

Building on the Success of

*Celebrate Recovery Inside:*

Practical Course Supplement

by Donald Stoesz

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## Introduction

Over twenty years ago, Saddleback Church in the United States started a Celebrate Recovery program modelled on the twelve-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (Appendix 1).<sup>1</sup> They published twenty-five lessons in a series of four booklets that participants could take as part of a closed step study.<sup>2</sup> They published a Celebrate Recovery Bible that included explanations of particular Scripture passages. Character sketches of fifty biblical and contemporary individuals were included.<sup>3</sup> Saddleback Church deliberately made the AA program more Christian to reach parishioners who did not want to go to AA groups. Celebrate Recovery author John Baker explains that he felt uncomfortable in AA groups because he kept referring to Jesus Christ as his Higher Power.<sup>4</sup> He felt uncomfortable in Christian groups because they did not know how to deal with his alcohol problem. Thus was born a Celebrate Recovery program aimed at Christians struggling in their personal lives.

I as a chaplain became involved in a local chapter of Celebrate Recovery nine years ago. I participated in the open share groups on Friday evenings. I completed a closed step study. I became a facilitator together with volunteers of CR in prison. I escorted inmates together with volunteers once a month to Celebrate Recovery sessions in the community.

Celebrate Recovery represented an excellent way for inmates to deal with their hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Offenders welcomed the opportunity to share a meal with community members. They enjoyed the music, worship, and prayer services. They listened carefully to the testimonies and teaching sessions. They felt comfortable sharing in the gender-specific groups dedicated to particular topics. I together with other chaplains encouraged volunteers to start a Celebrate Recovery group inside prison. Inmates have a lot of work to do before they can safely reintegrate in society.

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<sup>1</sup>Celebrate Recovery website. [https:// www. celebraterecovery.com/ resources/ cr-tools/ 8principles](https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/8principles). <https://www.celebraterecovery.com/resources/cr-tools/12steps>. Retrieved October 2021.

<sup>2</sup> John Baker, *Stepping out of Denial into God' Grace, Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory, Getting Right with God, Yourself, and Others, Growing in Christ While Helping Others* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible*, edited by John Baker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp. 1595-1596.

<sup>4</sup> John Baker, "Introduction," NIV *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible*, pp. ix – xxxi.

Celebrate Recovery represents one program among many others that help offenders move on with their lives.

### Five Ingredients for Success

What has made Celebrate Recovery so successful? I researched other programs offered to inmates in prison. Lawyer and religious studies professor Winnifred Sullivan has written a book about the success of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative program offered to offenders in an Iowa prison (1998-2008).<sup>5</sup> Five ingredients made this program work: *faith, belief in change, egalitarianism, self-identity, and discipleship*.

All five aspects are included in the eight Christian principles of the Celebrate Recovery program (Appendix 1). Principle 2 of Celebrate Recovery fulfills the requirement of *faith* by asking participants to “earnestly believe that God exists.” Principle 3 fulfills the second requirement of *belief in change*. It involves “consciously committing all of my life and will to Christ’s care and control.”

Principle 4 speaks to the *egalitarian nature* of the program. Participants share their inventory with someone they trust, usually a sponsor within the program. Believers work on *self-identity*, the fourth ingredient, when they ask God to “remove their character defects” in Principle 5. They “evaluate their relationships” in Principle 6. They “reserve a daily time with God in self-examination” in Principle 7.

*Discipleship* is included throughout the eight principles. Principle 1 speaks about being powerless to “control my tendency to do the wrong thing.” Principle 2 says that God has the power to help the participant recover. A person consciously commits themselves to Christ’s care and control in principle 3. The person shares about their life with someone they trust in Principle 4. The person voluntarily submits themselves to any changes that God wants them to make in principle 5. The believer offers forgiveness for hurts experienced and makes amends for harm done in principle 6. Principle 7 has the participant gaining the power to follow God’s will. Principle 8 has to do with yielding oneself to God. *Faith in God, will to change, egalitarian sharing, and self-understanding* include the theme of *discipleship* at all stages of the process.

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<sup>5</sup> Winnifred Sullivan, *Prison Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 172-179. Cf. the discussion in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), pp. 133-140.

## Questions about Introduction

1. Have you participated in a Celebrate Recovery Program? How it did help you? If you have not participated, would you like to get involved? What are the issues that you would like to deal with?
  
2. Winnifred Sullivan identifies five ingredients that have made Celebrate Recovery a success: *faith, belief in change, egalitarianism, self-identity, and discipleship*.
  - a) How has *faith* helped you cope with your life? Name specific examples.
  
  - b) Do you believe in the possibility of *changing your life*? What are the areas you need to work on?
  
  - c) Do you have *a friend or peer group that you trust*? Are you willing to share your experiences with them?
  
  - d) What role does a *Celebrate Recovery facilitator or pastor* play in this? Do you have an accountability partner or sponsor? What role have they played in your life?
  
  - e) Do you have *a positive image of yourself*? Name five good qualities. Are there areas that need work? Name some of them.
  
  - f) What *disciplines or routines keep you healthy socially, physically, spiritually, and religiously*? Are there areas that need work?

## Chapter One

### Some Limitations of Celebrate Recovery

Several questions arose during my sojourn with Celebrate Recovery. The first question had to do with whether one could graduate from the program. Is one in recovery for the rest of one's life or is there an end to recovery? The general assumption has been that one is in recovery for the rest of one's life. One returns repeatedly to the yearlong CR lessons because there is always more that one can learn about God and oneself.

There is a danger is returning to the negative tendencies in one's life. For example, revisiting the issue of denial in the first lesson results in the unintended consequence of reliving past cycles of hurt, addiction, and habits. Repeated visitation of these issues can lead to a negative assessment of one's recovery -- even if there are more issues that need work in the second and third go around,

Let me give some more examples. Lessons 9, 10, and 11 involved writing down an inventory of one's life. CR facilitators handed out an additional worksheet to participants during these lessons. This worksheet asked believers to write down good qualities about themselves. Facilitators discovered that an emphasis on the hurts experienced and harm done during these lessons led to self-loathing and depression among inmates. Offenders relived the very real harm that they had done when they wrote down their inventory. Looking at one's positive characteristics provided a balance.<sup>6</sup>

Two possibilities for participants are outlined after they completed the program (lesson 24).<sup>7</sup> Being involved in other ministries in the church represents the first option. Becoming involved as a sponsor or leader of Celebrate Recovery represents a second option.

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<sup>6</sup> *Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory*, participants guide 2, offers some balance to this approach, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Growing in Christ While Helping Others*, participants guide 4, p. 55.

These two options fulfill the eighth principle of Celebrate Recovery. Participants want “to be used by God to bring this Good News to others.” Participants are passing on the recovery and healing that they have experienced for themselves. An assumption implied in the first branch of this road is that participants have graduated from the program. The restoration and healing of participants enable them to give back in other ways.

A fourth example illustrates the way in which Celebrate Recovery helps participants continue to grow in their spiritual life. CR recently published a graduate course, *The Journey Continues*.<sup>8</sup> This program is for participants who have completed their first or second closed step studies. This course addresses similar issues raised in the first four booklets of the eight Christian principles. *The Journey Continues* is sufficiently different so that participants can continue to grow in their walk with God.

These illustrations demonstrate how Celebrate Recovery continues to evolve. I offer fourteen topics in this book as useful supplements to what CR participants have already learned. These suggestions are like water running downhill.<sup>9</sup> The pull of God’s gravity is so powerful that spirituality, faith, and belief find fulfillment in the ability to love. One learns how to desire deeply while giving graciously. One becomes honest. Humility and care are keys to success.

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<sup>8</sup> John Baker, *The Journey Continues*, Volumes 5 - 8 (Harper Christian Resources, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> See Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace: Reflections of a Prison Chaplain* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2010), p. 85.

## Questions about Chapter One

1. Is it possible to graduate from your addictions, your negative tendencies, your bad habits? Is it possible for you to graduate from Celebrate Recovery?
2. What other groups, resources, routines, and involvements help you live a fulfilled life? What do you do if you fall back into one of your bad habits? Do you return to addiction groups or Celebrate Recovery to work on those issues?
3. Is there a danger of repeating the twelve steps over and over again? Does returning to the issue of denial in the first lesson hook you back into some tendencies, habits, and behaviours that you thought you had overcome?
4. Does affirming good qualities about yourself help balance the negative image and bad behaviours in which you indulge? In what ways have you been able to give to others as a result of your recovery?
5. What are you hoping to get out of this group? How is God involved in your recovery?

## Chapter Two

### Created in the Image of God

The Catholic Catechism asserts the fact that human beings have been *created in the image of God*.<sup>10</sup> It affirms the freedom of human beings in their search for God.<sup>11</sup> It acknowledges that human beings sometimes use their radical freedom to sin.<sup>12</sup> This sin results in the loss of grace.

The Catechism makes a distinction between a tendency to sin, called *concupiscence*, and sin itself.<sup>13</sup> All of us have an inclination to sin based on our selfish desires. We sin when we feed the flames of these proclivities to possess what we want. Placing one's covetous impulses within an ethic of care and respect enables a person to become whole, spiritually, emotionally, and socially. The Catechism acknowledges the inevitability of sinning while placing that original sin within the salvific perspective of the gospel. God forgives our sin, saves us from ourselves, and empowers us to live redeemed lives.

#### Concupiscence

The Catholic Catechism makes a distinction between original sin that Adam and Eve initiated, and concupiscence, which represents a “weakness of nature” and a “tendency to sin.” God removed original sin through atonement of Christ’s sacrifice. Believers confess that God has set them free from sin. Concupiscence nevertheless remains in believers.<sup>18</sup> Concupiscence refers to “the tinder to sin.” It provides the kindling within human emotions easily incited and ignited with the slightest spark.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition (Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2019), p. 17, cf. pp. 14-15. Please excuse the use throughout of the masculine pronoun in the Catechism. Pierre Allard, long term national director of chaplaincy in Canada (1988-2006) includes being created in the image of God as a key basis for prison ministry, *The Statement of the Correctional Service of Canada Values and a Biblical Perspective for the Role of Chaplain* Unpublished Doctor of Ministry Dissertation (Lombard, Ill.: North Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), pp. 82-91.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 430

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15, 255, 358.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 358.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

The ninth biblical commandment mentions concupiscence: “You shall not covet.”<sup>20</sup> The Catechism lists lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes in discussing this law. Concupiscence represents “any intense form of human desire” or “sensitive appetite” that goes contrary to the operation of human reason.<sup>21</sup> These desires can lead to (sexual) violence and injustice. Breaking the tenth commandment, “coveting one’s neighbour’s goods,” can lead to theft, robbery, and fraud.<sup>22</sup>

The Catholic Catechism does not consider concupiscence as a sin in-and-of-itself. It “unsettles” human beings’ “moral faculties” and inclines human beings to sin “without being in itself an offence.”<sup>23</sup>

This statement is different from the way that some Protestant denominations view the situation. This is how the second Article of the Augsburg Confession on original sin translates the German text:<sup>24</sup>

Since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination (the word “concupiscence” is used in the Latin text) and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin (brackets added).

Further on in the *Book of Concord*, the *Solid Declaration* remarks that human nature, after the fall:<sup>25</sup>

is completely dead to the good – completely corrupted. . . there is no spark of spiritual power left or present with which human beings can prepare themselves for the grace of God.

Richard Snyder has shown how various Protestant theologians affirm a similar belief in total depravity. The problem does not have to do with:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 601-602.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 602.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 606, 457.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 602.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, translated by Charles Arand, et.al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 39. Cf. *The Catholic Confutation of the Augsburg Confession*, Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, *Source and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 107-108.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 544.

<sup>26</sup> T. Richard Snyder, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), pp. 36-37.

acknowledging the connection between sin and redemption, but from understanding sin as destroying all capacity for the good, beauty and truth. In so doing we lose sight of the grace that is present in all creation.

The Catholic Catechism suggests that human beings can struggle against sin and emerge victorious. In speaking about the woundedness of human beings, the Catechism states:<sup>27</sup>

Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back to God, but the consequences of nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.

In another section, it states:<sup>28</sup>

The new life in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.

This distinction between concupiscence as “a tendency to sin” and “sin itself” is important for two reasons. First, some people have not only watched pornography or thought of killing their neighbour. They have not only coveted their neighbour's wife and goods. They had seized and claimed both.

These actions demonstrate that human desires are powerful factors in people's lives. Feelings, emotions, and “sensitive appetites” can easily overflow into rage and revenge, violence, and injustice.

There are, indeed, differences between thinking and acting, desiring and seizing, coveting and claiming. Most people have thought, desired, and coveted many things. They have not acted on these impulses. They have been able, with the help and grace of God, to refrain from overt criminal and immoral acts while still being susceptible to sin and evil.

The second reason for making a distinction between a tendency to sin and sin itself is because some offenders find it hard to separate -- their sexual desires, negative feelings toward themselves and their spouses, desire for money, and hatred of their

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<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 358.

enemies -- from the criminal acts that they committed. They concluded based on their guilt and shame regarding their criminal acts that it was wrong to feel anger, express rage, or access their emotions to know what went wrong with their lives.

A person's range of feelings is normal and has been created by God. These emotions are immensely useful in understanding how other people and things make us feel. Strong desires are part of how God has created us. God has created a balance between the irrational and the rational, between heart and mind, between emotions and rationality.

To say that concupiscence is not "in-and-of-itself" a sin brings a huge sigh of relief. Separating the act from the "tinder to sin" that ignites the blaze enables us to access the many unconscious and conscious reasons that we commit sin. We have sometimes nurtured concupiscence to the point that it became an unstoppable raging fire. We all have "weaknesses within themselves:" -- insecurity, avarice, pride, power, lust, envy, jealousy, anger, or rage. We have sometimes fed these desires to get what we want. Emotions are not necessarily sins in-and-of-themselves. They can lead to much bigger things if allowed to fester.

The Catholic Catechism's reticence to call concupiscence a direct sin allows us to own that part of ourselves that is less than good. Acknowledging weakness and sensitivity enables us to claim these aspects of our lives as needing work. Believers can struggle and claim victory rather than seeing faith primarily as a matter of "seeking forgiveness" for having these thoughts at all.<sup>29</sup>

### Passions

The Catechism continues its reflection on the emotional aspect of existence by looking at human passions. It affirms the fact that passions are "neither good nor evil. They are morally qualified only to the extent that they effectively engage reason and will."<sup>30</sup>

The Catechism builds on this distinction by suggesting that love, "attracted to the good," represents the most fundamental passion.<sup>31</sup> Love causes a desire for the

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<sup>29</sup> The limits of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology have to do with the fact that he had a tragic view of life. He believed that the love of God entered into history primarily as crucifixion and forgiveness, D. B. Robertson, editor, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1976), pp. 269, 276. This negative view of salvation history makes it hard for inmates to affirm the possibility of change in their lives, cf. Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 159.

<sup>30</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 436.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

absent good and the hope of attaining it. This movement finds completion in the “pleasure and joy of the good” possessed.

Offenders are hemmed in on every side by accusations and convictions that they have broken many taboos. Daytime programming emphasizes the negative aspect of this fact. Offenders are given tools to stop “stinking thinking,” to consider the consequences of their actions, to learn what “not to do” in a situation.

Taboos such as not stealing, not killing, not sexually assaulting, not harming, and not coveting are limited in effectiveness because of their deontological priority (emphasis on rules). Staff do not provide offenders with enough positive reinforcements, teleological goals, and reachable rewards to motivate them to change.<sup>32</sup> This is why the above statement about love and its rewards is so important. To speak about the “pleasure and joy of the good” possessed represents a completion of life that is hard to put into words.

To give an example, *eros* finds its fulfillment in the mutual love of marriage. At the same time, forgiveness, forbearance, acceptance, and compromise represent an integral aspect of the covenantal nature of the relationship.

The same thing applies to one’s love for God. A beatific vision of God in which divine intimacy is experienced represents the wherewithal of faith. I can attest to this fact on an experiential level. When I transferred together with my family to another province four thousand kilometers away to continue my work as a chaplain, I had a powerful mystical experience. The move had been stressful; I had already worked for over ten years in the system. My family and I had a difficult time adjusting.

At the same time, I found myself refreshed in my work. My colleagues were immensely supportive. The work was fulfilling. I found a renewed sense of calling to chaplaincy. Part of this renewal involved an intense spiritual and religious experience. I found myself reflecting on an image of Madonna and child during the Advent and Christmas season. I developed a seven-step spiritual journey in conjunction with the use of a labyrinth. I wrote a manual for the spiritual retreats that I facilitated.<sup>33</sup> I referred to this experience as the intimate presence of God. Human intimacy and love are two things that are hard to find in a prison setting.

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<sup>32</sup> I have considered the difference that deontology and teleology, myth and fairy tale, make in motivating and providing positive solutions to inmates’ problems, Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 12-14, 95-100.

<sup>33</sup> Donald Stoesz, *The Intimate Presence of God: A Seven Step Spiritual Journey* (Innisfail: Shtace Publishing, 2003), 81 pages.

Divine intimacy represents one means by which one can find one's way back to the living. A beatific vision is one way of naming this experience.

Seeking good as an object is a way that passions become integrated into the life of faith. I like this way of stating the matter. Motivational interviewing occupied 70 per cent of my time in my encounter with inmates. They had overriding guilt and shame about crimes. They had experienced many losses. They were depressed and dreaded the future. They felt trapped within the prison system. Inmates became fatalistic. These offenders were reminded on an almost daily basis about the taboos they had broken, the harm they had done, and the severity of the consequences.

The fact that the ship of blame and conviction is tilted so far in one direction within the prison system is the reason why I find the Catholic Catechism's affirmation of human nature, human freedom, passions, conscience, and the beatific vision so refreshing. In the midst of guilt and shame comes an affirmation that we have been created good. We retain the freedom to act in a gracious manner. God is "with us" as Being itself. Passions and concupiscence can find ultimate fulfillment by believers oriented toward the good.

This good can be referred to as love. Intimacy works in human and divine relationships.<sup>34</sup> This intimacy is an existential reality along with a teleological goal by which offenders can be healed and redeemed. Motivational interviewing has everything to do with hope and faith that love will win out in the end. The actual experience of love on a divine and human level reinforces this sense of hope and wish for freedom. The idea that we experience "pleasure and joy" in the good achieved, that we "sing for joy" at this divine experience represents an immediately achieved goal that motivates us again and again to move toward the good.

### Moral Conscience

The Catechism goes on to speak about the role of conscience. Conviction of conscience has always been my most obvious starting point regarding interviews with offenders. Within the first five minutes, offenders are telling me how sorry they are that they committed their offences. They tell me that even though they knew it was wrong, they did it anyway. They are at a loss to know why they were willing to go against the dictates of their conscience. They became wilful and arrogant in the

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<sup>34</sup> Bible courses such as *Experiencing God* and *Purpose Driven Life* start the discussion with God "seeking a loving relationship," *Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 155-157

face of a great deal of stress, debilitating circumstances, and sheer inability to ask for help. They found their own criminal solutions to the problem.

The fact that offenders recognized what they were doing was wrong has always been the most obvious way “into” all the reasons and actions and justifications for what they did. The fact that they have a law written in their hearts -- to which Ezekiel (18:1-4), Jeremiah (31:31-34), and Romans (1:20-21, 2:14-15) attest -- showed me that inmates have been created good. They are capable of making moral judgments. They are deeply sorry for what they have done.

These confessions and acknowledgements are the first step in a long road to recovery. Offenders were willing to suspend the voice of their conscience in favour of wilful actions and harmful decisions. It takes time to unravel what this means and the role that conscience plays in all of this.

### Virtues

Mortal virtues are the last aspect of human emotions, human nature, and human will that the Catechism deals with before turning to the consequences of sin. Hope, faith, and love are regarded as three theological virtues that inform other ones: prudence, justice, fortitude, perserverance, and fruits of the Spirit.

Use of overriding theological virtues to guide specific principles and actions is what makes the Catechism “user friendly.” Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of spirituality and belief that inmates know very well. They are forced in prison to either hope or die. They are forced to come to terms with what they believe. And they have to reflect on whether love, actualised as part of their past life, is again possible. Whether love of God or love of others or love of self is intended is less important than the very possibility of love within dire circumstances and tragic results.

The way in which these three theological virtues inform other ones is reflective of the Catechism’s overall approach. It places the Ten Commandments within the context of the two greatest commandments: love of God and love of neighbour. Integration of the Old and New Testaments within a covenantal theology speaks volumes about how these Ten Commandments have already been written on the hearts of human beings.<sup>35</sup> Jesus fulfilled the Law and Ten Commandments by helping people see how this applied specifically to them. The Ten Commandments represent a big fish net that captures the worst misdemeanours. Jesus is suggesting

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<sup>35</sup> Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 37:26-28.

that the webbing in this fish net is indeed much smaller, so small in fact that it fits into our hearts.

The Catechism has a wonderful way of enunciating this truth:<sup>36</sup>

It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of *interiority* is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, self-examination, or introspection.

The harmful consequences of offenders' actions make them numb and devoid of any feelings and emotions regarding their crime. They committed their crime by suspending, not only their conscience, but their empathy, humanity, morality, religiousity, spirituality, and solidarity with others as well. The sheer selfishness of their actions makes inmates particularly difficult to deal with in regard to their ability to be "present to themselves" in the form of *interiority*.

The challenge of this task is the reason that the Catechism places the Ten Commandments within the context of love of God and love of neighbour. The underlying purpose of the Ten Commandments' taboos is to undergird the positive. Sanctity of life is the reason not to kill. Belief in God is the reason not to have idols. Understanding internal authority is the reason one honours one's parents. Enjoyment of private property is the reason one does not steal others' goods. Blessing and joy in other people's relationships represent the flip side of envy and covetousness.

I have welcomed this wholistic approach because inmates are drawn so quickly into the condemnation that is front and centre in regard to taboos they have broken. My goal has been to complement the importance of keeping taboos with the positive reasons that these laws have been established in the first place.

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<sup>36</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 439.

## Questions about Chapter Two

1. Do you believe that we have been born good? Explain.
2. What role does original sin play in our lives? Are we fated to sin?
3. Is the distinction between concupiscence (desire) and original sin helpful?
4. What does it mean to feed our desires? What role does conscience, passions, and virtue play in our decision making processes?
5. In what ways can we struggle against sin and gain victory?
6. What is the relationship between the Ten Commandments and Love of God and Love of Neighbour?

## Chapter Three

### A Beatific Vision

The Catholic Catechism refers to a beatific vision as a mystical experience in which God opens up divine “mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him capacity for it.”<sup>37</sup> Images in the Scripture that point to this indescribable experience of the divine are “life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, and paradise.”

I can speak to this reality on an existential level. We as a family moved to Bowden twenty years ago so I could work at a prison nearby. I experienced what can be referred to as a beatific vision. Neither faith nor reason was an intricate aspect of the experience. It was a feeling, deep emotion, desire, and envelopment of my whole being within what I would describe as the intimacy of God.<sup>38</sup> It was a powerful experience of affection and love. God was present within my life to such a degree that I was inspired to continue to work as a prison chaplain for the next twenty years.

Part of the reason I had such a powerful experience was because prison is not a place that one really wants to enter. It is a place that I never dreamed of “living in.” I had been a pastor. I wanted to become a university professor. I was an academic. I came from a good family. I had a good family. I had any number of close friends. Why would I want to supplement those fulfilling realities by working in a prison?

I fell in love with the ministry. I was able to “speak into” a variety of situations which required my assistance. I learned more about ecumenism and faith and inter-faith dialogue in Archambault and Leclerc and Cowansville and Federal Training Centre that I did in ten years studying religion and theology at McGill University.

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<sup>37</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 268. “This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father’s house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise. . . . God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself open up his mystery to man’s immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. The Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory ‘the beatific vision.’”

<sup>38</sup> I wrote a book entitled. *The Intimate Presence of God*, because of this experience.

There was a reality to prison life that I could not find in books or in pastoring. “Snap” decisions were required in innumerable situations. I had to trust my judgment to answer difficult requests. God was with me. I could not manage numerous situations in which I became involved.

This initial foray into prison life does not explain the need for a beatific vision. Any new job or career gives a person the energy to meet a new challenge and find work fulfilling. The same satisfaction is not as evident ten years down the road. The job has become routine, there are family and social concerns, children to raise, and new hobbies and sports to get involved in. A renewal is necessary in order for a career to continue to be meaningful.

This is especially true of prison chaplaincy. Prison life may appear infinitely boring and routine. Anyone living and working in that environment can attest to a broad range of pressures that slowly squeeze life out of a person. The sheer number of demands on a daily basis is exhausting.

The need for a beatific vision becomes evident. The prison is such a negative place to work that one is forced to contemplate how to survive and thrive in that environment. The beatific vision represented for me an ecstatic experience of divine intimacy because that was precisely what was missing in a place like prison.

Inmates are hungry for attention, for love, for acceptance, and for affirmation. They are hungry because all of those things have been taken away from them as a result of their offences. They invited and received vilification for what they had done.

Outside observers may say that offenders should not expect anything except judgment and punishment for what they have done. This statement is true at one level. It is another thing for a staff member to choose to work in that environment, to listen to inmates’ complaints and incessant badgering, to empathize at some level, and to intervene in so many other situations. Staff cannot escape the vilification directed at inmates. They are the ones who vicariously absorb the pain of it all.<sup>39</sup>

The beatific vision was a liberating experience for me because of the sheer oppressiveness of this cauldron of care. The vision had directly to do with what was missing. Knowledge of God was readily available while seeing God was not really

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<sup>39</sup> The movie, *Monster’s Ball*, DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2001) depicts the oppression of such an environment. I comment on the movie in my book, Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 66.

possible. Experiencing the intimacy of God was real precisely because this sense of belonging within Being itself was missing in a prison environment.

I had been part of a loving family when I grew up. I was part of a loving family when I married and we had children. That love was not extended in the same way to the inmates with whom I worked. I could talk about the love that I had for them only in a tangential way. I was not there when they went to bed at night, when they had nightmares about their crimes and their losses, when they lived with dread and shame and guilt.

The intimacy of God was the only thing I had to offer. That affection was the only reality that could counteract the loves that they had lost. They could experience the intimacy of God in the same way that I had, through intense meditation on the sheer hell of it all. One was lifted from the oppression precisely at the point when it became the severest.<sup>40</sup> It was like the killing of the children at Christ's birth and Judas' betrayal of Christ at his arrest and crucifixion. The moment of greatest evil occurred when God shone most brightly. The sheer depression of the job forced me to experience real love and closeness to God.

Emotions and passions represent the roots of many crimes that offenders have committed. Emotions and feelings have to be owned and accepted and embraced in order for restoration to happen. Discovering the power of intimacy represented a way of channeling these desires. The intimacy of God was real. One owned what was lost in order to experience life in a divine way.

Courses like *Experiencing God* and *The Purpose Driven Life* are popular because they speak about a relationship with God.<sup>41</sup> They speak about the fact that God wants to have a "loving relationship" with us. God wants to be "our Friend," "our Comforter," and "our Lord." These courses talk about a loving relationship with God because so few offenders know what it is like to have a loving relationship with anyone else.

This way of talking about God can be extended to images of bride and bridegroom. Mark 2:19 speaks about the disciples feasting with the bridegroom while Jesus is still with them. Matthew 25:10 talks about ten bridesmaids going to the wedding feast of the bridegroom. Ephesians 6:29-32 speaks about Christ loving the church in

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<sup>40</sup> I reflect on this experience in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, p. 149.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 155-157.

the same way that husbands love their wives. John refers to the church as a bride because of the fellowship, intimacy, and care experienced there (Revelation 19:7).

The Church represents a fellowship of believers that love each other. We experience God in a very personal sense in this womb of care. This love substitutes for the lack of concern and care and love that inmates experience within a prison context. I experienced a real level of fellowship with these men as part of the body of Christ.

A beatific vision is sometimes necessary for a person to be sustained in ministry. It represents a powerful antidote to the misery, bleakness, and despair that is experienced in a prison setting.

### Questions about Chapter Three

1. Would you say that it is possible to have a beatific vision?
2. Describe experiences of God that you have had. What is the difference between knowledge of God, faith in God, and experience of God?
3. Have courses such as *Experiencing God* and *Purpose Driven Life* helped you in establishing a relationship with God?
4. Have these courses been helpful in establishing positive relationships with others?
5. What other courses would you suggest would be helpful in your spiritual growth?

## Chapter Four

### Restoration to Original Righteousness

Another way of speaking about a beatific vision is to reflect on the meaning of original righteousness. The Catholic Catechism affirms the fact that Adam and Eve were constituted in an original “state of holiness and justice.”<sup>42</sup> This grace of original holiness was to “share in the divine life.” Children represent a good example of what it means to dwell in this state of original righteousness. We can all remember the naivete, childlike trust, kindness, compassion, love, care, hope, and faith that we had as pre-adolescents.

The Catechism affirms the fact that even though human beings were created good, they fell as a result of Adam and Eve’s sin.<sup>43</sup> This inevitability of sinning is known as original sin. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant that Adam and Eve had to leave paradise. They sowed fig leaves for themselves for clothing because they had lost their innocence.

We can all remember the time when we lost our naivete. Perhaps we threw sand into our brother’s face because they took away our toy. Perhaps this loss of innocence had to do with guilt over sexual awareness. We can remember the time when we started disobeying our parents. Perhaps we stole a candy bar from the grocery store.

Inmates are very aware of the evil and sin that they have committed. They live with the consequences of the decisions they have made. This consciousness of sin can make them despair and become depressed. They believe that they are fundamentally evil and not worthy of love and attention.

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<sup>42</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

I tell inmates to return to a second naivete<sup>44</sup> in order to find healing and hope. The innocence, love, and trust that one experienced as a child needs to be revisited and affirmed. This restoration is possible through the sacrificial love of Christ. Christ has restored us to original righteousness because of his selfless death on the cross.<sup>45</sup>

Harville Hendrix is a marriage counselor who uses this restoration to original righteousness to good effect. He suggests to couples on the verge of separation that they revisit the reasons that they fell in love in the first place.<sup>46</sup> They can reignite the initial spark of attraction, affection, and love that they had for each other. Retracing the steps of commitment they made at the beginning of their relationship breaks the power struggle occurring after years of marriage. Forgiveness, forbearance, and acts of love enable couples to move past issues of power and control.

The Celebrate Recovery program is similar. CR facilitators hand out a worksheet in lessons 9, 10, and 11 that asks participants to write down good qualities about themselves. Looking at one's positive characteristics balances the hurt and harm that one has been experienced.<sup>47</sup> Naming and confessing what has gone wrong in Principle 4 gives way to forgiveness and absolution. Having been cleansing from the power of sin, offenders reaffirm aspects of themselves that have been left behind.

Affirming the fact that we were originally good and righteous shows us that love and faith and hope are possible. Good characteristics existed within our core being when we were young. These elements of trust, faith, hope, and love can be reclaimed.

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur elaborates on what this second naivete entails in *Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 352.

<sup>45</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 481-485.

<sup>46</sup> Harville, Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want* (New York: Saint Martin Griffin, 1988), pp. 119-130.

<sup>47</sup> *Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory*, participants guide 2, offers some balance to this approach, p. 29.

### Questions about Chapter Four

1. Name childlike qualities that you had when you were young. Describe these instances of innocence, trust, faith, hope, and love.
2. Do you believe it is possible to be restored to original righteousness? How is Jesus Christ involved in this?
3. Creation and redemption are ways of talking about original righteousness and restored righteousness. What good qualities that you had all of your life? What qualities, actions, relationships, or characteristics need to be restored?
4. Do the beatific vision and restoration to original righteousness helpful in your journey toward wholeness?

## Chapter Five

### Feelings of Remorse<sup>49</sup>

Fiction writer J. K. Rowling is psychologically convincing in her description of what happens when one commits murder. She suggests that a person's soul is ripped apart every time someone kills another human being.<sup>50</sup> The individual becomes less human. They have increasing difficulty in feeling grief or pain because they have had to numb themselves from the awful deed they have committed. The distancing of emotion and empathy enables the killer to go on with life. He represses feelings of guilt and shame associated with the crime. Indeed, the killer is prepared to kill again because those receptors that register pain and those inhibitors that regulate taboos have been turned off. A taboo is easier to break the second time around. A person who comes to prison for the first time finds it less intimidating to come back again. The groundwork has been laid to live beyond the law and morality.

Living beyond morality is what happens to Tom Riddle Junior as we journey with him through the seven Harry Potter novels. In the first book, we meet him in a weakened state, inhabiting the body of another person. Tom grows stronger in each novel as he rallies his troops and uses his cunning to gain a new body. The climax of his rebirth occurs in the fourth book. Tom uses the arm of a servant, the bone of his father, and the blood of an enemy to make a new body.<sup>51</sup> Tom is convinced that he can defeat Harry and become the new headmaster at Hogwarts. Through stamina and fortitude, Tom shows how much he wants to defeat the forces of good in order to rule with power and might. His Death Eaters gather at the end of the fourth novel to wage war on Dumbledore and the Ministry of Magic.

The extent of Tom Riddle's evil deeds becomes evident as the fifth and sixth novels unfold. We learn that Tom has not only killed Harry's parents. He has killed various

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<sup>49</sup> This chapter represents a modification of chapter one, "Can Tom Riddle Be Saved?" Donald Stoesz, *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2018), pp. 13 -31.

<sup>50</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 246.

<sup>51</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), pp. 556-557.

staff members of the Ministry of Magic and his own father as well. These murders are more than strategic ploys to gain power and control of the wizarding world. The deaths serve Tom's purpose of splitting his soul into seven pieces and hiding them in different Horcruxes so that Tom is safe from being killed. J. K. Rowling graphically demonstrates the fact that each death takes Tom further and further from humanity. Tom is unable to feel or experience loss because he has split his soul into so many pieces. His obsession to hide his soul within wizarding trophies shows the extent to which his very being is within these material objects.

### How to Put One's Soul Back Together Again

Is it possible for Tom to put his soul and life back together again? I meet men every day who are somewhat like Tom Riddle. They have committed serious crimes that have made them into emotional-less beings, preoccupied with themselves, and the material world around them. They have cut themselves off from their feelings because they are not sure what they would do if they let these emotions run free. They have become afraid of themselves and their proven capacity to harm others. They have retreated into a shell from which they may not emerge.

Hermione gives us the answer to this question in the seventh novel. After Dumbledore's death, she takes the liberty of retrieving an ancient book, entitled *Secrets of the Darkest Arts*, from his library. Hermione finds out that people can put themselves back together by feeling remorse. She tells Ron, "You've got to really feel what you've done."<sup>52</sup> The book suggests that the pain of feeling remorseful can be so horrible that it can destroy a person. The group agrees that Tom would not attempt such a thing.

Remorse is a relatively innocuous attribute that does not count for much in the world of power and strength. Remorse has to do with admitting one is wrong. This change of mind appears to others as a vacillating characteristic. It assumes that human beings are deeply fallible and should admit their shortcomings. This is not easy to do for a person who feels justified in what he has done. Tom feels entitled to take revenge on his father because he abandoned him. Tom feels entitled to kill James and Lily Potter because their son, Harry, represents a threat to him. Tom was acting in self-defence, so to speak, because of a prophecy that predicted a young child would gain the power to kill Tom. Tom has embarked on a path that has made it increasingly difficult for him to change his mind and turn around.

I identify with Tom's suspicious attitude toward remorse. I work with men who are not convinced of the healing powers of feeling sorry for what they have done. Sometimes they feel justified in their actions. The other person would have killed

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

them if they had not struck first. Staff view an inmate's sign of regret or contriteness as an attempt to manipulate the system. Offenders are expressing remorse in order to get early parole. Staff find it difficult to tell the difference between being honest and being manipulative.

Rowling demonstrates the healing aspects of remorse through her other characters. Harry tells Dumbledore that he is sorry for having become distracted from the task of retrieving a memory from Professor Slughorn. Dumbledore accepts his apology and asks Harry to give the job a higher priority.<sup>53</sup>

Dumbledore apologizes to Harry for keeping the details of Harry's life secret. He mistakenly thought that he could protect Harry by not telling him everything about Voldemort's plans to kill him. Dumbledore realizes that his withholding of information has led to the inadvertent death of Sirius Black, Harry's godfather. Dumbledore's humanity becomes painfully obvious in these exchanges.<sup>54</sup>

Snape's humanity becomes clear when Harry retrieves his last memory as Snape is dying. The memory reveals that Snape is deeply sorry for causing Lily's death. Snape loved Lily. He is stricken with grief and anguish when Voldemort uses Snape's information to kill her along with James. Snape is in Dumbledore's debt for the rest of his life. He promises to protect Harry in spite of the fact that he cannot forgive James, Harry's father. James bullied Snape during their years at Hogwarts.<sup>55</sup>

Dumbledore realizes there are some "wounds that are too deep for the healing."<sup>56</sup> James relentlessly harassed and ridiculed Snape. Snape could not fully commit himself to teaching James' son, Harry, to protect himself against the mental intrusion of Voldemort's thoughts. Snape's vow to protect Harry did not preclude his feelings of loathing and resentment against Harry's popularity. The success of Harry reminded Snape too much of James' popularity and ultimate marriage to Lily.

Feelings of pain alongside expressions of remorse are evident in Harry's reaction to the death of his godfather, Sirius Black. Harry rails against Dumbledore and shouts that he "does not want to be human."<sup>57</sup> Harry does not want to feel anymore because the loss of Sirius Black is too hard to bear. He trashes Dumbledore's office by throwing things in every direction. Harry becomes angry when Dumbledore suggests that Sirius has to take responsibility for his decisions. Harry points his finger yet

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<sup>53</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, pp. 399-400.

<sup>54</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), pp. 727, 730.

<sup>55</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* pp. 544-545.

<sup>56</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 735.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 726.

again at Snape and questions Dumbledore's trust in him. Dumbledore takes it all in stride and accepts the death of Sirius as his fault.

This exchange undergirds the reality of pain and suffering involved in showing remorse. Dumbledore is most vulnerable as he anguishes over his decision to distance himself from Harry. The death of Sirius and subsequent anger of Harry are all too real. Dumbledore is exhausted, sad, burdened with grief, and able to cry.<sup>58</sup> Rowling's prediction in the seventh book that remorse can be so painful that it can ruin a man appears to have come true.

These examples demonstrate that putting one's soul back together again by feeling remorse is possible. Dumbledore is patient and understanding of Harry's tantrums in spite of Harry's woeful ignorance of the larger picture. Snape's remorsefulness makes him loyal to Dumbledore. He is committed to the good in spite of the fact that this courage may get him killed. Healing one's soul does not ensure the future integrity of life and limb.

According to Rowling, Tom has a chance up to the very end to redeem himself. Harry gives him this option at the height of the last battle at Hogwarts. Voldemort is pointing the Elder wand at Harry and preparing to speak the death curse, "*Avada Kedavra!*" When Tom Riddle tells Harry that the wand of destiny is truly his, Harry agrees, and then adds:<sup>59</sup>

"But before you try and kill me, I'd advise you to think about what you've done . . . think, and try for some remorse, Riddle . . ."

"What is this?"

Of all the things that Harry had said to him, beyond any revelation or taunt, nothing had shocked Voldemort like this. Harry saw the pupils contract to thin slits, saw the skin around his eyes whiten.

"It's your last chance," said Harry, "it's all you've got left . . . I've seen what you'll be otherwise . . . be a man . . . try . . . try for some remorse. . ."

"You dare -?" said Voldemort again.

"Yes, I dare," said Harry, "because Dumbledore's last plan hasn't backfired on me at all. It's backfired on you, Riddle."

J. K. Rowling's insertion of this discussion at the height of battle shows that she believes in choices, even when death is imminent. We have options even when the situation is desperate and the response predictable.

Tom Riddle has a hard time listening to Harry because he believes his possession of the Elder wand seals Harry's fate. His cunning and insight have enabled him to gain

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, pp. 735, 744, cf. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 594.

a huge advantage over Harry. The problem, as Harry explains, is that the wand Voldemort is holding is not powerful because it does not accept Voldemort as its rightful owner.

Voldemort has once again seized power with an inadequate insight into the larger situation. He underestimated the power of love, honesty, and remorse. Tom Riddle is oblivious to the unconscious dynamic between magic and magician. The magician is only as powerful as the magic he wields.

Magic consists of the fact that Dumbledore, the second last owner of the Elder wand, was disarmed of it. The power of the wand passed from Dumbledore to Draco when Dumbledore forfeited it to keep Draco alive. Its power transferred from Draco to Harry when Harry disarmed Draco of his own wand during a fight at Malfoy Manor.<sup>60</sup>

The ownership of the Elder wand is not dependent upon it being taken by force. The power of the wand transferred from Dumbledore to Draco to Harry in a peaceful and deferred manner. Desire and passion do not have to end in murder in order for a person to obtain the object of one's aspirations.<sup>61</sup> Harry's use of Draco's wand in the last battle is more powerful than Voldemort's possession of the Elder wand because of Harry's proper use of magic. Voldemort missed his chance at power by grasping onto it.

The story may have ended differently if Voldemort had taken the opportunity to feel remorse and regret. Perhaps he would have died anyway at the hands of so many enemies around him. Many people felt justified in killing him in retaliation for the many deaths he had caused. Who knows what difference a tinge of regret would have gained him in terms of his soul?<sup>62</sup>

### Salvific Effects of Remorse

Harry, Dumbledore, Snape, and Regulus Black admitted they were wrong in some of their actions. Their mistakes cost the lives of others as well as their own. Rowling's inclusion of their humanness in the face of Tom Riddle's intractability shows the widening gulf among these protagonists. Rowling suggests that a

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<sup>60</sup> Cross-reference the sequence of events and explanations provided in J. K. Rowling, *Harry and the Half-Blood Prince*, pp. 545ff; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, pp. 383ff, 397ff, 505ff, 593ff. The first chapter of this book demonstrates how one can channel desires and passion in a redemptive manner.

<sup>61</sup> Note Harry's discussion with the wand maker about this point, J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 402.

<sup>62</sup> Wormtail's momentary lapse of concentration due to regret caused his iron hand to tighten against his throat in a death grip, J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, pp. 380-381.

vulnerable display of regret and change is, in fact, the way to go. There is victory in weakness that power can never achieve.

Tom is given so many chances to repent that the reader wonders if he is no longer eligible for salvation. He has blasphemed the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30). His willingness to kill an increasing number of people in the vain hope of hiding his own soul shows that Tom has become so self-centred that redemption is remote. He has gone beyond good and evil itself.

Is it possible for the men I work with to show remorse and thus be saved? Rowling accepts this possibility as real. She gives Tom an opportunity to show remorse at the very end of his life, six pages from the end of her seventh novel.

There is precedent for this possibility of salvation in the Bible. Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of them repented while the other mocked and ridiculed Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Listen to Jesus' reply to the one who asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus goes to his kingdom: "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

This response is hard to hear when one has been personally affected by the mayhem others have foisted upon oneself and other victims. It is hard to imagine Tom going to heaven if he had repented at the last moment. And yet, there it is. Rowling and God give the criminal a final chance to repent, even in the face of so much evil. Neither Tom nor the criminal on the cross could ever repay their wrongs. Neither of them had time to return good for evil. Neither of them could do anything to redeem themselves in the eyes of others.

The Bible nevertheless suggests that remorse and repentance alone are sufficient for salvation. The simple act of the will to admit one is wrong appears to be a large step in the right direction towards one's salvation. Some people only have time to repent, nothing more.

The repentant criminal on the cross is known in historical literature as Dismas. His repentance shows how valid an act of contrition can be. At the very least, a human being can show their true regret at what they have done.

### Conclusion

This chapter has explored the possibilities of making right decisions in difficult circumstances. It has concluded that the human will has the capability of acting even when the situation is dire. Harry, Dumbledore, Snape, and Regulus Black admitted their mistakes and committed themselves to the good. Tom Riddle allowed his plight to overwhelm and influence his decisions. Tom Riddle Junior exacted revenge on his father for abandoning him. He went on to gain power and control at the expense

of everyone around him. He continued to commit murder and mayhem in spite of the chances that people gave him to turn toward the good,

Tom's final chance came when Harry gave him the option to show remorse for what he had done. Harry suggests that Tom can at least heal his soul in the process. Tom chose damnation over that of regret. J. K. Rowling shows through her other characters that this fateful choice is not inevitable. Snape and Regulus Black repented of their actions and worked for the rest of their lives in doing good. Remorse is the first step along this healing journey in spite of the possibility of death in the very next instance. God gave the thief on the cross a reprieve as well as eternal security because of his repentance and belief in Jesus.

This scenario of hope and healing within harrowing circumstances is of comfort to me as a prison chaplain. A window of opportunity opens up as I help the men come to terms with the harm they have committed. The willingness of the thief on the cross to find forgiveness even as he is dying is a symbol of hope for the men with whom I work.

### Questions about Chapter Five

1. Is remorse the beginning of a journey toward transformation? Explain.
2. How is remorse connected to conviction of sin and feelings of regret?
3. How much pain is involved in feeling remorse?
4. Whom do you speak to about your feelings of remorse?
5. What is the relationship between remorse, confession, and forgiveness?

## Chapter Six

### Confession and Absolution

Is absolution and granting of forgiveness after confession necessary to bring about healing? Gordon Jensen raises this question regarding Protestant Reformer Zwingli and the Wittenberg Concord. Zwingli concentrated on the pastoral advice and counselling involved in helping the believer “remove an obstacle of sin.”<sup>63</sup> Zwingli felt that it was enough for the participant to “name the sin” involved rather than proceeding to the next step of a priest granting absolution after hearing the confession.<sup>64</sup>

Granting of forgiveness is a powerful therapeutic force in the context of remorse, repentance, affirmation of forgiveness, reception of grace, and absolution of guilt. I can speak to this experience as a chaplain who has heard many confessions.

I recently spoke to a friend of mine who had killed someone almost forty years ago. This person spent more than fifteen years in prison for his offence. He had accepted God’s forgiveness for his crime. He had accepted some other people’s forgiveness of him for having committed such an offence. And yet, this person could not forgive himself. He regarded this last step as “entitlement.” It was something that diminished regard for the victim who had died. I suggested to him that absolution of guilt in response to repentance was also necessary. He could only come to peace if he forgave himself.

A more bracing example illustrates the limitations of absolution. Several Mafia members have come to me seeking absolution in the “realm beyond.” These men could not admit their guilt nor detail their crimes in private confession. They sought absolution in the same way that genuinely remorseful participants did. I was always

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<sup>63</sup> Gordon Jensen, *The Wittenberg Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), pp. 46, 124.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 185-187,

amazed at these requests. The Mafia members, who were devout Catholics, believed that public confession and attendance at Mass would absolve them of the criminal behaviour in which they were still involved. These requests spoke to me of the deep hunger of many people seeking absolution, regardless of how this request was related to their intentionality and actualization of life itself.

Discussion of *Counselling and Confession*, by Walter Koehler

Walter Koehler has written a book about the role of private confession in the practices of the church. He begins by detailing the differences between pastoral counselling and hearing confession. He goes on to look at theological resources within the Lutheran tradition to help pastors hear confession and grant absolution.<sup>65</sup>

The first chapter outlines twentieth century trends in psychology that have shaped pastoral counselling. Carl Rogers was a therapist in the 1940s who introduced a client-centred therapy to his counselling sessions. Client-centred counselling meant that the “responsibility for the solutions to the problem and the control of the session rests with the counselee.” Rogers focussed on “the innate tendency toward growth and actualization. Given a healthy environment, man will throw off his negative reactions and develop into a healthy, full functioning person.”<sup>66</sup>

This humanistic approach, steeped in a positive view of human beings, is reflective of what I have been about for the last twenty-five years. In *Glimpses of Grace*, I wrote that I “carefully listen to what the person has to say in order to understand the basis of his or her query.”<sup>67</sup> This subject-oriented approach echoes the work of Stephen Duguid, who has provided philosophical and therapeutic rationales for work with inmates.<sup>68</sup>

I resonate with the work of other psychologists that Koehler mentions.<sup>69</sup> Freud’s discussion of the Oedipal complex, his understanding of the self as composed on an id, ego, and superego, and his sensitivity to the unconscious aspects of life have been invaluable in my work as a chaplain. I have used his theories to help offenders understand themselves better.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession* (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary Press, 2011), pp. 20-31, 45-59.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>67</sup> Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 54.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Duguid, *Can Prisons Work?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

<sup>69</sup> Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, pp. 24-37.

<sup>70</sup> Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 91-100, 115-124, 125-132.

Koehler outlines William Glasser's Reality Therapy.<sup>71</sup> It is more interested in behaviour modification than discovering the underlying reasons for a person's actions. I have used this therapy to help offenders gain a realistic perspective of themselves. Offenders are notorious for deflecting blame, including the role of mental illness in their offences. I often joke with the men. Are those people the only ones you can blame for your crime? I am sure you can find others to blame. I counsel them: "Share the blame as widely as possible so it does not reflect so badly on yourself."<sup>72</sup>

Koehler questions the role of these therapies because of their anthropocentric approach. He suggests that pastoral counselling is more interested in a theocentric approach.<sup>73</sup> I agree with Koehler that theology and faith can address inmates' needs. A religious solution speaks to the issues of guilt and shame, dread and despair, loneliness and grief.

Acknowledgement of sin, repentance, grace, forgiveness, justification, assurance, and absolution occur on a deep level of faith. Inmates come to chaplains because they want to deal with the spiritual aspects of their lives. Chaplains address this situation through a combination of psychological wisdom and pastoral care. Psychology along with theology are invaluable in helping chaplains understand the reason for inmate behaviours.

The Celebrate Recovery program covers the stages of repentance, surrender, confession, forgiveness, absolution, and assurance that Koehler speaks about at the end of his book.<sup>74</sup> Confession and absolution are integral to restoration and reconciliation on a divine and human level.

One question that remains has to do with the confidante to whom the person confesses. Many inmates with whom I work trust very few people. Some of them have had bad experiences with pastors and churches. It takes time to build trust. I point them in the direction of AA or CR. When it comes to sharing their inventory and confessing their sins, they often choose a recognized sponsor who is a CR facilitator rather than myself.

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<sup>71</sup> Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, p. 28.

<sup>72</sup> I note the difference in approaches between Freud and Glasser in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, page 305,fn2.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Koehler, *Counselling and Confession*, p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 77-80.

Inmates feel more comfortable sharing with a volunteer who is anonymous as well as an “equal.” I have considered the importance of this egalitarian dynamic regarding Celebrate Recovery and confession in a chaplaincy manual.<sup>75</sup>

CR is an egalitarian driven program that has much to offer church and society. Pastors should make as much use of it as possible. Koehler’s goal of having pastors becoming good pastoral counsellors, along with hearing confession and granting absolutions, is commendable. Collaboration with other groups and believers who are dedicated to something similar is to be encouraged.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

Public and private confession are an integral part of what the Gospel has to say about our need to be remorseful, repent, confess, receive forgiveness, and live by the grace which Christ has made real for us who are called by faith. The Augsburg Confession has retained public and private confession, along with absolution, for a reason.<sup>77</sup> The success of such groups as Celebrate Recovery demonstrates the effectiveness of this process. This program includes private confession and private absolution as necessary aspects of the healing journey. Koehler’s book is invaluable in showing how pastors can make use of the latest psychological therapies while bringing a much-needed theology of sin, confession, forgiveness, and grace to the discussion.

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<sup>75</sup> Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 138-140.

<sup>76</sup> The effectiveness of confession and absolution ultimately rests, as Koehler notes, on the trust and confidence that the participant has in the person to whom they are confessing, *Counselling and Confession*, pp. 76-77. Confidentiality and professionalism of the pastor or CR facilitator are key.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, pp. 45, 73-74.

## Questions about Chapter Six

1. How is confession related to forgiveness and absolution?
2. Whom do you confess your sins to?
3. Is the Celebrate Recovery program something you would consider in your walk of faith?
4. How is it different from AA?
5. Celebrate Recovery and Grief Recovery believe in the two step process of accepting responsibility for harm done and offering forgiveness for hurts experienced. Is this a helpful way in proceeding with healing and restoration?
6. Naming good qualities about oneself is an exercise that balances negative attitudes or actions one has taken. How do you feel about this exercise?

## Chapter Seven

### Hidden Consequences of Punishment

The Prodigal Son story in the Gospel of Luke (15:11-31) is primarily about forgiveness. The younger of the two sons asks his father for his inheritance, receives it, squanders it, and then returns home to ask forgiveness. The father forgives him by throwing a big party and celebrating the fact that his son has come home.

Forgiveness and acceptance are also issues for the older brother. The older brother is resentful because he has stayed faithful and worked hard for his father while his younger brother was away. The older brother has to consider whether he can forgive and accept his younger brother, now that he has come home.

Both brothers have to let go and forgive in order to move on. The younger brother has to forgive himself for his rebellious attitude and wanton spending. The older brother has to forgive his younger brother for being so irresponsible. Self-righteousness is a sin with which the older brother has to deal. Self-loathing is a sin with which the younger brother has to come to terms.

Both of these types of sin are prevalent among the men with whom I work. Guilt and shame are part of many inmates' lives because of their addictions and irresponsible behaviour. Self-righteousness is prevalent because several inmates consider the crimes that other inmates have committed as worse than their own. They look down on other inmates in order to avoid looking at their own offences.

I have included the story in this chapter because of the hidden costs of punishment. The role of punishment is real in spite of the fact that the father forgave the younger son along with the older brother. The fact of the matter remains that the younger son has no more inheritance to draw on. As he himself says on his way home, he will have to become a servant of his father in order to make a living. The younger son is dependent on his father and his older brother to find a place within his family.

Let us look at the situation from the viewpoint of the older brother. The inheritance that the older brother will receive is presumably the farm itself, once his father has died. The older brother reaps huge rewards for having stayed faithful and loyal to his father. There is only one inheritance left to give, namely the farm itself.

The younger son has to live with the fact that he is now co-dependent on his father and older brother to survive. He has to regain the trust and confidence of his family in order to be accepted. He has to show that he is competent to run the farm, get along with his brother, and work for the best interests of his family. The situation is no longer about himself. The younger brother has to look at the bigger picture.

Part of the larger picture has to do with the fact that the younger son has lost everything: reputation, money, status, competence, rapport, and acceptance. He has to work as hard at regaining his reputation as he did in his frivolity in losing everything. The cost of losing everything remains with him. He has no money. His friends know about his past life. He has to regain the trust and acceptance of his older brother. He has to prove his worth to his father.

This hidden aspect of punishment is apparent to me because of the number of losses that inmates have experienced – after God has forgiven them. Their forgiveness enables them to be psychologically and spiritually free of the burdens they have carried. Inmates' actions and crimes nevertheless have real consequences that stay with them for the rest of their lives. They cannot undo the hurt that they have caused. They cannot change the fact that they are now vilified for what they have done. They are rejected for various jobs for which they apply. They are unable to be trusted in various group settings. They live with the broken relationships that they have left behind. They literally have to start a new life.

The above realities are what I call the hidden consequences of punishment. It is hidden because it goes on long after the prison term is over. Inmates continue paying for their sins long after their prison sentences. They have committed actions that affect the rest of their and their victims' lives. They may now be divorced, unable to visit their children, unable to find a job with the same salary scale that they had before. They may not be able to establish healthy relationships because of the dysfunctionality that they have lived with for so long.

Many people speak about recovery lasting a lifetime. The reason that this phrase is used is because so many habits are hard to break. Gambling, drugs, alcohol, obsessions, and immediate gratification may be so entrenched that inmates find themselves back at the same place they were before they came to jail.

Let us take the young son as an example. The fact that he squandered his inheritance means that he may not be trusted with his family's finances. He may have to work

in an area on the farm that does not involve the handling of money. The son may continue to be addicted to gambling and momentary relationships. He may use every paycheck that he gets to continue his bad habits. This may mean that he does not have enough money to pay monthly rent to his older brother for living expenses. He may not be able to cook for himself or take care of himself. His father or his older brother may have to step in order to support him.

I am using the illustration of the Prodigal Son story to show the reader that there are hidden costs of punishment. Inmates have “paid” for their actions with a prison term. At the same time, the behaviours that they exhibited before they came to jail may continue long after they have finished their jail term. I know of lifers who came back to jail on a breach ten or twenty years after they were released. These men had not come to terms with the fact that their addictions or other bad habits were more entrenched than they realized. As soon as they thought they had conquered their addictions, their dependencies came roaring back. As soon as they faced a major crisis, these ex-inmates returned to their old coping habits to “solve the problem.”<sup>78</sup>

These experiences made me realise that old habits are more prevalent than I had surmised. The younger son may continue to exhibit irresponsible behaviour because this is something with which he is familiar. He may not be trusted with money for a long time to come because of his squandering of his inheritance.

This story has as much to do with the older brother as the younger son. The older brother’s reaction to his father’s forgiveness is what I experience in relation to society’s response to inmates. Christians may accept the fact that God has forgiven inmates who have become believers. Society may accept the fact that offenders have paid for their evil actions through a prison term. Christians and society may still feel unsafe around these ex-inmates. They may question whether the inmate has dealt with the issues for which he was convicted and sentenced to prison.

Society and Christians have as much work to do in accepting ex-inmates as offenders do in gaining the respect of others. The story ends with the older brother remaining uncertain about whether he can truly forgive his younger brother. The years of faithfulness and loyalty to his father inadvertently resulted in resentment at his younger brother’s infidelity. The older son worked hard for his father as much to prove that he was self-righteous as he did because of his love of work and his father. The older brother has to decide whether he truly wants to inherit the farm. His resentment may get the better of him. He may decide to ask for his own inheritance from his father and leave the farm because he cannot stand being with his young brother.

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. one story in Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 92.

Some people in society believe that inmates are incorrigible. “Offenders are not capable of changing,” they say. “They should stay in jail so that society can stay safe.” I believe that some inmates should never be let out of jail. The reality of the matter remains that most inmates will be let out of jail at some point. Is it not better to try to reduce harm, and believe in change than simply give up?

Society is like the older brother. It cannot decide if inmates deserve a big party when they repent. It cannot decide whether inmates should be let out of jail. It cannot decide if inmates are employable once they have been let out of jail. Self-righteousness causes people to stumble when considering the foibles of other people.

The Prodigal Son story touches the dilemmas of inmates and people in society. Inmates have to regain respect and establish rapport with others. Society has to decide how inmates can be kept safe while being given a chance to change. Christians have to do the same.

### Questions about Chapter Seven

1. Name ways in which you can identify with the younger and older son.
2. Have you lost a lot as a result of your offence and/or sin?
3. What have you gained in your sojourn of life?
4. What would have been different if you had not offended?
5. Is society like the older son who does not know whether the younger son should be forgiven?
6. Are Christians like the older son who does not know whether the younger son should be given a chance to change?
7. Are there other comments you have about the role of punishment?

## Chapter Eight

### Surrender to God<sup>80</sup>

The twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous illustrates what dying to sin and rising to life through surrender is all about. In the first step, members of AA acknowledge their utter helplessness in the face of their addictions (Appendix 1).<sup>81</sup> They affirm powerlessness over their attraction to drinking. While others are able to drink responsibly, AA members drink to the point of self-destruction. They are unable to stop drinking until they reach the end of their rope. At that point, they acknowledge they are addicted to alcohol and need help.

This acknowledgement of powerlessness is paradoxically the first step toward change. The very act of asking for help names the evil and enables alcoholics to move on with their lives. Their cry to a higher power places their self-destructive behaviour into a broader perspective. The God of the universe empowers them to move to the next step.

The twelve-step program is ingenious in its psychological understanding of the addictive personality. The first two steps speak only about admission of helplessness and belief in a higher power. An act of the will occurs in the third step when a person turns their life over to God. Writing an inventory of one's life represents the next step. An inventory enables a more profound understanding of how much harm one has caused others. The participant presents this inventory to another person.

The alcoholic is encouraged to admit their need for God to intervene in their lives. This is followed by the seventh step in which the person asks God to "humbly remove our shortcomings." Making direct amends to the people one has harmed occurs in the ninth step. The person becomes increasingly aware of what it means for a person to turn one's will over to God.

The twelve-step program is effective because it takes an incremental approach to life. Many offenders do not know how to take a measured approach to life. The many predicaments into which they have gotten themselves paralyse them. They are

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<sup>80</sup> This chapter represents a modification of chapter three, "Role of the Will in Effecting Salvation," Donald Stoesz, *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, pp. 47-62.

<sup>81</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1955), p. 59.

frenetic in their haste to get on with their lives. It does not take long until all of life comes crashing down on them again. Offenders have a propensity to juggle as many balls as possible to see how far they can get. They have not yet learned that most of life's successes come from a lot of work at a few things.

The twelve-step program understands that one-step at a time is needed in terms of the human will. Admission, belief, decision, inventory, re-admission, removal, asking, willingness, making amends, re-inventory, seeking, and practice are twelve action words the alcoholic is encouraged to consider. Alcoholics know that they can at any point travel from the ninth step back to the first one. They have to admit all over again they are powerless over alcohol.

Relapse does not mean defeat. The alcoholic knows what a difference AA made when they began the program. They know that they are still welcome at an AA meeting, in spite of the fact that they may still be drunk. The open door is there for the alcoholic rather than the other way around. The twelve-step program holds out hope even as the person is descending into the pit of hell by starting to use alcohol again. Like God, the twelve-step program never gives up on a person.

The twelve-step program link of human nature to a higher power is different from enlightenment thinking that is optimistic about humans' reasoning abilities. It is also different from some theologies that are radically pessimistic about human possibilities. AA does not believe as the humanists do in the ability of human beings to succeed because of their own will power. They are pessimistic enough about the hold that drugs and alcohol have had over their lives. They understand an act of the will can create more harm than good. Acknowledgement of their self-destructive tendencies paradoxically diffuses the situation. Admission enables them to commit fully to their recovery.

The twelve-step program is voluntaristic in the sense that it believes enough in human will power to ask the alcoholic to show up to a meeting and admit their dependency. It goes beyond humanism in that this act of the will is only efficacious if one turns it over to the will of God. This spiritual affirmation places the AA program within the realm of faith while undermining the fatalism so prevalent within the Augustinian heritage of Christianity.<sup>82</sup> The will of God joins with the will of human beings so that belief in a higher power disentangles self-paralysis and empowers the alcoholic to move forward.

The fundamental belief that we can move forward in spite of the baggage we are carrying is what I am affirming in this theology of prison ministry. God gives us a way out, not only to cope, but also to move ahead with success. This is something I

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<sup>82</sup> Cross-reference my reflections, Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace*, p. 159.

repeat on a daily basis within my ministry. The men become overwhelmed so easily and so quickly that I have to constantly remind them God is the one who is “working all things out.” We are only along for the ride in the sense that God is the one who shows us the possibilities within the impossibilities. There are always options that we can cash in on, no matter the difficulties.

AA teaches us to take one-step at a time as we recover from our sinful nature. While the sinful tendencies hold us down, the redemptive possibilities God has granted as actual, enable us to move forward.

### Rising from the Dead by Being Raised

The New Testament gives us a good example of the relation between the human and divine will. Hans Frei, in his book, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*,<sup>83</sup> makes the point that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. In his speech to the people of Jerusalem at Pentecost, Peter asserts “God raised him up, having freed him from death” (Acts 2:24). He repeats this statement in Acts 2:32: “God has raised this Jesus to life.” Peter refers to it again in his second sermon to the people at Solomon’s Portico: “God raised him from the dead” (Acts 3:15). He makes the same affirmation before the high priest of Jerusalem: “The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 5:30, cf. Matthew 28:6-7).

This assertion makes eminent sense from a human point of view. Dead people cannot raise themselves. Someone else needs to enact a resurrection. This is particularly true in Jesus’ case because it is theologically important to know that Jesus died before God raised him from the dead. Some early believers claimed Jesus was only pretending to be dead in order to make his escape from the grave later on. For theological reasons, they could not believe that Jesus as omnipotent God could suffer death. Jesus was too powerful a person to allow himself to be killed.

The need for God to raise Jesus from the dead is important for a number of reasons. It is important for addicts and prisoners alike to know that they are unable to manage their lives. They make promises and have illusions that they can “make it this time.” Prisoners, like all Christians, need to confess they are powerless over making history turn out right. They are completely dead in terms of their will power. God needs to save them from themselves.

The salvation story of death and resurrection is a useful one for all believers. God is sanctifying them. Paul refers repeatedly to dying and rising with Christ. This is the way that Christians can move on with their lives (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:19-21, Romans 6:5-11; 8:10-11). Paul himself went through a dramatic

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<sup>83</sup> (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), pp. 152-155.

conversion experience (Acts 9). He knew what it was like to change from killing Christians to serving God with his heart and mind. Paul thought he was doing the right thing in the first place. He realized that his zealous persecution had more to do with what he wanted than with what God wanted. He came to realize the significance of death and resurrection in his own life. He referred to his own experience repeatedly to help other Christians.

This way of understanding the relation of the divine to human will is helpful. Christians need someone else to provide the spark that will get them going. They need to be unhooked from the burdens and guilt they feel in order to be empowered to move on. They need to acknowledge the extent to which they can do nothing without God. Humility, repentance, forgiveness, and grace provide the divine wherewithal to engage the human will. Christians thank God for raising them to new life.

Several Scripture passages fly in the face of this divine empowerment of human endeavours. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples that no one has the power to take away his life. He has “the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again” (John 10:18). The Gospel of John emphasizes the power of Jesus to decide the time of his own death, as well as his power to “rise from the grave.” When Jesus confronts the officers who are going to arrest him, they all fall down to the ground (John 18:6). Jesus tells Pilate that he has no power over him except the power that has been given to Pilate by God (John 19:11).

The Gospel of Mark also refers to the fact that Jesus will rise from the dead. Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 8:31 that he will be killed and “after three days rise again.” He repeats this prediction in Mark 10:34, when he tells his disciples “he will rise again” after the Gentiles have killed him (cf. Luke 18:33; 24:34).

John along with Mark and Luke want to make the theological point that Jesus is equal to God. Jesus as God had the power within himself to rise from the grave, even though he was dead. This assertion of Jesus as having power over death is useful for us as an analogical symbol. It builds on the long theological discussion that the church has had about the relation of the human and divine will within Jesus.<sup>84</sup> We sometimes feel, like Paul, that we are powerless to do good. Jesus gives us encouragement through assertion of his will power. Through the witness of the

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<sup>84</sup> A theological formula of Jesus having two wills was drawn up in the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.); see Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, p. 544. It reads in part: “. . . our Lord Jesus Christ is the one and the same Son, the Same perfect in Godhead, the Same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the Same consisting of a rational soul and a body *homoousios* with the Father as to his Godhead, and the Same *homoousios* with us as to his manhood . . . made known in two natures which exist without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures having been in no wise taken away by reason of the union, but rather the properties of each being preserved, and both concurring into one Person and one *hypostasis*.”

Gospel of John, Jesus is suggesting that we do not have to view his death and resurrection in a primarily passive sense. In spite of the fact that we are often helpless in the face of unforeseen and foreboding circumstances, we should not let that discourage us. Like Jesus, we need to embrace the will power God has given us through God's creation of human beings as good.

We are all prone to blaming others for the mistakes we have made and for the helplessness we feel. Offenders have a tendency to share the blame as widely as possible. Deflecting responsibility appears to be an innate feature within human beings. It is hard to stand up and take the blame for harm. The above passages suggest that we can take responsibility for ourselves. We should not only accept the mistakes we have made. We should also be willing to lay down our lives for others. Jesus assumes that we are able to act when he asks us to take up our crosses and follow him (Matthew 16:24).

### Creation and Redemption

Two theological assertions help us understand that human beings are able to act responsibly and redemptively. First, God has created human beings in the image of God. They are capable of acting "like God." This humanistic emphasis on the innate goodness of human beings is a healthy corrective to Paul's pessimistic view of human nature. Jesus is saying by analogy to his own situation that human beings are able to "lay down their lives and take them up again." They are able to sacrifice their own interests in favour of the greater good. This type of affirmation and confidence in human beings is needed in the prison system today.

Creation is not the only reason God has gifted human beings to do the right thing. Human beings can figuratively raise themselves from the dead because of the grace they have received from Christ himself. Christ's death and resurrection enables us to be unhooked from the depths of despair to live, breathe, and succeed in him. The very grace we received through creation has been renewed and revived through re-creation in order to move from the tangle of original sin to the embrace of Christian fellowship.

This type of grace is especially evident in the book of Hebrews. The writer refers repeatedly to the fact that we are to approach the throne of grace with boldness (Hebrews 4:16). We are to have confidence to enter the sanctuary (Hebrews 10:19). We have full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22). We hold fast to our confession of hope (Hebrews 10:23).

These accolades reinforce the idea that transformation occurs as believers move from a state of sin to a state of grace. Believers move from an affirmation of justification to an embodiment of holiness through their willingness to follow Jesus.

The way in which Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament requirement of sacrifice is the way that Christian believers can move to a fulfillment of their deepest desires. We enact the intentions for which God has created us. The grace that God bestows on us intersects with the freedom with which we embrace God's will.

### Conclusion

Hermione in the *Harry Potter series* suggested to Harry and Ron that Voldemort could heal himself by feeling remorse (see above, chapter five). Fiction writer Victor Hugo had Bishop Bienvenu in *Les Miserables* offer the last of his prized possessions to Jean Valjean so Jean would come to understand what graciousness and compassion were all about (see below, chapter twelve). Jean came to a realization of what sacrifice meant when he heard the prayers of the nuns of Petit Picpus lying prostrate before the altar of God. Jean came to know what love meant when he became the father of Cosette and raised her until she was of age.

These examples illustrate that change is possible when altruism becomes part of the equation. These human examples mimic the spiritual image represented by Jesus. Jesus' willingness to lay down his life along with his ability to take it up again move us to another level of understanding. I use the word "magic" to describe this dynamic. It is only through a mysterious transformation that change is enacted. By acknowledging that they are utterly helpless, alcoholics bring their will under God's control. By giving up his life, Jesus rises from the dead by being raised by God.

These contradictory statements and paradoxical realities find their resolution in the magical agency of the divine. Reconciliation is tied closely to the Eucharist. It is precisely here where death and life, hatred and love, human and divine will, rejection and inclusion, and alienation and belonging come together. Inmates understand the magical nature of this transaction only too well. They have been vilified and rejected. They have been narcissistic and self-destructive. Offenders come to realize these burdens can be overcome on a human plain by a supernatural result. No human explanation is adequate for these paradoxes of guilt and forgiveness, shame and conviction, and rejection and belonging. We search for answers on a magical, spiritual, and deeply religious level.

### Questions about Chapter Eight

1. How does your will and the will of God work together in recovery?
2. Are there times when the will of God takes over your will in making decisions?
3. Are there times when your human will dominates? Is that a good thing?
4. What does surrender of God mean to you?
5. How you do practice surrender?

## Chapter Nine

### Co-Dependency Course<sup>86</sup>

#### Short Illustration

I attended a Celebrate Recovery session on a Friday evening together with two inmates. The facilitator introduced himself as someone who was in recovery from co-dependency. He went to explain the nature of co-dependency. At some point during the speech, one of the inmates whom I had escorted there leaned toward me and whispered, “I thought being dependent on someone else was a good thing.” I leaned back toward him and replied, “I thought so too.”

Thus was born my introduction to the nature of co-dependency. I learned that while we are all dependent on each other, co-dependency has to do with a person living their lives through another person in an unhealthy manner. A co-dependent person’s life is dependent on how the other person is feeling. They do not have their own identity. They do not have a very high regard for themselves. They believe that friendship and love have to do with being at the “beck and call” of the next person.

The facilitator’s explanation struck a chord. I have interviewed many inmates in their thirties and forties who are insecure. They attach themselves to other inmates in order to be more secure in their identity and social relations. These inmates seek protection from assault by these more powerful individuals. The irony of this situation has to do with the fact that these more independent individuals take advantage of their so-called new friends. They “borrow” the insecure men’s play stations, demand canteen money, ask these inmates to clean their cell, and do other favours. These insecure individuals are in an unhealthy relationship with their so-called protectors.

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<sup>86</sup> Chapters ten, eleven, and twelve represent modified versions of chapter sixteen, “Spiritual Value of Personal Development Courses,” Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 141-149.

I decided to offer a course on co-dependency. Melodie Beattie's book, *Co-Dependent No More*,<sup>87</sup> was especially helpful. She combined aspects of the grief process,<sup>88</sup> the twelve-step program used in *Celebrate Recovery*, and spoke about the need for spirituality. Melodie Beattie was a recovering alcohol for ten years before she realised that she had stalled in her recovery. People tended to avoid her because she was a miserable "dry drunk."

Melodie learned that she attached herself to other people in unhealthy ways.<sup>89</sup> She learned that co-dependency is "living one's life through another person to the detriment of one's own existence."<sup>90</sup> She uses the example of a spouse who protects and enables her alcoholic husband. The wife spends her whole life trying to please her husband in the mistaken belief and hope that he will accept and love her. She must learn to set boundaries for herself in order to become healthy.<sup>91</sup>

Melodie suggests a variety of methods to move on with one's life. The first step involves grieving over the loss of one's former self. Realization of dysfunctionality enables one to move beyond denial to an affirmation of self-acceptance and self-esteem.

The twelve-step program<sup>92</sup> moves from denial to acknowledgement, from taking inventory to an act of confession, and from an act of faith to making amends. These stages enable a person to move beyond co-dependency. Working the steps of recovery makes a person aware of the unhealthy ways in which one has related to others. Self-love and self-care go a long way in setting boundaries. One detaches oneself so that other people's miseries do not drag a person down.

Melodie uses the Karpman Triangle to show how the cycle of co-dependency works.<sup>93</sup> A young man meets a woman who needs assistance in leaving her abusive boyfriend. The new boyfriend helps her move to a new apartment with her young daughter and pays for her rent. The young man becomes romantically involved and

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<sup>87</sup> (Minnesota: Hazelden Publishing, 1986).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp. 134-138.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, pp. 83-86.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pp. 1-8.

<sup>91</sup> One is reminded the co-dependent spouse in Tyler Perry's movie, *Why Did I Get Married?* DVD (Lionsgate, 2008), 113 minutes, in which she realises that her poor self-image enabled her husband's abuse of her. She divorces him because he cannot respect her.

<sup>92</sup> Melodie Beattie, *Co-Dependent No More*, pp. 187-200.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, pp. 83-95.

moves in with his new girlfriend. Several months into this venture, the woman asks the man to leave after they have a series of conflicts.

The young man is distraught because he thought that they had a good relationship. He feels that the woman should be more grateful for what he has done for her. As saviour and rescuer, the young man feels that the woman should reciprocate the “love” that he has shown to her. The young man begins to feel resentful of the relationship and identifies as a person who has been “victimized.” The “love” that he believed he had for the woman turns to hate and jealousy over the lack of attention that he is receiving.

The boyfriend fails to realise that his relationship with his girlfriend is not mutually beneficial. The man’s misinterpretation of his rescue and care as love creates an unequal power balance. The woman is appreciative of her new boyfriend helping her in time of crisis. She becomes resentful when this helper-helpee role begins to define the relationship (parent-child, superego-id). She wants love rather than pity. She wants some sense of self-confidence rather than being defined as a needy person. A mutual relationship is not possible if the man defines his role as the primary caregiver and rescuer.

The man has difficulty in accepting his new girlfriend as an equal because he does not see himself as worthy of true love. He can only love a person who is needier than he is. The man requires his girlfriend to be co-dependent on him. Co-dependency is the only dysfunctional form of love that he has ever experienced. Both parties’ recognition of their unhealthy bond represents the first step in unhooking co-dependent habits.

Melodie Beattie’s broad use of resources to overcome co-dependency dovetails nicely with the role of chaplains in their assistance of offenders in becoming healthy individuals. Grief recovery, the twelve-step program, along with identification of emotions and feelings in the relationship process help offenders recognise their past dysfunctional behaviours and move forward.

### Questions about Chapter Nine

1. Have you ever been in co-dependent relationships? Name them.
2. Describe unhealthy features of an emotional bond.
3. How were you able to untangle yourself from this situation?
4. How much does co-dependency play a part in your relationships?
5. Describe five healthy relationships. Why are they healthy?

## Chapter Ten

### Grief Recovery courses

*Grief Recovery* is important because it helps inmates deal with losses that they experience when they come to jail. The first type of grief has to do with offenders' despair over their sentence and incarceration. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five categories of grief, *denial*, *anger*, *negotiation*, *despair*, and *acceptance* are applicable to this situation.<sup>94</sup> Some inmates rail against the conviction, insisting that they are innocent of the crime. The pervasiveness of this attitude makes it hard for staff, lawyers, and other people involved in knowing who is telling the truth.

Kubler-Ross -- as well as Alcoholics Anonymous and Celebrate Recovery -- have recognized that *denial* is often the first instinctive response by an inmate to traumatic events affecting their wellbeing. Upon hearing the news that one has cancer, a patient is instinctively drawn to the idea that this news can not be true, that a mistake has been made, that this news applies to someone else. Offenders find it hard to admit that they committed a crime.

An inmate's second response is *anger* at the fact that the court convicted them. There may be some "small truth" regarding the offence that occurred. The inmate nevertheless feels that the sentence is unfair, that several facts are incorrect, and that an injustice has occurred. Some inmates hold on to this *anger* for the rest of their sentence, including inmates sentenced to life imprisonment. According to these inmates, the fallacy of facts as presented in court, as witnessed by others and used to convict the person, gives them impetus to rail against this conviction for a long time.

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<sup>94</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. *On Death and Dying*, pp. 37-132.

Kubler-Ross' third phase of grief has to do with *negotiation*. A correctional officer told me about his experience working in the Remand Centre. He observed several inmates carrying around Bibles and spending quite a bit of time in the prison chapel. These inmates were anxious about what would happen at their trial. The officer noticed the same inmates throwing their Bibles away and walking away from the chapel after their trial. The court had not acquitted them of their charges. These inmates negotiated with God while there was still time to lessen the trauma of the arrest that they experienced. They asked God to intervene in the situation so that the court would not convict them. It sometimes takes a long time for an inmate to own up to the harm that they have done.

*Despair* represents a fourth phase of the grieving process. Inmates isolate in their cells and spend time sulking over the sentence they have received. Depression is a natural response of someone who has had to face traumatic changes in their lives. Incarcerated individuals are often divorced. They have few if any parenting responsibilities. They have lost their career as well as their reputation. It takes awhile before offenders feel comfortable in re-engaging the world.

*Acceptance* and *resignation* are two words that describe the last phase of the grieving process. Inmates begin to own up to their part in the crime. They begin to understand the multitude of factors that led them to come to prison. They acknowledge the radically new circumstances with which they must deal. Inmates learn to accept the fact that their former lives as husband, parent, professional, and respected member of the community are over. They must reinvent themselves to take account of the fact that they committed a serious crime.

#### Reconsideration of Kubler-Ross' categories

A second type of grief has to do with offender's loss of loved ones through separation and death. John James and Russell Friedman deal with this aspect of grief in the book, *The Grief Recovery Handbook*.<sup>95</sup> They suggest that Kubler-Ross' categories are less applicable to situations in which a person is grieving the loss of someone else. *Denial* does not play a large part in this grieving process. While it may be difficult to accept one's own dying or coming to prison, a person generally accepts the fact that one's father, friend, or child has died. It is a matter of how one deals with this news.

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<sup>95</sup> John James and Russell Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, pp. 11ff.

*Anger* may play a part in this process because a person is upset that their friend has died. The person who died had so much more to contribute. One can no longer depend on the person as confidante. This *anger*, however, does not trigger a further reaction of *negotiation*. The death is irreversible. Unlike one's own sickness, which may be curable, and unlike one's trial, in which the court may acquit a person, the death of a loved one is final.

James and Friedman suggest that a person consider what could have been *different*, *better*, and *more* if that person had not died.<sup>96</sup> Actively fantasizing about the expectations, attachments, bonds, hopes, and friendship that one had with the person enables one to access the depth of emotions triggered when one's friend dies. Processing these emotions through fantasy of hopes and possibilities helps a person come to terms with the depth of loss that they are experiencing.

Loss of one's spouse through divorce, loss of one's career, loss of one's pet, or loss of family relationships represent occasions when one can use James and Friedman's approach. One can heal from the breakup of a marriage by looking at one's expectations and hopes upon committing oneself to that relationship. The sudden termination of this love, friendship, intimacy, loyalty, and family situation forces a person to think about the commitments that one made. There are deep disappointments over what could have been. There are resentments toward the other person for their part in ending the relationship. Acceptance of the new situation of singleness can only happen if one retraces the reasons that one fell in love in the first place. Reconsideration of these initial assumptions, commitments, and demonstrations of love and affection enable a person to come to some understanding of what one has lost.

### History of Loss and Relationship Graph

Drawing a *history of loss* graph is an exercise that helps coalesce the feelings that one has about one's losses.<sup>97</sup> Acknowledging the accumulation of losses that one has experienced enables one to understand the extent to which these losses have influenced one's life. A timeline places these events into their proper perspective.

Working through the highs and lows of a *broken relationship* balances the memories and feelings of that person. No person is as much of a saint as we thought the person was. No person deserves as much vilification as we sometimes feel is necessary.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, pp. 61ff.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, pp. 85-103, 115-134.

Reflecting in depth on the positive and negative characteristics of another person helps to place that person into a larger perspective.

### Apology, Forgiveness, and Strong Emotional Statements

*Accepting* one's part in the loss, *forgiving* the other person for their part, and writing a statement about *strong feelings* are three exercises that a person can do to complete the grieving process.<sup>98</sup> This process is similar to the fourth step of Celebrate Recovery. Participants write an inventory about the hurts they have experienced, the harm they have done to others, and the good that they have done in their lives. Healing consists of accepting one's part in the relationship loss. One apologizes for wrongs done. One forgives the person for hurting you. One finds a way to reconcile, make amends, and come to peace about the situation.

### Religious Aspect of the Grieving Process

Loss of faith and anger at God for the death of a loved one are natural aspects of the grieving process. James and Friedman encourage participants to process their feelings about their faith and ambiguity toward God that can sometimes occur because of grief.<sup>99</sup> Forgiveness is possible because of the divine forgiveness that one has experienced. Apologies are possible because the act of harm or experience of grief does not define one's self-identity. A healthy view of self enables one to accept one's part in the grieving process without being overwhelmed by the sheer amount of feelings involved.

James and Friedman are open to the difference faith, spirituality, and religion make in the grieving process. Participants are encouraged to include the effects on their faith that the grieving process entails. Forgiveness and faith, repentance and acceptance of guilt, grace and a healthy self-image are ways of including religion as a healthy resource in the healing process.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 136-160.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, pp. 49-51.

## Questions about Chapter Ten

1. Have you ever taken a grief recovery program? Was it helpful?
2. Is Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief applicable in your case?
3. James and Friedman suggest that one should think about what could have been *different, better, or more* if that person would not have died or been separated from you. Is that a helpful way of looking at the grieving process?
4. What has stopped you from grieving the loss of loved ones?
5. What has helped you to grieve?

## Chapter Eleven

### Relationship Courses

Two relationship courses deepen the discussion of feelings involved and delve in the salient features of a healthy marriage. Rachael Smith's thirty-one short vignettes of emotive words enable offenders to own the range of feelings that arise as they fall in love with another person.<sup>100</sup> Words such as *joy, respect, forgiveness, intimacy, uniqueness, maturity, gratitude, and acceptance* point to the positive and mutual aspects of friendships. Words such as *rejection, criticism, pain, weakness, correction, assumptions, anger, disloyalty, enemies, and loneliness* illustrate the wedges of attitudes and opinions that can develop and destroy relationships.

Each of these words has a double meaning. For example, *rejection* is a powerful word that most people experience negatively. People can become defined by their friends' and family's rejection. *Rejection*, nevertheless, is sometimes necessary when a person becomes co-dependent on a person.<sup>101</sup> A person needs to set boundaries of care and commitment in order for a relationship to stay at a mutually satisfying level. Rejection of a person's advances, overbearing nature, and manipulative attitude help a person retain a healthy attitude toward themselves.

Smith liberally sprinkles her book with biblical quotes to make her point. She uses two verses to illustrate the impact of *words*. "Pleasant words are as honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24). At the same time, "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Proverbs 18:8).<sup>102</sup> These scriptural references are instructive rather than prescriptive. They bring out the negative and positive meanings of the words without assuming that the reader is a believer.

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<sup>100</sup> Rachael Smith, *Building Healthy Relationships* (2015).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

A second book that delves into the specifics of marriage relationships is *Getting the Love You Want*, by Harville Hendrix.<sup>103</sup> This book is for couples considering divorce and/or separation. Hendrix believes that couples can save their marriage if both parties are willing to work at why they fell in love in the first place. A reconsideration of their romance helps to re-establish their marriage on a proper foundation.

Hendrix uses creation in God's image to help couples restore their lost, repressed, false, and disowned selves.<sup>104</sup> We are attracted to another person as the result of deep unconscious wounds reflected, like a mirror, in the other person. We are attracted to the other person because there is something in their experience that resonates deeply with our own sense of wonder, esteem, intimacy, affection, self-worth, pain, and suffering. We believe that the other person can heal us because they bring something intimately familiar yet distinctively unique to complete the part that is missing in ourselves.

Hendrix uses a variety of exercises to help couples bring these assumptions and unspoken feelings to consciousness.<sup>105</sup> Power struggles and core arguments define the relationship when partners are unwilling to give (anymore) of themselves in order to heal the other person. Hendrix' point is that one can only get the love one wants if one is willing to give it away.<sup>106</sup> Hendrix helps couples become supremely satisfied with themselves and each other through mutual respect and unconditional love.

Hendrix's book is especially apt for inmates who have committed offences against family members. These offenders have little insight into the reasons that they would offend against their children and/or spouse. Recognition of their unconscious anger, resentment, jealousies, and entrapment in the relationship goes a long way in unravelling the reasons that these inmates were willing to offend in such inappropriate ways.

These two relationship books are invaluable in identifying the many feelings and emotions involved in the journey to recovery. One goes through grief by acknowledging one's losses. Co-dependency is named so that one's dysfunctional relationships are arrested. Learning how to build healthy relationships is a positive

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<sup>103</sup> Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21-46.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 88ff.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 162ff.

antidote to focussing only on taboos. The two books by Hendrix and Smith go a long way in identifying positive exercises to replace the bad with the good.

### [Link to Celebrate Recovery Program](#)

The Celebrate Recovery program highlighted in chapter six grapples with many of the same issues identified above.<sup>107</sup> Like grief recovery, CR asks participants in the fourth step to take an inventory of persons who have hurt them and people one has harmed. Apologies and forgiveness, making amends and taking ownership of wrong done helps in the healing process.

Celebrate Recovery consciously uses the twelve-step process of Alcoholics Anonymous. CR expands upon it to deal with any hurt, habit, and hang-up a person has experienced. It adds eight Christian principles to these steps to identify Jesus Christ as the Higher Power. God grants forgiveness and provides grace. Saddleback Church started the program over twenty years ago because many of its church members did not know with whom they could share their personal problems.<sup>108</sup> Celebrate Recovery has filled a gap in ministry between worship on Sunday mornings, Bible studies on Wednesday evenings, small group meetings for fellowship and prayer, and individual counselling sessions with the pastor, elders, and deacons. CR's confidential, group-based approach fosters a sense of belonging and acceptance. It builds peer support and accountability through its mentoring of leaders and programmatic outline of steps to recovery.

### Conclusion

The four books noted above are samples of *personal development* courses that chaplains can facilitate to enhance their ministry. These books dovetail with the spiritual nature of chaplains' work while providing concrete steps taken by inmates on their road to recovery and reintegration.

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<sup>107</sup> John Baker, *Stepping out of Denial into God's Grace, Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory, Getting Right with God, Yourself, and Others, Growing in Christ While Helping Others* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

<sup>108</sup> *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible*, edited by John Baker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), pp. ix – xi.

### Questions about Chapter Eleven

1. How many feelings can you identify that you have toward a close friend or partner?
2. Do you need to have negative feelings sometimes in order to set boundaries?
3. Are you separated or divorced? Would Harville Hendrix's book help you understand the reasons for the relationship break-up?
4. Have you ever been in a power struggle with someone else? Were you able to resolve it?
5. Have you been able to discover the Love that You Want?

## Chapter Twelve

### Ability to Love<sup>110</sup>

I made the assumption in my first book, *Glimpses of Grace*, that the story of Jean Valjean had primarily to do with his salvation.<sup>111</sup> Jean's journey of faith began with his justification as exemplified by the bishop's gracious gift of two silver candlesticks. Jean's profound remorse in response to this supreme act of compassion transformed itself into self-acceptance, forgiveness, and a commitment to change.

Jean's faith deepened in his sojourn at the convent of the Bernardine nuns of the Obedience of Martin Verga. The nuns' voluntary imprisonment within this cauldron of God's care made Jean realize that transformation was a life-long commitment. The end of the second section of the book, entitled *Colette*,<sup>112</sup> described this change:

Jean's soul subsided into silence like this cloister, into fragrance like these flowers, into pea like this garden, into simplicity like these women, and into joy like these children . . . His whole heart melted in gratitude.

The journey of sanctification in Jean's life was working its magic through the voluntary submission of these devout nuns.

Victor Hugo defines the purpose of his book as a journey from justification to sanctification. He appeals directly to the reader toward the end of the novel:<sup>113</sup>

The book, which the reader now has before his eyes, is from one end to the other, . . . the march from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from the false to the true, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from rottenness to life, from brutality to duty, from Hell to Heaven, from nothingness to God.

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<sup>110</sup> This chapter represents a modification of chapter two, "Ability to Love," Donald Stoesz, *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, pp. 31-47.

<sup>111</sup> Donald Stoesz *Glimpses of Grace*, pp. 3- 14.

<sup>112</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, pp. 484-485.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1042.

This emphasis is misguided and even self-centred if it fails to address the *telos* of this movement, namely the ability to love. One could even argue that the overarching theme of the book has more to do with love than with salvation. The four main characters, *Fantine*, *Cosette*, *Marius*, and *Jean Valjean*, form the major sections of the book. The central two figures, *Cosette* and *Marius* fall in love and marry at the end of the novel. The bookends of two protagonists, *Fantine* and *Jean*, frame this idyllic bliss. Their parental care and selfless sacrifice represent the basis of what true love is all about, placing other people ahead of one's own interests.

The priority of love becomes even more compelling when one realizes the background of these unlikely heroes. *Jean* is a convict who has been in prison for nineteen years. *Fantine* is a single mother abandoned at her pregnancy. She supports her young daughter financially. She gives *Cosette* away to avoid the stigma of being a parent before becoming a wife. Her daughter *Cosette* becomes a labourer with a foster family at the age of five because there is no one to protect her. The fourth protagonist, *Marius*, is the son of a republican rejected by his rich, monarchist (grand) father. *Marius* cannot reconcile the opposing beliefs of his father and grandfather. He joins the French rebellion of 1833 and is nearly killed in the process.

An even greater, motley crew surrounds these disparate characters. *Gavroche* is a street urchin in Paris who takes his two younger brothers under his wing. *Eponine* is his sister who does her unscrupulous father's bidding in his attempts to fleece wealthy strangers. *Javert* is a police inspector who, having been born in prison, becomes punitive justice personified. *Monsieur Gillenormand* is the rich monarchist who tries to reclaim the affections of his grandson, *Marius*. Roman Empire lover *Gillenormand* disowned his republican son, *Baron Pontmercy*. *Babet*, *Gueulemer*, *Claquesous*, and *Montparnasse* are bandits who join *Thenardier* in his attempt to trap and kill *Jean Valjean*.

Then there are *Monsieur* and *Madame Thenardiens*, an inn-keeping couple whom Hugo describes as:<sup>114</sup>

souls which, crablike, crawl continually toward darkness, going back in life instead of advancing in it, . . . becoming steeped more and more thoroughly in an intensifying darkness.

Hugo names the book after this family. Hugo suggests that this couple has reached the point "at which the unfortunate and the infamous are associated, and confounded in a single word, a fatal word, *Les Miserables*."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 627.

Victor Hugo is not only asking whether God can save these people. This is an inherently, self-centred question that concerns one's own destiny. The question of whether it is possible for people to love each other lies within these themes of justice and transformation of the good. Hugo has deliberately chosen characters that are unlovable to force the reader to come to terms with this issue.<sup>116</sup> As every Bible reader knows, it is one thing to love those who love you.<sup>117</sup> Familial love is a natural extension of biological loyalty and commitment to a progenitive future. Much more difficult is the prospect of loving someone thrown into one's path.

Hugo explores this fated reality through the development of his characters. Jean Valjean did not realise how hard it would be to be accepted in society. Bishop Bienvenu could not fathom having to ask for forgiveness from the very compatriot who brought down his religious house.<sup>118</sup> Fantine did not realise that her first love would abandoned her. The street urchin Gavroche had no idea that he would to be killed at the barricades. The young adult men of the ABC club did not comprehend the futility of their cause. The Thenardiers had no idea that they had come to represent the very pathos of society.

Hugo gives these characters choices along the way. Some of them, like the Thenardiers, appear incapable of choosing the good. They abandon three of their five children while using their two daughters for their own pathetic schemes. Others, such as Fantine, sacrifice everything to care for the ones they love, in this case, her daughter Cosette. In each of these situations, Hugo is asking the question whether it is possible to love and sacrifice oneself for the sake of another.

The bond established between an aging convict and an orphan girl represents one of his answers. Jean's heart has melted and he has learned to love. He takes care of Cosette and raises her as his own. As she becomes a woman, it is only natural that she will fall in love with a man of her dreams, in this case Marius. Like Fantine, Jean has to give up the only love he has ever had for their daughter to be happy. He fades into the background so that mutual love can be consummated. It is possible to have a fairy tale ending. People can live happily ever after, even if this reality appears remote and even impossible in the light of such disparate characters and difficult circumstances.

### Relevance for Prison Chaplaincy

The reader may have guessed by now why I find Victor Hugo's novel so compelling. I meet every one of his characters on a weekly basis in the prison chapel. The

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<sup>116</sup> Graham Robb refers to this contradictory reality in his book, *Victor Hugo: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), p. 399,

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Matthew 10:37-42

<sup>118</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 32-39.

unrepentant Mafia member bows religiously before me. The arrogant sexual predator vows never to be caught again. The young drug dealer comes to pull the wool over my eyes. The attention-deficit-disordered man wants to be left alone from the bullying he receives. The spiritually hungry, remorseful gentleman has no idea how he got here. Many others are drawn to the acceptance-prone gospel I get to preach each Sunday.

The question in each of these cases is not whether God has saved them. God promises that to them in the same way that he granted salvation to the repentant thief on the cross. The immediate question has to do with whether I can love each of these men. Is it possible for me to accept them in the same way God does, even after I have learned much more than I want to know about each one of these chapel participants?

My tendency is to become more like Javert and Marius than Bishop Bienvenu and Jean Valjean. The punitive voice of justice rises in me like a prophet as I feel the need to reinforce the punishment these men have already received. Marius cannot accept Jean Valjean until Jean has become Jesus a thousand times over. Jean Valjean has to prove his righteousness repeatedly in order to be accepted by another human being. Marius together with his bride run over to the house where Jean is dying after learning that Jean saved him from death. A benediction with a cross in it appears in the last scene.<sup>119</sup> The severe costs of redemption are evident to all.

This last scene of pathos is why I love Victor Hugo's novel so much. The cost of redemption is high, to which any inmate can attest. Forgiveness, love, acceptance, and belonging come at a high cost. This cost represents the result of what offenders have taken away from the people they have harmed. Nothing can undo the damage they have done. A chaplain and volunteer and family member and victim have to decide whether they, each in their own way, can mete out forgiveness and love.

Victor Hugo, for one, thinks that such a scenario of living happily ever after is possible. It comes in the face of so much dying. And yet, the young couple is presumed to outlast the pages of the novel. I, too, have had to come to terms with the question of whether forgiveness and love are possible.

People tend to forgive and love each other if they come from similar, broken destinies. Jean and Cosette were able to love each other because their abandonment. The men I meet are attracted to men and women severely wounded and punished as themselves. Misery loves company. There is a lot of both that can be found in prison.

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<sup>119</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 1218-1219.

The possibility of love shines in front of the black backdrop of pain and suffering and evil. I can only minister in prison if I am able to love. I am able on a daily basis to reach out a hand of acceptance. This gesture may or may not be reciprocated. As Hugo demonstrates so well, some people become increasingly worse while others not only find redemption but love in their destiny as well.

Hugo's novel is primarily a love story. It is only "tangentially" – may I use that casual and cavalier word – about crime and punishment. To what extent can I emphasize the love and acceptance that happens within a prison chapel while choosing to ignore the setting in which it occurs? To what extent am I blissfully naïve? To what extent am I reinforcing illusory thinking by telling the inmates they are loved? Can I, like Victor Hugo, assert the power and triumph of love over and above the backdrop of evil and destruction that is so real?

### More Precise Definition of Love

Marital love, filial love, mutual love, and divine love are all different ways of saying the same thing. I meet men who are marry for love after they have put so much destruction behind them. I meet inmates who re-establish love for their parents and siblings and children after many years of rejection. I meet offenders who find camaraderie and establish solidarity with each other in order to know that love is still possible. I meet the God of grace in the chapel each week as I bow before the divine in abject submission and reverence. I offer the God of consolation and love to these men. The intimacy of God may be the only and last thing they will ever experience.

A chaplain's responsibility is to help these men understand the possibilities of these different types of love. Some men are able to marry. Others simply repeat the same mistake they made the first time around. A chaplain points out the fact that a man's true love may not be able to be faithful to him. The relationship may only be a fantasy of the man's imagination.

A more realistic scenario may mean re-establishing communication with one's family. An offender's consideration of bridges they have burned help them sense whether they can or want to build another one. The hurt of father and mother and brother and sister has to be revisited to assess the possibility of loving at all. Emotional capacity of vulnerability after so much pain and harm is the surest indication of whether healing is possible.

Solidarity with each other in prison is perhaps the most realistic possibility of love and faith within the foreseeable years to come. Emotional bonding with each other is the most reliable indication of what is possible in the future. Openness to vulnerability, exposure, recriminations, and acceptance within a group of men is the

surest way of knowing whether healing, redemption, love, and reintegration are possible. These men have faced similar punishments, committed similar offences, confessed their sins to God, and been open to counsel. While looking disjointed and appearing lopsided, this body of believers is the best manifestation of the body of Christ that is available.

There is – finally -- intimacy with God not replaced by human display. I have returned to this theme repeatedly as the men have shared with me their deep loneliness, despair, sense of hopelessness, and frustrations. The intimacy of God is something that can never be taken away from them. They may even profit from this devotional practice by getting to know what intimacy is all about.

Divine intimacy is such an effervescent reality that others may simply dismiss it as illusory. This may be true. Jesus asks that we believe without having seen. This belief is tested as we take the intimacy of God as a means of healing our wounds and understanding what true love is all about. Who is to say how divine love relates to the human love for which we pine?

#### Duration of Love

An aspect of love left undefined is its duration. Several of the men I have known fell in love with women while they were in prison. Perhaps surprisingly, I generally recommend that this friendship and love, or whatever it may be, be nurtured by both parties. I am happy to meet with the couple to discuss their relationship. They are often quite emotionally attached. While affirming the friendship, I suggest that their love may only last as long as the man is incarcerated. There is something about separation that makes the heart grow fonder. Men and women become more emotionally attached to each other when they do not have the daily encumbrances of living together.

I encourage the couples' emotional bonding while suggesting to them the possibility that they may not stay together when the man is released. There is something about "knowing where your man is at all times" that makes women feel safer than when their boyfriends are released. The men are then free again to fall in love with whomever they may meet.

The above experiences bring up the question of the duration of love. While love is very real for two people while apart, actually living together, marrying, and having children is more daunting. I have concluded that love is possible within a particular circumstance, while not possible or even advisable from a longer-term perspective.

A similar issue arises in relation to chapel services. The handshake of peace among offenders may only be efficacious as long as we all remain in the chapel. Peace may

dissipate once inmates who “have a beef” with each other exit the chapel doors. Once outside, a different set of rules comes into play, rules which stipulate that one should “beat the crap” out of the next person if one’s honour has been questioned.

The duration of redemption and love and forgiveness is a real issue in prison life. I preach about the eternal love of God. This message is received a little less sanguinely when applied to human relationships. Love has to be practiced on a minute, daily, weekly, yearly, and eternal basis in order to be efficacious. Jesus told his disciples to forgive the same person four hundred and ninety times because he knew that it would take that long for real forgiveness to sink in.

A similar attitude applies to love. Love needs to be defined, practiced, and lived. Fantasy, illusions, wishful thinking, false expectations, broken promises, and realistic possibilities need to be deciphered before an inmate can trust, believe, love, and care enough. The tragedy of the past has to be replaced by hope for the future.

### Conclusion

I have suggested that Victor Hugo’s novel is principally about the possibility of love. The fact that Marius and Cosette live happily ever after in the face of large class differences, accentuated by the political and cultural mess left over by the French Revolution, speaks volumes about Hugo’s belief in love as the effect of salvation. Hugo’s religious optimism is evident when he has Jean Valjean take down the crucifix on the wall beside his deathbed. He looks up in benediction at his silent benefactor, Bishop Bienvenu. The Bishop absolved him of all guilt and shame and prejudice. He gave him the wherewithal to love in the same way that Jesus did. Jean is clearly a Christ figure in his numerous sacrifices of love for Javert, Marius, Fantine, and Cosette. The Restoration of France after the Revolution clearly included faith and religion for Hugo. Hugo was exiled for nineteen years before making his triumphant return to his beloved country.

Faith and religion continue to be part of Correctional Service Canada because of their commitment to include these aspects of life as part of their service to the incarcerated men and women they hold in custody. There is much more than faith and religion going on in a prison chapel. Hope, faith, and love within the utopian pronouncements of the gospel ring out in spite of the fact that they can and are misinterpreted by all concerned. This is the reason I have continued to be a minister of the gospel within a prison setting for the last thirty years. Love is possible, perhaps even real.

### Questions about Chapter Twelve

1. What are some obstacles in your life that prevent you from being able to love?
2. Name some instances in which you have learned the ability to love.
3. Does your relationship with God help you to have relationships with others?
4. Describe how your relationship with God and others is a love relationship.
5. What does the duration of love mean in your relationships with others?

## Chapter Thirteen

### Eros and Agape in Relationships

The genius of Andres Nygren's book, *Agape and Eros*,<sup>120</sup> has to do with his underpinning of divine agape as the basis of human selflessness. To love one's neighbour and one's enemy goes against human nature. Human nature says that one should only love those who love you, those biologically related to you, or those from whom you can gain some benefit. There is no reason from a self-interested perspective to love one's neighbour or one's enemies. God is the one who has shown love to humanity through God's supreme sacrifice of his Son. God saves and empowers us to love those who are unlovable. God enacts divine grace, forgiveness, compassion, and empathy through God's faithful subjects and believers.<sup>121</sup>

Nygren's treatise on *Agape* undergirds my Mennonite tradition's affirmation of pacifism as a logical outcome of Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek" (Matthew 5:39) and "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). 1 Peter 2:21 states that Jesus has "left us an example in his suffering and death:"

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23).

Mennonites have understood this saying as not only applying to Jesus' atonement ("He bore our sins in his body, on the cross" 1 Peter 2:24). It is a saying that applies to Christian ethics ("so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness" 1 Peter 2:24).

Loving one's enemies goes against the natural impulse to defend one's country against invaders and defeat tyrants such as Adolf Hitler. God is the only one through

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<sup>120</sup> Two volumes, translated by Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1932, 1939).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. pp. 61-159.

God's selfless love of humanity through Jesus Christ that enables Christians to carry through Jesus' command to "love one's enemies." Mennonites have taken this saying of Jesus regarding Christian discipleship literally.

I correlated Nygren's treatise on *Agape* and Christian pacifism thirty years ago. I have since reassessed the situation. I continue to be a pacifist and consider discipleship an integral part of what it means to be a Christian. I have nevertheless realised that there is a hidden, negative side to this whole affair. This realization became clear as I re-read Nygren's book and reflected on the history of pacifism within my own tradition.

One of the outcomes of Nygren's emphasis on *Agape* is that he rejects the idea of self-love as non-Christian. "*Agape* . . . excludes all self-love. Christianity does not recognize self-love as a legitimate form of love."<sup>122</sup> Self-love is contrary to *Agape* because it compromises the divine initiative of selfless love that flows from God to humanity. Any human love that flows "on its own accord" toward one's neighbour or toward God lessens the theological affirmation of salvation, grace, justification, and forgiveness that flows from God to human beings.<sup>123</sup> Jesus' command in Matthew 22:39 to "love your neighbour as yourself" is possible because of God's selfless love for humanity.

I consider this logical conclusion of Nygren's theocentric emphasis on *Agape* as unfortunate. One problem I have encountered among offenders is that they do not love themselves. They do not believe that they should love themselves. Consequently, they have stayed in bad marriages and continued to be self-sacrificial to their spouses to the point of self-abuse. Self-love is the beginning of a long journey in which offenders learn how to balance their own needs with the needs of those whom they love.<sup>124</sup>

### The Problem

I have worked with offenders who divorced their wives after they committed their crimes. These men believed during their time in the community that they could save the relationship if they gave more of themselves to their wives. They believed that they had to be a martyr to save their marriages. These distorted beliefs contributed to these men feeling trapped and alienated within their marriages. These men

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. pp. 95-100, 127-132, 551-558.

<sup>124</sup> I consider some of these themes in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual*, pp. 91-100, 141-148.

committed their offences partly because they did not know how else to deal with the situation.

Self-love was particularly hard for them to grasp. They quoted Scripture back to me: we are to love selflessly; God wants us to love our spouses unconditionally. I suggested that the dynamics of marriage are much more complicated than taking biblical statements such as “you should not divorce” or “you should love your spouse unconditionally” at face value.<sup>125</sup>

The secret to a successful, happy, and fulfilling marriage is no different from anything else in life. It takes two to tangle, two to love, two to work out differences, two to compromise, two to forgive, and two to become reconciled with each other. To use a simple example, one’s car is going to break down if one does not look after it, take it in for maintenance checks, and put money into it to keep it running well. Same with a marriage.

### The Solution

These offenders motivated me to do research into the factors that contribute to a healthy marriage. Harville Hendrix’s book, *Getting the Love You Want*,<sup>126</sup> is particularly helpful. Hendrix starts with a simple premise cited in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Marriage is one of the most wonderfully intimate, emotionally fulfilling, and spiritually profound experiences that one can have.

Hendrix suggests that couples are intuitively attracted to each other based on what he calls their “*imago*.” One’s *imago* is “a composite picture of the people who influenced you at an early age.”<sup>127</sup> Couples who first meet each other often have an “ah ha!” experience. The person exhibits all of the emotional and social characteristics with which one is intimately familiar.

Let us take a stereotypical example. A young woman is attracted to a young man because he exhibits all the emotional characteristics of her alcoholic father. Unlike her father, this man is clean cut, well dressed, socially appropriate, and emotionally available. After these two people marry, the woman discovers to her horror and chagrin that her husband has similar addiction issues as her father. She was attracted

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<sup>125</sup> See Matthew 5:31-32, 5:44-48.

<sup>126</sup> (New York: Saint Martin’s Griffin, 1988).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

to this man as much because she knew how to respond to his emotional needs as with the fact that they had “fallen in love.”

Hendrix goes on to show how marriage relationships work. Part of the reason that the above-mentioned woman married this man was because she was looking for someone who could love her in a way that her father could not. Her father loved his daughter while remaining distant, aloof, and acting cruel in his self-absorbed alcoholic state. His daughter believed that her husband could fulfill all her needs.

Her husband had the same idea regarding his own needs. He married this woman because she understood so well his violent mood swings between being overly distant and overly loving. The husband believed that the marriage was too good to be true. Here was a woman who could address all of his unfulfilled needs. He was, after all, an alcoholic, with his only true friend being the contents of a bottle. Here was an intimate partner who could help him with his alcoholism.

*Eros* is supremely fulfilling as well as irritably debilitating. Hendrix describes how couples experience the phenomenon of *recognition*, *timelessness*, *reunification*, and *necessity* in their intimate relationship with their partner. They cannot do without each other (*necessity*). They have known each other forever (*recognition*). This moment will last forever (*timelessness*). They are finally at peace because the other person has made them whole (*reunification*).

This delusional thinking ends abruptly when the partner realizes that her lover is not the sum of all her wonderful relationships and influences from the past. Her lover is unique, different, and unable to heal all the wounds that she wants him to dress. Couples move into the power struggle stage of their relationship. They begin demanding love from the other, hurting each other as necessary to get the love they want. They retrench into a deeply narcissistic phase because they do not know why their marriage has turned out so differently, from what they had imagined and projected.

A power struggle can end up in divorce because neither party believes it is worth giving of oneself anymore. It is better to move on and start with another person. The next person is willing to show love and attend to one's needs. Getting the love that one wants from one's current spouse is unattainable.

Hendrix suggests that these dysfunctional marriages can be saved. There is hope even for the couples mandated to come to his couples workshops as a last ditch effort to save their marriages.

Hendrix offers two solutions. First, it is necessary to re-romanticise the love and affection that the couple had for each other when they met. There is a profound reason why the couple fell in love and got married in the first place. Reliving the love that one used to have for the other person makes it possible to channel this *eros* in a positive direction of affection, love, and intimacy all over again.

This ingredient in Hendrix' advice represents the *eros* side of things. I tell the men who have left a broken marriage. They must learn to love themselves in order to love others. They need to reflect on those things that made their wives so special, so unique, and so loveable. I go through a series of steps in which these men share about why they loved this person in the first place. These men realise during the reliving of these memories that their marriages could have been saved. The men realised that there were numerous things that they could have done to move from a martyr, self-pitying, self-absorbed stance to re-attracting their former spouses.

This sharing was often filled with many "ah ha!" experiences. After twenty years of staying in a bad marriage, the men had forgotten why they loved their wives. This re-imagining of the possibility of *erotic love*, within which is a deep acceptance and love of self, represented the only means by which these men would be able to love and have successful marriages in the future.

Hendrix's second piece of advice has everything to do with the *agape* side of things. We have assumed up to this point that *erotic love* is all that is needed for two people to fall in love and get married. The truth of the matter is that unless *agape* becomes part of the equation, many marriages are bound to fail. *Agape* has everything to do with the number of times that a couple has to forgive each other for what they have done, to compromise so the other person will feel accepted, to accept each other for who they are rather than what they wish each other to be. They are to love their partner unconditionally regardless of whether this love is returned.

*Agape love* that devolves into a (religious) obligation to stay in the marriage no matter what -- for the children, for God, for the martyrdom complex -- is dysfunctional. *Agape love* expressed in dialectical relationship with *erotic love* is the type of love that survives and flourishes.

The latter type of love has everything to do with what God did for humanity through Jesus Christ. God loved humanity regardless of whether human beings would reciprocate that love. Couples require this divine love to stay married. Forgiveness, forbearance, letting go, grieving, diminished expectations and fulfillment, total acceptance, and unconditional love are the only ways that couples can move beyond

a power struggle. This is at least, what Hendrix recommends. *One gets what one wants when one gives love away.* What a wonderful way of summing up the intricate relationship between *eros* and *agape*.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid. p. 250. Hendrix quotes 1 Corinthians 13 at the end of his book: “love is patient, love is kind. . . . It is not self-seeking . . . it keeps no record of wrongs . . . It protects, trusts, and never fails.”

### Questions about Chapter Thirteen

1. I have suggested that selfishness is a good thing. What do I mean by that?
2. How is naming our desires helpful in establishing relationships?
3. How does God's selfless love work in our lives?
4. How have you experienced the dialectic between eros and agape in your relationships?
5. How does eros and agape work in terms of your relationship with God?

## Chapter Fourteen

### Ability to be Honest

Prison chaplaincy is unique in that conviction of sin represents a key component in pastoral care. Inmates have committed serious offences. Healing comes when the Holy Spirit convicts them of the evil and harm they have committed. Conviction by the Holy Spirit is a difficult process because of the guilt and shame involved. Self-loathing is a common response to admission of guilt. Inmates have few resources to cope with this aspect of their lives.

I have chosen Jean Valjean as a fictional representative of a convict who undergoes significant transformation to healing and wholeness. The unexpected grace granted to him by a Catholic priest represents the beginning of a long process in which Jean is convicted of sin, owns up to what he has done, accepts forgiveness from God and others, and goes on to become a productive member of society. He becomes the (step) father to Cosette and raises her as his own. He forgives police officer Javert for pursuing him relentlessly for a breach of justice. He lets go of his feelings of revenge and resentment at society for putting him in prison for nineteen years for stealing a loaf of bread. He learns to love and receive love.

One of the more significant aspects of the novel occurs when Jean Valjean reveals who he really is. He assumed the name of Monsieur Madeline when he became a factory owner and mayor of a town. He assumed the name of Fauchelevent when he lived in Paris together with his stepdaughter. He did so because he was scared of the consequences of revealing where he had been. The police were looking for him because Jean had stolen a forty-sou piece of money from a young lad that he met on his way. He knew that he would be punished if he revealed who he really was.

Jean's fears came true when he decided to testify in court that the man Champmathieu, they were holding for trial was not actually Jean Valjean.<sup>129</sup> He

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<sup>129</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 202-260.

appeared in court to clear the man's name. The police arrested Jean and sent him as a slave to the galley ships.

Jean's fears came true again years later after escaping from the ship and was presumed dead from drowning. He revealed to his new son-in-law that he was an ex-convict who had served nineteen years in prison.<sup>130</sup> Jean felt that he needed to be honest in order to come clean about whom he was. Marius subsequently banned Jean to visiting his stepdaughter once a week in a basement room of Marius' house. Marius had a difficult time accepting the fact that his father-in-law had been a convict.

The point of the chapter is to show that forgiveness, confession, surrender, and love represent only the beginning of transformation. Becoming honest about who one (really) is, or was, can change people's perceptions about us. Chapel volunteers sometimes ask me whether they can ask an inmate why he is in jail. I tell them that information is confidential which only an inmate can divulge. I warn the volunteers that finding out why a person is in jail can change their perceptions and attitudes toward the inmate. Finding out personal information about a person means that one has to take responsibility for the new knowledge that one has received. Some volunteers want nothing more to do with an inmate after they find out the offence that the offender has committed.

Jean Valjean had the same fears. He never told his stepdaughter Cosette that he had spent time in jail. She was horrified at the sight of a chain gang of convicts who went by them on the street. She did not consider them human. Jean decided at that point that he could not tell her that he had been one of those men.

Fear of rejection is one factor that inhibited Jean from revealing who he was. Marius could not accept the fact that his new father-in-law had been in prison. Marius banned Jean to visiting his stepdaughter in a basement room because Marius considered him less than human. Marius changed his mind when he realised that Jean had saved him from death at the barricades. He and Cosette rushed to visit Jean on his deathbed.

Jean worked at being honest with himself while letting other people find out about his past on a need-to-know basis. I take the same approach with the men in the community. Their previous incarceration is a private matter that only needs disclosure if there is risk. Divulging information occurs in the context of a trusting relationship. Even these parameters are not always enough. An inmate dating a girlfriend knows that at some point, he will need to reveal something about his past.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 1147.

He knows that the girlfriend may reject him once she finds out more about him. There is a point at which a person has to decide whether the risk is worth it.

I have counselled couples who separated after the girlfriend realised that she could not forgive her boyfriend/husband for what he had done. In spite of her initial forgiveness and acceptance, the girlfriend decided in the end to leave her boyfriend. These experiences taught me a valuable lesson. Our desire is to forgive, confess, accept, and surrender. Negative experiences sometimes interrupt and intercept that ability to offer grace.

Some of the girlfriends I have counselled are victims. This past victimization both attracted and repelled these women to the men with whom they fell in love. These women had to sort out their own feelings about the matter before they could commit their lives to another person who had victimized someone else.

### Questions about Chapter Fourteen

1. Transparency is a big step. How have you become transparent in terms of your relationship with God, others, and yourself?
2. Does honesty play a role in your faith?
3. How much does honesty play a role in your daily life?
4. What has honesty cost in your life?
5. How many sacrifices have you had to make in order to be honest?
6. How have other people accepted your honesty?

## Chapter Fifteen

### Discipleship<sup>132</sup>

The impetus for change is real when the court convicts and sentences a person to a period of incarceration. The shame and guilt that comes with one's conviction are powerful factors that motivate a prisoner to take a serious look at their past life. Loss of freedom, loss of reputation, loss of relationships, and loss of livelihood are direct results of imprisonment. A person's offence often has long-lasting, ripple effects that takes many years for the offender as well as their victims and the larger community to deal with. A chaplain has to enter into a deeper consideration of these fundamental losses in order to help a prisoner grieve.

Saint Francis is helpful in this regard.<sup>133</sup> He willingly gave up three things that are integral to most people's lives: money, marriage, and independence. These sacrifices had profound effects on the people around Francis. His father was upset that his son valued neither his business nor his money. Clara was dismayed that the form of love Francis was offering was outside of the marital norm. The church was worried that the fanatical nature of Francis' actions was closer to heresy than orthodoxy.

Francis had to show his father that there was something more valuable than money. He had to demonstrate to Clara that the intimacy of spiritual love surpassed the type of earthly love that bound one person to another. He had to prove to the pope that his spirituality was directly reflective of what the church was trying to do in its celebration of the body of Christ in word, deed, Eucharist, and fellowship.

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<sup>132</sup> This chapter represents a modification of chapter four, "Significance of Saint Francis for Prison Ministry," Donald Stoesz, *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation*, pp. 63-76.

<sup>133</sup> The story of Saint Francis is told in various books and movies, Johannes Jorgensen, *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913); Julien Green, *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi*, translated by Peter Heinegg (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1985); Michell Soavi, *Saint Francis*. DVD, 205 minutes. (2002 Media Trade: S.P.A. Ignatius Press, 2006); *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. DVD, 121 minutes (Paramount Pictures, 1973). *Francis of Assisi*. DVD, 105 minutes (Parseus Productions, N.Y., 2013, Twentieth Century Fox, 1961.)

Let us look at each spiritual discipline in turn. There is, first, the matter of money. The men that I work with have been willing to steal or sell drugs or commit fraud in order to become rich. This need for excess and greed landed these men in a situation where they had nothing to show for their efforts. They ended up penniless and poor, at the opposite end of the spectrum of wealth and success for which they were hoping.

These offenders had to look more profoundly into the reasons for their preoccupation with money. The practice of interiority is a spiritual discipline that places the pursuit of riches into a larger perspective. Jesus asked the rich man to give up his wealth because this is where the rich man needed to grow spiritually. His willingness or unwillingness to face the value he placed on money determined his spiritual welfare.

A similar need for discipline is evident in the men who come to prison for sexual crimes. Their preoccupation with sex, along with their need to be promiscuous, have ended them up in a situation of enforced abstinence. Those of us who are not in prison can remain active sexually because we understand the place of sexuality within the larger framework of marriage, fidelity, commitment, and moderation.<sup>134</sup> The safeguarding of sexuality within a broad emotional, spiritual, and social framework allows us to be sexually active in a way that is not possible for those men who have few boundaries. Their need to abandon taboos has ended them up in a celibate state similar to that of Francis. This celibate state is prescribed rather than embraced as desirable.

Incarceration has also occurred for those men who have been unable, for whatever reason, to obey the law. Their anti-authoritarian behaviour became so bad that they were now under the thumb of severe taskmasters who told them when they could get up, when they were to go to work, and when they were supposed to go to sleep. These men were in a worse situation than when they were adolescents. Their lack of freedom made them reconsider what it meant to live peaceably and comfortably under authority.

The need for spirituality to address these issues is understandable. We live within the bounds of authority, sexuality, and salaries because we consider these things to be part of what it means to be fully human. We are willing to conform to the demands of our bosses because we want a paycheck at the end of two weeks. We are willing to engage in sex that is more moderate because we want to keep our spouses happy and our sexual appetite intact. We are willing to live on a reasonable amount of

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<sup>134</sup> The practice of homosexuality in prison makes the issue of sexuality even more real. When propositioned by fellow inmates, offenders have to come to terms with their own sexual identity and the role of sexual relationships and actions in jail.

money because we know that riskier adventures in the stock market or frequent changes in jobs can result in a worse financial situation than before.

The result of this mediocre lifestyle is a mediocre spirituality. This spirituality is not reflective of the underlying meaning of money, sexuality, and obedience because we have accepted the general norms of living within one's financial means, enjoying sex within the bounds of faithfulness, and being obedient in one's work and social situations. Our life experiences have not severely tested our spirituality. None of these three disciplines has become a problem.

The matter is quite different for the men with whom I work. Their obsession with sex, their insatiable need for money, and their inability to listen to anyone but themselves keeps bringing them face to face with the law. External bounds are necessary because no internal ones are adequate to rein them in. The intervention of external forces coerces these men into thinking about the meaning of life. Why do they need to be under such harsh sanctions when less severe ones will do for most of the rest of us?

The willingness of Saint Francis to be "abnormal" in relation to these three disciplines comes into view. It is hard for us to watch Francis disassemble himself from normality because it makes us question the normality under which we are living.<sup>135</sup> Whom does God call to such charisms of poverty, chastity, and obedience when less extremism will do?

Chaplains look these harsh realities in the face, in the same way that Francis embraced the very thing that he hated to do, touch lepers. We as chaplains journey along this road of harshness and privation because this is the only path available for spirituality to shine on the other side of the gauntlet of pain and suffering. We enter into the lives of these men as they face the facts that they have been richer, more promiscuous, and more disobedient than we have been in our staid, middle-class existence. These prisoners have to face the fact that they are now poorer, celibate, and more obedient than we need to be. No mean of mediocrity is available within this realm.

The relevance of Saint Francis to the lives of incarcerated men is understandable. Francis forces me along with the men I work with to face the starkness of the spiritual life. It is only as we give up human intimacy that divine intimacy is possible. It is

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<sup>135</sup> I am reminded of *Into the Wild*, a DVD movie that came out several years ago, depicting an American graduate of a university who decided to forgo the normalcy of life for the abnormality of "roughing it in the bush" (Paramount Pictures Home Entertainment, 2017). He ended up dying in the wilderness of Alaska because he had not learned sufficient survival skills. The movie sat on my shelf for a year before I was able to watch it. It reminded me too much of what I was like and what I did as a youth, hitchhiking across Canada, camping in the bush for weeks on end, and reading Kafka.

only as we surrender ourselves to human authority that we understand what acquiescence to God really means. It is only as we give up control of our money that satisfaction of heavenly desires is possible.

### Penance of Jean Valjean

Another story reinforces the link between Saint Francis' voluntary penance and inmates' involuntary embrace of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In Victor Hugo's novel, *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean becomes transformed in the convent of the Bernardine nuns because he understands the amount of suffering the nuns undergo in their veneration of the holy sacrament.<sup>136</sup> The fact that the nuns pummel their bodies to bring the temptations of riches, pleasures, and independence under control makes eminent sense to Jean Valjean. He has spent the last nineteen years fighting with authority, deprived of love, and destitute. He felt compelled to steal the bishop's plates because it had been so long since he had seen anything of monetary value. The shining, gleaming, sparkling reflection of his face in the silver plates represented infinite value because Jean had lived so long in a squalid existence. Jean was willing to claim anything of value and hold onto it for dear life.

The nuns' self-imposed existence spoke directly to Jean Valjean. He knew what it was like for an imposed existence to be handed to him. His flash of recognition into the sisters' lives represented a mirror into which Jean could see what his life was really like. Jean's sojourn with the sisters was even more effective than the grace given to him by the bishop. While the bishop's grace offered him new life and freedom, the imposed existence of the nuns' lives made him aware of how his newfound freedom could be channeled into real life and love. His sojourn with the nuns taught Jean how to be honest with other people as well as with himself. He learned to forgive as he himself had been forgiven. He learned how to pass on the love he himself had been given.

### Replacement of Fear with Meaningful Work and Honesty

What do inmates have to do to redeem themselves? Saint Francis, along with Jean Valjean, serve as helpful examples in this regard. Francis set out to renovate churches. Jean became an owner of a factory that specialized in making jewelry. The first way in which Jean and Francis were able to redeem themselves was through meaningful work.

I find myself in a similar position concerning the men with whom I work. I started a crocheting program for two inmates who were senior citizens, had health problems, could not master the art of knitting, and had been reduced to minimum allowance

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<sup>136</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, pp. 408-485.

because of their lack of employability. These men were more than happy to do something useful. They learned how to crochet blankets, mittens, and toques for the needy. Their willingness to be gainfully employed was better than whiling away time in their rooms, being anti-social, feeling sorry for themselves, and becoming increasingly resentful against a system that “did not do anything for them.”

One man helped facilitate an *Experiencing God* course that I offered on an occasional basis. This man was a Christian who wanted to make a difference in terms of his witness to others. The Work Board approved this initiative as something useful, not only to the individual concerned, but to other men as well.

These men have reflected spiritually on their pilgrimage through jail. One of the men has begun to open up about his family, his children, and the reasons why he “felt compelled” to come to jail. One source of success breeds another: self-confidence, trust to share, and belief that his motivation to change will make a difference.

Honesty became a part of Jean Valjean’s life as he confessed to Marius, his son-in-law, that he had been a convict.<sup>137</sup> Honesty goes a long way in naming the lengths to which offenders have been willing to go to come to jail. While not making things better, self-reflection has proven therapeutic.

The case of Francis is instructive. He was willing to go to Rome and risk rejection for his radical views. The documentaries show how the Pope and cardinals initially rejected him because of his impossible ideals. It took time for Francis to articulate the reasons for his radical discipleship. It took time for the listeners to have a better understanding of what he and his followers were all about. According to Johannes Jorgenson, Francis traveled several times to Rome to receive permission to preach, evangelize, and be accepted as orthodox.<sup>138</sup>

My experience with inmates has been similar. Their willingness to be honest, trusting, and forthcoming comes as trust, rapport, and acceptance are established. I remember one man suspended several times while on parole and sent back to jail. This man was not yet ready to be honest with himself and others, seven years after his sentence began. The last time I heard from him was the first time he sounded sober and in his right mind, in the community, and trying to get on with his life.

### Relationship Courses

Relationship and co-dependency courses are helpful because inmates have not found a replacement for the boundary-breaking pursuits in which they were involved. Most

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. pp. 1162ff.

<sup>138</sup> Johannes Jorgensen, *Saint Francis*, pp. 83-86.

of the men have been in relationships before. They know how to live life through another person. They are fathers and grandfathers in addition to being (ex) husbands. Relationship courses help inmates deal with the next dating situation that comes along, the next co-dependent encounter that comes their way, and the next opportunity to be a saviour for someone more in need of help than they are.

Offenders come to terms with a variety of emotions as they fall in love, become infatuated, and want to use drugs again because they cannot handle the mental stresses of life. It is better to deal with these emotions in prison, *sans* one's significant other, than to wait until it is too late.

Francis' commitment to celibacy and fellowship is instructive. Francis and Clara established a special bond, right up to the end of Francis' life. Their commitment to celibacy says a lot about the type of discipline and resolve necessary for two people to remain spiritually pure while emotionally bonded.

The fact that Francis practiced celibacy within the world showed his willingness to deal with temptations in a wide variety of social settings. Francis did not want his mission to be cloistered, to be dependent on property and walls to ensure that he and his men could remain poor. Total dependency on God meant begging in the streets.

Emotional bonding within a gender-specific fellowship is an effective and safe way of dealing with feelings as offenders encounter the opposite sex and are released into the community. The safety of sharing in relationship courses and recovery groups in prison is extended through Celebrate Recovery, Alcoholics Anonymous, and small groups in the community. The possibility of real friendship among offenders in prison is extended to their families, significant others, and children as they reintegrate into society.

### Final Comment about Obedience

Obedience was a huge issue in Francis' case because he sounded and acted so much like a fool, an imbecile, and a lunatic. He had to clarify the fact that these actions were a result of a radical call of God instead of his own crazy, perhaps revolutionary and anarchistic ideas.

The need to be recognized as legitimate and worthy of building up the kingdom, already established by God, can be a huge mountain to climb. The need to be radical can end up with a person falling off the edge of life without having a place to stand. Respect for authority is one of the bigger challenges that offenders face. They would rather live in a tent in the woods in the middle of winter than having to obey their parole officer.

There is something inherently rebellious in all of us that needs to be recognized, owned, accepted, and rejected in favour of commitment to the greater good. No one is listening if you are standing in the middle of the woods, far from the maddening crowd. Your complaint that no one is listening to you is warranted in this instance. I had to remind the author of this complaint that he needed to air feelings, resentments, and grievances in such a way that they could be heard. We are all subject to authority. Naming the particular instance in which this authority needs to be accepted is the point.

*Prayer of Saint Francis*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon,

Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair, hope,

Where there is darkness, light,

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console,

To be understood, as to understand,

To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

### Questions about Chapter Fifteen

1. Discipleship is a big word. What does it mean in your life?
2. Are poverty, obedience, and chastity spiritual gifts?
3. What do you think of Saint Francis' life?
4. What other disciplines do you practice to strengthen your faith?
5. What other disciplines would you recommend to others?

## Concluding Reflections and Comments

1. What was the most important thing you learned during this course?
2. What did you find less than helpful? Are there some principles that were not explained adequately?
3. Are there some principles that are more helpful than others?
4. Are there other theological principles that you would recommend?
5. Are there other courses or studies that you would recommend?

## Appendix 1

# Celebrate Recovery's Eight Recovery Principles

## The Road to Recovery Based on the Beatitudes

**R**ealize I'm not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable. (Step 1) "Happy are those who know that they are spiritually poor." Matthew 5:3a

**E**arnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him and that He has the power to help me recover. (Step 2) "Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

**C**onsciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control. (Step 3) "Happy are the meek." Matthew 5:5a TEV

**O**penly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust. (Steps 4 and 5) "Happy are the pure in heart." Matthew 5:8a TEV

**V**oluntarily submit to any and all changes God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects. (Steps 6 and 7) "Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires" Matthew 5:6a TEV

**E**valuate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others when possible, except when to do so would harm them or others. (Steps 8 and 9) "Happy are the merciful." Matthew 5:7a TEV; "Happy are the peacemakers" Matthew 5:9 TEV

**R**eserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will. (Steps 10 and 11)

**Y**ield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and my words. (Step 12) "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires." Matthew 5:10 TEV

# Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Steps and Biblical Comparisons

**1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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