

REACHING OUT IN A CRISIS

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In writing this, our goal was to create a guide designed to give us insights in to how we can better understand our purpose as believers that want to reach out to come to the aid of those who are struggling.

In order for us to heal from or help others recover from any crisis we need to see our relationship with Him our community, and ourselves in a new and more powerful way than most of us do as we make our way through life. Those giving aid and comfort to the afflicted need to do so in the confidence of the power of God in order for those who are receiving it to be assisted by their efforts.

In the pages ahead we are going to spend time focusing on building stronger lives as Christians by understanding God's plan for us to work, serve, heal, and worship in the center of the storms of life.

When we come to the aid of anyone struggling or if we are struggling ourselves we need to look for a framework, or steps to take that we can build upon. Recovery, like our walk of faith is a journey not a destination. For that purpose we will be relying upon a set of biblically supportable steps as a framework for healing. The twelve steps have been used to assist people in moving from the darkness of everything from addiction to surviving incest for decades. The steps hold no magic, they are simply a well defined road map for us to use when we are looking to overcome crisis.

The twelve steps along with a series of biblical studies that mirror their actions can also give us a framework to understand our roll in coming together with those that are in need. of our support in the midst of their personal crisis. The steps are a way of placing our actions into some framework that make sense when nothing else in life does. They are the steps that the care giver and care giver need to find mutual assurance in taking together. No one can give you faith in the middle of a crisis, they can only witness theirs. These steps are designed to help us to bring a personal perspective with God to the center of all that we do.

THREE KEYS TO OFFERING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE OF CRISIS;

One of the first things that we need to recognize is the personal nature of crisis. The magnitude of the disaster of the pain in our life may cause us to become overwhelmed with the suffering, or it may create a heightened feeling of anxiousness for the victim but it does not change the personal way in which each individual needs to be approached. The tragedy of loosing a loved one in a plane crash, food or disaster can not be separated from the tragedy that we see around us in our every day lives as people of faith. The tragedy of living in the loneliness and silence of a forgotten life, of loosing a premature child, not being able to have children, suffering through divorce, domestic abuse or the

wake of addiction is equal pain on a personal level to any disaster. Responding to people in crisis or taking help in our time of need is a deeply personal. If we can not come to people in their time of need in the spirit of the power that God has given us to face our own crisis, than we can be of little help. I am often amazed in the middle of tragedy how people will begin to say things that have no value, that do not ring true, even though their word are biblically based the use of them has been removed from person experience, empathy or love. As the apostle Paul tells us we can have all knowledge but if we have not love it is of no value. It is in many cases worse than worthless, it is annoying and painful

The second thing that we need to recognize is that our involvement in tragedy is a blessing for us as believers in Christ. If we are people of faith we need to show it in the midst of tragedy. The test of our faith is suffering. Do we run to it or away from it. If we believe in the healing power of a God that overcame death, there is no tragedy that can not or will not strengthen our faith. It is a personal strengthening, that goes along with our testimony for those that need our help.

The third thing we need to take into crisis with us is a humble spirit and the power of prayer. Christ wants us to weep with those who weep. This does not imply showing up in the center of a crisis with all the answers. We act with our hearts and our hands not our intellect when we are called to be at the side of those who suffer. It is important for us not to apply easy answer to suffering. Sure, God will make something good of the evil that destroys peoples live, sure He has a plan but these are not word of comfort in the center of a loss. What people need is to talk and to ask questions, to be angry, to weep, to laugh, to be bewildered. We need to be beside them, working to show them Gods love and to share the personal testimony that we have about what God has done in our lives when they ask. If we are with those who have lost children and we have not, it is imperative that we never pretend to know their pain; we only need to share it, listen to it and hold onto them in love.

Our personal testimony and faith in God is what directs us to be in the path of those who suffer. It is our calling as Christians. Any church family that is not reaching out to those who suffer is fundamentally either not seeking to understand God's purpose for them or rejecting the opportunities that he gives them daily.

In the world of Christian recovery, the understanding of authentic community takes on a vibrant meaning. It is one of the reasons that the twelve steps is such an important tool for us to use as we seek to help those who are injured. The purpose of the steps is to not just bring a person back to a place of healing but to put them into a position to bring a personal testimony to the center of a group of Christian's dedicated to assisting others.

One the most important things that we can learn when we follow the principles of recovery is that the job of rebuilding our lives takes a minimum of three participants. Those injured need to support of those willing to open their lives to them and when the two come together they meet one another in the power of Christ. If we don't meet those that suffer in this power than we will all suffer greater injury. When God is at the center

of recovery we have begun to heal even before the first word is spoken. We can not heal or be healed in our own power.

We see the need to find a new kind of community when we recognize a need to assist those that are in pain or when we recognize our own. Seeing the need of those that suffer is imperative but we also need to understand that there are those that we can not reach or that we are not the people that God intended to reach them. Real change in my own life could not begin until I had actively accepted the notion that not seeking recovery was more painful than the prospect of real life change. In order to be helped in the middle of life's pain we need to want to live and change. In overcoming a personal battle with drugs I needed to admit my powerlessness and to reach out for help. Secondly, I needed to appeal for assistance from God in order for life change to take hold. Until I had turned my will and my life over to God, I was involved in a self help program. I couldn't clean my own house let alone fix my own problems. This has been true of every recovery issue I have faced in my life. Turning to the power of God to find the boundaries in my life and the truth that goes with them created hope that all of the self help books in the world could not give me. There is hope in knowing that we are powerless without God to sustain any life change.

I needed to overcome the attitude that I was in control, that I would be the pilot of my personal ship out of pain. I needed to submit myself to at least one other person that I could share openly with so that I could gain insight through their experience, strength, and hope. But more importantly that person represented the partner I needed to have Christ in the center of the effort to change my life. There are a number of biblical principles in place here that we need to recognize when we are trying to bring aid to those in pain. One of the most significant is grasping the power of Christ that is given to us when we choose to join together with other believers to search for answers and to help. There is humility, trust, and creation of community in that decision that carries incredible power with it. It is the new community that we need to understand and care in. Our personal relationship with Christ, a person that is reaching for help and Him in the center of it.

**FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, I AM (CHRIST) THERE IN THE MIDST OF THEM."
(MATTHEW 18:20)**

This is an incredible promise from Christ. In context He is talking about the miracle of community and His desire to have people join together with a common goal of doing His will. This points us to the power of Christians laying aside their pettiness, their rights, and their protections to seek the true will of God in their lives and for those around them. Christ talks about the miracle that will transpire when we have the heart to do this in His name. This passage gets put in front of us a great deal in church. I have used it many times in prayers before counseling to help remind myself who is really going to attend the meeting! The power of this statement is the invocation of the living person of Jesus Christ. He is talking about His spiritual presence coming to us, not the Holy Spirit or the angels of light but Christ Himself.

When we face the trials of life in the center of a disaster area, when we lose the people close to us, when we face our own death, the trauma of divorce, separation and addiction, we need to remember this passage. We need to come together as believers and speak these words in a powerful way. We need to expect the miracles that follow. When we reach out to one another, not in our own power but in the power of Christ, with the express purpose of leading the lives that He wants us to, the miracles begin to unfold. He brings peace to the center of the pain and healing can begin.

This direction to reach out or to come together as believers can only happen when we are willing to be transparent about our pain and struggles. Opening our hearts destroys the plan of the enemy. Satan's job is to take the pain that we are experiencing and to convince us that nobody can understand, that we will be judged by others, and that we are separated from the "*NORMAL*" people in the church because of our issue or pain. Does it scare you to be with someone that has been wracked with pain and injury who is angry at God? Have you ever been angry at God? Are you in a strong enough place of faith to admit that your faith has wavered?

It is also Satan's job to blind us to our own short-comings so that we will take our new found faith and use it to judge and to condemn others for the actions and mistakes of their life. We have within these two statements the strategy of evil to keep us from helping one another in a time of need.

- 1) The enemy wants us to be consumed with fear and self doubt about our ability to help those that suffer to find healing.
- 2) He wants us constantly judging and establishing barriers to faith for others. They are not worthy of our assistance, people that are too far gone, too far off the beaten track, too responsible for their condition or pain.

Believers that choose to take on the task of ministering to the broken from the strength of their testimony, break the power that evil uses to separate people. When you have been to the edge of the blackness and looked in, when you have heard the voice that asks you to turn and face the world in a new power and in a new light, there is no sin, no mistake, no darkness, no tragedy or transgression too large to be forgiven. There is no pain too small or too large to be shared and there is no guilt or shame that can not be destroyed in the light of Christ; the light that He offers to give freely to those who reach out to one another in His name.

Our first step in recovery shows us the way to find true community. We admit that we are powerless over our hurts, habits, and hang ups and that our lives have become unmanageable. It seems like a large admission, but it is the simplest reality that we can come to regardless of our personal statement of faith. If this world is an accident, nobody holds power over an accident. If this world is, as all logic and reasoned scientific examination points to, a place of creation, your power to manage is of less significance than the power that created the entire universe and all that resides within it. When we realize that our view of control is an illusion, we can reach out for help and those that

have been where we are can reach back to help us. We may find that for most of us, it will take a real crisis to admit that we are not in control of our corner of the universe. This is a step every believer needs to take. Some of us will take it in the middle of a personal storm; some of us will take it coming to the aid of those in one. Never run from pain as a believer, where there is pain and struggle He is their waiting for the power of faith to enter the situation so that the healing can begin.

It is imperative in our walk of faith in reaching those that hurt that we help to create a place where there is no levels of righteousness. We need to be people of support that don't care where those in need of help come from, what choices they made in getting their or the number of times that they have failed. We need to come to a place where we can look directly into the eyes of the people that we want to help and see a mirror of our personal brokenness. If you can't see the reflection of your pain in their eyes, they can't see it in yours. Know in your heart what your gifting is and if you desire to help the wounded in their times of need assess your spiritual gifts and work to develop a mirror of brokenness. It is the basis of everything that we do in recovery and the cornerstone of the teaching of Christ as He worked patiently with those who followed Him to attempt to explain the kingdom of heaven. One story that Christ used to help us to see some of the fundamentals of *reaching out* comes to us in the book of Luke. The story is called the lost or the prodigal son. (quick note: The word prodigal has a Greek root that translates into something with value squandered.)

In this account Christ tells us about a second born son that gets tired of hanging around the farm and working with his father and older brother. He comes to his dad and asks him to give him his portion of his inheritance early so that he can begin to really live. Almost immediately after the father gives him half of the value of his estate the boy travels to a distant country and begins to lead a fast life. He squanders all that he has and wakes up to find himself in a pig sty. We have here a story about a good Jewish boy from a good Jewish family wasting everything that he has in a distant Gentile land and winding up in a position that would be seen as the most revolting place that any person of his faith could land in, literally a fate worse than death. Christ is painting a picture in this that we all need to see to be part of the hands that reach out with compassion on behalf of His church.

¹⁴ABOUT THE TIME HIS MONEY RAN OUT, A GREAT FAMINE SWEEPED OVER THE LAND, AND HE BEGAN TO STARVE. ¹⁵HE PERSUADED A LOCAL FARMER TO HIRE HIM TO FEED HIS PIGS. ¹⁶THE BOY BECAME SO HUNGRY THAT EVEN THE PODS HE WAS FEEDING THE PIGS LOOKED GOOD TO HIM. BUT NO ONE GAVE HIM ANYTHING. ¹⁷"WHEN HE FINALLY CAME TO HIS SENSES, HE SAID TO HIMSELF, 'AT HOME EVEN THE HIRED MEN HAVE FOOD ENOUGH TO SPARE, AND HERE I AM, DYING OF HUNGER! ¹⁸I WILL GO HOME TO MY FATHER AND SAY, 'FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST BOTH HEAVEN AND YOU, ¹⁹AND I AM NO LONGER WORTHY OF BEING CALLED YOUR SON. PLEASE TAKE ME ON AS A HIRED MAN.'"

²⁰"SO HE RETURNED HOME TO HIS FATHER. AND WHILE HE WAS STILL A LONG DISTANCE AWAY, HIS FATHER SAW HIM COMING. FILLED WITH LOVE AND COMPASSION, HE RAN TO HIS SON, EMBRACED HIM, AND KISSED HIM. ²¹HIS SON SAID TO HIM, 'FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST BOTH HEAVEN AND YOU, AND I AM NO LONGER WORTHY OF BEING CALLED YOUR SON. (LUKE 15:14-20)

We can glean two powerful truths from this that assist us in a biblical understanding of what reaching out means in recovery.

1) LETTING GO OF THE PAIN

If we are reaching out for help, we need to be prepared to let go of the past and to be transparent about our mistakes. We can't go into the center of other peoples injures with hidden baggage. Meeting other peoples needs in place of dealing transparently with our own is one of the greatest traps we can fall into. We can be motivated to help others in the weakness not the strength of our faith. If we are reaching out to help others we need to understand our motives. You will find some of the saddest souls in churches serving from a place of pain in the hopes that they will find freedom from the past in meeting the needs of others. Part of healing from the pain of our past is based on moving out of our place of self centeredness and coming to the aid of others, but personal healing can not start until we face the issues of our own life using a format like the twelve steps. I don't want to discourage your personal desire to reach out to those in need; it is my greatest hope as Christians is that we all would do precisely that. We need to prepare ourselves to help others so that we can bring the best representation of Christ to them. Sharing in an open and transparent way about our own struggles, failures, injuries and powerlessness moves those assets from the camp of Satan to the camp of Christ.

This is a two way street, those that we come to assist may not be able to admit their personal powerlessness in the middle of their pain. This may mean that we are only able to meet a physical need and to pray for them for future life change. Each person needs to grieve, suffer loss or overcome injury in a different way in a different time. We need to be waiting for them patiently, looking for them and ready to grasp them so that they can be restored. The father in this story is not standing outside the pig pen nagging the son. He is working in the power of God, in prayer and patients, not pressure. We can not change the heart of a person, we can not advance the process of grief or give those who suffer easy answers or a time table for the journey to wholeness. We can only wait, act and pray in the power of Christ. This is why the testimony of authentic live change is the best tool we have working behind the power of God. When we are comfortable with our need for a savior, people can see it in our eyes. This is the power in which to witness in the center of a crisis.

We can begin to see the pain of life as our strength not the strength of evil. We need to see our struggles and the struggles that we face with others as the greatest assets that God can give us to change our lives and to minister to others. Our pain creates the desire to change. The need to change points us to a search for answers; we find answers or truth in Christ. Real faith for the vast majority of people in recovery comes as a direct result of pain. Until the pain gets bad enough, we hang onto the people, places, and possession for comfort. The world and all that is in it is our god and we cling to it even as the flood waters rise. When there is little or nothing left to hold onto we, "come to our senses"!

In the center of a disaster, everyone needs our physical and spiritual assistance. As the heat of crisis is reduced and people are in a place to make choices we have to have a framework of how to reach and invest in those that are desirous of change. How can we tell if someone is truly looking for assistance? The answer to this question lies in the text of the stories. The son does not buy the pig pen and turn it into an apartment. He doesn't move the pigs to one side and redecorate. He doesn't try to convince himself that they are just sheep that look like pigs. He doesn't buy nose plugs or put up air fresheners. He leaves the pig pen! In meeting the needs of other we need to understand that until someone decides that they are going to change their life and reject the things of life that are destroying them, that there is nothing we can do for them except wait for them in prayer and patience. If they are consumed by grief, devastated and isolated all we can do is speak the truth in love and pray.

As Christians looking to do the work of God, the response of the individual, or our fear of rejection or failure can not be limiting factors. We need to reach out know each and every life is valuable to God, that change is His business and that we are operating in the theater of change only because He moved to change us.

This is a double edged sword of reaching out. The understanding of who is in charge of change needs to motivate us, so that we do not grow weary in doing God. If you think you can do it yourself, if you can not apply the principles of love without it being about you, you are setting yourself up for placing an easy chair in the corner of the pen by the trough. These are all of the things that add up to facing life's struggles in our own power. We need to realize when we are in the fight alone!

2) WATCH FOR AND RUN TO THE BROKEN

If we have found the comfort of healing and recovery in Christ, we move our focus from being consumed with our issues to a place where we can begin to serve in a new power that is not our own. It is our greatest goal as we change our lives to listening to that voice that calls on us to use the experiences of our lives to reach out and help others truly seeking to come home. Working our way through the principles of Christian recovery moves us into a place where we can have the strength to help others for all of the right reasons!

Within the story of the lost son there are a number of culturally significant and unspoken things that we need to look at more closely. First and foremost, the father knows his son and the son knows the father. He knows that he will return and he waits. He does not run to the pig pen and talk him out of the muck. He trusts in the knowledge that his son took with him when he departed. The son only returns because he can trust the righteousness of the father. When we reach out to the broken and they are looking for answers, we need to ensure that we speak with a confidence in the power of Christ to forgive and heal based on our experience and relationship with Him. We need to know it ourselves and believe it with all that we have as we fight with the mistakes of our human frailty and wake to find ourselves in equally disturbing situations. Knowledge of the Father and

confidence that He is waiting to see His children return is one of our greatest defensive and offensive weapons in this spiritual battle. He does not wait with His arms crossed. There is no lecture, no condemnation, no reprisal, or punishment, ceremony or decorum, just an unembarrassed and unashamed expression of love. When we reach out to others and we can show them how we care in our emotions and our actions we reach them with a message that is more powerful than any words that we can speak.

The passage says, *and while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.* Jewish tradition would have lent some extra meaning to this story. It would have been seen as undignified or below the station of any elder to run for any reason. Jews would have seen this as embarrassing or unnatural. The word compassion that is translated from Greek is only used three times by Luke. He chooses this specific word to describe Christ's interaction with a woman who has lost her son. He comes to her and touches the casket and restores him to her out of this same compassion. In the original translation we see the words, "moved to pity, or a longing to relieve the pain of someone that emanates from the pit of your stomach. It is this basis of compassion that models God's desire for us to watch for the lost and to strip away anything in our lives that will stop us from communicating His love for those that seek truth or desire to change their lives or overcome a pain that is shaking them in the very core of their being.

Within this story Christ is reminding us that we need to not just watch for the broken and hurting but recognize when they are attempting to come home and rush to meet them. We may need to run to those who can not walk, bring food to those who are starving, help those who are left behind to say goodbye to the family and friend beside graves. We may have to dress wounds, hold babies and cry with those that are inconsolable. But the compassion that Christ give us if we ask for hearts to help the broken will have us running to their sides because we desire to share their pain.

The broken are looking for a place of peace. There can be no peace without the presence of God. When we run to those who hurt without reluctance we are allowing the spirit that want to work within us to go before us. It is the authentic outpouring of that spirit that allows people to understand the character of God.

We need to reach out to the people around us and share the good news that there is a safe place to come home to. A place where there is an end to shame and guilt and the pain of the past. In counseling with a woman who had recently lost an only son it came to me that unless she could see the mirror of the brokenness she felt, in my eyes, that I could be of no assistance to her.

We worship a God that knows pain and grief in a profoundly personal way. When we are in the company of the broken that are believers in Jesus Christ, He is in the center of that gathering with us. We can look into one another's eyes and see the brokenness He paid for with His own blood. Let's reach out for help and to help in the power of Christ. We need never be alone again.

Q: Is there a pain, a shame, or guilt in my life that I can not share with someone?

Q: Can I be transparent about the pain of my past?

Q: Do I believe that my pain can become my greatest asset in ministry?

REACHING OUT IN THE POWER THAT HEALS

As we continue seek answer so that we can assist those in crisis we have an immediate reality that we need to focus on. We can not do the work of healing alone. We need a clear understanding of who God is in the midst of the trauma of our lives. We also need to see how believers need to join together to minister to the needs of those that struggle through crisis. It is my goal within these pages to help create and maintain a better understanding of the development of an authentic community of believers that are not just capable of responding to need and crisis but anxious to do so.

One of the most important hurdles to the creation of an authentic community of motivated believers is our understanding of what we have in Christ. Christ points to this in His ministry when he comments about the gratitude that accompanies the forgiveness of someone who is guilty of much. The church as a whole struggles with this concept, we need never be confused by any thoughts that lead us to a belief that we have less to be forgiven for than those that struggle with more transparent forms of sin. If as Christ suggests that saying hateful things to your brother is equal to murder and the lust we have in our hearts is equal to adultery there is not higher ground of righteousness for anyone in the church to take.

Being convicted of your position of sin before a perfect and sinless God is the best motivation that we can give the church to reach out to help others. When we understand the great gift of grace and understand our unworthiness we should have a greater place of gratitude from which to minister to the needs of others.

This is one of the reasons that working in the area of recovery ministry has given me a new perspective on how all believers can use our collective need for salvation to reach others in their place of crisis.

It is evil's desire to place our talents on the shelf. We take a relationship with the God that created the universe and gave the life of His Son to heal us and put that behind every other distraction of our day. Everything else comes first, and when the people around us are in need of our witness they fall behind everyone else as well. We are generally speaking, afraid to reach out. We don't have the answers, the time, the gratitude or the inclination. Something happens to us when we begin to serve however that stirs us with a

sense of gratitude that is hard to place into words. We see a new level of Christian community and for many of us we want more, but serving others in their place of crisis still brings with it great risk, inconvenience of complication than we are willing to meet. We are driven by fear and apathy, distraction and the urgent needs in our lives verses the gratitude of a life changed for eternity.

These are the emotions that separate us from the ability to be in love with our community of believers, to enter into battle with them so that lives in crisis can be changed. If we can not meet our daily emotional needs with the gratitude of our salvation how can we share that with another person struggling through life's tragedy? We can not give what we do not have. If we try we are immobilized by our fears. This is one of the key factors that takes a church from a place of being capable of responding to the most desperate needs of the community and turns it into a congregation that struggles to meet the limited needs of its own people. In this place the church struggles for relevancy. It is too apathetic to be what it was designed to be.

We need to see the sin that we have been forgiven as the power of the church. It is our requirement for forgiveness that brings us together in the first place. IT is the spirit that dwells in us when we admit our sin that inspires us to be more like Christ. Understanding the need for forgiveness should draw us together as people that are eager to bring the good news to others. These are the things that draw us together as believers, the core of what should give us a sense that we truly belong in a community that reaches out to help others.

Before we find a meaningful relationship with Christ we spend our lives believing that we are alone in facing life's pain. We put on masks to protect ourselves or our families. The harder we work to protect ourselves the more spiritually isolated we become. As believers we know at the very core of our being that this faith requires more than sitting in a soft chair for an hour a week, but stepping out to help others requires more of us than we may be willing to let people see.

If the claims of Christianity are true it is a calling that demands a greater response than most of its participants are willing to give. We wind up giving way to the things of the world and not the things of God. This being said, how can we meet anyone in their moment of crisis when we have nothing of substance to offer them or ourselves? We see people that have lost people, places and possessions. Consoling them in their loss requires our belief in something larger than the things that have been taken away from them. Many of us are filling ourselves up with our jobs, our homes, our families and our possessions. We can't comfort anyone in their hour of need if they have lost the very things we are using for our strength. This is one of the things that fills us with fear and dread at coming into the center of crisis. Our fear does not come from our strength in faith but our lack of it. It is our personal fear that relates to our beliefs about how we would response to similar pain.

To overcome this fear we need to develop a deeply personal conviction of our own salvation. With that conviction comes the personal testimony of God's faithfulness. It is

this power that can see us through a personal crisis. Our confidence comes from understanding who God is in the middle of the things that don't make sense. Seeing Him working in the pain of our lives and forgiving us for sins that we can not correct ourselves fills us with a great sense of gratitude, gratitude is turned to action because it is built on our faith. Faith in action overcomes fear.

The western church is in many cases grinding to a place of irrelevance because those that occupy its pews have no basis of gratitude on which to build their faith. They are, in their minds, not forgiven much; they are giving up much to come to church. They are not overwhelmed by the grace they receive, they are upset by the call of giving to the church or reaching out to the needs of the broken. They are uncomfortable, apathetic and ill equipped to witness their faith.

Using the principles of recovery to better understand the pathway from darkness to light we can focus on the principle associated with the second and third steps. We continue the process of healing by focusing on the understanding of our relationship with God. The first thing we do is admit our powerlessness, we seek recovery. The second task is to see God for who he really is. Not a head knowledge of God but one that gives us a clear and meaningful idea of who He is in the good and the bad things of our lives. We need to have a relationship with God that is built on the totality of our brokenness; a belief that places the understanding of His love for us above the circumstances of our lives.

We can't witness to the broken without this foundation to stand on. Without it we are like any secular charity all we have to give people is the money in our pocket. If you have been on the front line of ministry or in Christian based recovery you will have noticed how quickly you can bond with another believer under these circumstances but struggle to do the same in the community at large? The deeper, richer and more grounded a person is in the reality of their brokenness and their relationship with God the more powerful they can be in developing and maintaining deep and meaningful relationships with others. When we understand that we have attained a great gift through grace than we could ever purchase we can begin to see and meet the needs of the people around us. We understand why we belong!

THE THIRD STEP IN RECOVERY AND ITS BIBLICAL COMPARISON GIVES US THE FOLLOWING DIRECTION: WE MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILLS AND OUR LIVES 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)

When we have no relationship with God we have no inner guide or moral code by which we can measure the boundaries of our relationships. Relationships based on anything but eternal truth change based on the circumstances of the day. This leaves us in a place where we are constantly using others or others are using us to meet their needs.

The dimension that God brings to us in our relationship with Him is the framework for making sense of every relationship we manage while we are on this earth. If we turn our will and our lives over to Him we turn our relationships over to Him as well. We recognize what is healthy based on His plan for us and separate ourselves from the things that are not in our greater good. We come to places where we can invest in others from His power and receive more than we could ever give because of who He has made us.

It is Satan's desire to destroy the hope of belonging by attacking it at its root. The plan of evil is to damage our relationship with God by placing things between us that can become gods in His place. The moment our relationship with God is broken by our allegiance to things other than Him we see a pattern that divides us as believers. When we are double minded about our relationship with God we are unable to witness to others effectively or to come to their aid in the midst of crisis. Sin divides and paralyzes; God's goodness draws people together for greater purpose.

We see the intent of satan in the account of the first sin

**THEN THE LORD GOD CALLED TO ADAM AND SAID, "WHERE ARE YOU?". SO HE SAID, "I HEARD YOUR VOICE IN THE GARDEN AND I WAS AFRAID BECAUSE I WAS NAKED SO I HID MYSELF". AND HE SAID, "WHO TOLD YOU THAT YOU WERE NAKED"? HAVE YOU EATEN FROM THE TREE OF WHICH I COMMANDED YOU THAT YOU SHOULD NOT EAT?" THEN THE MAN SAID, "THE WOMAN WHOM YOU GAVE TO BE WITH ME, SHE GAVE ME OF THE TREE, AND I ATE"
GENESIS 3:8-12**

We place something between ourselves and God and we go from people capable of acting in His power to people hiding from Him and any opportunities that we have to reach others. Our first reaction is to retract ourselves from God in shame and guilt. Our second is to isolate ourselves further by blaming the people closest to us. Our third reaction in isolation and turmoil is to blame God for the personal problems. We see this pattern when we are called as churches to meet the needs of the broken in our communities or during a time of crisis. We hide from the call in the hope that it will go away, we blame those around us for not answering it and finally we blame God for allowing it to happen in the first place.

In the case of Adam and Eve, it was not Adam's fault that he had not chastised His wife and rejected the apple. It was her fault for giving it to him and God's fault for giving him the wife to begin with!

One of the greatest examples of the power of God's plan to unit Christian to reach out comes to us in the book of Acts. We have a story about a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus that later changes his name to Paul. Saul is a Pharisee, a man filled with rage and hate, of growing influence in Jewish religious circles. He, like Adam and Eve has placed something, in this religion, between himself and God. In all of the rules, regulations and

do's and don'ts he has taken on the position of god and is doing everything that he can to crush this new movement of Christian faith called "the way". He is responsible for beating, jailing and killing early believers in Jerusalem and is aware of a new group of believers in Damascus. He goes to the leaders of council to receive the authority to go to Damascus to imprison, kill and beat the followers of Christ. On the road Saul is surrounded with light and blinded and He sees Christ. Saul is left in Damascus blind for three days and during that time he fasts and prays and in the darkness of his brokenness his life is changed. Christ speaks to one of the disciples, Ananias, in Damascus in a dream and asks him to go to Saul. Ananias questions Christ to make sure that this is really the man that he should seek out because he is afraid of Saul. It is imperative to remember that the longer we act out the more difficult it is for people to reach out to us. In that nothing is impossible for God, Christ assures Ananias that he needs to go and place his hands on Saul. The first thing that Saul sees when his blindness is healed is a believer in Jesus Christ that can minister to his needs. Ananias can only meet Saul's need because His sense of gratitude to God is larger than his fear of the healing work he has been called to do.

17 SO ANANIAS WENT AND FOUND SAUL. HE LAID HIS HANDS ON HIM AND SAID, "BROTHER SAUL, THE LORD JESUS, WHO APPEARED TO YOU ON THE ROAD, HAS SENT ME SO THAT YOU MAY GET YOUR SIGHT BACK AND BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT." 18 INSTANTLY SOMETHING LIKE SCALES FELL FROM SAUL'S EYES, AND HE REGAINED HIS SIGHT. THEN HE GOT UP AND WAS BAPTIZED. 19 AFTERWARD HE ATE SOME FOOD AND WAS STRENGTHENED. SAUL STAYED WITH THE BELIEVERS IN DAMASCUS FOR A FEW DAYS. 20 AND IMMEDIATELY HE BEGAN PREACHING ABOUT JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUES, SAYING, "HE IS INDEED THE SON OF GOD!" ACT 9: 17-20

Saul comes from darkness, rage and murder, to an immediate understanding that he is on the wrong path. We like to call this the fastest first step in the history of recovery. It is in this new relationship with God that he finds community first with Ananias, a man that was willing to place the things he held to be true in God above his personal fear and resentment, secondly through the disciples that Ananias leads Paul to. Saul becomes an incredible and begins to tell people the good news about Christ. People look at him in amazement knowing that just days before he was trying to kill these people and now he is in their company and proclaiming the power of the risen God! His greatest failure is turned into one of his greatest strengths, he relies upon it, does not hide it, he faces his past and never denies it. He uses it to build his relationship with the broken.

22 SAUL'S PREACHING BECAME MORE AND MORE POWERFUL, AND THE JEWS IN DAMASCUS COULDN'T REFUTE HIS PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS INDEED THE MESSIAH. 23 AFTER A WHILE THE JEWISH LEADERS DECIDED TO KILL HIM. 24 BUT SAUL WAS TOLD ABOUT THEIR PLOT, AND THAT THEY WERE WATCHING FOR HIM DAY AND NIGHT AT THE CITY GATE SO THEY COULD MURDER HIM. 25 SO DURING THE NIGHT, SOME OF THE OTHER BELIEVERS LET HIM DOWN IN A LARGE BASKET THROUGH AN OPENING IN THE CITY WALL. ACTS 9 22-25

BELONGING TOGETHER MEANS:

- 1) Reaching out to those that God wants us to help regardless of our fears. When we know that the person that is lost in the middle of pain and crisis belongs with us by virtue of who they are in Christ not what they have done we know we belong too.
- 2) Finding and stay close to people that have the ability to place God as the most important thing in their lives. It is this power of community that allows us to heal and to reach others for Christ. .
- 3) Leading the broken and the lost into a community of believers so they can be baptized fed and protected. We know that we belong when people meet our needs and help us to overcome the pain that we have endured.
- 4) Reminding one another, by the company that we keep, that we are forgiven not just by Christ but by one another for the things of our past. If we can not forgive we can not hold onto the promise of forgiveness.
- 5) We hold fast to the people that God sends to us so that we can be lowered to safety in our times of trouble or so that we can be there to aid them and comfort them in their time of need.
- 6) We can meet the needs of people in crisis because of our understanding of where each person's worth comes from.

We can talk about forgiveness but it is at those moments in your life when you need to count on the full strength of God that he places us all in a community that will stand with us in our times of greatest need. We can celebrate with one another, laugh and cry with one another in the safety of a community that is authentically built on the will of God and not on the manipulation, guilt or shame of the evil one. From this place of belonging we can meet the needs of others without fear.

We can place the garbage of the world between us and our relationship with Christ and content ourselves with relationships that are built around that garbage. We can spend our lives in communities of people build around what was on television last night, the weather and the latest gossip about the easiest target on the block. Or we can feel the fullness of belonging somewhere with people that love you, honor you and cherish you not based on how much you have, what or who you know but simply on the love that you have found in the person of Jesus Christ. We know that our lives have changed when we can look into the eyes of another Christian and speak to them about the depth of our experience, our hope, our pain and our faith. When we can laugh and cry together without fear we know that we belong together. When we belong together we can reach out to meet the needs of people in crisis in the power of Christ and from communities of strength.

Q: Am I placing things between me and my relationship with Christ that make meeting the needs of others impossible.

Q: Do I have an community of like minded believers around me

Q: In my time of need are their people that I can call that I know will love me for who I am in Christ.

Q: Can I take the relationship that I have with God to the center of any crisis.

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