

Lesson 6

Action

Principle 3: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.

"Happy are the meek." (Matthew 5:5)

Step 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)

Introduction

When we get to Principle 3, we have worked, with God's help, the first two principles to the best of our ability. We admitted our lives were out of control and unmanageable, and we came to believe that God could restore us.

But even after taking the first two steps we can still be stuck in the *cycle of failure* that keeps us bound by guilt, anger, fear, and depression.

Tonight we are going to see how to get "unstuck."

How do we get past those old familiar negative barriers of pride, fear, guilt, worry, and doubt—those barriers that keep us from taking this step? The answer is *action!*

Principle 3 is all about ACTION. It states: "We choose to commit ...". Making a choice requires action.

Almost everyone knows the difference between right and wrong, but most people don't like making decisions. We just follow the crowd because it's easier than making the decision to do what we know is right. We procrastinate making commitments that will allow change to occur from the pain of our hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

Do you know that some people think that deciding whether or not to discard their old toothbrush is a major decision? Others are so indecisive that their favorite color is plaid!

But seriously, do you know that to not decide is to decide?

Do you know putting off the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Higher Power, Lord, and Savior really is making the decision *not to accept Him*?

Principle 3 is like opening the door: All you need is the willingness to make the decision. Christ will do the rest!

He said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Action

Let’s look at tonight’s acrostic: ACTION.

Accept

Commit

Turn it over

It’s only the beginning

One day at a time

Next step

The first letter, *A*, stands for **ACCEPT** Jesus Christ as your Higher Power and Savior!

Make the once-in-a-lifetime *decision* to ask Jesus into your heart. Make the decision to establish that personal relationship with your Higher Power that He so desires. Now is the time

to choose to commit your life. God is saying make it today! Satan says do it tomorrow.

In Romans 10:9 (GNB) God's Word tells us, "If you declare with your lips, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

It's only after you make this decision that you can begin to COMMIT to start asking and following *His* will! That's the *C* of the word action.

I would venture that all of us here tonight have tried to run our lives on our own power and will and found it to be less than successful. In Principle 3, we change our definition of willpower. Willpower becomes the willingness to accept God's power to guide your life. We come to see that there is no room for God if we are full of ourselves.

We need to pray the prayer the psalmist prayed when he said, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:10).

The letter *T* in action stands for TURN it over.

"Let go and let God." You have heard that phrase many times in recovery. It doesn't say just let go of some things to God. It doesn't say just let go of, turn over, only the *big* things.

Proverbs 3:6 (TLB) tells us, "In *everything* you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success."

"In *everything* you do." Not just the big things, not just the little things. Everything! You see, Jesus Christ just doesn't want a relationship with part of you. He desires a relationship with *all* of you.

What burdens are you carrying tonight that you want to turn over to Jesus? He says, "Come to me and I will give you rest—all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke—for it fits perfectly—and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens" (Matthew 11:28–30, TLB).

The next letter in ACTION is *I*. IT'S only the beginning.

In the third principle we make the initial decision to accept Christ as our personal Savior. Then we can make the commitment to seek and follow God's will. The new life that begins with this decision is followed by a lifelong process of growing as a Christian.

Philippians 1:6 (TLB) puts it this way: "God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished."

I like to compare the third principle to buying a new house. First you make the decision to buy the new house. But that's only the beginning. There are still more steps that you need to take before you actually can move into the house. You need to go to the bank and apply for the loan. You need to get an appraisal. You need to complete the escrow. You need to contact the moving company. You need to contact the utility companies—all before you are ready to move in.

Recovery is not a three-principle program! Principle 3 is only the exciting beginning of a new life—a life we live in a new way: ONE day at a time.

The letter *O* in ACTION stands for ONE day at a time.

Our recoveries happen one day at a time. If we remain stuck in the yesterday or constantly worry about tomorrow, we will waste the precious time of the present. And it is only in the present that change and growth can occur. We can't change yesterday and we can only pray for tomorrow. Jesus gave us instructions for living this philosophy: "Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time" (Matthew 6:34, TLB).

Believe me, if I could go back and change the past, I would do many things differently. I would choose to spare my family the pain and the hurt that my sin-addiction to alcohol caused.

But I can't change even one thing that happened in my past. And neither can you.

And on the other side of the coin, I can't live somewhere way off in the future, always worrying if "this or that" is going to happen. And neither can you. I leave that up to God.

But I can and do live in today! And I can, with Jesus Christ's guidance and direction, make a difference in the way I live today. And so can you. You can make a difference one day at a time.

Wrap-up

This finally brings us to the last letter in our acrostic. *N* stands for NEXT step.

The next step is to ask Jesus into your life to be your Higher Power. How? It's very simple.

Pastor Rick Warren has developed an easy way for you to establish a "spiritual B.A.S.E." for your life. Ask yourself the following four questions, and if you answer yes to all of them, pray the prayer that follows. That's it. That's all you have to do!

Do I

- Believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and showed He was God by coming back to life? (1 Corinthians 15:2–4)
- Accept God's free forgiveness for my sins? (Romans 3:22)
- Switch to God's plan for my life? (Mark 1:16; Romans 12:2)
- Express my desire for Christ to be the director of my life? (Romans 10:9)

If you are ready to take this step, in a minute, we will pray together. If you have already taken this step, use this prayer to recommit to continue to seek and follow God's will.

Dear God, there are some here this evening that need to make the decision to commit

their lives into Your hands, to ask You into their hearts as their Lord and Savior. Give them the courage to silently do so right now in this moment. It is the most important decision that they will ever make.

Pray with me. I'll say a phrase and you repeat it in your heart.

Dear God, I believe You sent your Son, Jesus, to die for my sins so I can be forgiven. I'm sorry for my sins, and I want to live the rest of my life the way You want me to. Please put Your Spirit in my life to direct me, Amen.

If you made the decision to invite Christ into your life, let someone know. I would love to talk to you after our fellowship time.

Principle 3 Testimony

My name is Brenda, and my story begins in the south—Louisville, Kentucky, to be exact—where I was born into an all-white family. Kind of like the movie *The Jerk*, where Steve Martin says, “I was born a poor black child,” except mine was just the opposite: I was born a poor “white child.” It was funny in the movie, but not in my life.

I guess you are wondering how this could be. Well, my mother was married and had one child, my older brother. She worked at distilling (Kentucky being the whiskey capital of the world), and as she was leaving work one night, she got into an elevator and was attacked, beaten, and raped by a black man. As God would have it (I know this now), I was the result of this incident.

I've wondered more times than you can imagine why my mom didn't give me up, since in the South all those years ago, a black and white relationship was more than a no-no. This story is not about prejudice, but it was so prevalent in those days, especially in the South, and

particularly among uneducated people. So certainly my mother realized that my birth into this white family was going to more than complicate things for her and definitely for me.

I was hated from the very beginning by the man to whom my mom was married. He mistreated me from the start. By the time I was in the first grade I had been beaten or hit daily. I had been burned, had knives thrown at me that split my nose right down the middle, was scalded by soup, locked in closets, and was literally stomped on until I lost all bodily function (that was because I couldn't memorize a song). I was made to get up at 3:00 a.m. to go put cigarettes up in a tree so this man could shoot them out, and he would often shoot before I was out of the tree. And of course I was sexually abused as well. He was a very sick man. You see, he was an alcoholic, and he died when I was in the first grade.

My mom proceeded to meet alcoholic after alcoholic, get involved and have a child. Each one would abuse her and us and then move on. She then got involved with another wrong crowd and wound up in prison. We were sent to live with a grandmother who was cordial enough and did what she was supposed to do and take care of us while Mom was away, but she was not very affectionate.

Then there were the other relatives, the uncles and the cousins who pretty much left the other kids alone—all but me. I was the target for much more mental, physical, and sexual abuse by them all. In fact, I used to think I had a sign painted on me that said, "Pick on me," or "Kick me," or "Hit me," or "Here I am," because that's all I ever got. There was no love; there were no kind words, no words of encouragement, and no terms of endearment.

Well, needless to say, I grew up very, very tough. I had to fight my way through every situation, constantly defending myself. I didn't have many friends in school, really, because the kids weren't allowed to hang out with a "black girl." I was the only black kid in all my schooling

through graduation, truly the odd man out.

I do have to tell you, I really liked going to school. It was about the safest place I could be. Any place was better than home. In fact, I left home at fourteen but found it really rough, so I had to return to the insanity.

Anyway, in school I became very involved in sports—track was my forte—and I was voted “Most Athletic” in my senior year. But not once did one person from that family come to see me run. Not once.

Since so many people had hated me instantly because of my color, I remember thinking when I was quite young that one day I just wasn't going to accept people not liking me, unless they gave me a chance first! Just give me five minutes. If you don't like me, okay, but please give me a chance.

I wanted so much to be like the other kids and do normal things—go skating, go to dances, and such—but it just wasn't going to happen because no one wanted or could take a “black girl” anywhere except, that is, behind closed doors, so I proceeded, as they say, to “look for love in all the wrong places.” I found a group of undesirables like myself that I could be a part of. This took place in the '70s, the biggest drug era ever. Believe me when I tell you that I have tried them all. I went on to what I call my mode of self-destruction. I met a guy, got pregnant, and had a son. I can tell you for sure, my son has been my lifesaver. There's no doubt that God sent him to me.

I have always been blessed and been able to have a job or two. In fact, I had three jobs when I bought my first house at age thirty-three. I moved into that house, became a drug dealer, and was still taking care of business. I was what you would call a high-functioning drug addict. I always had a job, a car, great clothes, and money. How could I possibly have a problem?

A few years later, I moved to Houston. It was there that I became involved in cocaine. I was stopped for a traffic violation, was searched, and they found a one-pound bag in my purse (because at this time I was doing probably close to an eighth a day). I was put on probation, and drug testing was a part of it. I tried beating the system by drinking pickle juice. (Don't try it; it doesn't work.) Anyway, I was sent to jail for three months for breaking probation. Talk about a wake-up call! Don't think I changed instantly, but I knew then that this was not how I was going to live.

I had always been close to my mom, and I know that she protected me to the best of her ability. She was the one person who loved me and who I trusted. The day after I got out of jail, my mom passed away. I was crushed: the one person I could trust was gone.

I packed up everything and moved from Houston to California. I had to have my probation and counseling transferred, and I continued to stay in a program.

After meeting a man here who turned out to be an abuser (I wasn't allowed to go out of the house except for work and groceries), I found myself watching Fred Price on the TV. Through him, God spoke to me as loudly as I'm speaking to you now. I'm sure that He was speaking directly to me. He had a lot to say Sunday after Sunday, once He got my attention.

I prayed to God and asked Him to get me out of this relationship and sure enough, six months later, I was free. I started attending another church and gave my life to the Lord two weeks before New Year's Day.

Then, on New Year's Day, I was raped. There were a few things that had stuck with me in my Christian life, and one was that "all good things are from above," so I still believe that incident was a swipe at me from Satan (certainly not his last) because he didn't want to lose me as one of his warriors.

I know that God has had a plan for me all along. I believe that part of His plan was for me to start on my recovery then and there. I had been pushing all those feelings, all those ugly things that had happened to me as a child, into a “Pandora’s box.”

Once on my road to recovery, I discovered that I had to open up that box. I had to take each item out and face it, one item at a time. I’m not going to tell you that it was easy, because it wasn’t. It was as painful the second time around as it was the first, but I made the most fascinating discovery: Regardless of all those things people had done to me as a child and throughout life, and even the acting out that I had done, I was not guilty. It was not my fault. I really and truly was not the terrible, horrible person that I thought and felt that I was. In fact, I can stand here today and tell you that God has let me see that I really am not a bad person at all.

As I have had the opportunity to read God’s Word, I can see that my life as it was, was part of God’s plan from the beginning, not to hurt me by any means, but to shape me and to mold me into the person I am today.

After having been in therapy and in a program for a few years and also being a Christian, I knew that all that insanity had been removed from my life. It was then that I started praying for a man to be with—one who God would send me. A few months later I met the man who would soon become my husband. He was a fun-loving guy who was a Christian and loved the Lord.

After a short period of time, we were married. We were blessed twenty-fold from the beginning. God poured His blessings out on us, gave us a beautiful house on the lake, great cars, a hair salon. God was good.

After about eight months, my husband started behaving differently—drinking a lot and being gone for three to four days at a time. As the months went on, I discovered that I had, in fact, married an addict.

It was at this time that some friends had invited us to Saddleback to hear their kids sing in the Christmas program. We were looking for a church home at the time and never felt the need to be anywhere but here at Saddleback after that night.

During some of the tough times when my husband was acting out, I discovered Celebrate Recovery. I encouraged him to come with me, and he did a few times but rarely stayed for the groups.

Anyway, I finally had to make the decision for me—since I am the only one I'm in charge of—to come and commit myself to the program. I desperately needed to talk to someone. The problem I had at the time was deciding which group to go to, since I needed them all. I chose codependents in a chemically addicted relationship.

My husband's disease was progressing at such a rate that I could not keep up with it. Needless to say, our marriage was suffering, but I kept on praying and asking for prayer, and I kept on trusting God for all of the answers.

After about three months, I was asked to lead the group, which I did with God's help all the way to January of 1995.

It is here that the third principle comes in: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care.

Second Samuel 22:2–3 (TLB) says, "Jehovah is my Rock, my fortress and my Savior. He is my shield and my salvation, my refuge and high tower."

It is to my complete and utter amazement that I stand before you all tonight to be able to give praise to God. You see, if it were up to Satan, I would have died last January, when my husband attacked and beat me and left me unconscious. It is due to the God that I serve and the name of Jesus Christ, however, that I am here, and I want to give Him all of the glory.

As I recap the events of that day and all those long months that followed, I must tell you that God is real and I have seen His face! After I was beaten and knocked unconscious, my car was stolen. My purse, my money, credit cards, jewelry, and everything else that I considered valuable at that time were also taken. I even had to leave my beautiful home that I loved so much. I left that day for the hospital with just a bag of clothes, my broken body and spirit, and my Bible. I thought that everything was gone. This is when some miracles started taking place, and not just one.

First of all, God sent Jesus Christ to me during the attack to ward off Satan so I could escape. After that traumatic experience, God totally surrounded me with angels on earth. One was a girlfriend from work who soothed me with her voice, took me to the hospital, and got me some food and a hotel for the night. She also canceled all of my credit cards and my bank account.

Next was another girlfriend (adopted by missionaries in Africa) from my job who came to get me from the hotel. She gave me a car to drive and the keys to her apartment, which was a very safe place to be. She also gave me a purse (ha! ha!) even though all I had to put in it was my Bible. What else did I need?

I had to take a week off work due to bruises to my body and my ego. I didn't return to my house until three weeks later, which is when another miracle took place. I had been so ashamed of what had happened to me, yet I knew that I had to make an emergency move of out my house. Finally, the day before I moved, I made two phone calls to people in the choir, and I also mentioned my situation to a couple of people at my Celebrate rehearsal. I was completely shocked when, at 9:00 on Saturday morning, seventeen people showed up on my doorstep. Eight women started packing like bandits. The men put the things in the truck, and my whole house

was in storage by 1:00 that afternoon. Talk about a miracle! Only God could have done that job. I was even able to go to church that night. Then three weeks later I moved again, and everyone was there again.

As I think about it, there was not a day that went by last year without some trial in it of some sort. I had to deal with the closing of the house and the bank accounts, the lease people, the police and detectives, lawyers, and of course, I still had to work and perform at a job that was sometimes highly stressful.

I finally got my car back from an impound lot three weeks later. By the grace of God and my guardian angel, there was not a scratch on it. All of my stereo equipment was gone out of it, which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. You see, in all that quiet time in the car, God and I had a lot of wonderful, loving conversations. We had more quiet time than we had ever had before.

I was trying to manage my townhouse and the hair salon and all of the overhead that goes with it. I couldn't do it, so God did. The lease was up on the business in August, and with the help of my all-girls' Celebrate wrecking team, we took that shop apart and closed those doors. God always made a way where there seemed to be no way!

Every time there was something going on up here at church, I was one of the first to arrive. I was here Tuesday for both rehearsals, Wednesday for midweek service, and I sang on Thursday night at women's bible study. Of course, I was here on Fridays, and if the choir sang, I was here on Saturday and Sunday.

I needed this church and my church family to help me stand in the midst of it all. God has been so faithful to me. As it turned out, I had the best year financially that I've ever had at my job, and God just blessed me with a new house. Did I say I thought I had lost everything? I think

not! I have gained more through my trials than I could have ever lost! Just to have seen God's face was more than I could ever have asked for.

In looking at this last year, I see that I can now better accept the things I cannot change, and it truly takes courage to change the things you can, and I have struggled with the wisdom to know the difference.

I would like to tell you that my marriage survived and is flourishing. I am sorry to say that it is not. Our divorce was final in January of this year. I'm trusting God to see me through this time as well. He has promised me that He will never leave me or forsake me. Brothers and sisters, the same holds true for you. Just ask Him.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8 it says, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." Psalm 147:3 (KJV) says, "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." And Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Thank you for letting me share!