

Recovery, Backsliding & Relapse

A Meditation for Twelve-Step Recovery

Hello, my beloved in Christ Jesus! We have climbed the ladder of recovery together - some may be a rung or two ahead of others, but the important thing is that we are all taking steps, moving forward, and shedding weight as we go. Our legs are stronger than when we took that first step, our minds are a lot clearer, our hearts cleaner, and our grip on reality way stronger. Most of us have some more work to do. Remember, the Bible tells us not to grow weary in well-doing, but to work hard, pressing toward the goal of Christ-likeness (Phil. 3:14, Gal. 6:9, Rom. 8:29). You must be consistent to succeed - making an early commitment and then seeing it through is essential to success and the joy that the Lord has for you.

Warning! Warning! Warning! There has been one major hindrance to our recovery, and it has been right there since "day one" - it is our own pride and self-sufficiency. I am sure by now we have had to deal with it at some time, one and all. If you have not, you are not working the program, you are not being honest, and therefore you are not in the process of recovery. No matter how bad you may want recovery, the only ones who succeed are those who keep moving forward and face whatever comes up. God's word says "I can do all things through Christ Jesus except succeed in recovery from the shame, pain and hurts of this life?" Not!! Rather, it says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Who are you going to believe? The choice is yours, but even that comes from your Heavenly Father. Yes, the free will to choose whom you will believe - God the Almighty Creator, or the enemy the devil, the deceiver - the choice is up to you! Just how much faith does it take to believe in a God who never fails? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

I know some of us have been on an emotional roller coaster since we started, and it has not been easy. But think for a minute, and only a minute, just how insecure you felt the first time you attended a meeting - the fear, the shame, the feeling of isolation and aloneness, the pain. Now think how you feel today in the group. Ninety-nine percent of us feel much safer, hopeful, confident and blessed. These are all signs of growth - praise God! Yes, and praise God we must - all the time! I know all too well that some of us have had to go through some real valleys during these steps, but be assured, if you know Jesus as Savior and Lord, you did not take one step alone. He has promised to take each step with you (Psalm 91:15). I know that reconciling with God has been tough, but I also know that doing the 9th Step and making amends to other human beings is even harder. Why, you might ask? Why is it harder to face a mortal sinner, whether saved or not, and be honest and forgiving, than to go to a sinless God who knows all about it anyway? God does not want any of His children to carry the burden of a fallen world on his or her shoulders. That is why He says for us to "cast all our burdens on Him" (Psalm 55:7, I Peter 5:7) and exchange our heavy burden for His light burden, and He will give us rest (Matt. 11:28-30). If we will but take His yoke upon ourselves, the weight will be light as we team up with Him.

The Great Deceiver is not a "happy camper" - he is after your soul! Your soul is made up of your mind, will and emotions, and he works to take away any joy you may have by bringing in DOUBT! Maybe doubt about God, or about yourself, or he may introduce "illusions of grandeur" concerning your recovery. Warning! This leads to PRIDE, the "Number One Killer of Recovery"! The Bible gives us clear instructions on what to look for, because when pride slips in, we begin to listen to the enemy (I Peter 5:6-9). We will without a doubt feel good about OUR OWN efforts and accomplishments, even about our walk with the Lord, only to fall into failure, disappointment, feelings of worthlessness, depression. The key point here is to recognize these problems before they turn into "relapse" (the recovery term) or "backsliding" (the Bible term). Whichever term you use, the cause and result are the same - we start feeling sorry for ourselves, maybe even have a pity party: "Woe is me!" "The program doesn't work"

"It's just no use, I can't get over it, no matter how hard I try!" "These meetings are a waste of time!" "I was better off with what I am trying to get rid of." It is at this point that you must ask yourself, "Why and for whom am I trying to get better?" If it is for any other reason than for yourself and for God, and to do what God wants in your life, you will have problems. How can you expect to succeed when you have "left your First Love" - Jesus, and have been committed more to the creation than the Creator (Rev. 2:4)? You have tried to work it out yourself, but remember, God's word admonishes us to "lean NOT on our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledge Him" (Proverbs 3:5-6). If we "delight ourselves" in Him, He will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:5-6). It is when we lean and rely on our own understanding that "stinkin' thinkin'" creeps in, always prompted by our very subtle enemy. Only when we know the truth can we truly be set free. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." That's right! The ONLY way, ALL that is truth, and the ONE who gives life and renews life. The question is: do you know this Truth? If you do, then you have been set free, yes, free indeed! (John 8:36). We no longer need to live in any type of bondage, even in this fallen world - the price for our freedom has been paid in full! Our part, however, is that we must be fully committed and submitted unto the Truth who is all truth.

But how do we work this out in our daily lives? As long as we are "trapped" in these corruptible bodies, our new nature will be at odds with our flesh, and we will have a constant battle with evil (Rom. 7:14-25, Gal. 5:16-25). We must know just what our position is in Christ Jesus, and what authority is already ours. It's all in His word, what our problem is, and that is that we simply don't believe with all our heart and soul and commit ourselves totally to God. As we feed on the word of God, we learn what God's will is for our lives, part of which is to "be sober, be vigilant (always on the lookout) for the enemy" and to "flee all appearance of evil" (I Pet. 5:7-8, I Thess. 5:22). If indeed we will **surrender OUR own free will to God**, we will be free to live in His will. How can we expect to know what His will is if we don't feed on His word? If we do not take up the authority that our Lord has already bestowed on us, we will remain weak, and our senses will not be as sharp and keen as they should be. But if we have been feeding on God's word, and our mind is filled with godly thoughts, we will immediately recognize the devil's thoughts - they will be foreign to us and out of place. At this first warning is when we must "take those thoughts captive" by turning them over to the Lord, letting Him know that we don't want them, and asking that they be replaced with holy thoughts from His word. We must let His word and mind infiltrate our entire being, which you may not realize, is the same as being filled with the Holy Spirit (Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:18-19). If we "LET the word of Christ dwell in us richly" we will experience victory, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the keys is to believe God with nothing wavering, trusting no matter what, that you have victory and you can rejoice! But if you let negative thoughts in, you will have given your victory to an already-defeated foe (I John 5:4, James 1:5-8). You must not buy into the lies of this world. You need to be truly sanctified (set apart to God) and totally surrendered to the direction of His Holy Spirit. Paul said to the Believers in Rome, "I beseech you, Brothers, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). My dear friends, remember that "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8). We must seek God's will with single-mindedness (Psalm 27:4, Psalm 86:11) and the victory is ours - to God be the glory!

In His love and victory,

Pastor Tom