

Lesson 22

Gratitude

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: We 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

Tonight we are going to focus our attention outward rather than inward. We have taken many steps on our road to recovery. Our first step was to admit that we were (and are) powerless. Our second step led us to choose, once and for all, a power by which to live. We took our third and most important step when we chose to turn our lives and wills over to the only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

As we continue our journey, we grow in our conscious contact with God and He begins to unfold in our lives. And, as we begin to grow in our understanding of Him, we begin to live out the decision we made in Principle 3. We keep walking now, in peace, as we maintain inventories on a regular basis and as we continue to deepen our relationship with Christ. The way we do this according to Principle 7, is to “reserve a daily time with God.” During this time we focus on Him by praying and meditating.

Prayer is talking to God. Meditation is listening to God on a daily basis. When I meditate I don't get into some yoga-type position or murmur, “om, om, om.” I simply focus on and think about God or a certain Scripture verse or maybe even just one or two words. This morning I

spent ten or fifteen minutes just trying to focus on one word: “gratitude.”

I need to meditate every morning, but I don’t. Some mornings my mind wanders and I find it very difficult to concentrate. Those old familiar friends will come back. You know, that old familiar committee of past dysfunction. The committee will try to do everything it can to interrupt my quiet time with God. Through daily working the principles to the best of my ability, however, I’ve learned to shut them up most of the time.

I’ve learned to listen to God, who tells me that I have great worth. And He will say the same to you—if you will listen.

When I start my day with Principle 7 and end it by doing my daily inventory, I have a pretty good day—a reasonably happy day. This is one way I choose to live “one day at a time” and one way I can prevent relapse.

Another way to prevent relapse, especially during the holidays, is by maintaining an attitude of gratitude.

Gratitude

This week, the week before we celebrate Thanksgiving, I suggest that your prayers be focused on your gratitude in four areas of your life: toward God, others, your recovery, and your church. I’m going to ask you to write them down on your “gratitude list.” This is an interactive lesson.

Teacher’s note: Make copies and hand out the “Gratitude List” found in Appendix _____. After you present each of the four areas on the list, pause and give the participants a couple of minutes to complete each of sections.

We are going to take some time now for you to build your gratitude list for this

Thanksgiving.

First, for what are you thankful to *God*? Offer prayers of gratitude to your Creator.

In Philippians 4:6, we're told, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Psalms 107:15 encourages us to "give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and wonderful deeds for men." What wonderful deeds they are! What are at least two areas of your life in which you can see God's work and that you are thankful for this holiday season?

You can reflect on the last eleven months or on what God has done for you this week or even today. Then take a moment to list just a few of the special things for which you are thankful to your Higher Power.

The next area is to list the individuals that God has placed in your life to walk alongside you on your road of recovery. We need to be thankful for *others*.

"Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the word of Christ—the message—have the run of the house" (Colossians 3:15–16, MSG).

Who are you thankful for? Why? Take a moment to list them.

The third area we can be thankful for is our *recovery*.

"As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us" (Hebrews 12:1, GNB).

What are two recent growth areas of your recovery for which you are thankful? Again, list them now.

The fourth and final area to be thankful for is your *church*.

“Enter the Temple gates with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4, GNB).

What are two things for which you are thankful to your church?

Wrap-up

Take your “gratitude list” home with you tonight and put it in a place where you will see it often. It will remind you that you have made progress in your recovery and that you are not alone, that Jesus Christ is always with you.

Using your gratitude list, going to your recovery meetings and making them a priority, getting involved in service in your church are the best way I know to prevent relapse during the holidays.

Let’s close in prayer.

Dear God, help me set aside all the hassles and noise of the world to focus and listen just to You for the next few minutes. Help me get to know You better. Help me to better understand Your plan, Your purpose for my life. Father, help me live within today, seeking Your will and living this day as You would have me.

It is my prayer to have others see me as Yours; not just in my words but more importantly, in my actions. Thank You for Your love, Your grace, Your perfect forgiveness. Thank You for all those You have placed in my life, for my program, my recovery, and my church family. Your will be done, not mine. In Your Son’s name I pray, Amen.

Principle 7b Testimony

My name is Brett and I am a believer in Christ who struggles with issues commonly shared by children of alcoholics and other addicts.

I grew up in a rural community in the heartland of America. My parents were farmers throughout the majority of their adolescent and adult years. As a result, a strong, almost compulsive, work ethic was ingrained in the family. Unfortunately, another component was introduced into this family dynamic as well. I am not sure if initially this component was added to aid in relaxation, to help forget about a multitude of heartaches and setbacks associated with the farm, or to simply be a portion of the social setting after a hard day's work. I do know that the alcohol grew to become a substitute for interaction with the family members, to block intimacy in communication, and to anesthetize the pain and disappointments of life.

Looking back, I believe my dad often had a drink to break away from the perfectionism and performance issues that nagged at him as a result of growing up as the youngest child in a single-parent home with his father and four sisters. Even though I only spent my first four years on the farm, the behavior from that environment continued to manifest itself in our next residence. Oftentimes, when people hear the term "alcoholic" they think of a person who misses work and is passed out with a brown bag in his or her hand. On the contrary, my alcoholic parent was quite functional, never missed work, and was very financially responsible.

The primary issue was that Dad would either check out emotionally or become easily agitated when he would drink. I can clearly remember the sound of Dad's opening the refrigerator door in the basement, knowing that the next action would be the consumption of a shot or two of whiskey, directly off the bottle, followed by a beer. The audible cues signaled that it was time to give Dad his space—and plenty of it—to avoid conflict at any cost and to keep him happy. The result would translate into what I thought was a normal evening. Mom made every effort to run interference and to help avoid conflict. At the same time, however, she enabled Dad's behavior.

As the years passed, I did everything I knew to please others, avoid conflict, and excel to receive recognition. I was a member of many clubs in high school and college, received honors, awards, grades, and so forth, but I was never content. This performance-oriented behavior continued into my professional life as my career took off. However, the motivation for my success was not healthy. I was still trying to continue to please an unpleaseable parent even beyond the years of his life on earth.

During my years of scholastic and professional success, I egotistically took all the credit. It never crossed my mind that all of my talents, health, capabilities, and so forth were a gift from God. I did not realize they were a gift until I began to abuse and, to a degree, lose them. You see, even though work and school came easily, I always, always struggled with relationships.

During my second marriage, I was having a very difficult time with my stepdaughter. I was not sensitive to her needs, nor did I provide time for her. I visited a therapist and came to understand the issues were tied to my background as an ACA.

Five years of therapy helped my understanding academically, but in the deepest parts of my soul I knew something was missing ... but I couldn't understand what. About that same time my wife, Cindi, suggested that we attend Saddleback Easter services at Trabuco Hills High School. Reluctantly, I agreed and continued to visit for the next two months. At the end of each service I would argue with Cindi about the message and its content. I was not about to succumb to admitting that I needed God. I was convinced I could handle anything the world could dole out. Meanwhile, my life went into a tailspin. I could no longer juggle the spinning plates; my stepparenting skills failed, I had pneumonia for three months, we were pinched financially, and I was stressed out about my job.

During a Sunday service about this time a new pastor was introduced who was leading a

recovery ministry. At that moment I was convicted even deeper by God that I had been on the wrong path. I met John Baker and started my next five years with Celebrate Recovery. This time Christ was my Higher Power. I worked the steps as diligently, and if the truth be known, as compulsively as my little ACA legs would carry me. Seriously though, as I worked the steps, layers of hidden issues slowly began to be peeled back to reveal more to me. As I proceeded through the steps I reached Step 11, the step that reads, “We 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.” The 11th step was the fuel I needed to accept two things. First, that God would provide the peace and means to guide me and help me accept that my recovery is a lifelong process; and secondly, that He would always be there for me to talk to, to listen to, to be loved by, and to love back. All of these concepts were difficult for me because all of my life I was trying to *earn* things—approval, recognition, trust, forgiveness, and so forth. This step provided all of those things and more as long as I was obedient to have conscious contact with God.

As I took spiritual maturity classes at Saddleback, I came to understand that a daily quiet time was important if I was to grow in my relationship with my Higher Power, Jesus Christ. By reading God’s Word and spending time in prayer, my intimacy with and understanding of His will became more clear. I began to claim that I am His child, that He loves me unconditionally, that I am forgiven, and that I cannot earn His love.

Working Step 11 also has helped me to develop patience, because God is teaching me to be still and listen, to wait on Him and to trust that He will provide *all* my needs. He helps me to know that I need to let go of my will and to seek out His will—that He is in control and I’m not. What a relief! In the quiet, still moments He helps me see all the things that have happened in my

life to bring me to this moment today with you. I never knew He was so near and that I was so far away until I began to work the 11th step. It is my prayer that each of you will continue with this step that is challenged by all of the barking dogs, doorbells, errands, wandering thoughts, and diversions that the world places in our way. Throughout this step I have come to claim Philippians 4:13 (NCV) as my life verse: "I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength." May you also allow Him to strengthen you.