

Lesson 8

Sponsor

Principle 4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

“Happy are the pure in heart.” Matthew 5:8)

Step 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)

Introduction

Last month, we talked about the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which you found when you made the decision to turn your life and your will over to the care of God.

Now you will see that the road to recovery is not meant to be traveled alone. You will find that you actually need three relationships. Most important is a relationship with Jesus Christ. In addition, you need the relationship of your recovery group or a church family. Last, you need the relationship of a sponsor and/or accountability partner. Identifying a sponsor and/or accountability partner is especially important before you begin Principles 4 through 6, in which you work on getting right with God, yourself, and others.

We talked two weeks ago about doing a moral inventory—your evaluation of your weaknesses (shortcomings) and strengths. It has been said that to attempt an inventory by yourself can be as futile as peeling an onion to find the core. When you’re finished, there is nothing left but peelings and the tears.

As I said in Lesson 7, Principle 4 is all about getting rid of our “truth decay,” about coming

clean! Proverbs 15:14 tells us, “A wise person is hungry for the truth, while a fool feeds on trash.” Are you ready to feed on the truth about your life? Well then, it’s time to take out the trash!

That trash can get pretty heavy at times, so I don’t want you to handle it alone. You need a genuine mentor, coach, or, in recovery terms, a sponsor and/or an accountability partner. Some of you may still be unconvinced that you really need another person to walk alongside of you on your road to recovery, so tonight we are going to answer the five following questions:

1. Why do I need a sponsor and/or an accountability partner?
2. What are the qualities of a sponsor?
3. What does a sponsor do?
4. How do I find a sponsor and/or an accountability partner?
5. What is the difference between a sponsor and an accountability partner?

Why Do I Need a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner?

There are three reasons why you need a sponsor and/or an accountability partner.

Having a Sponsor or Accountability Partner Is Biblical

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (GNB) tells us, “Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone ..., there is no one to help him.... Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone.”

Proverbs 27:17 tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” The phrase “one another” is used in the New Testament over fifty times!

Having a Sponsor or Accountability Partner Is a Key Part of Your Recovery Program

Do you know that your recovery program has four key elements to success? If your program includes each of these areas, you are well on your way to the solution, to wholeness.

The first key is maintaining your honest view of reality as you work each step. I have yet to see this program fail for someone who could be completely honest with himself or herself. I have, however, seen some give up on their recoveries because they could not step out of their denial into God's truth. Having someone help to keep you honest is a real plus in successfully working the steps.

The second key element is making your attendance at your recovery group meetings a priority in your schedule. This doesn't include taking the summer off or not going to a meeting because it's raining outside. Don't get me wrong, it's great to take a vacation, but after the two weeks are up, come back to your meetings. Remember, your hurts, hang-ups, and habits don't take vacations. You need to make Friday nights here at Celebrate Recovery and other meeting nights that you attend, a priority. A sponsor and/or an accountability partner can encourage you to attend your meetings.

The third element is maintaining your spiritual program with Jesus Christ through prayer, meditation, and study of His Word. We are going to focus more on this in Principle 7, but you don't have to wait until you get there to develop your relationship with Christ. Your sponsor can pray for you and help to keep you centered on God's Word.

The last key element to a successful program is getting involved in service. Once you have completed Principle 8, you will be able to serve as a sponsor. Until that time, however,

there are plenty of other service opportunities to get you started.

You know, service is nothing but love in work clothes, and there are plenty of opportunities to “suit up” for at Celebrate Recovery. We need help with the Bar-B-Que, with Solid Rock Cafe, passing out bulletins, and much more. If you want to get involved, see me, give me a call, or speak to your small group leader. Your sponsor can also suggest ways for you to serve.

Without exception, everyone here needs a sponsor and/or an accountability partner.

Having a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner Is the Best Guard Against Relapse

By providing feedback to keep you on track, a sponsor and/or an accountability partner can see your old dysfunctional, self-defeating patterns beginning to surface and point them out to you quickly. He or she can confront you with truth and love without placing shame or guilt.

Ecclesiastes 7:5 (TLB) tells us that “It is better to be criticized by a wise man than to be praised by a fool!” The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.

What Are the Qualities of a Sponsor?

“Though good advice lies deep within a counselor’s heart, the wise man will draw it out” (Proverbs 20:5, TLB).

When you are selecting a sponsor, look for the following qualities:

- 1. Does his walk match his talk? Is he living the eight principles?** I have known many people who have the 12-Step “lingo” down pat. But their lifestyle doesn’t match

their talk. Be certain that the person that you choose as a sponsor is someone whose life example is worthy of imitation.

2. Does she have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ? Do you see the character of Christ developing in her?

3. Does he express the desire to help others on the road to recovery? There is a difference between helping others and trying to fix others. We all need to be careful to guard the sponsorship relationship from becoming unhealthy and codependent.

4. Does she show compassion, care, and hope but not pity? You don't need someone to feel sorry for you, but you do need someone to be sensitive to your pain.

As Pastor Rick (Warren) says, "People don't care about how much you know until they know about how much you care!"

5. Is he a good listener? Do you sense that he honestly cares about what you have to say?

6. Is she strong enough to confront your denial or procrastination? Does she care enough about you and your recovery to challenge you?

7. Does he offer suggestions? Sometimes we need help in seeing options or alternatives that we are unable to find on our own. A good sponsor can take an objective view and offer suggestions. He should not give orders!

8. Can she share her own current struggles with others? Is she willing to open up and be vulnerable and transparent? I don't know about you, but I don't want a sponsor who says that he has worked the principles. I want a sponsor who is living and working the principles every day!

What Is the Role of a Sponsor?

Let me give you six things that your sponsor can do:

1. She can be there to discuss issues in detail that are too personal or would take too much time in a meeting. This is especially true with Principle 4. You don't share your complete inventory in a group setting.

"I'm the lowest form of life on the earth" is a phrase often repeated by those doing their inventory. Others deny, rationalize, and blame: "Okay, I admit I did such and such, but it's not as if I killed anybody"; "Sure, I did a, b, and c, but my spouse did d through z; compared to my spouse, I'm a saint"; "All right, I admit it, but I never would have done it if my boss wasn't such a jerk."

The sponsor can be there to share his or her own experiences and to offer strength and hope: "You think you feel like a bum! Let me tell you how I felt when I did my inventory!" The sponsor's role is to model Christ's grace, forgiveness, and to give a sense of perspective.

2. He is available in times of crisis or potential relapse. I have always told the newcomers that I have sponsored, "Call me before you take that first drink. You can still take it after we talk, if you decide to. But please call first!" Remember Ecclesiastes 4:12 (GNB): "Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone."

3. She serves as a sounding board by providing an objective point of view. This is especially true in Principle 6. When you are dealing with the sensitive area of making amends and offering forgiveness, you need a good sounding board.

4. He is there to encourage you to work the principles at your own speed. It is

not his job to work the principles for you! He can coach your progress, confront you when you're stuck, and slow you down when you're working too fast.

5. Most important, she attempts to model the lifestyle that results from working the eight principles. It's difficult to inspire others to accomplish what you haven't been willing to try yourself. A good sponsor lives the principles.

6. A sponsor can resign or be fired. Sponsorship is not a lifetime position.

How Do I Find a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner?

The responsibility of finding a sponsor and/or an accountability partner is yours, but let me give you a few final guidelines to help you in your search.

1. First and foremost, the person MUST be of the same sex as you. NO

EXCEPTIONS. I don't think I need to expand this one.

2. Can you relate to this person's story? If you are choosing someone to be your sponsor, does he or she meet the qualities of a good sponsor that we just covered?

3. Come to the Bar-B-Que and the Solid Rock Cafe. Invest some time in fellowship and get to know others in your group. That's the main reason we have these fellowship events.

4. If you ask someone to be your sponsor and/or an accountability partner, and that person says no, do not take it as a personal rejection. Remember that their own recovery has to come first. I know a lot of you have asked your small group leader to be your sponsor. They all sponsor others, and the responsibility of leadership is great. If they turn you down, it's not personal. Their plate is simply too full! If someone turns you down, ask someone else! You can even ask for a "temporary" sponsor and/or an

accountability partner. Remember, these are not a lifetime commitments.

5. Most important, ask God to lead you to the sponsor and/or an accountability partner of His choosing. He knows you and everyone in this room. He has someone in mind already for you. All you need to do is ask!

What Is the Difference between a Sponsor and an Accountability Partner?

A sponsor is someone who has completed the four Celebrate Recovery participant's guides and has worked through the eight principles and the 12 Steps. He or she meets the six requirements that we talked about in the "Role of a Sponsor" The main goal of this relationship is to choose someone to guide you through the program.

An accountability partner is someone you ask to hold you accountable for certain areas of your recovery or issues, such as meeting attendance, journaling, and so forth. This person can be at the same level of recovery as you are, unlike a sponsor, who should have completed the eight principles or 12 Steps. The main goal of this relationship is to encourage one another. You can even form an accountability team of three or four.

The accountability partner or group acts as the "team," whereas the sponsor's role is that of a "coach."

You can start forming accountability teams in your small groups tonight. When you share, just ask if anyone is interested. Let God work and see what happens. I can guarantee this, though: nothing will happen if you don't ask.

Start looking for and building your support team tonight!

Let's close in prayer.

Dear God, thank You for this group of people who are here to break out of the hurts,

habits, and hang-ups that have kept them bound. Thank You for the leaders You have provided. Thank You that You love us all, no matter where we are in our recoveries. Show me the person You have prepared to be my sponsor. Help us to establish an honest and loving relationship that honors You and helps both me and my sponsor grow stronger in You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Principle 4 Testimony

Hi, I'm Dee. I was raised in the suburbs of Minneapolis. I had one brother who was older than me and a sister and twin brothers who were younger. I was very fortunate in growing up. I had piano, tap, acrobat, and ballet lessons, and I was a Girl Scout. We grew up in a nice two-story home that my dad built, and we owned both a boat and a summer cabin that my dad built.

My mom stayed home when we were small children, but when my brother and I were old enough to care for the younger kids, she went to work full time. I felt I had a lot of responsibilities and chores growing up. I never felt I could please my mom. Everything had to be done just right, or when she got home from work she'd become very angry. We were never given a chance to talk to her. She told us the way it was going to be and then walked away. I was told never to sass, not to be selfish, and she'd say, "If you can't do something right, then don't do it at all." I grew up being the good girl. I thought if I did everything right and said what she wanted to hear, then she wouldn't get angry.

My dad retired after twenty years in the navy. He was thirty-eight years old. He then became a liquor salesman and did very well at it. We moved from our home to another, stayed for two years, and moved again. By now I was a junior in high school. Our huge new home was located on a beautiful lake. We had a dock with two boats, and two new cars in the driveway. The

material things were always plentiful. I enjoyed the small, country high school I transferred to and joined as many extra-curricular activities as I could. I took secretarial courses because Mom believed girls didn't need to go to college: they get married, raise a family, and get office jobs.

I still didn't feel close to my mom. When I asked her if I could do something with friends, she'd say, "Go ask your father," or she'd say, "I don't know why you're asking me. You're going to do what you want, anyway." I never felt any support or approval from her.

When I was eighteen and graduated from high school, I got a good secretarial job and was still living at home. I moved out once in anger, but the place I chose to move to was not a good choice, and after one week I moved back home.

One January evening I was out ice skating with a girlfriend, and when I got back home, I heard that my sister, Linda, who was now sixteen years old, had been in a car accident. My dad and brother soon came home from the hospital and said Linda would be okay, but the doctor kept her overnight for observation. Mom had stayed with her.

At 4:00 a.m. I heard voices in the front hallway. It was Mom and Dad with the pastor from our church. Linda had died. How could that be? That only happens to other families, doesn't it? Dad blamed himself for Linda's death. He said if he'd given her the bigger car to drive and the one with seat belts, she'd still be with us. We couldn't talk about Linda's death. We all dealt with our grieving alone.

A year and a half later, we moved to California. I had a good job, lived on my own, and was attending community college. I met Butch, and one year later we were married. Three months after our wedding, Butch was sent to Vietnam for ten months. I lived with his family for six of those months, but then got my own apartment. Living with either set of parents did not work.

In 1973 and 1974, our two sons were born. In 1976, we bought our first home in Mission Viejo. Our new neighborhood had many young families like ourselves, and shortly after we moved in, a pastor and his family moved in nearby. We went to their church, Butch and I were baptized, and the boys were dedicated. I joined the women's neighborhood Bible study, and Butch and I joined the evening couples' Bible study. I was so thankful for this because in dealing with my sons, I would hear the anger in me, just like my mom. I began reading Dr. James Dobson's books on how to parent. The last thing I wanted was to sound like Mom.

As the boys grew, we had them in soccer, basketball, Little League, Indian Guides, and Boy Scouts. I was team mom, PTSA Vice President, Cubmaster, and I made team banners. I found that if I stayed busy, I didn't have to feel. Butch was gone a lot, either working late or having a drink with the guys. We'd talk about his drinking, but it never seemed to change things. When I'd call my mom to talk, she'd invite me over, and after a few drinks, I was fine.

In 1985, after living in our home for nine years, we decided to buy a larger home. I got a job at the new high school that was opening in the fall. We had a speaker at the first meeting I attended who talked about substance abuse on our campuses. He gave us a paper on the characteristics of an alcoholic. I know I turned many shades of red as I read that paper. It hit home. I thought an alcoholic was a skid-row bum. I didn't know it could be someone in my family.

In the fall of 1985, we moved to our new home. I started my new job, and three months later, the boys and I moved out. I started attending another church and found a support group at that church for AA and Al-Anon.

Butch and I were separated only a week when he said he'd go to AA meetings. We did this for three months, he at AA, I at Al-Anon, but then we quit. I figured if he didn't drink

anymore, our problems were solved. As I worked at my new job at the high school, however, low self-esteem started getting the best of me. I was working with people who had bachelor's or master's degrees, and I was feeling less than everyone. I found it very difficult to talk to an authority figure without crying, and I didn't know how to say no when asked if I could do something. I always smiled, looked happy, got along with everyone, and pushed hard to do it all and to do it well. Their approval of me was my self-worth.

In my evaluation with my supervisor that year, she was concerned about my crying and said that it wasn't normal. She suggested that I get professional help. I left thinking, "Oh, I'm not that bad." I read a book that summer on self-image, and in the fall when we were back at school, I told her I was fine.

I started carpooling to meetings with a lady whom I had just started working with. We would talk and listen to a Christian psychologist on the radio, and I started hearing some things that I related to.

In October 1992, I started seeing a Christian counselor whom she had recommended. It was here that I learned about codependency. Besides my weekly meeting with her, I went to codependency workshops and read a book on codependency three times! I was so glad to finally understand myself. My counselor suggested that I join a support group for codependent women and recommended Friday night Celebrate Recovery at Saddleback Church.

On Christmas Eve in 1992, we went to our first service in the tent, and in January, 1993, I came to Celebrate Recovery. I sat in the back of the tent and watched all of the people greeting each other and singing happy songs. I was scared about what was going on with me, felt very alone, and was very angry that I had to do this.

After two months of seeing my counselor, Butch and I began seeing her husband, who

was also an MFCC. At this time my mom was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer and was going through radiation and chemotherapy. She was not doing well.

In June 1993, Ryan graduated from high school, and in August we packed up both boys for college up north. I moved them into their new little house off the college campus and then drove back to Southern California, but I didn't stay. I quit my job, packed all of my personal belongings, and left for Northern California to go to my brother's home. I left friends, my job that I enjoyed, and my recovery program. My marriage wasn't good, and my boys were both gone, so I didn't think I had anything left here. My boss called me up north and said, "Dee, I can't hold your job open for you like I wanted. We're going to have to find a permanent replacement for you." I said, "That's not necessary. I'm coming back." I realized that I had made a big mistake. Once back home, I stayed with my dear friends, who never gave advice, only support. The first Friday night I returned to Celebrate Recovery, I saw Butch there, and he said he'd try again.

Well, I went back to work, moved back home, and started something new at Celebrate Recovery. In September, they were having a writing workshop, a spiritual journal. It would take nine months to complete, going every Friday night and working the 12 Steps in the workbook. This is when I realized that I had *many* of the ACA characteristics. As I worked my 12-Step program, I realized the anger and fears I had, plus the feelings I had been suppressing.

At Step 4, I was working through a lot of anger I had for my mom and the blame I put on her for my problems. There was a lot of hurt and pain during this moral inventory, but I knew that I had come too far to turn around, and I was determined to get better.

As I reached the end of my 12-Step program, I did feel better about myself. I was beginning to express my feelings, not very tactfully at first, but getting in touch with how I felt. I

worked through my fears of authority figures. I can now tell them what I *want* and *need*. I understand my feelings of abandonment now, and it's so good to know I'm not responsible for everything and that it's okay to say no!

Our marriage was still not good, and in the fall of 1994, I filed for divorce. We had been married for twenty-three years. It wasn't what I wanted, but I couldn't hang in there any longer. In my program, I learned that I could only change me, no one else. I had had many years of trying to "fix," "rescue," and "enable," and I was finally getting it—I had to detach.

I was now closer to God and felt a peace that He was in control and He would take care of me. I knew from my program that I only had to take one day at a time. On evening walks I would take my Celebrate Recovery song sheet and sing the songs that made me feel good, and I'd stop to meditate in the park before going home. I'd pray for God's guidance and His will for my life. I felt God's presence, and I knew that I was going to be okay.

In November, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, I put a prayer card in the offering basket and asked the prayer team to please pray for my husband. I felt he was on self-destruct. Three days later, Butch came back to his program.

It is now a year and a half later. In two weeks, we will celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and I believe it's only because of God and His will for our lives. If we had gone on our own wills, we would not be here—together—today.

My spiritual growth came slowly at the beginning. I struggled with "letting go and letting God." I wanted to fix all the defects in my life and in everyone else's, too. My progress is a product of God's help and a Christ-centered recovery program. I've learned that God's guidance is always available. All I need to do is listen, receive, and act without fear.

Psalm 27:1 says "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is

the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?”

Thanks for letting me share.