being evidenced-based. On the surface, this seems to be logical. We do not want to spend our time and limited dollars, recommending a program or practice that will not be effective. So, what are the problems with the scientific

method and “evidenced-based” treatment recommendations? To apply the scientific method, you must first state a hypothesis, and then you need to test that hypothesis. The problem with the scientific method when dealing with addiction is with the premise. A hypothesis is a statement that a specific action will result in a particular expected desired result. Unfortunately, we are not dealing with physics or chemistry, where measurements can be accurate and very precise. We are dealing with human desire, emotion, and motivation, which is impossible to measure with precision.

Another problem is that a reasonable hypothesis has a specific desired outcome. This outcome is a goal that is important to achieve. When you are dealing with the topic of addiction, the goals are not easily definable. We not only have long term recovery goals, but we also have immediate and intermediate goals. Early on in the treatment process, our goal may be to help a patient stay alive and get to the point where they realize they have a problem. Later on, in the treatment process, the goal may be for them to live their life to their full potential. To add to this dilemma, we also have to wrestle with the reality that the desired result is often uncertain. If we believe that promoting a life of recovery is the desired direction, then we need to have a definition and understanding of recovery. Your description and interpretation of recovery will determine the route you

choose to achieve that recovery. Is recovery something you realize, or is it something you strive to attain?

There has been a minimal amount of investigation into the factors necessary to maintain a life free of drugs and alcohol. What we do know suggests that experiencing negative consequences if a relapse occurs is the most potent force behind those who remain in recovery. If you have something significant to lose, you are more likely to stay in recovery. Ongoing attendance at a 12-step program and social and community support were also found to be beneficial factors. Those who maintain total abstinence tend to do better in the long-term than those who permit themselves to use small amounts of alcohol or marijuana. In other words, recovery must become a lifestyle to remain successful.

There are lots of important questions that remain unanswered. What we do know is that the problem of addiction is not getting better on its own. With increased affluence and opportunity, we are not getting better. Addiction is out of control, devouring the lives of many in our families and communities. We demand and expect immediate comfort. We live in an age where we expect there to be a chemical comfort or a distracting activity at our fingertips. We have access to more knowledge than ever before yet act more foolishly than ever before. The problem is getting worse, and our treatment methods are helping a

few but not honestly impacting the destructive trend. It is like we are trying to turn the Titanic with our only tool being a kitchen spatula, and when we see our efforts are not accomplishing what needs to be achieved, we paddle all the harder. We need to focus on a direction and plan that will produce ongoing increases in resilience. The ability to retain someone in a recovery program for thirty days is not an adequate goal. What would we recommend if we applied the wisdom of God's word to ourselves and our programs? What can we do to foster growth and resilience?

In Galatians 6:1-5 (TPT), we read, *"My beloved friends, if you see a believer who is overtaken with a fault, may the one who overflows with the Spirit seek to restore him. Win him over with gentle words, which will open his heart to you and will keep you from exalting yourself over him. Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other's troubles. If you think you are too important to stoop down to help another, you are living in deception. Let everyone be devoted to fulfill the work God has given them to do with excellence, and their joy will be in doing what's right and being themselves, and not in being affirmed by others. Every believer is ultimately responsible for his or her own conscience."* This passage should be our guiding light when we reach out to help others. We should be willing to help, cautious and humble in our approach, work with the highest standards of excellence, not seeking the affirmation of others,

and comforted by His Spirit. If we move in this direction, we will be fulfilling the law of Christ, stated in Matthew 22:36-40, *“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus answered him, “Love the Lord your God with every passion of your heart, with all the energy of your being, and with every thought that is within you. “This is the great and supreme commandment. And the second is like it in importance: ‘You must love your friend in the same way you love yourself. Contained within these commandments to love you will find all the meaning of the Law and the Prophets.”* If we claim to be followers of Jesus, then this is why we are here on earth today. If we claim we are His disciples, then we will be on a path that will be helpful to those struggling around us. You do not have to have a history of addiction to help an addict, but you do need to be in recovery. Being in recovery is nothing more than being a humble follower of Jesus, growing in grace through honesty, in an atmosphere of thanksgiving. We are here to love others as He loved us - even the unlovely. But, what does that mean, especially when dealing with a fellow human being wrestling with addiction? We cannot complete their recovery for them. We cannot know the thoughts and intentions of another person, let alone change them. What kind of help is worthwhile, and what kind of people should we be as we reach out to help others? As we read in Galatians 6:1, it is the ones who are overflowing with the Spirit that are in the position to reach out to help

others. Those overflowing with the Spirit will be living lives that are a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit. We should all be living this life of honesty, humility, acceptance, courage, compassion, forgiveness, and self-discipline. We should all be on the path of spiritual growth if we expect to be in a position to be of help to others.

What would it look like if we, as Christians, held ourselves to this standard? Do you want to help someone struggling with addiction? Are you overflowing with the Spirit? Is your life a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit?

The following chapters are principles we should all be applying to our lives. These principles are God's blueprint for personal growth. If we live by these principles, we will be people who are in a position to be of assistance to those around us who are struggling with addiction. You will need to address the elements that are draining your resilience bucket, but these principles of living will help fill your resilience bucket. Who we are is much more important than what degree we possess or the architecture of our workplace. Use the next chapters as filters for self-evaluation and tools to strengthen resilience. We need to be growing if we hope to be helpful. We need to have a supply in our resilience bucket if we expect to survive and thrive and be an example to others.

Chapter 14 – Honesty

It is very humbling to admit when you are powerless. Our culture encourages self-sufficiency and strength. While living in northern Canada, I enjoyed kayaking on the glassy smooth, quiet lake in front of our cabin. The sun would rise at 3 am in the summer, and I would regularly go for an early morning paddle before driving in for work. During this time, I learned to do an Eskimo roll with relative ease. After leaving the Canadian medical practice, we moved to Placerville, California. Our house was a short two-mile drive to the South Fork of the American River, a world-renowned river for rafting and kayaking. I was able to raft the river a few times before attempting the trip on my river kayak. Now, I have to tell you, an Eskimo roll on a calm lake is nothing like trying and accomplishing an Eskimo roll on a raging river. I have no idea how many times I swam that day – if I did remember, I would probably lie about to make my experience sound more accomplished. Let's say the trip ended with me exhausted, clinging to the edge of a rock, losing parts of my kayak, and then being rescued by a sympathetic group on a raft. The best part of that day was

finally admitting that I was powerless over that river and desperately needed rescuing.

Being honest enough to admit where you are powerless is very freeing. This kind of honesty does not mean we give up and go home; there is a lot we can and should do, but it is crucial to keep in mind this monster of addiction is more extensive than us. The problem is greater than our abilities, training, and programs. Do not treat it lightly! To be dealt with effectively, the problem will not be managed quickly, like removing a rotting appendix; it is a chronic condition like diabetes. When you are evaluating your ability to help someone in need, it is vital to stay humble and focused. Do not hide in a forest of well-meaning intentions. Talk is cheap and not to be trusted. Intentions are nothing more than deceptive self-talk. Work in the field of addiction is difficult; it is an ongoing struggle; there are no magic answers or solutions. If you are willing to embrace the uncertain struggle for what it is, it will humble you, and maybe it is in the humbling that frees you to become competent working with others.

This principle applies to our selves and our programs. Do not be addicted to your ego. If you remain humble, you may be able to be helpful. Still, if you are convinced you have the only successful answers and programs that others don't, you will be communicating to all those who struggle

that they are nothing more than weak, inferior beings, and your arrogance will cause harm.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans, addresses this issue of ongoing struggle. In Romans 7:15-25 (TPT), he writes, *“I’m a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid. So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it’s not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin hindering me from being who I really am. Through my experience of this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the “law” of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? I give all my thanks to God, for his*

mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God's righteous principles."

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Do you recognize your agonizing situation? Are you humble enough to see where you are powerless? You may have never touched a drug or drop of liquor in your life, but are you humble enough to admit that you struggle with significant issues in life? Do you believe that somehow it cost Jesus more to die for the addict than it did for the non-addict? If you are not wrestling, you are not living a Christ-centered life, and you will not be in a position to help someone who is struggling. If you would like to be helpful, you must be humble.

Chapter 15 – Faith

Faith is trust amid fear. We lived in northern California when my sons were in high school. They were both very fit and strong and enjoyed rock climbing. We took classes on climbing at a local gym and classes on protection placement in Yosemite and went on several guided climbs. My youngest son was fearless and could stick to the rock wall like a spider. Myself, on the other hand, was fearful and very cautious. As our knowledge and experience grew, so did my trust in the equipment. Experience and knowledge lead to more experience and more knowledge, and this developed into a trust. Exercised trust is faith. God wants us to seek Him, to get to know Him, to experience Him and His love for us. Seeking Him and experiencing Him will cause our faith to grow. Growing faith becomes a strength to hold us when we have fallen, just like the climbing rope when we stumble. Make no mistake; you have stumbled in the past, and you will stumble in the future. What do you trust?

If we rely on ourselves, we will end up arrogant and burned-out. When we are up against a seemingly impossible task,

it is common to rely on our education or what we believe worked in our past. We think and believe that we can do the impossible. Our arrogance drives us to work harder to prove ourselves, we begin to buckle under the burden of what we are trying to carry, and we fizzle-out. We become another tragic statistic of burn-out with other well-intentioned, arrogant do-gooders. We are not the power that a struggling fellow human needs for the restoration of their life.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, and you should not have an issue believing that God desires for your life and the lives of those you meet to be fully restored. He did not only give you a guidebook for this restoration, but He also gave His only Son. He loves you more than you can or ever realize. He also loves your addicted son, daughter, spouse, friend, and client more than you ever could. Believe in His love, trust in His love, and lean heavily on Him for the power necessary for a life-saving change. Keep close to your heart Isaiah 40:28-29 (AMP); *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become tired or grow weary; There is no searching of His understanding. He gives strength to the weary, And to him who has no might He increases power.”*

When you are weary, he will give you strength. When you feel you have no might or ability to bring about a change,

He will increase your power. If you are working or living to promote your program or plan, you will eventually fail. To trust in your self-determined power and intelligence, you will miss what is going on all around you. If we expect to have any impact on this monster of addiction, we must rely on a power higher than us as individuals. We need to be free to work with others and be able to listen with clarity and not be distracted by self-promotion or the need for affirmation. We will and do need power.

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Where are you getting your power? What are you trusting? What are you promoting? Are you listening? Are you more focused on those you are serving than you are on yourself or your program? What or whom are you promoting?

We must rely on a power higher than us as individuals, and we must work together. Humble yourself before God, seek Him and trust in His desire to help.

Do not become overly self-reliant. Do not try to help others as a means of treating your own issues or a means of gaining affirmation.

Chapter 16 – Surrender

About once every three to four years, we observed a unique event while living in northern Canada. When the weather was perfect, meaning a week of average temperatures of minus 20, the lake would freeze over like a perfectly formed piece of glass. On one of those occasions, we arrived at the cabin on a bright, frigid night. The conditions were perfect for limitless skating. As the temperatures dropped that night, the ice on the lake thickened and cracked with the sound of an aluminum baseball bat hitting a 45-gallon metal drum. As we looked at the lake from a distance, it looked like a thin layer of glass. We tied up our skates and headed out onto the lake surface. The first emotion that hit when we stepped onto the lake was fear. The lake was clear, clear enough to see fish swimming under the ice. We moved onto the surface with an anxious feeling until we noticed something that gave us confidence. Every hairline crack in the ice gave us a visual picture of the ice thickness, and we could skate without anxiety. Faith is like that; from a distance, it produces fear and anxiety, but when we can see where God has come through for use in significant ways, like the cracks in the ice, it gives us the confidence to

move ahead and not be held back by fear. Faith is real when you are standing on ice that looks like it will not support you. The antidote to fear is an active and living faith. Surrender is the step of faith that frees you to move ahead in your life.

If you decide to live this way, you will find your will, and your desires will start to shift. Your will should be maturing in the direction that moves from self-service to serving others. God did not put you here on earth to get all you can get. He put you here to enjoy Him and give all you can give. This type of life is where joy and contentment live. Follow the advice of Jeremiah when he wrote in Jeremiah 29:13-14 (AMP), *“Then [with a deep longing] you will seek Me and require Me [as a vital necessity] and [you will] find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” says the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and I will [free you and] gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’”*

Addiction treatment is restoration work; seeking and depending on God is a vital part of that work.

The surrender of our will and life to God is the ultimate act of humility that can free us from ourselves and our self-destructive paths. Submission to God is the humble path to contentment. There is no healing in addiction without humility and surrender.

James 4:10 (AMP), *“Humble yourselves [with an attitude of repentance and insignificance] in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you [He will lift you up, He will give you purpose].”* You need to be a humble servant to serve. We are serving the people God created, and God loves. At times we are His hands of help and words of encouragement. We need to surrender to God to serve, but it is not our place to try to make someone else surrender. People are free and will determine their own path, even if they die in the process. You cannot surrender on behalf of someone else, that is up to them. You can show by how you live your life that there is contentment in surrender that is not available anywhere else. If you need more power, you need to surrender more. As we walk this path of surrender, there are several things to keep in mind. We all struggle with the same major issues, yet we seem to think that we are the only ones struggling. Do not allow periods of discontentment to pull you off the path. Life will continue to have significant struggles, and you will be tempted to seek contentment from sources other than God. You may feel isolated, but you are not alone in the struggle. We are all tempted to turn our backs on God in similar ways but don't forget that He has provided a means of escape. God provided the way of escape through the work Christ accomplished on the cross. What does it mean that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light? At times life seems more of a duty and heavy burden than a blessing.

Most often, our discomfort and discontent do not lead us to the cross; it leads us to actions that are within our power and control. We strive to overcome uneasiness through denial, distraction, reaction, and minimization. All these methods seem to work briefly, but given time, leave us more discouraged and emptier.

To control our discontentment and felt pain, we alter painful reality through denial. We deny that we have a problem, or we minimize the seriousness of the problem. We deny our faults, and by pretending, they don't exist, believe that we will be able to hide our flaws. We deny our intent, pretending that our intent or motives are pure and positive when they are self-protective. We deny our self-centeredness and selfishness, convinced our actions are to serve others. We use fantasy and superstition to strengthen our denial, removing our felt pain further from experience and reality. We can even use perpetual turmoil as a means of denial, believing that if my life is in constant upheaval, I have an excuse, and do not have to deal with the more significant realities and issues of life. Through a lack of gratitude, we can even deny the many blessings in our life. If I chose to live in denial as a means of controlling felt pain, then thanksgiving and gratitude will not be a part of my life because they are an effective means of dissolving denial, and then I would have to face the realities of life.

If denying is not our first choice of controlling discontentment, then we will often choose distraction. Distraction is a mild form of denial and can be an effective way of dealing with discontentment and pain. If you want to lessen the pain of childhood immunization, distract the child with a noisy toy. We distract ourselves in many ways. We distract through entertainment. Movies, television, sports, computer games are all readily available and effective forms of distraction. Work can serve as a distraction, a way of avoiding dealing with or recognizing discontent in other areas of life. We can be distracted through education or additional learning. Self-help books are plentiful and can even offer some superficial benefit, but they can also be a form of ongoing distraction from the realities of life. We can be distracted by hobbies. We can be distracted, fighting for a cause, or being part of a group of like-minded people. It is not that any of these things can be called evil, they may be a valuable part of our life, but not if their sole purpose is a distraction. You still need to spend time addressing reality. We can achieve avoidance-distraction with ritual, the practice of a set of actions or procedures with an expected outcome. If I do things in a specific prescribed way, then God is obligated to bless me. If left uncontrolled, rituals can become compulsions, and compulsions can become obsessions, and the purpose of the action is wholly lost. If distraction becomes ineffective, it is possible to take it another level and seek to numb ourselves effectively. It is

possible for you to numb discontentment for some time with food, drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, or commuter games. Be cautious, and do not fall into this trap. It is the comfort provided by these activities that make an addiction an addiction. Be careful; it is easy to go from distraction to addiction without even realizing it.

Another mechanism of dealing with discontentment is through reaction. Anger can be an effective form of self-protection when you feel threatened. Living as a victim and avoiding responsibility through blame and bitterness can feel like a safe place to hide from life's discontentment. Feeling special because of your unique situation or life-pain can be used to justify rebellion and criminal activity.

We long for contentment. Denial, distraction, addiction, and overt reaction do not bring us more pleasure. These activities may be an attractive way of avoidance, but in the long run, leave us with more discontentment.

Hebrews chapter 4 describes the contentment that is available to all who have surrendered to God. It is the faith-rest that should be a part of every believer's life. If you want to be effective in helping someone who is struggling, you will need to be living in God provided faith-rest. Unfortunately, what we witness most often, or experience in our own lives, is a life where we believe in God, but faith is lacking. Where is this promised land of rest? We seem to be willing to remain content in our belief that will get us to heaven while we

continue to struggle with life's burdens. We are no different than the children of Israel; we believe in the promise but walk in the wilderness. Hebrews chapter four encourages us to walk in this faith-rest provided by God, "today." *"For those of us who believe, faith activates the promise, and we experience the realm of confident rest!"* Hebrews 4:3 (TPT)

God has promised us His rest; this rest is real contentment. It is the freedom to be the authentic you. It is not a life of complacency. It is the ability to know God's plan for you and the ability to live that plan with passion and commitment. It is living with the belief and faith that God's rest and peace are more significant than any of the world's burdens or problems. God is our source, God is our provider, and we should be living free in service to Him. When we surrender to Him, we win.

In Hebrews 4:10 (TPT), it is written, *"As we enter into God's faith-rest life, we cease from our works, just as God celebrates his finished works and rests in them."* We cannot gain God's faith-rest by our works, our accomplishments, or our programs; it is provided, as a gift, bought with a price. Real contentment is only available through and because of the cross. The cost was high; He paid the price. Therefore, contentment seems to be out of reach. It is out of reach because it is out of our range, it is only available through the cross. All other forms of felt contentment are the minimization

of genuine contentment. The only valid contentment is the faith-rest that Christ died to purchase for us.

Hebrews 4:11 tells us this is not the “let go and let God” kind of complacent rest; we obtain this rest through diligence and effort. It takes work and effort to surrender. We need to allow God to search our hearts; we need to root out unbelief and ask God for faith. We need to seek Him with all our heart and not just seek Him enough to feel a little better about ourselves today. We also need to gain a growing appreciation for what Christ accomplished on the cross. Hebrews 4:11 (TPT) *“So then we must give our all and be eager to experience this faith-rest life so that no one falls short by following the same pattern of doubt and unbelief.”*

The path of addiction recovery is the path of restoration. It is a challenging and dangerous path. Surrender to God, seek Him, find the peace that only He can give, and then work with diligence. Keep in mind the words from Colossians 1:20-22 (TPT), *“And by the blood of his cross, everything in heaven and earth is brought back to himself— back to its original intent, restored to innocence again! Even though you were once distant from him, living in the shadows of your evil thoughts and actions, he reconnected you back to himself. He released his supernatural peace to you through the sacrifice of his own body as the sin-payment on your behalf so that you would dwell in his presence. And now there is nothing*

between you and Father God, for he sees you as holy, flawless, and restored,”

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Have I surrendered my will and life to God? Am I seeking God with my whole heart? Where to I turn at times of discontentment? How am I living in denial? Am I living at peace?

Chapter 17 – Evaluation

Inventory taking, we do it all the time without even realizing what we are doing. When we glance at the gas gauge in our car, we are taking inventory. Just try covering up that gauge and going for a long drive. Not being able to see how much gas you have will significantly increase your level of anxiety. When we check our refrigerator and pantry, we are taking an inventory before we go to the store to get groceries for the weekend. Why is inventory taking important?

I was in medical practice in northern Saskatchewan in Canada from 1980 to 1992. During my time in the north, one of my goals was to become an able winter camper. Over the years, I gathered the necessary equipment and began taking short overnight trips. In time I discovered that I could survive best with very little gear. Winter camping is fabulous, water is everywhere, even though it is white, and there are no mosquitoes. After several brief overnight trips, it was time to prove my proficiency as a winter camper. My plan was a seven-day solo adventure. I thought it would be a good idea if someone knew where I was before my wilderness solo, so I had a friend take me to my chosen camping spot on the back

of his snowmobile. It was a great experience; it was March 1990; the weather was just below freezing; everything was perfect. Very quiet but perfect. I would sit on a small hill by my tent and watch the wolves dance across the frozen lake in the early morning. I walked a lot and prayed a lot and searched my heart a lot. The day before I was to head the 16 miles back to my cabin, the weather turned; it warmed up to just above freezing and began to snow. I packed up camp at 4 am and headed across the frozen lake now covered with 8 inches of new snow. It was peaceful and beautiful.

You may rightfully ask, what does this have to do with taking a moral inventory? Well, I used the time in solitude to do some very necessary soul searching, but realistically learned more about inventory taking on my trip back to my cabin. You see, I had 16 miles to travel on snowshoes where the trail was now completely covered with fresh snow. To get to my destination, I had to rely on my compass and blaze marks left on the trees by the trapper that used to use the trail. A blaze is where a piece of bark is cut away from a tree trunk, leaving a scar that is seen easily. I knew there was a road east of where I was camping. If I made it to the road, I would have no problem finding my cabin. I was able to make it across the lake with only two compass stops and direction adjustments. When I made it to the trail, I was happy to see the blaze marks were still faintly visible. It was a constant pattern of look for the next

blaze mark; walk to that tree then pause to look for the next blaze mark. Then walk, pause, look, walk, pause, look. Sometimes I had to turn left, and sometimes I had to turn right, sometimes I could just trudge ahead.

I am thankful to that trapper, whoever he is, for leaving those marks on the trees. It was necessary to alter my course every time I checked my compass or looked for a blaze mark. It was an exhausting ordeal, and obviously, I made it out alive. Still, my one-day easy walk turned into two days of uncertainty with frequent inventory checking via compass and looking for the marks on trees left by someone else. What I learned was that inventory taking is not a one-time self-evaluation; it is an ongoing continuous evaluation. At times you need a compass, and at times you need to look for marks left by someone else. Your survival depends on it. Is your path taking you where you want to end up?

At any given time, we are on multiple paths. We should be taking frequent inventory in numerous areas. Remember, do not be deceived by your good intentions; they are only self-generated lies to keep you off track; be brutally honest in your inventory taking. We need to approach each new day as David in the Old Testament did: Psalms 5:3 (TPT), *“At each and every sunrise you will hear my voice as I prepare my sacrifice of prayer to you. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on the altar and wait for your fire to fall upon*

my heart.” We need to take inventory of all God has given us; our possessions, our time, our home, our relationships, our intellect, our history, our family, our passion, our everything, and hand it all back and then be willing to wait. God’s fire will fall. We need to take inventory of our general life direction. Where are you headed, and what are you trying to accomplish? Are you living to serve yourself, or are you living to serve God and others? We need to take inventory of our relationships. We may say we love others, but what do our actions say? Who is important in your life? How are you showing them they are important? We need to take inventory of our resources. Are you under the weight of a burden of debt? Are you living within your means? Are you resting enough? Are you eating as you know you should? Are you getting enough exercise? Have you checked your health status recently? Do you get your teeth cleaned? Have you evaluated your relationship with God lately? Do the people around you know you are a person of faith? When did you pour your heart out to God last? When did you spend a little time waiting on Him? Time and energy should be spent taking inventory of our attitudes and character. How do others see you? Are you seen as caring or callous? Are you seen as full of the Spirit or full of bitterness? Be honest – it is your life – God will guide you, but you need to evaluate continually and then walk the path.

Several barriers may limit your ability to take an honest, moral inventory. Barriers occur in the form of denial, distraction, or deception.

Denial barriers often arise out of fear. Fear of rejection, fear of death, or fear of loss can set the stage for soul protecting denial. Denial is when you start to believe your drummed up good-intentions. Denial arises out of fear but comes to life out of pride. Do not allow your ego to make you the fool who believes his own lies.

Distraction barriers come in many various forms. It seems the more advanced our society becomes, the higher the number of distractions. How does anyone have any time for inventory taking when their electronic devices are continually monitoring them. My cell phone should allow me to feel free, not at the end of a very short leash. Distractions come in how others treat us or how we think others are treating us. The opinions of others can impact our freedom for accurate self-evaluation. Distractions can also occur in what we think we need to achieve. If by working harder and longer, I can get the car that would make me feel better about myself, then I work harder and longer. I no longer pause to take inventory, I get on the treadmill and run as hard as I can. Distraction can also show itself in the reaction to a perceived injustice. If you respond with anger or bitterness when you are wronged or injured, it will distract you from an accurate evaluation. Bitterness and

unforgiveness are a deadly trap. Distractions are everywhere; be aware of them; they are not there to help you.

Other barriers to accurate inventory taking are deception, confusion, and distrust. When you are drowning in a sea of uncertainty, it is challenging to do an appropriate inventory. It has become impossible to breathe these days without inhaling and choking on a lie. Who can you believe? Who can you trust? From fake news to pretentious Facebook postings, it is becoming more difficult to grab hold of any non-manipulated truth. Lord, help us!

We all need to be comfortable taking a moral inventory. It should be part of our daily life. Finding God's path for us is like my winter camping experience; we need to pause frequently, look intently, and stroll. There is no need to run. If you get comfortable with inventory taking with the small things in life, it will be easier to take stock when it comes to the crucial elements like an evaluation of your attitudes and character.

Put aside all pretense and make it your goal to be authentic. A manufactured, false image will only foster incorrect, meaningless, pressure-filled connections with others. If you want meaningful, genuine relationships, you need to be authentic. So, what does the path to authenticity look like in this crazy, fast-paced, noisy world? Only in silence and solitude will you find authenticity. In solitude is where isolation will make you stronger. Without silence and solitude, you will

be a faint reflection of those around you, not thinking or believing for yourself, a finger puppet of the masses. I mean an isolated, lonely, finger puppet of the masses.

We are superficially connected in so many ways these days it is hard to picture solitude with silence. Why do we never leave our houses without our cell phones, or when we do, we feel that something vital is missing - our constant conduit to the world, a short leash tied tightly around our neck. We need silence and solitude more now than ever before.

Solitude is taking time in a specific place with a deliberate purpose and plan. It is time to ponder and ask questions, it is a place we set aside, it is a purpose of finding what you believe and stand for, and a plan that is not forced or pressured.

For solitude to be productive, you need time free from observation and distraction. You will need to unplug your electronic connection with the world.

There are several different forms of solitude with different purposes and focus.

There is a mind-numbing solitude, which is often more destructive than beneficial. We can find mind-numbing activities like drugs, alcohol, gambling, computer games, and excessive observation of sporting events or television. Mind-numbing solitude is a break from the everyday world, but the result is less resilience. Mind-numbing isolation is attractive because it provides a readily available separation from the

pressures of the world with little personal investment. Over time this type of solitude loses its effectiveness and can cost you everything.

There is recreational solitude found in going for a walk or run, playing a sport, hiking in the woods, or sitting in a tree stand. If approached with a positive attitude, routine apparent mundane tasks like lawn mowing, floor cleaning, washing dishes, or car washing could be considered this type of recreational solitude. This type of solitude can be a real break from daily stresses as you have an opportunity to think through life issues without distractions from others. Recreational isolation can help improve your physical fitness and restore or maintain your resilience to a certain degree.

There is creative solitude found in activities like painting, photography, quilting, playing a musical instrument, or other creative activity. This type of solitude is another definite break from daily stressors and can also help restore your resilience. The most valuable form of solitude is restorative solitude, where you sit in silence with pen and paper with purpose and focus. This is the form of solitude that is fitting for inventory taking. You will need a place where you can separate yourself from others and the world. This place needs to be easy to get to and free from interruption. If you find it very difficult to focus your thoughts because of distractions from your past, you may have to start with some therapeutic

writing. Therapeutic writing is a way of setting aside past issues that weigh you down today. These could be past hurts, abuses, or injustices. To set these issues aside, take 30 minutes a day for four to five days, and write about the individual subject. This exercise will not eliminate the impact of past injustice, but, hopefully, it will help you to live more deliberately and not continue to live as a victim. If you live as a victim, you will live a powerless and ultimately meaningless and very isolated life. You do not want to live as a victim.

The goal of this time of solitude is to become more authentic. God only made one you and that you have unique qualities and an individual purpose. It would be a shame to neglect that uniqueness as you are working to gather appreciation from others, others who do not care.

Now that you have been able to free yourself a little from the burdens of past injustice, you can now focus on the present. It is a time of separation from the thoughts, actions, words, and opinions of others. It is time to honestly and humbly evaluate and reevaluate. This is what it looks like to take a moral inventory. What are your core beliefs? What do you stand for? Who are you?

For restorative solitude to be productive, it needs to not turn into a time of fanciful daydreaming. It can be helpful to write your thoughts as a way of keeping your wandering mind in check. This time is used to find your purpose and meaning, time to evaluate your choices, and the consequences of those

choices. A time to reflect on your mortality and the mortality of others. A time to ponder spiritual matters. A time to ask God to search your heart. What do you believe, and how is that evident in the way you live your life? I use this time to prayerfully consider passages in the Bible and how they apply to daily life.

Solitude time should be a time for reflection and contemplation and not a time for rumination over previous hurts and injustices. If you find these intrusive thoughts keep distracting you, then it may be time for more therapeutic writing.

It is not a race, take your time, remain focused but unpressured, and you will find, with God's guidance, that slowly your resilience, creativity, and authenticity will grow.

Another catalyst for accurate inventory taking is to have trustworthy people in your life who care enough about you to say, "no." We all need people around us who are willing to challenge us. It is easy to see the faults in others, and it is hard to see your own flaws. It helps to have others who understand your weaknesses, report to you what they see. Be the kind of person who invites people with this level of integrity into their life and then consider what they are seeing and be willing to seek out and take advice and correction.

David wrote Psalm 139 in the later years of his life. He had witnessed God's love, forgiveness, and strength many times in his life. He saw a giant fall with the impact of one small

stone. He saw armies defeated, and the wealth of a nation grow. He records in Psalm 139 how he is aware of God's expansive knowledge and presence. He acknowledges how God has formed us in ways that are beyond our ability to comprehend. Knowing all he knows and has experienced from God, he requests just one thing. He asks that God help him see if he is walking in any path of pain. David asks God for assistance with taking an accurate inventory when he wrote Psalms 139:23-24 (TPT), *"God, I invite your searching gaze into my heart. Examine me through and through; find out everything that may be hidden within me. Put me to the test and sift through all my anxious cares. See if there is any path of pain I'm walking on, and lead me back to your glorious, everlasting ways - the path that brings me back to you."* This should be our prayer as we place our heads on our pillows every night. God, show me the path of pain and the way back to you.

We should be watching over our hearts, taking moral inventory because this will determine the direction and the outcome of our life. You only get one life, spend it wisely. Proverbs 4:23-27 Amplified Bible (AMP) *"Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you a deceitful (lying, misleading) mouth, And put devious lips far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead [toward the path of moral courage] And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you [toward the path of integrity]."*

Consider well and watch carefully the path of your feet, And all your ways will be steadfast and sure. Do not turn away to the right nor to the left [where evil may lurk]; Turn your foot from [the path of] evil.”

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Am I authentic? What path of pain am I on? Do I have people in my life who care enough about me to say no? Do I make any time for solitude? Am I asking God to help me see the destructive directions in my life?

Chapter 18 – Confession

Health care is complicated. You are dealing with multiple unknowns in the midst of uncertainty and pressure, with patients that are not always willing to be responsible for themselves. The field of healthcare is filled with opportunities for errors. On a mild May evening in 1984, I was called to the emergency department to see one of my patients that had problems with bursitis in his shoulder. He was a rugged man of native descent who was returning home from a trip where he had sold some of the pelts from his mink ranch. His work was physically demanding, and his painful shoulder made life very difficult at times. He had responded very well with previous injections in his shoulder, so I drove the short distance to the hospital and met him in the emergency department. The nurse had kindly put the necessary supplies on the tray in the patient's room, so it was a simple matter of drawing up the solution and injecting his shoulder. The procedure went very well, and in a few moments, my grateful patient was on his way back to his trap line ninety miles to the north. As I finished up my paperwork and cleaning up the used materials in the

examining room, I noticed that the small vial of the solution I had just injected into my patient's shoulder was labeled "depo-provera" which is a female hormone. I had intended to give him an injection of solumedrol, a steroid, but instead injected his shoulder with a female hormone. Now, this was in a day and era where healthcare quality improvements road on the backs of shame and blame. I felt the guilt and shame but had no one to blame. I waited for the two hours it took for my patient to get home before I called him to admit my error. I informed him that the medication may not help his shoulder and that he may feel a little strange and then offered to give him the right injection the next time he passed through town. I did not report my error to the four other doctors I worked with; I just embraced my guilt and made sure I double and triple checked every vial of solution for the rest of my career. Fortunately for my patient, he did not suffer any ill effects, his shoulder improved. In the 1980s, healthcare errors were handled in this way. Find someone or something to blame, increase the shame and pressure, and then try harder. This practice encourages the practitioner to hide errors and deny near mistakes. This methodology did not improve the overall quality of healthcare. Errors in healthcare cause injury and harm and can be fatal. In 1980 an American engineer, Bill Smith, who was working at Motorola, developed a set of techniques for process improvement. These techniques and tools were

applied to the operation of the business at General Electric by Jack Welch in 1995. This set of quality management methods and practices became known as Six Sigma. Although the goal of the Six Sigma process was the production of defect-free products, the principles of Six Sigma error reduction quickly spread to the field of healthcare. One of the tools that were very applicable to healthcare quality was called Root Cause Analysis. I was on the medical executive committee at Marshall Hospital in Placerville, California when the administration introduced the Six Sigma concepts. It was not an easy task to shift from the methodology of change through guilt and shame to a model that encouraged exposure of errors and solutions that were not individual-based but team-based. To perform a successful Root Cause Analysis required a significant culture shift in the way errors were viewed. The entire medical staff had to be educated that errors and near errors needed to be exposed and investigated to find a successful system change that would prevent that error from happening in the future. It was a honor to facilitate a Root Cause Analysis meeting where everyone involved in the case could present their role in an atmosphere that was designed to find solutions and not look for someone or something to blame. The mistakes that were previously hidden because of guilt and shame began to surface in a

way that could be addressed as a system, and the quality improved rapidly.

So, you may ask; What does healthcare quality, Six Sigma, and Root Cause Analysis have to do with the value of confession? Confession is a conversation about how we relate to our faults. The most common and destructive mechanism for dealing with mistakes is to deny their existence and keep them hidden. We all have flaws, and many of these faults cause harm and can be just as fatal as a medical error. Confession can unlock your resistance to seeing your weaknesses and allow you to deal with them productively.

What is a confession? A confession is the next step after taking a moral inventory. It is the recognition and declaration of a fault or weakness.

The subject of confession is the confessor. A confession is a statement without strings attached. It is not a request for forgiveness – that is an apology. It is not a request for a second chance – that is repentance and mercy. It is not a request for restored trust – that is most often manipulation. Confession can be used as a form of deception where the confessor uses a confession to hide a more significant fault. The purpose of a confession is not meant to encourage others. This type of confession proclamation is most often a statement of arrogance that is demeaning to others. If

you want to promote someone, help them from where they are and not from where you have been.

A confession is nothing more than speaking what other people know about you anyway. A disclosure or revelation is a verbalizing of a deep dark secret about yourself that everybody else already knew. Others know your faults, but they don't know if you know or how you will react if you find out. You think you have successfully hidden your faults, but others know something is up. They may not know the specifics, but they are aware of the stench of deception in the air.

What should we confess? Why should we confess? To whom should we confess? When should we confess? The topic of the value of confession seems to raise more questions than it answers. Firstly, there are two broad categories of what we should confess. We should confess our sins, meaning our acts of rebellion and offense towards God and others. We should also confess our weaknesses, meaning our limits, inadequacies, and shortcomings.

Confessing our sins is a powerful antidote against the destructive forces of guilt and shame in our lives. As recorded in Proverbs 28:13 (TPT) *"If you cover up your sin you'll never do well. But if you confess your sins and forsake them, you will be kissed by mercy."* I do not need to list the areas of possible sin in your life; you are aware of those areas and the guilt and shame they produce. This guilt and shame

are a heavyweight; confess your sins, and receive mercy; let go of the unnecessary heavyweight. Do not forget that once you have confessed your offenses and obtained mercy, you need to forsake those offenses, meaning you do not continue to repeat the same offense. Repeated requests for forgiveness will only erode trust. This kind of confession is not the admission of wrong only when you are found out, that is nothing more than insincere spiritual dodgeball. This kind of disclosure involves owning your sin. It opens your eyes as to why you need forgiveness, grace, and mercy. This type of confession prepares you for the next step, which is repentance and a sincere apology. Admission of your sins and rebellious offenses is the antidote for a life of guilt and shame. Psalm 31:17 (TPT) *“As I call upon you, let my shame and disgrace be replaced by your favor once again.”*

The other area of our lives that requires confession is the area of our weaknesses. We do not like to see or admit our weaknesses. To be open to the reality of our weaknesses causes us to face all those existential realities mentioned in a previous chapter. We believe our weaknesses are a valid reason for us to be rejected by others and for us to experience isolation. We believe that it is our weaknesses that prevent us from finding our meaning and purpose in life. It is our physical weaknesses that result in our mortality and physical inability to perform tasks necessary for daily life. It is our felt weaknesses that make us feel incompetent

in issues that matter. We see our spiritual weaknesses as leaving us empty and separated from God. We work with all our energy and power to avoid the exposure of our weaknesses. Yet, Paul, in 2 Corinthians, encourages us to look at our weaknesses through a different lens. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (TPT)

“But he answered me, “My grace is always more than enough for you, and my power finds its full expression through your weakness.” So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I’m weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. So I’m not defeated by my weakness, but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment—when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ—I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power.”

You will not experience God’s power in your life if you avoid your weaknesses. Recognizing, embracing, and confessing your shortcomings is the antidote to your arrogance. Your arrogance prevents God’s power from being active in your life. Confess your weaknesses! If you do not confess your shortcomings, you will spend the rest of your resources and life trying to deny your weaknesses, hide your flaws, overcompensate for your shortcomings, or trying to overpower your weaknesses. Let’s look at an example.

Weakness reality number one. We are not able to determine someone else's decisions and life direction. Addiction affects not only the addict, but it also has a significant impact on their loved ones. I have met with many parents and spouses of addicts in my career. Most of them have been crushed, dealing with the deception and rebellious actions of their loved ones. It is hard to love someone you cannot trust. It is painful to accept where you have limited power. As painful as it may be to realize this powerlessness, it is essential to embrace what you can accomplish and what is beyond your control. We all have limited resources and energy; it should not be wasted where we are powerless. If you are in this challenging situation, pause and evaluate what is going on, then be responsible for what you are responsible for and let go of the responsibility that belongs to your loved one. You will need to set boundaries and stick to them, but in the end, the outcome is up to them. Do not make the problem worse by being responsible for them; it will destroy you, and it will not help them. Do not forget that in the presence of your weakness, God can and will show His strength. You are not smart enough; you are not strong enough; you are not wise enough. Denying your weaknesses will only burn you out.

When it comes to confessing your weaknesses, it is crucial to remember Jeremiah 17:9 (AMP) *“The heart is deceitful above all things, And it is extremely sick; Who can understand it*

fully and know its secret motives?” We are all plagued with pride and arrogance. We do a great job of deceiving ourselves. Be honest; ask for God’s help and do not hide or run from your weaknesses.

You need to be open and honest when it comes to productive confession. The world is full of mockers and gossips, so you need to be careful where and to whom you confess. Disclosure needs to be in an atmosphere that is safe, secure, confidential, and non-judgemental.

You need to start the path of confession by confessing to yourself. You will need God’s help to deal with your self-deception, so freely ask for help. You will need to take time and find a quiet place that is free of distraction. Make this time a regular occurrence and use God’s Word to open your heart. You will need to be humble enough to confess to yourself before you will be able to admit to God or others. If you do not acknowledge, the only fool you will be fooling will be yourself. So, pause and take the time to consider and evaluate what is going on in your life. Look at how you act and react. How does your arrogance show?

Once you have become more honest with yourself, it is time to confess to God. Remember, you are not admitting anything He does not know already; He is just waiting for you to come out of hiding. An open and honest confession to God increases your ability to hear the voice of the Spirit. If you

have trouble hearing God's voice, it could be because you are too preoccupied with trying to overcome your weaknesses. Confessing to God will improve your spiritual hearing.

Confession to another person that you trust will improve your honesty and authenticity. As you experience grace and mercy from another, you will find it less challenging to provide grace and mercy to others. If you have difficulty finding someone you can trust, then at least write down your confession. If you want healing and restoration, the key is through confession. James 5:16 (AMP) *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another [your false steps, your offenses], and pray for one another, that you may be healed and restored. The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power]."*

Stay sensitive to the voice of the Spirit and be ready to confess at any time. Ask the Lord to remove the scales from your eyes. Psalm 119:18 (AMP) *"Open my eyes [to spiritual truth] so that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law."*

The benefits of confession are social, personal, and spiritual. There are many social benefits to confession. Confession is a communication of transparency and authenticity, qualities that are lacking in today's world.

Confession is a foundation for meaningful apology and forgiveness. Authenticity and forgiveness are necessary to rebuild broken trust. We all have many weaknesses and imperfections. Our strengths are often a cause for separation because of comparison and competition, but our shared weaknesses can serve as a relational bond. Confession communicates trustworthiness and authenticity. There are multiple personal benefits to living a life open to confession. Taking the time to pause and reflect on who you are in light of God's word and to ask the Lord to search your heart regularly will increase your self-awareness. This increased and more accurate self-awareness will increase honesty and the realization of how much you need grace and mercy. To be capable humans, we need to see ourselves as others see us and not have our vision clouded by our arrogance and well-meaning intentions. It is not a lack of education that makes you stupid; it is a combination of denial and arrogance. Confession improves relationships by encouraging trust and burden-sharing. Confession is conscious cleansing; it is like a house cleaning of your soul. It is time for some major Spring cleaning. Pause, open your heart, and take out the trash you have been carrying for decades. You will want to rid yourself of this trash of arrogance, guilt, and shame before it becomes soul-rotting and life-destroying bitterness. Psalm 119:116 (TPT) *"Lord, strengthen my inner being by the*

promises of your word so that I may live faithful and unashamed for you.” You can live without shame if you do not get tripped up by your arrogance.

Confession will also increase your freedom to grow. With increased authenticity, humility, and honesty, you will be able to see the multiple areas where growth is needed and will be freer to move in that direction.

Another personal benefit of confession is peace. You can now live with freedom from the weight of guilt and shame. You may still have to live with remorse over past faults, but you will experience a renewed freedom without being held back by shame.

As you learn to embrace your weaknesses and shortcomings without guilt and shame, you will become more tolerant of others. The ability to provide grace to others will generate more mercy shown towards you.

The renewed freedom and emotional energy achieved through confession can strengthen your will and self-control. This increased strength can give the extra resilience needed to change destructive habits.

The most significant benefits of confession are spiritual benefits. Do you feel as if God has abandoned you? Do you feel spiritually lost? Arrogance and shame will leave feeling far from God. Confession of weakness will weaken the hold of vanity and help you see your place in God’s kingdom. There is a lot of unnecessary pressure in trying

to be God. God has a place for you, and it is better than you could ever imagine. Confessing weaknesses will also open your heart to God's searching your heart, and this will increase your sensitivity to His whispers. In the face of guilt and shame for our rebellion and self-centered living, if we confess to God, we will experience His grace and mercy. In my four decades of medical practice, I have witnessed a lot of life destruction. The life-destructive power of arrogance, shame, and bitterness is far greater than the destructive power of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined.

Confession feels like you are losing your life. Confession is admitting your weaknesses and facing your guilt and shame. Keep in mind the words of Jesus from Matthew 16:25 (TPT) *"For if you choose self-sacrifice and lose your lives for my glory, you will continually discover true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will forfeit what you try to keep."*

Keep up to date on taking your moral inventory. Be ready at any time to confess to yourself, God, and to another. Be on guard for the barriers that may interfere with your growth. You want to avoid living your life with pride clothed in guilt. The shame of living this way will result in you applying a filter to your life that has stamped on the edge, "Not loved by God."

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Am I a disciple of Jesus? Am I afraid of exposing

my weaknesses? Am I too arrogant to admit my sins and shortcomings? In what ways do I hide? Do I feel isolated from God and others? What do I currently do with guilt and shame? Do I grant grace and mercy to others?

Do not hide from yourself, hide from God, or hide from others. What feels like weakness is a strength.

Chapter 19 – Redemption

Where we see a need, we pursue a solution, where we do not see a need we become complacent. We all know of multiple areas of our lives that require change. We live with the belief that a little effort here and there will accomplish all the change that is needed. Redemption is a meaningless concept if we do not see a need for redemption. We abandon contentment and cling to complacency.

In 375 B.C. Plato wrote Republic. In this work is recorded an allegory about a cave. This parable is a story about a group of people that live in a cave deep beneath the earth's surface. They are chained to the cave walls and can only see the wall in front of them. Some people walk by the entrance to the cave carrying objects that cast shadows on the walls of the cave. These shadows are what they define as reality. The cave dwellers do not want to leave the cave as this is the only reality they know. If one did escape the cave and experience a new existence, the bright light of the sun would hurt his eyes, and he would run back to the cave. If one of the cave dwellers were dragged out of the cave, they would become angry and experience pain because of

the overwhelming brightness of the sun. If, however, one would escape the cave and remain in the new, bright world, his eyes would slowly accommodate, and he would begin to see a new and superior reality. He would still not understand all aspects of this new reality, but he would know it is superior to the reality he experienced living chained to the wall of the cave. As his eyes accommodated, his vision would progress from seeing shadows to seeing reflections in water, to seeing people and objects. If this freed prisoner were to return to the cave to report his findings, he would arrive with a sense of blessing for his new experience and felt pity for those still chained to the wall of the cave. As he enters the cave, his eyes that have become accustomed to the light would be blinded by the darkness. The cave dwellers would believe that the returning prisoner was damaged by his time outside the cave and would respond by wanting to kill anyone trying to drag them out of the cave.

This parable of the cave is an excellent image of the issues with redemption. There is a reality of wonder to be experienced through recovery, but we remain comforted by the familiar shadows on the wall. Our affluence has brought us some incredible, high-definition shadows. We do not feel comfortable leaving the cave. We will shut down and try to destroy those who want us to experience a world outside the cave. Through redemption, God offers us a life of

contentment, but we choose the life of familiar complacency. We are aware that there is a reality far superior to the one we are experiencing, but we are comfortable enough to refuse to leave our cave. As recorded in Romans 8:22 (TPT), *“To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth.”* The problem with redemption is that it is something we desperately need but don’t want.

On a recent trip to see our grandchildren, my wife and I were driving north on Highway 217 in northern Oregon. We were following a new white Mercedes sports car that still had the paper DMV sticker on the back windshield. In the car were a young man in his early thirties and his female companion. The car was beautiful, pearly white with those gull-wing doors. As we pulled up to the stoplight and signaled to turn left, we saw another young man in his early thirties. This second young man was standing on the side of the road with a cardboard sign that read, “need money to get home for Thanksgiving.” Within my field of vision were two young men of the same age.

Both young men were in desperate need of redemption, but one was more aware of the need than the other. No wonder Jesus taught in Matthew 19:24 (TPT), *“In fact, it’s easier to stuff a heavy rope through the eye of a needle than it is for the wealthy to enter into God’s kingdom realm!”* Satan does not

have to entice us to commit horrible sins to knock us off course. He just needs to see that we are comfortable in our complacency and busy with our distractions. Redemption means “to gain or regain possession of (something) in exchange for payment.” We need to be redeemed. Christ paid the price for our redemption so we can live the image of God in our lives as He first intended. As recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (AMP), *“For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God].”* We need redemption from ourselves and comfortable complacency.

Life is hard, confusing, troubling, and at times, feels impossible. We all struggle with the burden and pain of isolation, meaninglessness, responsibility, mortality, and spiritual emptiness. Our goal during these times of difficulty is not complacency or comfort; our goal is contentment. A life free from discomfort would lack the challenges needed to grow. Yes, we have times when we would like to see things work out smoothly. We long for our environment to change to accommodate our wishes, but what we desire is to know that amid very troubling circumstances that we are still at peace and not destroyed emotionally.

Remember that *“no temptation has taken you, that is not common to man.”* The significant struggles we face are the same. We all struggle with the pain of isolation, that we are alone, that no one understands us, and that we do not understand anyone else. We all struggle with finding our meaning and purpose. We know we are unique, but it can be challenging to discover what our mission is or even if we have a purpose, and at times, life seems meaningless. We all struggle with the fact that we have free choice and that our decisions are our responsibility. These choices can seem to be freedom but also come with consequences, guilt, shame, and remorse. We all struggle with our mortality, which in turn fosters denial and avoidance. Our time on earth is brief, and that thought is very troubling. All that we currently know will be gone. We struggle with spiritual emptiness, the void within us when we stubbornly try to work out life in our power with our plan. At times it does not seem possible to trust God. We strive with all we must to serve ourselves, to achieve some level of comfort, and as we do our condition deteriorates, and our discontent grows.

So, we all struggle with the same major issues, yet we seem to think that we are the only ones struggling. You may feel isolated, but you are not alone in the struggle. We are all tempted to turn our backs on God in similar ways but don't forget the next part of the verse that He has provided a means of escape. God provided the way of escape through the work

Christ accomplished on the cross. He has paid the price for our redemption. We no longer need to be chained to the wall of a cave, interacting with shadows and reflections.

The image of God in us is fractured, and we need redemption. Because of the work Christ accomplished on the cross, we can now renew our relationship with God and live the image and the life that He intended.

God has promised that the work of redemption in our lives will be continued, Philippians 1:6 Amplified Bible (AMP) *“I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will [continue to] perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return].”*

Our redemption is not dependent on what we say, what we do, or our good intentions. Our redemption is dependent on Him. Ephesians 1:7 (AMP), *“In Him we have redemption [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood, [which paid the penalty for our sin and resulted in] the forgiveness and complete pardon of our sin, in accordance with the riches of His grace.”*

Even though we are the product of generations of chained, cave-dwellers, we are free, because of the cross to escape those chains and live as God has intended. 1 Peter 1:18-19 (TPT), *“For you know that your lives were ransomed once and for all from the empty and futile way of life handed down from generation to generation. It was not a ransom payment*

of silver and gold, which eventually perishes, but the precious blood of Christ - who like a spotless, unblemished lamb was sacrificed for us."

Stop and pause. Be thankful for the redemption that has been purchased for you. Colossians 1:12-14 (TPT), *"Your hearts can soar with joyful gratitude when you think of how God made you worthy to receive the glorious inheritance freely given to us by living in the light. He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved Son. For in the Son all our sins are canceled and we have the release of redemption through his very blood."*

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Are you aware of how much you need to be redeemed? Are you grateful for the redemption provided to you? Do you realize that you require as much redemption as the worse sinner? Do you think you are wise or strong enough to redeem someone else? Are you living with the awareness of your redemption?

Chapter 20 – Restoration and Reconciliation

One of the best examples of apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation is the parable of the prodigal son told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32.

This parable contains all the elements for a study of forgiveness and reconciliation. There is a relational offense committed by the self-centered son. The father longs for a restored relationship. There is recognition of the wrongs committed by the wayward son. There is humility on the part of the rebellious son and his return to those he offended. There is a celebration at the restored relationship and status of the son. There is also the bitterness of the older son to show that the same event can be the cause of different reactions by different characters.

With the background of having done the work of taking an honest, moral inventory and then experiencing the impact of redemption, it is now time to move ahead with the acts of admitting offense and harm and moving forward to an apology, forgiveness, and movement towards restitution.

We do not live on a desert island. Our relationship with God and our fellow humans is vitally important. The process of

apology and forgiveness is the topic of the restoration of broken relationships. It is also the story of how relationships can strengthen and grow.

How we relate to one another tells the world our character; it is what defines us. The Bible stresses this type of relational restoration. 2 Corinthians 13:11 (TPT) *“Finally, beloved friends, be cheerful! Repair whatever is broken among you, as your hearts are being knit together in perfect unity. Live continually in peace, and God, the source of love and peace, will mingle with you.”* I know we would all like to have God mingle with us, to have that reassurance that He is always present.

It takes courage and humility to apologize and forgive. God does not desire us to be weighed down with guilt, shame, or arrogance. So, no matter how difficult it may seem, His plan for his people is that we be forgiving and work towards restoration in relationships where possible. It is essential to keep in mind the words of Jeremiah 29:11 (AMP) *“For I know the plans and thoughts that I have for you,” says the LORD, ‘plans for peace and well-being and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’*

Now is the time to put some feet on your integrity and begin to work on your relationships.

The first step is to pause and write a list of those you have hurt and the specifics of the harm. You need to take time, in solitude, to reflect. You need to be humble and honest.

Your offense was not wounding the feelings of another; it was your arrogance, weaknesses, or self-centeredness. Take time to consider those you have hurt. Carefully make your list, including what it was that you did to cause them harm.

Once you have your list, it is time to consider if an apology is appropriate. You will face some situations where it is best not to deliver an immediate apology. A delivered apology with a request for forgiveness may inflame some cases and cause more harm to the other person. Your goal is to bring an opportunity for relational healing and not to create a more significant division. So in situations like this, have your apology well thought out and prepared and be ready to deliver it should God open the door.

An apology needs to be sincere and nondemanding. You should be thinking more about the other person than you are of yourself. You are not in a position to demand forgiveness. Be prepared. Writing out an apology before it is delivered is very helpful. You need to consider when and where to offer the apology. Will it be given in a face-to-face conversation or sent in a letter? You want the person that you have harmed to know they are in control of the conversation and that you are not pressuring them for an answer or immediate resolution.

The purpose of an apology is to address issues in a relationship where you have crossed a boundary and

caused harm. It is an opportunity for humble and honest communication with another person because you value the relationship. It is doing what you can do to rebuild a relationship and, over time, set the framework for trust. It is an opportunity to express regret over the wrong you have committed. It is an opportunity for you to own every part of the wrong committed. Saying, "I'm sorry I made you feel bad," is not a sincere apology. This type of apology leaves the other person responsible for part of the issue; their wounded feelings.

An adequately delivered apology will help to define and reestablish boundaries in the relationship. It should help you learn from your past mistakes and be a chance to rebuild lost trust. An apology can also help put the conflict behind you and not allow it to fester into unresolvable bitterness.

A humble apology can help you maintain your integrity and assist you in being able to forgive yourself. Many times, the hardest person to forgive is yourself. These are the benefits of an apology, but what are the consequences of refusing to apologize?

We all know that relationships are essential, and healthy relationships are valuable. We also know that when we wrong another that an apology is a useful tool in the restoration of the relationship. So, why do we refuse to apologize at times? A refusal to apologize may mean that I

am indifferent; that the relationship was not meaningful; that I don't care. For example, if I accidentally cut off another driver in traffic, I am not going to chase him down to apologize; he would most likely be intimidated, and I could get shot. My relationship with the other driver is not essential; therefore, I do not see the need for an apology. If, on the other hand, if I rudely honk my horn at an elderly couple, as I have done, who were on their way to see me in the office, then an apology would be appropriate. In this case, the relationship has some meaning, and I crossed a boundary. You want to eat that crow before it has a chance of becoming a vulture.

Another reason for not apologizing is because I see the apology as being a threat to my self-image. To be honest, this is not an attempt to salvage my self-image but the protection of my arrogance. If this is your excuse for not apologizing, then you are in big trouble.

Another reason for not apologizing is the belief that an apology will not help or the impression that it will make the situation worse. This belief may be a valid reason, but be sure that you are not using it as an excuse to soothe your wounded pride. As mentioned before, there are some situations where you should be ready to deliver the apology, but wait for the appropriate time. Some apologies will never be offered.

Whatever the reason, there are consequences for not apologizing. A refusal to apologize when it is appropriate to apologize will damage personal and professional relationships. A refusal to apologize will erode trust and encourage destructive rumination. The rumination can quickly turn into anger, bitterness, or even hostility. These are not the ingredients for a healthy, meaningful relationship; they are the ingredients for a war.

How do we know when to apologize? You can use yourself as a filter. If what you did to another was done to you and it would have bothered you, then it probably deserves an apology. You should take the time to think through and prepare your apology and be ready to deliver it when the opportunity presents.

As you pause to ponder where you need to deliver an apology, keep in mind the necessary elements of a sincere and meaningful apology. You need to consider others more than yourself. The subject matter of the apology is what you did to cause harm. Make that subject matter the focus of the conversation and make it very clear. The apology needs to be free of blame. You should not blame the other person, the circumstances, or anything else. You crossed the boundary and are taking full responsibility. It is time to state the offense, take responsibility, express regret, and ask for forgiveness. Once you have apologized, you can reaffirm the relational boundaries and start to build back trust.

When you are delivering an apology, you cannot guarantee the result. You may be asking for forgiveness, but you should not expect it or demand it. Do not manipulate the other person's response or pressure them in any way. You may have to wait for an answer. Do not forget the essential part, which is to communicate the value of the relationship. It is not possible to wade through the murky waters of relational restoration without addressing the topic of forgiveness. We need to forgive if we expect our apologies to result in forgiveness from another. The Bible is clear on the importance of forgiveness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24 (AMP), *"So if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and while there you remember that your brother has something [such as a grievance or legitimate complaint] against you, leave your offering there at the altar and go. First make peace with your brother, and then come and present your offering."* Apology and forgiveness take priority over sacrifice and service. The appropriate response when you have wronged someone else is to apologize. The proper response when you have been wronged is to forgive, even if it is not requested by an apology.

The actions, injustices, and abuse of others have hurt all of us to varying degrees. Many people have suffered unimaginable damage and injustice. Forgiveness is not condoning the abuser or the offensive action; that would increase the abuse. Forgiveness is not excusing the offender or their responsibility

because of extenuating circumstances. No circumstance, medical condition, or psychiatric condition, justifies ongoing violence. Forgiveness is not forgetting; forgetting in the face of abuse is denial. Reconciliation is not forgiveness; it may be the goal of forgiveness, but just because you forgive someone you love does not mean you should automatically trust them; that would be foolish. Trust is the bedrock of a meaningful relationship and is only built over time.

What then is forgiveness? Forgiveness is letting go of anger and resentment. It is the recognition that anger and bitterness cause more personal harm than any act of injustice or abuse. If you hang on to the resentment and demand anything from the offender, you are giving all of your power over to them; it will destroy you. Do not give into anger and bitterness; let go of the anger and take your life back from the abuser. You need to get to the point where you can say and believe that the offender owes you nothing; that your life today is your life and that the past owes you absolutely nothing. This is not easy, but it is very necessary. You cannot undo the injustice, but you can stop it from controlling your life. The act of forgiving is the freedom needed to escape the trap of the offense. A victim lives a lonely life in a prison of their own making.

Forgiveness will free you from that prison. It will increase your optimism and elevate your mood. Forgiveness has been shown through medical studies to be a guard against

anger, bitterness, stress, anxiety, and depression. There are many physical benefits from forgiveness; you will experience a decrease in cortisol, the stress hormone, you will see improvements in your blood pressure, less heart disease, and a decrease in inflammation that may be a factor in causing diabetes and cancer.

Forgiveness has also been shown to lessen the likelihood of developing an addiction and to lessen relapses in those who suffer from addiction.

Yes, we all want the benefits of forgiveness, but how do we forgive? The first step in forgiving is to be honest about how you were offended and that this has made you angry. The process can be very uncomfortable as many of us have been raised to believe that all anger is a sin. The reality is that denial about the anger caused by an offense is more likely to lead to sin than the anger itself. This is where you need to be “angry but sin not.” This is not an encouragement to act on your anger or to act out your anger. This is time to honestly and humbly admit to anger that is the result of an offense caused by someone else. If you do not uncover the anger, you will not know what needs to be forgiven. You then need to make a decision to forgive. You know why you should forgive, and you know the consequences of not forgiving, but it will still take making a decision on your part to forgive. Now, take some time to walk in the shoes of the offender. If you get

close enough to any other human, you will find valid reasons to reject them and compelling reasons to be compassionate. We are all deeply flawed, and we have all caused harm to others. If you realize your need for forgiveness, it can help you develop some compassion for the offender. This does not mean that you should remain in an abusive relationship or try to restore a previously harmful relationship, but it does mean you can more easily forgive. Now is the time to let go of all those toxic, angry, vengeful, and bitter emotions. They now owe you nothing; you are free from the burden of the offense. Reflect on your growth and be thankful. Another tool to help with forgiveness is therapeutic writing that was introduced in chapter 16. This process can help you let go of harmful emotions. Therapeutic writing can be particularly helpful in two of the more difficult areas of forgiveness; forgiving someone who is no longer alive and forgiving God. If you are blaming God for your present or past life trouble, then you need to get to a place where you can forgive. Blaming God is never justified. He is not the author of your pain. He has provided the path away from your trouble. If you feel anger towards God, be honest, and tell Him; write down your thoughts and feelings and ask Him for help. It can also be challenging to forgive someone who is no longer alive. You may feel guilty when you feel anger towards someone who has passed away. After all, you are still alive, but they are not, plus this is a relationship where restoration is not possible.

This is another time when writing your honest thoughts and feeling may be very helpful. If appropriate, you should write them your apologies, ask for forgiveness, and then write out the steps of forgiveness as it applies to that relationship.

The Bible teaches that forgiving others allows God to forgive us. To the disciple of Jesus, forgiveness is not an option; it is a demonstration of submission to Christ. It is essential to realize that unforgiveness is a willful act of hostility and demonstrates a lack of faith. Matthew 6:14-15 (TPT) *“And when you pray, make sure you forgive the faults of others so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you withhold forgiveness from others, your Father withholds forgiveness from you.”* So, just how much do you need God’s forgiveness? That is how much you should forgive others. Forgiveness is a serious spiritual matter; do not take it lightly. Ephesians 4:31-32 (AMP), *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor [perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, fault-finding] and slander be put away from you, along with every kind of malice [all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence]. Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave you.”* This is the life of recovery you need to model to help those struggling with the disease of addiction. This is the kind of life you should be living if you are a disciple of Jesus.

So, move ahead with your life. Pause to consider how much you need forgiveness; find where you need to be apologizing, and let go of the prison of past offenses and forgive.

Today maybe your time for a significant life breakthrough. Consider the words of David in Psalm 51:12 (TPT), *“Let my passion for life be restored, tasting joy in every breakthrough you bring to me. Hold me close to you with a willing spirit that obeys whatever you say.”*

When it comes to apology and forgiveness, ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Who have I offended? How have I hurt others? Am I aware of my anger? Who has hurt me in the past? Who is hurting me right now? Am I willing to let go of past harm and forgive? Do I realize how much God has forgiven me? Do I realize how much it cost God to forgive me? Is my life a demonstration of negativity? Is my life a demonstration of the positive emotions of forgiveness, love, hope, joy, compassion, faith, awe, and gratitude?

Chapter 21 – Resilience & Sanctification

The path of recovery is a lifelong journey. This process of growth and sanctification requires persistence and resilience. The goal is to become the people that God intended. The path is narrow and uncrowded.

The word resilience comes from the Latin word *resilientm*, which means “inclined to leap or spring back.”

Resilience is the ability to get knocked down and then get back up again; it is the power of recovery from adversity.

For an elastic band, resilience is the ability for that object to be stretched and then return to its original length – unless stretched too often.

For human beings, resilience is the power and ability to get back to a predefined normal state – unless stretched too often. At that point, either a new norm is established, or you live in despair.

When this ability is functioning well, all seems to be OK, you have reached the status quo, and feel at peace.

Resilience is important because you cannot avoid getting knocked down regularly.

Studies have shown that life achievements may be more the result of resilience than talent. We all know very talented people who are frustrated with their life because they lack the necessary resilience or grit to allow their ability to flourish. Success in life-long recovery requires resilience. Sanctification, or spiritual growth, requires resilience.

The study of resilience is a study of adversity management. Adversity is a common, often daily characteristic of human life. Some difficulties you will be prepared for, but for much of it, you will not. Adversity will not destroy those who are resilient, but those who are not resilient may become overwhelmed.

Resilience is more of a path than a destination. How you walk the route will have a significant impact on your experience of life, especially your experience of life's challenges.

Where should we look for reliable guidance on resilience? Resilience is affected by all aspects of who we are: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. My opinions on resilience come from four primary sources. Firstly, my personal experience with adversity, for much of which I was unprepared. Secondly, the observation of the lives of the thousands of patients I have had the privilege to observe over the years, some who demonstrated resilience amid significant adversity. Thirdly, from a critical review of the current literature on resilience from the world of psychology,

philosophy, and theology. Fourthly, from the Bible, God's reliable guidebook on how to live a life of resilience.

In the book of James in the New Testament, we are encouraged by the following words. James 1:2-4 (TPT) *"My fellow believers, when it seems as though you are facing nothing but difficulties see it as an invaluable opportunity to experience the greatest joy that you can! For you know that when your faith is tested it stirs up power within you to endure all things. And then as your endurance grows even stronger it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking."* These verses encourage us not to run from the many adversities in life but to embrace them as a way of getting more durable and more complete. This one shift in our worldview would significantly reduce unnecessary stress, and free up the energy spent trying to avoid inevitable adversity. The expectation that you can live an adversity-free life will weaken your resilience and increase your despair. Be honest; life is complicated and confusing and at times seems impossible.

We can get a better understanding of psychological resilience and the resilience needed for successful recovery by comparing it to physical fitness.

Resilience and sanctification are to the soul what physical fitness is to the body.

We all came into this world with an individual capacity for both resilience and physical fitness. Some of us were gifted to be weightlifters and others, marathon runners.

With both physical fitness and resilience, we are all born with a different capacity, the fullness of which often goes unrealized. We could all be more physically fit, and we could all be a lot more resilient.

How do we improve our physical fitness? Physical fitness is gained by breaking down your body with specific physical demands and then with proper rest and nutrition you slowly but gradually get stronger and fitter.

Exercise itself does not make you stronger; it tears you down; you get stronger when you rest. Once this process has occurred over and over many times, you are now more prepared to perform better physically. You can now lift a heavier weight or run faster.

Through stress and recovery, resilience also has a chance to grow and develop, but unfortunately, it is not as simple as physical fitness with its defined and proven exercise programs. It is not possible to go to the “soul gym” and bench press 10% of a divorce, 5% of the loss of a spouse or child, and 50% of the unknown disaster around the next corner. With a physical fitness program, you can prepare to run a faster mile by training to run a faster mile, but with resilience, it is not that clear. If, however, you only sit there and contemplate what disasters may occur to you tomorrow,

you will, in the process, drain your current resilience tank and be much worse off. Just like getting physically stronger, rest and proper “soul nutrition” are necessary to get stronger.

Being more resilient has many benefits. If we are more resilient, we will be less likely to get caught in the trap of chronic stress with its consequences of increased heart disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, and addiction. With increased resilience, there is less sense of being overwhelmed by adversity and, therefore, an improved ability to cope, along with a significant reduction in stress-induced inflammation, thus, improving overall immune response.

We will also be less likely, during times of stress, to be tempted by diversionary activities that have severe life consequences like addictions, gambling, or dangerous risk-taking behavior.

With low resilience, there is an increased impact of chronic daily stress. This results in chronic anxiety, altered immune system, and release of white blood cells from the bone marrow, causing increased inflammation, which increases the risk for diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's.

Resilience is a function of activity in our brains. Resilience is the ability to continue moving towards a pre-determined goal, despite obstacles or setbacks. Our mind can gather a massive amount of data and filter it in such a way that we can smell a rose and say that it is a good thing or we can step in the pile of stuff our dog left for us on the lawn and said that is

not a good thing. Our brains can gather all this data and filter it into pathways that move us either closer to our goals and rewards or place us in a frustrating holding pattern. The cycle of struggle, reevaluation, regrouping, and rest within the brain is how our resilience develops, matures, and eventually gets stronger.

If you need a quick check to see how you are doing on the resilience scale, take a look at your self-care. Are you taking steps to be as healthy as possible? Are you exercising? Do you get your teeth cleaned? Are you overweight? Are you doing anything about it? Do you get enough rest? Are you still smoking? Are you participating in unnecessary risk-taking activities? Do you have a healthy diet? Are you living within your financial means? This list of self-care questions could be very long; you know what I mean. Are you living in a way that builds or resilience or tears it down? With God's help, you get to rewrite the script of the most troubling times of your life. How do we improve as people? How do we become the people that God intended us to be? In the world of theology, the term for this process is sanctification; in the field of addiction, the name for this process is recovery. Sanctification is one of those mysterious theological terms that we often do not understand very well. Its most fundamental meaning is "being in a state of proper functioning." My first car was a yellow, 1970 Toyota Corona. On a fridged winter night, while in university in Canada, I

would have to use a credit card to hold open the butterfly valve in the carburetor to get the car to start. It was a painfully cold process that would work most of the time. I have also used a credit card to open the locked door of my college apartment and scrape the frost off my frozen windshield. That little credit card was handy, but these accessory uses were nothing compared to what that card could do when it performed as intended.

A sanctified credit card is a beautiful thing. In the context of spiritual growth, sanctification means “to be set apart for the intended use of the designer.” In other words, sanctification is the process of becoming more holy. It is becoming more like Christ. Sanctification is not the appearance of a change but a real transformation. A transformation into the image of Christ. Romans 8:29 (TPT) *“For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him.”*

The Bible teaches that at salvation, faith in Christ caused our spirit to become alive, and then His Holy Spirit is present in our lives to help transform us into beings that resemble Christ. The question then is, are you more like Christ this year than you were last year? What does it mean for you to be more like Christ? God breathed into man His image at creation. The image was damaged when Adam and Eve turned their

backs on God. Salvation with ongoing sanctification is the opportunity we now have because of the work of Christ on the cross. We can become what God intended us to be. Our restored selves will demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Galatians 5:22-23 (TPT) *“But the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions; joy that overflows, peace that subdues, patience that endures, kindness in action, a life full of virtue, faith that prevails, gentleness of heart, and strength of spirit. Never set the law above these qualities, for they are meant to be limitless.”*

If we had any understanding of our potential as God’s created beings, we would quickly recognize the need for sanctification. Sanctification is restoration; it is becoming what God intended for each of us. We promptly settle for mundane when we could be experiencing magnificent. We strive to the point of exhaustion to obtain what only God freely offers. Our God-given image was injured when Adam and Eve rebelled against God. We now, through Christ, can regain the image.

Why is sanctification necessary? Why do we need to change? All you have to do is pause for a moment and look at the world around you. The rates of addiction and suicide are rapidly rising, trust is declining, and love has grown cold. We have never been more affluent, yet we remain in despair. Improving the economy will not solve the main issues facing

humanity. We need a spiritual awakening. We need a community of Jesus followers who are courageous enough, to be honest and humble enough to put down their pride and wholeheartedly seek the Lord. Our hurting world is in desperate need of the light that only God can give through His people. We can be the people that God intended, people who have an intimate relationship with Him, who have purpose and meaning, who can live without fear with the vitality necessary for a full life. We should be living as if God is restoring the image that He gave us.

Jesus came from God the Father and sacrificed His life for our salvation and our sanctification. Salvation is only the first step in a lifelong path of growth and spiritual maturity. Be grateful for your salvation, and be diligent about your sanctification. The road to holiness is for all who are Jesus' disciples.

In Hebrews 12:14 (TPT), we are encouraged to pursue sanctification, *"In every relationship be swift to choose peace over competition, and run swiftly toward holiness, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord."* Do you want to see the Lord? Run with all you have toward holiness. Do not dance with compromise or rest in complacency. He has promised an abundant life, and He does not neglect His promises.

If you feel your faith is weak, then what should you do? Sanctification will strengthen your faith. 1 John 2:3-6 (TPT), *"Here's how we can be sure that we've truly come to know*

God: if we keep his commands. If someone claims, "I have come to know God by experience," yet doesn't keep God's commands, he is a phony and the truth finds no place in him. But the love of God will be perfected within the one who obeys God's Word. We can be sure that we've truly come to live in intimacy with God, not just by saying, "I am intimate with God," but by walking in the footsteps of Jesus." If you feel your faith is weak, you are most likely not walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

The enemy attacks us through our thoughts. Thoughts of weakness, self-importance, isolation, fear, anguish, and despair are the weapons he uses to interfere with our growth. We need to trust the Lord and take those thoughts captive as a part of our sanctified life. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (TPT), *"We can demolish every deceptive fantasy that opposes God and break through every arrogant attitude that is raised up in defiance of the true knowledge of God. We capture, like prisoners of war, every thought and insist that it bow in obedience to the Anointed One."*

You may ask, how will we know if we are on the right path? We should be progressively growing into God's desired likeness. We should be becoming Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (TPT), *"We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter*

level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Do others see Jesus when they see me, or do they see someone wrapped up in their arrogance? Yes, the transforming work of sanctification will only be complete when Christ returns, but we should expect to see some noticeable changes while we are still on earth.

Now, wouldn't it be nice to be thankful for our salvation and then kick up our feet and cruise through life until we enter the golden gates. Scripture teaches that sanctification is not an option. 1 John 1:8-10 (TPT) *“If we boast that we have no sin, we’re only fooling ourselves and are strangers to the truth. But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, he will be faithful to forgive us every time. God is just to forgive us our sins because of Christ, and he will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we claim that we’re not guilty of sin when God uncovers it with his light, we make him a liar and his word is not in us.”*

Sanctification is one of those concepts that is understood best by uncovering what it is not. Sanctification is a process; it does not occur instantaneously at salvation. Paul reported in Romans, the battle between our fallen humanity and our regenerated spirit continues after salvation. Romans 7:14-25 (TPT) *“For we know that the law is divinely inspired and comes from the spiritual realm, but I am a human being made of flesh and trafficked as a slave under sin’s authority. I’m a*

mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid. So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it's not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin hindering me from being who I really am. Through my experience of this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the "law" of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God's righteous principles."

Sanctification is not instantaneous, but we have help and promised guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Like salvation, sanctification is not something we obtain by our efforts. The same power that saved us also sanctifies us. Ephesians 2:8-10 (TPT), *“For it was only through this wonderful grace that we believed in him. Nothing we did could ever earn this salvation, for it was the gracious gift from God that brought us to Christ! So no one will ever be able to boast, for salvation is never a reward for good works or human striving. We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!”*

Sanctification is not a fruit of the Spirit, but authentic fruit will only be present in the lives of those on the path to holiness. Self-generated fruit may look good, but it is toxic if eaten.

Sanctification is not a gift of the spirit. The gifts of teaching, preaching, helps, or prayer, are gifts are to be used to serve others. They have been freely given by God to serve others. They are to be used as an expression of your sanctification; they do not prove you are sanctified. The gifts are not a badge of honor to be worn as a sign of spiritual superiority. They are designed to be used by servants.

Sanctification is not resilience. Ongoing spiritual growth will produce resilience, but being resilient does not mean you are

sanctified. God has promised us that He will strengthen us where we need strength. Philippians 4:13 (TPT) *“I know what it means to lack, and I know what it means to experience overwhelming abundance. For I’m trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty.”* We should be living and growing with God-infused strength.

Sanctification is not self-control. Evidence of our spiritual growth should be growing restraint, but self-control by itself is not sanctification. We are encouraged in scripture to purify ourselves because of God’s promises. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (TPT) *“Beloved ones, with promises like these, and because of our deepest respect and worship of God, we must remove everything from our lives that contaminates body and spirit, and continue to complete the development of holiness within us.”* Our self-control should be out of respect and gratitude for all God has done for us, not out of pressure to feel better about ourselves or somehow act to gain God’s favor.

Sanctification is not strict adherence to religious rituals. We are called to true holiness, an authentic change of heart, and not ritualistic appeasement. 1 Peter 1:15 (TPT) *“Instead, shape your lives to become like the Holy One who called you.”* Yes, if you are on the path of sanctification you will pray more, you will worship more, and you will read God’s word more, but this is not sanctification.

Living as if our spiritual growth depends on what we can do, our good intentions or strict adherence to a specific code quickly becomes stifling legalism. Sanctification is a work of God's Holy Spirit. Romans 8:4 (TPT), *"So now every righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled through the Anointed One living his life in us. And we are free to live, not according to our flesh, but by the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit!"*

We should be motivated to grow out of gratitude. 1 John 3:1-3 (TPT) *"Look with wonder at the depth of the Father's marvelous love that he has lavished on us! He has called us and made us his very own beloved children. The reason the world doesn't recognize who we are is that they didn't recognize him. Beloved, we are God's children right now; however, it is not yet apparent what we will become. But we do know that when it is finally made visible, we will be just like him, for we will see him as he truly is. And all who focus their hope on him will always be purifying themselves, just as Jesus is pure."*

We are living in the time of God's new covenant, a covenant of grace. To live on the basis that we can act to gain God's approval is to substitute the law for God's grace. Ephesians 2:10 (TPT) *"We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born,*

God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!"

How does one get sanctified? How can we become the people that God intended? Do we have an active role in our sanctification?

Firstly, sanctification is through the body of Christ. If it were not for the cross, there would be no opportunity for sanctification. Hebrews 10:10 (TPT) *"By God's will we have been purified and made holy once and for all through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus, the Messiah!"* The necessary sacrifice for our salvation and sanctification has been made; it is not gained by strenuous, sacrificial effort on our part. Our role in this is small but significant. We are to believe, live by faith, and seek Him with our whole being.

Through faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, sanctification is possible. It is as if the road back to a relationship with God is a path where Christ, through His sacrifice, opened the door, the Holy Spirit then guided us to the door and now directs us on the way. Galatians 5:16 (TPT) *"As you yield freely and fully to the dynamic life and power of the Holy Spirit, you will abandon the cravings of your self – life."* Living in a dark, godless world, the Holy Spirit is the light on our path and the breath in our lungs. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (TPT) *"We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being*

transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” Is the Holy Spirit guiding you? Are you becoming more like Jesus? What motivates you? Romans 8:5-6 “Those who are motivated by the flesh only pursue what benefits themselves. But those who live by the impulses of the Holy Spirit are motivated to pursue spiritual realities. For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set controlled by the Spirit finds life and peace.” Are you struggling? Are you trying hard under your strength to become Christ-like? Do you realize your efforts will never be good enough? Romans 8:8-10 (TPT) “For no matter how hard they try, God finds no pleasure with those who are controlled by the flesh. But when the Spirit of Christ empowers your life, you are not dominated by the flesh but by the Spirit. And if you are not joined to the Spirit of the Anointed One, you are not of him. Now Christ lives his life in you! And even though your body may be dead because of the effects of sin, his life-giving Spirit imparts life to you because you are fully accepted by God.”

One of the tools used by the Holy Spirit in guiding our sanctification is the inspired Word of God. John 16:13 (TPT) *“But when the truth-giving Spirit comes, he will unveil the reality of every truth within you. He won’t speak his own message, but only what he hears from the Father, and he will reveal prophetically to you what is to come.” 2 Timothy 3:15*

(TPT) *“Remember what you were taught from your childhood from the Holy Scrolls which can impart to you wisdom to experience everlasting life through the faith of Jesus, the Anointed One!”* God’s Word was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is alive and applicable today. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”* As we live in a fallen world, we pick up dirt throughout the day. We need regular washing of the Word of God. When I was a younger man, I wrongfully thought that I knew enough of God’s Word to last a lifetime. After all, I learned a lot of scripture on a Bible quiz team while in high school, and I had attended three years of seminary. Little did I realized that knowledge of the Word and being washed by the Word were two different things. If you are on the path of sanctification, you will crave the daily washing and refreshing that is only available in God’s Word. We need God’s Word to help the scales of self-centeredness fall from our eyes so we can see more clearly. Hebrews 4:12 (AMP) *“For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* We need to pause and take time to consider while meditating on God’s Word, what it means to

have the mind of Christ. Philippians 2:5 (TPT), *“And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation.”* What is your motivation? Is your motivation self-promotion and affirmation? Is your motivation the mindset of Christ?

The process of sanctification is an act of faith. Romans 12: 1-2 (TPT) *“Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God’s marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship. Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes.”* Faith is necessary for sanctification because it is a work of the Spirit that produces growth. God is kind and gentle, He will not force you to grow, but He is there to facilitate your growth if you want it bad enough. Do you want to grow? Do you see the need for the Holy Spirit to be working in your life? Are you complacent where you are at right now? How does your life measure up to the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22? Are you painfully aware of where you need God’s help to become what He intended? If you were to Xray the bones of a child, you would find something that looks very unusual. In a growing child, there are clear lines visible on

Xray. These lines are called an epiphysis or a growth plate. The cells at these growth plates are different than the cells that make up the rest of the bone. These cells divide and multiply, with the result being a lengthening of a bone. The rest of the bone cells provide a healthy skeletal structure so the child can learn to walk, run, and perform other physical functions. Just like the growing, immature bones of a child, our spiritual growth also has growth plates. If you want to see where God is working in your life, you should be aware of your spiritual growth plates. For example, meditate on the fruit of the spirit, and you will find many of these spiritual growth plates. When we look for evidence of the fruit of the spirit in our lives, we should see areas of significant growth and change, but we will also see the areas where we are lacking. Where we recognize the need for more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is where the Spirit is ready and able to work. Do you see the limit to your ability to love? Do you see where you need to love others more to become more fully the person that God intended you to be? If, at this point, you see the need and just try harder, you will fail. At this point in our spiritual growth plates, we need to cry out to God for help. We are dependent on Him for the changes that are desperately needed. With faith He will change you, Hebrews 11:6 (AMP) *“But without faith it is impossible to [walk with God and] please Him, for whoever comes [near] to God must [necessarily]*

believe that God exists and that He rewards those who [earnestly and diligently] seek Him.” Take time to consider each of these fruit of the Spirit, be honest, ask for God’s help, and grow.

If you are still confused about what God’s plan for your life is, consider 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 (TPT), *“Let joy be your continual feast. Make your life a prayer. And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks, for this is God’s perfect plan for you in Christ Jesus.”* God’s perfect plan for you is to be continually thankful. Are you in His will? Are you thankful? Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Am I growing or dying? How is the fruit of the spirit demonstrated in my life? Am I in recovery (on the path of sanctification)? Does my life promote authentic recovery?

Chapter 22 – Service

If we were living by the principles of the last section, then this chapter would not be necessary. Service is a natural byproduct of recovery and sanctification. Gal. 5:13 (TPT) *“Beloved ones, God has called us to live a life of freedom in the Holy Spirit. But don’t view this wonderful freedom as an opportunity to set up a base of operations in the natural realm. Freedom means that we become so completely free of self-indulgence that we become servants of one another, expressing love in all we do.”* The opposite of love is not “hate;” the opposite of love is “blinding self-indulgence.” The dictionary definition of freedom is; “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.” The freedom that is worth pursuing should produce joy and contentment, and not pressure and disappointment. Freedom used for limitless self-indulgence can only provide very short-lived pleasure and satisfaction. The freedom that results in long-lasting peace is the freedom found serving others.

So, what does it mean to serve others? Service is nothing more than love in action. If you are aware of your needs, you know how to serve others. Service requires the ability

to see past your wants, needs, and desires so you can see a little more clearly what is going on with those around you. Service is living and breathing the life of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, where Paul informs us that; *“Love is large and incredibly patient. Love is gentle and consistently kind to all. It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else. Love does not brag about one’s achievements nor inflate its own importance. Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honor. Love is not easily irritated or quick to take offense. Love joyfully celebrates honesty and finds no delight in what is wrong. Love is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.”* This kind of love is not humanly possible. As self-centered beings, we are all too wrapped up in ourselves to love in the way that God intended that we love. To love God’s way, we need supernatural comfort when we are troubled, we need supernatural guidance when we are confused, and we need supernatural joy when we feel discouraged. The comfort, guidance, and joy we need to love is the promise of the Holy Spirit’s witness to our spirit. With this kind of love, we can prefer others above ourselves and live the life God intended. We can provide others a meaningful level of respect and compassion. “God so loved the World,” so, if we are His children, we should love as He loves.

As we race through life, it is easy to become numbed by reports of people in anguish. We hear media reports hourly of wars, natural disasters, and human tragedy. Lord, help us to slow our pace so we can see others as you see them. The temptation is to see people as statistics on a graph, but those parents that just lost a child to a drug overdose are not numbers on a chart; they are living, breathing creations of God who are in deep pain. Pause, consider their pain, pray for them, be available, and if God opens the door, be ready to reach out a hand.

This kind of service is not what we would call “doormat” service. There must be a balance between love and trust. To “love” your drug-addicted child who asks for money by giving them what they ask for is not love; it is dangerous codependency. For service to be meaningful, there have to be boundaries. God loves us, and His Word is filled with limitations; boundaries not meant to constrain us but limits that are to free us. There is difficulty in setting boundaries when we are more concerned about ourselves than we are about the other. In the example of the child asking for money, if you need the child to love you for a sense of meaning in your life, you will have a significant problem setting boundaries. Boundaries are necessary and can be lifesaving.

This kind of service is not for show or personal recognition. Service for personal gain is not authentic, and it will eventually fail. When you do receive praise for your service, do not let it go to your head. Remember who you are serving.

Serving is not pressuring someone to go in a direction they are not willing to go. You can and should set boundaries, but you cannot compel a desirable response — an apparent change in lifestyle that occurred under pressure will collapse.

So, why should we serve? We were made and designed to serve. We were meant to be free from the destruction of living a life of self-focus and self-centeredness. God made man for service as recorded in Genesis 2:15 “*So the LORD God took the man [He had made] and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it.*” We are made to cultivate and keep the garden – we are designed to have a fulfilled life when we are caring for what God has provided. We were created to serve.

We were also made to serve and uplift each other as recorded in Genesis 2:18 “*Now the LORD God said, “It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him.”*” God has put us in families and communities to complement each other, not to

compete with each other. We are to build one another up and not tear each other down.

We get ahead by serving, not by being served. Now, this concept goes against all we frail humans hold dear. We are far more likely to grasp at any opportunity to get ahead, even if it hurts someone else. We resist the promotion of others. We live in a world where it is all about me, and honestly, since Adam, the world has always been just about me. In God's kingdom, the tables are turned as recorded in Mark 10:44-45 (TPT) *"The path to promotion and prominence comes by having the heart of a bond-slave who serves everyone. For even the Son of Man did not come expecting to be served by everyone, but to serve everyone, and to give his life as the ransom price in exchange for the salvation of many."* In God's kingdom, the top spots are for the servants. Mark 9:35 (TPT) *"Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples to come around him, and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be content to be last and become a servant to all."*

God wants you to be content, and God made you to experience joy and fulfillment in your life through service; not self-service. Do you want to succeed in your life? Do you want to get ahead? Do you want to be promoted? If you do, then look at where you could be serving. No level of fame or fortune will give you as much contentment as there is in being in the place where you were designed to serve. There are areas of service during all the seasons of our life.

If we claim to be followers of Jesus, His disciples, then our faith should be seen in the actions of our lives. Deeds of service should accompany our words of faith. If I claim that God is my provider, I should not feel I have to hang on tightly to everything I have, and if I declare God is my protector, then I should not be living in constant fear. Keep in mind the words of James 2:14-17 (TPT) *“My dear brothers and sisters, what good is it if someone claims to have faith but demonstrates no good works to prove it? How could this kind of faith save anyone? For example, if a brother or sister in the faith is poorly clothed and hungry and you leave them saying, “Good-bye. I hope you stay warm and have plenty to eat,” but you don’t provide them with a coat or even a cup of soup, what good is your faith? So then faith that doesn’t involve action is phony.”* Is your faith real? Are you a phony? As you move out of your self-protective comfort zone to serve others, it will express your faith and cause your faith to grow.

We were made to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We are members of God’s team and a vital part of building His kingdom. No membership in any group or club will be able to replace the significance of being part of God’s work. God made us to perform His good works as recorded in Ephesians 2:10 (TPT) *“We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our*

destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!" Do you know your part in God's kingdom? What gifts or talents do you have to offer to others? Are you providing them or hanging on to them?

We should be serving the Lord and those He created. Our lives should echo the words of John the Baptist in regards to Jesus when he stated in John 3:30 (TPT), *"So it's necessary for him to increase and for me to be diminished."* How do you measure up? Who is increasing in importance in your life? This does not mean that we are to spend endless hours in prayerful meditation and never interact with our world. No, your world needs the light you possess. So, work hard, be passionate, be committed, love those God has placed in your life and follow the advice of Colossians 3:23-24 (TPT) where we are told to, *"Put your heart and soul into every activity you do, as though you are doing it for the Lord himself and not merely for others. For we know that we will receive a reward, an inheritance from the Lord, as we serve the Lord Yahweh, the Anointed One!"* Build bridges, write music, and throw yourself entirely into the life God has blessed you with, but remember the glory goes to Him. 1 John 4:19-20 (TPT) gives us a way of measuring our stated love of God; *"Our love for others is our grateful response to the love God first demonstrated to us. Anyone can say, 'I love God,' yet have hatred toward another believer. This makes him a phony, because if you don't love a brother or sister, whom you can*

see, how can you truly love God, whom you can't see?" We are to love and serve God as well as loving and serving those He created. It is not good enough just to state we love God. Those words alone are meaningless. 1 John 4:20 (AMP) "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates (works against) his [Christian] brother he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

James 1:27 (TPT) tells us about the evidence of this kind of love and service; *"True spirituality that is pure in the eyes of our Father God is to make a difference in the lives of the orphans, and widows in their troubles, and to refuse to be corrupted by the world's values."* How do you view those who are struggling? Do you see them as suffering from the results of their irresponsibility? Do you see them as being loved by God? Do you believe Jesus died for them and much as you think He died for you? This book is on the subject of what it takes to help or serve those who suffer from addiction. How do you view other humans who struggle with addiction? How do you see their parents? Are you empathetic or judgemental? Remember Matthew 23:11 (TPT), *"The greatest among you will be the one who always serves others from the heart."* Who are you serving from the heart? You should be serving your spouse, your family, your neighbors, your community, and to some level the world. Do not become overly frustrated with the slow progress of others. Keep in

mind what we are told in Romans 15:1 (TPT), *“Now, those who are mature in their faith can easily be recognized, for they don’t live to please themselves but have learned to patiently embrace others in their immaturity.”* Are you living to please yourself? Never forget that when we are serving others, we are also serving the Lord as recorded in Ephesians 6:7-8 (TPT), where it states, *“Serve your employers wholeheartedly and with love, as though you were serving Christ and not men. Be assured that anything you do that is beautiful and excellent will be repaid by our Lord, whether you are an employee or an employer.”* Do you see your employer or employees as if they were Christ, or do you see them as being agents of the devil? Do not become a prisoner to your arrogance and self-indulgence.

We can serve others in many different ways. We serve by taking the gifts and talents that God has given us and, in turn, offering those to others by our example, by observation, by hearing, by being, and by doing.

We serve by example. Whether you like it or not, you are being watched, and not just by Google or your cell phone. The message of your life has a lot more to do with how you live your life than the words you speak. How you live your life will communicate if you are authentic and trustworthy. Live your life deliberately; your life speaks loudly. Jesus is our example as to how we should live our lives as recorded in Matthew 20:28 (TPT) *“For even the Son of Man did not*

come expecting to be served by everyone, but to serve everyone, and to give his life in exchange for the salvation of many.” Be an example of this type of service. Are you willing to sacrifice for others? What kind of example are you?

Service requires observation. If we are here to meet a need, we become aware of the need by observing. It is essential to realize that the other person's needs and their stated demands may not be the same thing. To serve means to address a need, not to comply with a request automatically. Do not be quick to offer solutions for assumed problems. Be patient, take your time, ask questions, and observe.

We also serve by hearing. The Bible instructs us to be quick to hear but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Listen carefully, and do not assume you know what someone is trying to say. Ask lots of questions and be as specific as possible. Do not be shocked when you find out that much of what you have been told is a lie. Remember the be slow to anger part. It can be very challenging to remain in any relationship with someone who is continuously deceptive.

We also serve by being. Serving by being means we should not see ourselves as being better than others. If you are on the path of recovery or encouraging others on the recovery path, you will not be concerned with where you are in comparison with others. A life of recovery or spiritual

growth is not a competition. Humble yourself and be willing to learn from others, even those you are helping. Live by the words of Paul to the Philippians and walk together with purpose. If we walk with a common goal, we will be less likely to get off track with self-promotion. Philippians 2:1-11 (TPT) *“Look at how much encouragement you’ve found in your relationship with the Anointed One! You are filled to overflowing with his comforting love. You have experienced a deepening friendship with the Holy Spirit and have felt his tender affection and mercy.*

So I’m asking you, my friends, that you be joined together in perfect unity—with one heart, one passion, and united in one love. Walk together with one harmonious purpose and you will fill my heart with unbounded joy.

Be free from pride-filled opinions, for they will only harm your cherished unity. Don’t allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves. Abandon every display of selfishness. Possess a greater concern for what matters to others instead of your own interests. And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation.

He existed in the form of God, yet he gave no thought to seizing equality with God as his supreme prize. Instead he emptied himself of his outward glory by reducing himself to

the form of a lowly servant. He became human! He humbled himself and became vulnerable, choosing to be revealed as a man and was obedient. He was a perfect example, even in his death—a criminal's death by crucifixion!

Because of that obedience, God exalted him and multiplied his greatness! He has now been given the greatest of all names!

The authority of the name of Jesus causes every knee to bow in reverence! Everything and everyone will one day submit to this name—in the heavenly realm, in the earthly realm, and in the demonic realm. And every tongue will proclaim in every language: “Jesus Christ is Lord Yahweh,” bringing glory and honor to God, his Father!” Do you see yourself as being better than others? Do you see yourself as the answer to other's problems? Are you willing to learn from others? In your next interaction with someone, focus on what you can learn from them and not what you can teach them, and see how that works out.

So you are grateful for all God has done for you, you have observed those you want to serve, you have listened and are not all wrapped up in yourself, and you want to live a life of service, so now it is time to do something. Service requires action; it is a verb and not a noun. We have all been given unique gifts, interests, passions, and abilities that are intended to be given away in service to others for

the building of God's kingdom. 1 Peter 4:10 (TPT) *"Every believer has received grace gifts, so use them to serve one another as faithful stewards of the many-colored tapestry of God's grace."* These God-given gifts are not to be used to gain fame or an inflated sense of self-importance. Give your gift; do not hide it. Your gifts were given to you. You need to give them back to God and then to others in the form of service for the glory of God. Matthew 5:16 (TPT) *"So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven."* What are your gifts? What are your interests? What are your talents? What are you doing with all you have been given? God's bountiful gifts are numerous and become spiritual gifts when they are offered to others for the glory of God. If you want a fulfilling life, you will find it in service.

Chapter 23 – Conclusion

Summer swim lessons; what a blast! One of our highly anticipated times in the summer is when three of our grandchildren spend two weeks with us for their annual swim lessons. The greatest joy has been to observe their progress from fear to competence. While sitting on the side of the pool last summer with other parents and grandparents, I realized that what I was observing was a perfect metaphor for recovery. The water represents life, and swimming is the metaphor for learning to live life.

At one end of the pool was an area that was separate from the other parts of the pool. It looked like a huge hot tub. The water was warm and shallow, with steps that made it very easy to get into the water. This was the part of the pool reserved for the beginners, those who were very afraid of the water. In this pool, every fearful, budding swimmer had an instructor or parent by their side. The beginners in this pool learned that water is to be respected and that playing in the water could be a lot of fun. This was the smallest part of the pool but the noisiest with sounds of joy, at times forced laughter and the occasional cough, sputter, and

terrifying cry. Unfortunately, this was the class that got smaller as time passed. Maybe they were too afraid to learn to swim, or perhaps their parents lost interest, or perhaps they were planning on returning in the future.

This group represents those who are in early recovery. They may have come to realize that living life with an addiction is like learning to swim with lead weights tied to your ankles, or they may, in their addiction, have lost sight of the joys of life. Early on, they learn that there are rewards far superior to drugs or alcohol, and even though life can and is terrifying at times, it is also very worthwhile. This early phase is also a vulnerable stage and will often require a lot of external support, but with time and determination, the probability of success is excellent.

In another part of the pool, there is a group that has graduated from the shallow, confined pool. This group would still be considered beginners, but they have gained some necessary competence while maintaining a healthy respect for the water. This group has one instructor for every three to five students. The water is still shallow enough for them to reach the bottom, but they are now in the “real” pool. From this part of the pool the early swimmers can see the more advanced swimmers diving off the diving board, swinging from a rope swing or laughing as they race down a slide.

This group is a representation of those in early recovery who have experienced some of the joys of a sober life but are still in need of a lot of support as they learn to negotiate life's hazards. Like the swimmers at this stage, they are more engaged in the process but are still very vulnerable.

In the central part of the pool are the intermediate swimmers. At this stage, they have learned to negotiate all parts of the pool comfortably. They work on getting more robust with different swimming strokes and learn to dive from a diving board and starting blocks. They still require guidance as their strokes are imperfect, but they are getting to their goals. At this phase, there is one instructor for several students, but for safety, the students swim with a "buddy" and look out for each other.

This group represents those in recovery who have learned how to live life without dependence on drugs or alcohol. At this stage, they continue to work on getting more durable and more competent. They may no longer need an instructor, but benefit significantly with having a "buddy." The primary danger at this stage is overconfidence. Like our swimmers, there are still times when they will need to rely on others and avoid hazards. It is one thing to be able to swim in a calm lake, and it is another to swim in a swift-moving river.

Who else of importance is at the pool? Family and friends are sitting on the benches, watching their little ones learn to swim. These are the essential people who brought the kids to the pool. They are not teaching them to swim, but they are a necessary part of the learn-to-swim process. They smile and give thumbs up gestures and speak words of encouragement. There are instructors - the skinny, shivering, mild-mannered high school student working their summer job. They are in the water, guiding, demonstrating, and encouraging. You cannot teach someone to swim from the bench on the side of the pool; you need to be in the water. You learn to swim from someone who knows how to swim. Now, they did not have to experience drowning to be capable instructors; they just have to know how to swim. It is the same with addiction treatment. You do not have to have a history of addiction to be useful, but you do have to be in recovery. Recovery is spiritual growth, as evidenced by honesty, humility, and gratitude. Recovery is the small daily steps one takes to become the person they were designed to be. Are you that person? Are you growing daily? Are you in the water or observing from the sidelines? We should all be living with humility, honesty, and gratitude so we can offer hope to those who are struggling around us. (1 Peter 3:15) *“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who*

asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”

Books by this Author

Pearls From the Psalms

Dismantling Destructive Strongholds

God's Armor For Today's Battles

Our Fractured Image

Godly Grit

Prepared to Stand

Deadly Roots

The Subtle Destructive Power of Bitterness

Fodder for Ponder

Poems on pondering.

Stress Undressed

A look at five major causes of stress.

Now I've Gotcha!

A brief overview of the substances causing addiction.

