

Lesson 15

Victory

Principle 5: Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.

“Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires.” (Matthew 5:6)

Step 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)

Step 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)

Introduction

Tonight we are going to look at an overview of Principle 5. We are going to answer the question, How can you have victory over your defects of character?

Victory

We are going to use the acrostic VICTORY.

Voluntarily submit

Identify character defects

Change your mind

Turn over character defects

One day at a time

Recovery is a process

You must choose to change

The *V* is VOLUNTARILY submit to every change God wants me to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my shortcomings. The Bible says that we are to make an offering of our very selves to God. “Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.... Let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind” (Romans 12:1–2, GNB).

When you accepted Principle 3, you made the most important decision of your life by choosing to turn your life over to God’s will. That decision got you right with God; you accepted and determined to follow His Son Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

Then you began to work on *you*. You made a fearless and moral inventory of yourself. The first step in any victory is to recognize the enemy. My inventory showed me that I was my greatest enemy.

You came clean by admitting and confessing to yourself, to God, and to another person your wrongs and your sins. For probably the first time in your life, you were able to take off the muddy glasses of denial and look at reality with a clear and clean focus.

Now you are considering what Step 6 says: that you are “entirely ready to have God remove all of your defects of character.” You’re at the place in your recovery where you say, “I don’t want to live this way anymore. I want to get rid of my hurts, hang-ups, and habits. But how do I do it?”

The good news is that *you* don’t do it!

Step 6 doesn’t read, “You are entirely ready to have you remove all of your defects of character,” does it? No, it says, “You are entirely ready to have *God* remove all your defects of

character.”

So how do you begin the process to have God make the positive changes in your life that you and He both desire?

You start by doing the *I* in victory: IDENTIFY which character defects you want to work on first. Go back to the wrongs, shortcomings, and sins you discovered in your inventory. Falling down doesn't make you a failure, staying down does! God just doesn't want us to admit our wrongs, He wants to make us right! He wants to give us a future and a hope! God just doesn't want to forgive us, He wants to change us! Ask God to first remove those character defects that are causing you the most pain. Be specific! “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

Let's move to the *C*, which stands for CHANGE your mind.

Second Corinthians 5:17 tells us that when you become a Christian, you are a new creation, a brand new person inside. The old nature is gone. The changes that are going to take place are the result of a team effort. Your responsibility is to take the action to follow God's direction for change. You have to let God transform (change) you by renewing your mind.

Let's look at Romans 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

To transform something means to change its condition, its nature, its function, and its identity. God wants to change more than just our behaviors. He wants to change the way we think. Simply changing behaviors is like trimming the weeds in a garden instead of removing them. Weeds always grow back unless they are pulled out by the roots. We need to let God transform our minds!

How? By the *T* in victory: TURNING your character defects over to Jesus Christ.

Relying on your own willpower, your own self-will, has blocked your recovery. Your past efforts to change your hurts, hang-ups, and habits by yourself were unsuccessful. But if you “humble yourselves before the Lord, ... he will lift you up” (James 4:10).

Humility is not a bad word, and being humble doesn't mean you're weak. Humility is like underwear: we should have it, but we shouldn't let it show. Humility is to make the right estimate of one's self or to see ourselves as God sees us.

You can't proceed in your recovery until you turn your defects of character over to Jesus. Let go! Let God!

The next letter is *O*: ONE day at a time.

Your character defects were not developed overnight, so don't expect them to be instantly removed. Recovery happens *one day at a time!* Your lifelong hurts, hang-ups, and habits need to be worked on in twenty-four-hour increments. You've heard the old cliché: “Life by the yard is hard; life by the inch is a cinch.” Jesus said the same thing: “So don't be anxious about tomorrow, God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time” (Matthew 6:34, TLB).

When I start to regret the past or fear the future, I look to Exodus 3:14 where God tells us that His name is “I am.”

I'm not sure who gets the credit for the following illustration, but it's right on. God tells me that when I live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, life is hard. I can take God back there to heal me, to forgive me, to forgive my sins. But God does not say, “My name is ‘I was.’” God says, “My name is ‘I am.’”

When I try to live in the future, with its unknown problems and fears, life is hard. I know

God will be with me when that day comes. But God does not say, “My name is ‘I will be.’” He says, “My name is I am.”

When I live in today, this moment, one day at a time, life is not hard. God says, “I am here.” “Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Let’s look at the letter *R*: RECOVERY is a process, “one day at a time” after “one day at a time.”

Once you ask God to remove your character defects, you begin a journey that will lead you to new freedom from your past. Don’t look for perfection, instead rejoice in steady progress. What you need to seek is “patient improvement.” Hear these words of encouragement from God’s Word: “And I am sure that God who began a good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns” (Philippians 1:6, TLB).

The last letter in victory is *Y*: YOU must choose to change.

As long as you place self-reliance first, a true reliance on Jesus Christ is impossible. You must voluntarily submit to every change God wants you to make in your life and humbly ask Him to remove your shortcomings. God is waiting to turn your weaknesses into strengths. All you need to do is *humbly ask!*

“God gives strength to the humble, ... so give yourselves humbly to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. And when you draw close to God, God will draw close to you” (James 4:6–8, TLB).

Wrap-up

To make changes in our lives, all I had to do and all you need to do is to be *entirely* ready to let God be the life-changer. We are not the “how” and “when” committee. We are the preparation committee: all we have to be is *ready*!

Tonight, Jesus is asking you, “Do you want to be healed, do you want to change?” You must choose to change. That’s what Principle 5 is all about! Let’s close with prayer.

Dear God, show me Your will in working on my shortcomings. Help me not to resist the changes that You have planned for me. I need You to “direct my steps.” Help me stay in today, not get dragged back into the past or lost in the future. I ask You to give me the power and the wisdom to make the very best I can out of today. In Christ’s name I pray, Amen.

Principle 5 Testimony

Hi, everyone, my name is Tom and Saddleback is my church family. I’m also a believer who struggled with alcoholism.

Actually, today I’m here to talk about my struggles with impatience, which, in my case anyway, always goes hand in hand with anger. Years ago I was honored with the prestigious title of “Angriest Man Alive.” But today I’m here to share the hope and victory that is found in Christ.

Over the years, I’ve struggled at being patient with the irritations and inconveniences that we’ve all faced. But instead of learning to be patient, I watched my anger get more and more out of control until, finally, I lost everything.

Even at a young age, I remember anger being such a dominant factor in my life. With my four brothers and myself at home, there was this fear when my mother would erupt. I remember the one time I was saved from getting hit in the head with an iron. Thank God it was still plugged

in and the cord wouldn't allow the iron to reach me. I'll tell you, I really just thought that was the way life was. Even being young and just in my teens, anger that came from anxiety dominated my thoughts and consequently my actions. In me burned a restlessness, an irrationality, and discontent. It caused such inner turmoil that I sought to drown out these feelings with alcohol and drugs. This was at the ripe old age of thirteen. As the storm raged in me, the only thing that would calm it was booze and drugs. See, to me, my drinking and drugging wasn't a problem—it was my solution. I just wanted the ease and comfort I saw in other peoples' lives. After a while, impatience led to further anger and anger turned to rage.

By this time, in my early twenties, my outbursts had caused me to lose everything—jobs, family, a fiancée, and friends. I was left isolated, and again drugs and alcohol were my refuge. But still the rage grew and then turned inward. I had grown to hate the person I had become and dying seemed a welcome thing in my life. I remember calling my friend Matthew, one of the few friends who would still talk to me, and I said, “Matt, I'm tired and I just want to end it.” He said, “Tom, can I ask you a question? Do you want to die, or do you just want to be happy?” Well, I thought, *Die ... happy ... die ... happy*. Hey, happy's not a bad choice! I just wanted peace.

Now, I had tried to get my act together before by making oaths and resolutions. But all these new moral codes and philosophies didn't work. You see, even with as much self-knowledge as I had, and even with all my human resources controlled by my will, I failed miserably. The needed power just wasn't there. Only an act of providence would save me.

That's when I sought help. I found a 12-Step recovery group and, in the process, found I needed God, which led me to the cross. Praise God! Praise God for Celebrate Recovery and this church. That's where I found my peace. It was kindness, mercy, and His grace that inspired me to turn to the Lord. Since I've given my life to the Lord, three things have happened.

First, I began to see life more and more from God's viewpoint. It's just a miracle how my whole perspective has changed. Just knowing He's in control sets me at ease. With less fear and anxiety, there's really no cause for anger. In Isaiah 41:10 His Word says, "Do not fear, for I am with you." Also, Philippians 4:7 talks about a peace that is beyond our understanding. This is not a peace I had in me, rather peace He put in me.

Second, God's love is replacing the anger in my life. Showing me I had value in His eyes, He demonstrated that love by dying on the cross for me. My response of love is to have faith that His ways are greater than my ways. And that trust has led to action. Through prayer, study of His Word, and walking in faith by His loving guidelines, He has transformed my mind and done for me what I could never have done for myself. And through His spirit, I've found the comfort that I've always looked for. He's turned my anxiety and despair to hope, my fear to faith, and my pain to compassion.

Finally, I'm depending every day on Christ to help me control my impatience. The peace I have only comes from having a totally dependent relationship with Jesus Christ. And I'm so glad my relationship is based on His faithfulness to me, not my faithfulness to Him.

You see, sometimes I still struggle with impatience. I started to lose my temper just yesterday, but I didn't react like the old angry Tom. Instead, I relied on His promises from 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 and Philippians 1:6.

I'm not all I'd like to be, I'm not all that I could be, but praise God, I'm not the angry man I used to be. Thanks for letting me share.