

## Lesson 4

### Sanity

**Principle 2:** Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.

“Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

**Step 2:** We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

### Introduction

We spent our first month on Principle 1. We finally were able to face our denial and admit that we are powerless to control our tendency to do the wrong thing and that our lives had become unmanageable—out of control!

Now what do we need to do? How and where do we get the control? The answer is to take the second step on our journey of recovery.

The second step tells us that we have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. “Wait a minute!” you’re saying. “I spent an entire month hearing that to begin my recovery I had to face and admit my denial. Now you’re telling me that I must be crazy? That I need to be restored to sanity? Give me a break!”

No, Step 2 isn’t saying that you’re crazy. Let me try to explain what the word “sanity” means in this step.

As a result of admitting our powerlessness in Principle 1, we can move from chaos to hope in Principle 2. We talked about that in our last teaching session. Hope comes when we

believe that a power greater than ourselves, our Higher Power, Jesus Christ, can and will restore us! Jesus can provide that power where we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors. He alone can restore order and meaning to our lives. He alone can restore us to sanity.

## **Sanity**

*Insanity* has been defined as “doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result each time.”

*Sanity* has been defined as “wholeness of mind; making decisions based on the truth.”

Jesus is the only Higher Power who offers the truth, the power, the way, and the life.

The following acrostic, using the word *sanity*, shows some of the gifts we receive when we believe that our true Higher Power, Jesus Christ has the power and will restore us to

SANITY!

**S**trength

**A**cceptance

**N**ew Life

**I**ntegrity

**T**rust

**Y**our Higher Power

The first letter is *S*, which stands for STRENGTH.

When we accept Jesus as our Higher Power, we receive strength to face the fears that, in the past, have caused us to fight, flee, or freeze. Now we can say, “God is our refuge and

strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” (Psalm 46:1) and “My mind and my body may grow weak, but God is my strength; he is all I ever need” (Psalm 73:26, GNB).

Relying on our own power, our own strength is what got us here in the first place. We believed we didn’t need God’s help, strength, or power. It’s almost like we were disconnected from our true power source—God!

Choosing to allow my life to finally run on God’s power—not my own limited power, weakness, helplessness, or sense of inferiority—has turned out to be my greatest strength. God came in where my helplessness began. And He will do the same for you!

The next letter, *A*, stands for ACCEPTANCE.

Romans 15:7 (GNB) says, “Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you.”

When we take Step 2, we learn to have realistic expectations of ourselves and others. We learn not to relate to others in the same old way, expecting a different response or result than they have given us time and time again. We begin to find the sanity we have been searching for. We remember to pray and ask God “to give us the courage to change the things we can and to accept the things we cannot change.”

As our faith grows and we get to know our Higher Power better, it becomes easier for us to accept others as they really are, *not as we would have them be!*

With acceptance, however, comes responsibility. We stop placing all the blame on others for our past actions and hurts.

The next letter, *N*, stands for NEW life.

In the pit of our hurts, habits, and hang-ups, we were at our very bottom. We know the

feelings expressed in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9 (TLB): “We were really crushed and overwhelmed, and feared we would never live through it. We felt we were doomed to die and saw how powerless we were to help ourselves; but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God.”

The verse goes on to say, “God ... alone could save us ... and we expect him to do it again and again.”

The penalty for our sins was paid in full by Jesus on the cross. The hope of a new life is freedom from our bondage! “When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TLB).

The next benefit of this step is the *I* in sanity: INTEGRITY.

We gain integrity as we begin to follow through on our promises. Others start trusting what we say. The apostle John placed great value on integrity: “Nothing gives me greater joy than to hear that my children are following the way of truth” (3 John 4, NCV).

Remember, a half-truth is a whole lie, and a lie is the result of weakness and fear. Truth fears nothing—nothing but concealment! The truth often hurts. But it’s the lie that leaves the scars.

A man or woman of integrity and courage is not afraid to tell the truth. And that courage comes from a power greater than ourselves—Jesus Christ, the way, the TRUTH, and the life.

The *T* in sanity stands for TRUST.

As we work Step 2, we begin to trust in our relationships with others and our Higher Power. “It is dangerous to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the Lord, you are safe” (Proverbs 29:25, GNB).

As we “let go and let God” and admit that our lives are unmanageable and we are

powerless do anything about it, we learn to trust ourselves and others. We begin to make real friends in recovery, in our groups, at the Solid Rock Cafe, and in church. These are not the mere acquaintances and the fair-weather friends we knew while we were active in our addictions and compulsions. In recovery you can find real friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, to walk beside you on your journey through the principles—friends whom you can trust, with whom you can share, with whom you can grow in Christ.

The last letter in our acrostic this evening is *Y*: YOUR Higher Power, Jesus Christ, loves you just the way you are! “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

No matter what comes your way, together you and God can handle it! “And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out” (1 Corinthians 10:13). “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens” (Psalm 68:19).

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Higher Power and Savior, we are not only guaranteed eternal life, but we also have God’s protection in time of trials. Nahum 1:7 says, “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”

## **Wrap-up**

Recovery is a daily program, and we need a power greater than ourselves—a Higher Power who will provide us with the strength, acceptance, new life, integrity, and trust to allow us to make sane decisions based on His truth!

And if you complete the next principle, Principle 3, your future will be blessed and secure! Matthew 6:34 (TLB) says, “So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.”

Let's close in prayer.

*Dear God, I have tried to "fix" and "control" my life's hurts, hang-ups, or habits all by myself. I admit that, by myself, I am powerless to change. I need to begin to believe and receive Your power to help me recover. You loved me enough to send Your Son to the cross to die for my sins. Help me be open to the hope that I can only find in Him. Please help me to start living my life one day at a time. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

## **Principle 2 Testimony**

Hi, my name is Judy, an adult child of an alcoholic (ACA). I'm a Christian struggling with the effects of being raised in chaos. I'm the oldest child of a career Air Force officer, so I learned at a very young age not to become attached to anything, because good-byes hurt too much. I started building walls to keep others out.

I dearly loved my father, but he spent most of my childhood away from home, leaving my siblings and me in the care of a mother who raged and criticized. I grew up believing there was something wrong with me, not my family. Try as I would, I could never do anything to please my mother. Bigger and thicker walls went up.

My sister Jeri was born a year and a day after me. From the beginning, I felt in competition with my sister. My mother paired us one against the other. If Jeri and I did something wrong, I got punished because I was the oldest and should have known better. If Jeri did something wrong, I still got punished because I was older and should have kept her out of trouble. Talk about growing a codependent! If I cried, I was sent to my room and told not to come out until I had a smile on my face. So, I learned to wear a mask and never reveal the hurt inside.

I was super responsible by the time I was five; I had to be to survive. I learned never to ask for help, and I learned how to anticipate my mother's every mood. I even felt a duty to protect my younger brother and sisters from my mother's rage and to comfort them. I also had to deal with my guilt when I failed. But above all, we had to appear perfect to the outside world. My mother's favorite line when we were caught doing something wrong was "What will other people think?"

By the time I reached junior high, I was an angry young girl. But, of course, since proper young ladies do not get angry—especially in my mother's house—I learned to cry instead. My punishment now for crying was to write one hundred times "God helps those who help themselves." Her idea was to cure a crybaby, but I came away with the impression that God only helps perfect people, and I knew that wasn't me.

I didn't know much about God growing up; church was hit-and-miss in my family. Church attendance was about image rather than worship. We did say grace before dinner, but it was more a routine than a prayer. I remember singing "Jesus Loves Me" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children," but the words were just words to a song; they meant nothing to me. So by the time I hit high school my impression of God was a distant person who lived in heaven, with a Son, Jesus, who helped perfect people when He wasn't too busy.

When I was in the eighth grade, my dad was sent to Vietnam. That was the worst year of my life, because the one person who loved me left. And Daddy never came back. Oh, *Dad* returned a year later, but he had developed a severe alcohol problem. He was home, but he withdrew from the whole family. I took the rejection hard. I kept trying to figure out what I did wrong. My home life became a crazy cycle: the more my dad drank, the more my mother raged; and the more she raged, the more he drank.

When I was sixteen I discovered boys. I found out if you slept with them, they would tell you, “I love you” and hold you, and just for a while, that terrible ache inside would go away. By the time I reached my junior year, I was a straight-A student with a full-blown reputation.

That same year I found out my parents had “had” to get married because my mother was pregnant with me. No wonder my mother hated me and my dad drank so much, I thought, certain it was my fault. Not too much longer after that everything came to a head. My family life, the pressure to be perfect, and my sexual behavior was too much for me to handle and I tried to commit suicide. Praise God I wasn’t perfect at that, but from then on I just went through the motions of living. I had learned my lessons well: don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel. I created a fantasy based on magical thinking and “if onlys” to replace the reality of broken promises and dreams.

The summer before my senior year, I went to a church revival with a schoolmate and accepted Christ as my Savior. At least, I went forward and prayed the prayer because everyone else did. I was even baptized. I truly did believe things would change. They had to change! When my mother found out what I did, she exploded. She said I was going to hell for what I did. I was already baptized as a baby and what I did was unforgivable. Now I was convinced God would never help me.

But then Chris came into my life and I didn’t need God. It didn’t matter that he dated my sister before me. I was determined to succeed where my sister had failed.

But the star athlete had a slight character flaw: a violent temper. I was thrown across a classroom one day into a pile of desks. I went to the office for help but was told I shouldn’t make up stories about decent people. I learned an important rule that day: people will believe an image over the truth.



I stayed with Chris, even though he beat me up two more times before graduation. After all, I believed it was my fault and if I could just be perfect, he wouldn't hit me anymore. Chris went to West Point and I went to William and Mary and after graduation we got married. On our wedding night he beat me severely because I wasn't a virgin. Frightened and alone I withdrew further into my shell. I couldn't go home to say I was wrong; what was left of my pride wouldn't let me. So I chose to step into the cycle most battered women exist in: if I try hard enough, then this insanity will stop. I took all responsibility for the violence in my marriage. My entire existence focused on pleasing Chris, who became my god.

As Chris's use of marijuana and alcohol increased, so did the violence. And it didn't stop at the verbal and physical level, but escalated to sexual abuse as well. I did try to escape once when my son, Jeff, was six months old (he's almost eighteen now). Chris came home and caught me trying to leave and I received the worst beating ever. As he beat my head into a wall with his hands around my throat, he said if I ever tried to leave again, no one would ever find me. Then he laughed and said, "Go ahead and tell. No one will ever believe you. I'm the perfect officer and a West Point grad. They will think you're crazy." So, I never left and I never told. I hid my bruises and hid my soul. I truly began to believe I was insane and God was punishing me for every guy I slept with. I believed I deserved what I was getting and, when I began to acknowledge that Chris was being unfaithful, it confirmed that I was worthless and unlovable. But, despite all the chaos—the alcohol, drugs, affairs, and violence—we were the perfect couple to the outside world. I had learned that image was everything, and I used every ounce of energy preserving it.

Our oldest son, Jeff, wasn't immune to the violence. He has memories of me being hit. Most of his memories, though, are the sounds of my pain and tears. He would hear the violence

in the night and then wake to see Mommy's smiling face the next morning, looking as if nothing had happened. I'll be honest with you, I didn't know my son had all these memories. When Jeff was sixteen he was hospitalized for depression and suicide threats. The doctor asked me about Jeff's memories for confirmation. I thought he had been asleep; I thought I had somehow protected him. For his entire life, that was my focus: to love him with all my heart and protect him at all costs from the violence. All my love and protection helped contribute to the chaos in Jeff's life, though. I would inspect his room to make sure it was perfect. I would redo assignments and projects to make sure they were perfect. I made sure everything in our lives was up to Chris's standards. My motives were loving, but I taught my son, through my actions, that he could do nothing right.

In September of 1989, Jeff was diagnosed with diabetes. That same month, Chris's secretary was fired for being unprofessional when Chris broke off their affair to be with someone else in his company. It was too much for me to handle, and I actually got up the courage to ask Chris to leave. For once, things switched and I became powerful: he begged me not to kick him out. I know now he was desperate to preserve his image at the office, but at the time I thought he loved me and was sincere about recommitting. In January of 1990, Justin was conceived and I was truly happy for the first time in my life. It lasted for six months. During my sixth month of pregnancy, I found out Chris was involved with someone else. Because I was pregnant, he didn't hit me, but he raged until I was so upset I began having labor pains. Then he beat up Jeff. There I was again in the bottom of that familiar dark hold of chaos, only I wasn't alone; I'd brought the most precious things in the world with me—my boys.

So, I brought them into my world of isolation. We hid from the outside world and shut Chris out completely. I taught Jeff well how to shut down emotionally, to walk on eggshells, and

not to trust or talk. He also learned to keep the image up at all cost. We were a strong partnership, mother and son; we had to be to survive. And into this mess, Justin joined us. He was everyone's focus because with Justin you could forget the chaos and pain for a while and hold pure innocence.

When Justin was a year old, I heard about ACA. It took six months before I could get up the courage to go to a meeting. I remember a lot about that first meeting because it was so powerful. I walked in and was warmly welcomed; I didn't know how hungry I was for a smile. I heard the problem and solution read and realized this was where I belonged. Of course, I was under the impression that after a few quick meetings I would be cured. When people began sharing and I heard how long some of them had been in recovery, the hope of a quick fix vanished. What I remember most were the steps of recovery. And Step 2, "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." I decided to give God another chance—and that's all He needed to start working. I just had to believe a little.

As I got stronger, I confronted Chris with his affairs. I asked him to give up his current friend and go to counseling with me. We had sixteen years of marriage and two beautiful boys, and I had a willing heart to try for all our sakes. Chris did not and on April 21, 1992, he left the family for good. God has been working powerfully in my life since then. That first year, I discovered Saddleback through an old friend who just happened to call after Chris left. The first sermon I heard from Pastor Rick was "Isn't Life Fair?" I've been learning and growing through Saddleback since then. I found a wonderful therapist and survived the divorce process. I feel like I've been on God's fast track since I rededicated my life to Him. He brought me to Celebrate and I became an ACA group leader in February 1993. I began and graduated from a master's program in counseling psychology. I'm currently an MFCC intern with Lutheran Social Services. Life has

not been perfect; it's been a long and difficult process of personal and family recovery.

Children are not immune to family violence, they learn from it. And last year, Jeff stepped into repeating the cycle. He threatened his girlfriend and she took out a restraining order on him. One day he walked by the store where she worked and landed in juvenile hall for two weeks. He learned well from his dad, and he thought he was immune from consequences. Praise God, Jeff's getting object lessons early in life; the consequences have been swift and hard. But he's learning—slowly—to undo the lessons of the past.

Each step of the way, God takes me to deeper levels of my fears and pains, helps me face them, and cleans out the wounds. He gifted me with the most wonderful accountability partner, who's been there to support and love me and let me be me. God gave me an ACA family where I get the nurturing and support I didn't get from my own family. They also provided a safe place where I could take off my mask and cry out my pain. He provided godly men in my life so I could learn all men are not jerks, and you can get safe hugs in a safe place with people who love you just because you're you. God provided an abundance for me because He knew the greatest storm of my life was still ahead—the one I am in the midst of now. I can look back over the last four years and see how He has prepared me for this storm. I've got a good strong boat, and He made sure I believed He would never leave or abandon me.

On Mother's Day last year, after he came home from a visit with his stepmother and dad, my younger son, Justin, disclosed that his dad had mistreated him. I panicked for a second but then went straight to God for His guidance. I've been through enough storms to know not to try and row the boat by myself. God led us to counseling which, in turn, led me to the current storm I'm churning in. Right now it appears to me as if all doors have been closed. Chris's image appears to be a powerful influence on everyone who speaks with him. There are times I feel I

have already lost this case.

But, into my fears, God shined a candle. On January 31, at midweek service, Pastor Tom spoke about impossible situations. How God loves impossible situations because He uses them to stretch our faith, strengthen our hope, and to show His incredible love for us. My ACA group knows how I have been struggling with my faith and hope these past months. They know how I am fighting the magical thinking and broken promises of my youth in order to put total trust in God. He didn't lead me here to watch me fall now. People will do that to you. GOD DOESN'T! For me to stand before you today is a mighty leap of faith. I'd rather stay in the safety behind my walls and trust God there to help me work through my doubts and fears. When I was asked to do my testimony, I wanted to do Step 3. Actually, I wanted to wait until my storm was over and then share with you what God had done after the fact. But I was encouraged to share my hope and I realized what God was asking me to do. It's one thing to believe in your heart that God will deliver you, it's a bigger step of faith to say to those you trust, "I expect a miracle." I've been pushed out from behind the safety of my walls to proclaim my hope: my God is a God of impossible situations and I *do* expect a miracle. Romans 5:3–5 says, "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

As a friend always asks me when I start to get discouraged, "Judy Lynn, how big is your God?" He's big enough to free me from my fears of Chris, to tell the secrets of the past to, and to trust His light to shine on the truth and crush the false images. He knew the battle was coming. He prepared me for it, and He's providing His abundance during it. I do believe a power greater than myself can restore my family to sanity. My name is Judy, and I am overcoming the chaos of my

past through Jesus Christ. Thanks for letting me share.