

Lesson 21

Relapse

Principle 7: Reserve 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.

Step 11: 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 3:16)

Introduction

(Note: At Saddleback Church, we start with Lesson 1 in January. Therefore, we are teaching Principle 7 in November. That’s why this lesson begins with a reference to Christmas.)

Tonight, we are going to start working on Principle 7. We are going to look specifically at how to maintain the momentum of your recovery during the approaching holidays!

Holidays can be tough, especially if you are alone, or if you are still hoping your family will live up to your expectations. This is a key time of the year to guard against slipping back to your old hurts, hang-ups, or habits. A key time to guard against relapse!

Therefore, tonight we are going to talk about how you can prevent RELAPSE. You don’t have to start your Christmas shopping yet, but it’s not too early to start working on a relapse-prevention program.

Preventing Relapse

Tonight’s acrostic is RELAPSE:

Reserve a daily quiet time

Evaluate

Listen to Jesus

Alone and quiet time

Plug in to God's power

Slow down

Enjoy your growth

The first letter in relapse stands for Principle 7 itself: RESERVE a daily quiet time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and gain the power to follow His will.

As I said, during the holidays, it's easy to slip back into our old hurts, hang-ups, and habits. The alcoholic goes back to drinking, the overeater gains back the weight, the gambler goes back to "loss wages" (Las Vegas), the workaholic fills up his schedule, the codependent goes back to an unhealthy relationship. The list goes on and on.

The first step in preventing a relapse is to admit that you will be tempted, that you are not above temptation. Jesus wasn't, why should you be?

We find the account of Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4:1-11 (TLB):

Jesus was led out into the wilderness to be tempted there by Satan.... For forty days and forty nights he ate nothing and became very hungry. Then Satan tempted him to get food by changing stones into loaves of bread.

"It will prove you are the Son of God," he said.

But Jesus told him, "No! For the Scriptures tell us that bread won't feed men's souls: obedience to every word of God is what we need."

Then Satan took him to Jerusalem to the roof of the Temple. "Jump off," he said, "and prove you

are the Son of God.”

Jesus retorted, “It also says not to put the Lord your God to a foolish test.”

Next, Satan took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him the nations of the world and all their glory. “I’ll give it all to you,” he said, “if you will only kneel and worship me.”

“Get out of here, Satan.... The Scriptures say, ‘Worship only the Lord God. Obey only him.’”

Then Satan went away, and angels came and cared for Jesus.

The test was over; the devil left. Jesus was tempted. He never sinned, but He was tempted.

Mark 14:38 tells us: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Remember, being tempted isn’t a sin. It’s falling into the action of the temptation that gets us into trouble. You know it’s odd, temptations are different from opportunities. Temptations will always give you a second chance!

Temptation is not a sin; it is a call to battle. When we are tempted to fall back into our old hurts, hang-ups, and habits we need to say to Satan as Jesus did in Matthew 4:10 (TLB): “Get out of here ... The Scriptures say, ‘Worship only the Lord God. Obey only him.’”

The next word in our acrostic reminds us of Step 10: EVALUATE.

Let me just recap what we have talked about in the last two lessons. Your evaluation needs to include your physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health.

As Pastor Rick (Warren) says, don’t forget the value of doing a “H-E-A-R-T” check. Ask yourself daily if you are

Hurting

Exhausted

Angry

Resentful

Tense

If you answer yes to any of the above, just use the tools you have learned in recovery to help get you back on track. We find specific instructions for this step in Romans 12:3–17: “Be honest in your estimate of yourselves.... Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other.... Be patient in trouble.... Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through.”

Daily practice of Step 10 maintains your honesty and humility.

The *L* is LISTEN to your Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

We need to take a time-out from the world’s “rat race” long enough to listen to our bodies, our minds, and our souls. We need to slow down enough to hear the Lord’s directions. “Test everything that is said to be sure it is true, and if it is, then accept it” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, TLB). I like that verse in *The Message*: “Don’t be gullible. Check out everything and keep only what’s good. Throw out anything tainted with evil.”

Let’s look at the letter *A*, which stands for ALONE and quiet time.

The first part of Step 11 says: “We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God.”

In Principle 3, we made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to God’s care; in Principle 4, we confessed our sins to Him; and in Principle 5, we humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Now, in Principle 7 in order to keep your recovery growing, you need to have a daily quiet time with Jesus. Even He spent time alone with His Father; you need to do the same. Set a daily appointment time to be alone with God, so that you can learn to listen carefully, learn how

to hear God!

In Psalm 46:10 God tells us to “be still, and know that I am God.”

Step 11 uses the word “meditation.” Meditation may be new to you, and you may feel uncomfortable. The definition of meditation is simply “slowing down long enough to hear God.” With practice, you will begin to realize the value of spending time alone with God.

The Enemy will use whatever he can to disrupt your quiet time with God. He will allow you to fill your schedule with so many good things that you burn out or do not have the time to keep your appointment with God. The Enemy loves it when he keeps us from growing and from working on the most important relationship in our lives—our relationship with Jesus.

Psalm 1:1–3 (GNB) tells us: “Happy are those who ... find joy in obeying the Law of the Lord, ... they study it day and night. They are like trees that grow beside a stream, that bear fruit at the right time.”

The next letter is *P*: PLUG in to God’s power through prayer.

I can’t tell you the number of people who, in counseling, have asked me, “Why did God allow that to happen to me?”

I reply, “Did you pray and seek His will and guidance before you made the decision to get married, before you made the decision to change jobs?” or whatever their issue might be.

You see, if we don’t daily seek His will for our lives, how can we blame Him when things go wrong?

Some people think their job is to give God instructions. They have it backwards. Our job is to daily seek His will for our lives. You see, God’s guidance and direction can only start when our demands stop.

Don’t misunderstand me here. I’m only suggesting that we must stop *demanding* things

of God, not stop *asking* things of Him. Specific prayer requests are another way to be plugged into God's power.

In Philippians 4:6, Paul tells us to pray about everything asking for God's perfect will in all our decisions: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs and don't forget to thank him for his answers."

The verse says *His* answers, *His* perfect will—not mine or yours. Ours are imperfect and most often self-centered. We often use prayer as a labor-saving device, but I need to remind myself daily that God will not do for me what I can do for myself. Neither will God do for you what you can do for yourself.

Let's look at the *S* in our acrostic: SLOW down long enough to hear God's answer.

After you spend time praying to God, you need to slow down long enough to hear His answers and direction. We can become impatient. We want God's answer now! But, we need to remember our timing can be flawed and God's timing is always perfect! After we pray and ask, we need to listen. God said to Job, "Listen to me. Keep silence and I will teach you wisdom!" (33:33, TLB).

Philippians 4:7 (TLB) tells us: "If you do this [present your requests to God] you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus."

Finally, the last letter in relapse is *E*: ENJOY your growth.

You need to enjoy your victories. Rejoice in and celebrate the small successes along your road to recovery! First Thessalonians 5:16 (GNB) tells us to "be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances. This is what God wants from you in your life in union with Christ Jesus." And don't forget to share your victories, no matter how small, with others in your

group. Your growth will give others hope!

With daily practice of these principles and with Christ's loving presence in your life, you will be able to maintain and continue to grow in recovery!

Wrap-up

Honestly, sometimes I wish I could take a vacation from my recovery, especially during the holidays. I'm sure you all have felt that way at one time or another. But let me assure you that relapse is real. It does happen! And it can be very costly. I urge you to take the actions that we talked about tonight to prevent relapse.

Let's get practical. Here are some things to do to prevent relapse during the holidays:

1. Pray and read your Bible daily. Establish a specific time of day to have your "quiet time."
2. Make attending your recovery meeting a priority. Stay close to your support team. If you find yourself saying, "I'm too busy to go to Celebrate Recovery tonight," make time. Flee from whatever you are doing and come share your recovery.
3. Spend time with your family if they are safe. If they are not, spend time with your church family. We are going to have Celebrate Recovery every Friday night throughout the holidays. You do not have to be alone this holiday season.
4. Get involved in service. Volunteer! You don't have to wait until you get to Principle 8 to start serving.

These are just a few ideas and suggestions. Share tonight in your small groups on ways that you, with God's help, can prevent relapse in your recovery.

