

PATH OF LIFE

*You will make known to me the **path of life**; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.*

Psalm 16:11

12 Step Recovery Program

Written by Greg Grebe
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Introduction

This is not a program for reformation. This is a 12 step program that has a goal of “transformation”. Transformation is more than stopping a bad habit. Transformation is changing the character or nature of a person. Like changing from a caterpillar to a butterfly. *Romans 12:1-2*

This is a 12 step program. Other programs can help people stop drinking. The person may be reformed.

The definition of “reform” is: “to make better by stopping abuses” or “to cause a person to behave better”.

Jesus refers to being “born again”, in *John 3:7: you must be born again*. The same thought is in *2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, **the new has come!***

This program of transformation assumes you believe (or will come to know) a few basic facts. They include:

- 1) The God of the Bible is real. *Romans 1:20: For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

- 2) Scripture is inspired by God. *2 Timothy 3:16: All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.*
- 3) The Word of God performs a work in those that believe. *1 Thessalonians 2:13: And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.(NIV)*
- 4) God is omnipresent. He is here with you now. *Psalms 139:7-8: Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*
- 5) God loves you. He desires a relationship with you. *John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- 6) We can know the will of God by reading His word. *Romans 12:2: Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.*
- 7) The good news, “the gospel”, can be summarized as: Jesus died for our sins and arose from the dead. *1 Corinthians 15: 1-8.*
- 8) After Jesus was raised from the dead the Holy Spirit was given to followers of Christ. *John 14; John 16; Acts 2.*

- 9) The Holy Spirit will disclose (reveal) things to us from God the Father and Jesus Christ. *John 16:13: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."*
- 10) Jesus said: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, ..." *John 6:44.*

It is a fact that God loves you. Stop for a moment. Do you think you might be here because God wanted you here? Look back over the events of the last several days or weeks. Has God been drawing you? Maybe your God is speaking to you? What has He been saying? How did you get here?

Starting today, make it a practice to ask yourselves: "Is God revealing His will for me through my circumstances?" "What has God been trying to say to me?" Ask God directly: "What is it you want me to do?" Then listen.

God does speak from His Word, the Bible. You may find that God speaks to you in other ways. But, He will always be consistent with His Word. When you hear from God, and He lets you know what you should do, you need to respond in obedience. That is how He will transform you. If you fail to respond what God is saying to you, acknowledge that to Him, ask for forgiveness, and respond the next time in obedience. He

wants a relationship with you. It will take time to recognize His voice, and recognize when He is speaking to you. Don't give up. He will not give up on you.

A Word of Caution

Most of us are familiar with following a recipe in a cookbook, or perhaps reading the assembly sheet on a new tool.

In one way this class is similar. These steps are meant to help.

But, this class is also different. You cannot have this life without God giving it to you.

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

Romans 8:11

Life in Christ cannot be produced by human effort without the love of God.

Second, to the extent you do not succeed it is probably related to a failure to yield or surrender to God.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30

Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Transformation requires that you surrender or yield to God’s work in you. It is done in relationship with God, not solo. *Philippians 2:12, 13.*

STEP ONE..... CHOOSE LIFE

Deuteronomy 30:19

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.

Right now do you feel you have options? Or, does it seem like you are in a rut and can't get out?

Do you feel that somehow your life should be going better? But, you have tried all kinds of things and none have worked? Or perhaps you are one step away from a disaster.

You do have choices right now. You might not even believe you have options. But you do.

The fact is that God gives us choices. One clear example of this is found in the book of Deuteronomy. We are told in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 that if we obey the Lord our God that the Lord your God will bless you.

On the other hand, if we disobey the Lord then curses shall come upon us and overtake us, Deuteronomy 28:15-68. God is clear on this. You have a choice.

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

God wants us to choose life. The life God is talking about is more than just being alive.

It is an abundant life. *John 10:10: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

It is a life that bears much fruit. *John 15:8: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”*

It can be a life of peace and thankfulness. *Colossians 3:15: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.*

God loves us so much that he offers this life in Him as a gift. *Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

He wants us to have it. But, God will not force anyone to accept His gift of life. We are free to choose.

While God allows us freedom to choose, some of our choices may be bad for us.

There are two ways to go through life: your way or God’s way.

This is what the Bible says about your way:

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Proverbs 14:12

This is what Scripture says about the path God has for you:

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

Psalm 16:11

Are you really living? Do you have joy? Or, have you been making your own choices that have been killing you. You know what I mean. Choices that are bad for you. If you keep doing what you are doing, you are going to end up hurt or dead. Or, if you keep doing what you are doing, people are going to leave you. Or, if you keep doing what you are doing, life will get more and more confusing and more and more empty.

It is like they say, insanity is where you keep doing what you have been doing and expect a different result.

The choices you are making may be killing you. Today, next week, next month? You do not want to believe or accept that this may all turn out really bad. You work hard so you think you should be able to have that thing you want. Or, perhaps you have put up with this or suffered that. Now people want you to give up something you want? You think: no way! It may feel like you need it. You may believe you deserve it. Alcohol? Prescriptions? Pornography? Gambling? Adultery? Worse? Have you really found life there?

Deep down you know your choices are bad for you. You know they are. But you lie to yourself. You can see how other people have messed up. But you are different. You can handle your bad/risky choices. It won't be you who loses your job, your license, your family, your reputation, or your wife (or husband). Or even your life. You tell yourself, somehow you will be able to juggle all these things and make it work. That bad stuff won't happen to you. On the other hand, maybe it will. Maybe it has.

But even if you don't die physically, you may find yourself not really living. Your life is stalled and probably getting worse. Dying inside and pushing the ones that love you away. You are not producing any fruit. You are going in circles.

Really, what joy or happiness is coming from what you are doing? You hurt. Perhaps you are hurting others. Perhaps even death seems like an option.

There is another way. There is another choice. The choice of life. This life is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

“that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.”

Romans 10:9

Stop for a moment. Think about your life. Are you really finding joy? Are you missing something? What are you searching for? What brought you here?

So, what is your decision? Which one are you going to choose?

- I do not want to change. I prefer staying with what I know.
- I will do nothing because I am afraid I will lose all my friends.
- I really think I can handle this. I will try harder.
- I want to do it my way.
- I do not want to choose life because _____
_____.
- I have had enough of my way. I've decided that I want to quit hurting myself and hurting others. I have decided to choose life in Christ.

CHOOSE LIFE

STEP TWO..... CRY OUT TO THE LORD

Psalm 107:6, 13, 19, 28

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses.

We all have problems. Sometimes our difficulties are of our own making. How do you try to solve your problems? On your own? How has that been working for you? Even if you want to control your life, how far are you going to go on your own?

Over and over some of us try to make things work. We adjust this or that. We tell others we will be different. We tell ourselves things will change. We tell ourselves we can control our life. We are strong and know just what we need to do. Rarely do we find things are really getting better. It may seem like it. But, pretty soon the same stuff starts happening again and again. It seems like we are doomed to keep repeating the stuff that hurts us, hurts others, hurts the ones we love. The fact is, without help, we can expect to keep experiencing the same things.

Without help, we are without hope.

Scripture tells us:

“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Most of us realize that other people can help us. Parents, spouses, teachers, mentors and friends may all help at one time or another. For

example, when we are sick, or need to move furniture, or to help explain something we want to learn. Do you remember the commercial where hundreds of people follow the phone to provide support/help?

More than all of the help we might get from others, we have direct access to the unlimited help available from God.

*“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;
From where shall my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made the heaven and earth.
He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.”*

Psalms 121:1-3

Can you imagine? The all powerful, Creator God, will help you?

For many people it is hard to ask for help. It is a sign that we are weak, perhaps incompetent, or fearful. We do not want to risk people finding out that we are not capable of doing things by ourselves. But, God wants to help us. God also wants us to ask for help. When we ask God to help, we are telling Him that He is important to us and we trust Him. There is help for you -- you just need to ask God for help. He wants a relationship with you.

Are you miserable? Do you find yourself in the chains of addictions, habits and poor choices? Do you feel you are repeating the same problem, situation, sadness, or fight, over and over again?

Psalm 107:10-11 says: “There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High.”

Notice that Scripture says the misery and chains came from rebellion against God's counsel. The rebellion is compared to dwelling, or living, in darkness. Can you imagine what it would be like to live in darkness? You may not know where you are. You certainly will have trouble finding your way. You will not see dangers. You stumble around lost. How do you find your way?

Psalm 107 describes the problem and then provides the solution. In verse 13-14 we find the following words: *Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands apart.*

Most of us like to believe that we can handle things on our own. We start out as toddlers telling our parents we can do things. We tie our own shoe and say, "I can do it!" As we get older, we take pride in being independent. We are growing up. We are self-sufficient. We are competent. We are wise and strong. We can do it! Or, at least we like to think we can.

God is ready to help. But, we have to ask.

As Jesus said in *Matthew 7:7*: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Mark 10:46-52: There was a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. As Jesus came into Jericho Bartimaeus cried out: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Many were telling him to be quiet. But Bartimaeus kept crying out all the more. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped. Jesus asked the blind man to be called to Him. Jesus knew what the blind man needed. Even so, Jesus asked: "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said: "Rabboni, I want to regain my

sight!” *And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. Mark 10:52. (NKJV)*

Bartimaeus needed help. He asked for the thing he needed. Jesus healed him.

Do you have a pride issue? Are you afraid to ask for help? Are you still trying to prove yourself? You might not like asking for help because you are afraid to involve other people. Or, you may be afraid that someone may have an opinion about what you are doing and how you are doing it. You would rather be left alone so you can decide for yourself how to live.

The choice is yours. You can continue to make the choices you’ve been making. But, if your past choices have resulted in misery and unhappiness then you could ask for help.

There is help. The One who has all power and wisdom. *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1.* If you want relief from misery and chains of your choices then you should cry out to the Lord and he will answer you. If you want to enjoy all you are meant to enjoy then you cry out to the Lord and he will answer you. He wants a relationship with you...cry out to the Lord!

Where are you?

- I want to do this on my own.
- I do not think anyone can help me.
- I am too proud to ask for help.
- I will not cry out to God because _____

- I am ready. I need help. I will ask God for his help.

CRY OUT TO THE LORD

1 Chronicles 16:7-36

STEP THREE WALK IN THE LIGHT

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Are you hiding things? What have you done in the last month (or last week) that you hid? Did you stash something in a drawer? Did you put something in the trash and cover it up? Did you grab the mail first? Maybe you locked your computer for your “privacy”. Do you sneak a drink?

Remember the times you were caught? You just managed to prove you were not trustworthy. You had a secret side. Not real great for relationships. How can people trust you when you are afraid to tell them who you are?

We should think about why we covered things up in the first place. We are told in Scripture that some people love the darkness. Why? In *John 3:19-20* it says that people love the darkness because their deeds were evil. And people do not come into the light because their deeds would be exposed.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. John 3:19-20. (NIV)

In other words, people stay in the dark because they are hiding what they are doing. Maybe you spend money on something you should not. Or perhaps you hide your bottle, or your stash or that magazine. We do not want people to know what we do.

So, we tell ourselves lots of things: “It is none of their business.” “We can handle this.” “We have earned the right to make our own choices.” “Those people around us are not reasonable.”

We can come up with all sorts of excuses and explanations. But, Scripture says we are hiding what we are doing because we really know what we are doing is wrong and we do not want to be exposed, or caught.

If some people find out what we are doing then they will criticize us. Others may try to correct us. Or, it may start an argument. (And, it may be hard to defend our side of the argument. After all, we are hiding the truth.)

So, we pretend we are someone we are not. We cannot let people know who we really are. We want people to treat us with respect and kindness. But, we believe if they really knew who we were (and what we had done) they would not respect us and they would not be kind. So we pretend. We hide who we are. We stay in the darkness.

If we are honest with ourselves we know we are not being fair or reasonable. We want people to respect us when we are not acting respectable. We want our marriages to work well when we are doing things to hurt the marriage. We want people to support us when we think they would not support us if they knew who we really were. So we lie. We cover up. Above everything, we want to continue doing what we have been doing.

We want what we want. That is our priority. Nobody and nothing will stand in our way. We will run over them or sneak around them. We lie by not offering the truth. When confronted, we look the other person in the eye and tell them anything but the truth. Most of us have become liars.

Sometimes our goal is to get more than we deserve. The only way we can make this work is to hide who we really are and what we are really doing.

What a mess. What happens when people find out? Whatever respect or love we might have experienced has been jeopardized. Sometimes we never recover. People do not trust us because we have shown ourselves to be dishonest. We are not trustworthy. What we pretend we are, we are not.

Remember the saying “out of sight-out of mind.” It is very similar to “sweeping things under the rug.” The concept is the same. If we do not see something then we can pretend it does not exist. Then we do not have to deal with it.

When we take our dirt and hide it under the rug we are avoiding reality. The dirt stays. It does not go away. We have not dealt with it. Just because our stuff is kept in the dark does not mean it went away. It is still there. In the darkness.

Would you like to deal with that stuff? The dirt. The garbage. The stuff that shames us. Can you imagine what it would be like to be free from that?

The first thing we must do is to bring things into the light. The danger here is that we only bring a little into the light. The big stuff is still

“under the rug” and not being addressed. Or, just as bad, we put a spin on things so we do not look so bad. We must tell the truth. We need to quit pretending. If we have a problem we face it head on. We tell the truth about it. If we are out of control because of our problem we should not deny, minimize, or excuse. Tell it like it is.

Have you been lying to someone? Stop. Quit.

Is there something you need to confess? How long will you wait? Stop, think about it. Have you been wrong? Tell God. Tell the person you hurt. Apologize. Then, be different.

Even if you are only 5% of the problem. Accept responsibility for your part. Let God deal with the other person. You deal with your part.

So we are told to practice the truth. *John 3:21: But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.* (NIV) When we practice the truth we come into the light.

When we read the Bible we can start to see things about ourselves. On our own we are blind. But, Jesus Christ can restore our sight. *John 9:25: "...one thing I do know, that, though I was blind, now I see."*

When we can see, we have a better chance of staying on the path. *Psalms 119:105 says "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path."*

The goal here is to agree with God about who we are and where we are. We need His help to see ourselves. He helps us through His Word, the Holy Spirit and prayer.

Then we just speak truth. God wanted us to have freedom. There is freedom in the truth.

Can you imagine a life where you are not hiding things? A life where you can stop worrying about getting caught? Where your life is an open book. Where your spouse, or kids, or friends, or employer can look anywhere and the only thing they are going to find is things that should be there. No secret hiding places, no embarrassing internet sites, and no worries about someone finding out who you really are.

Sometimes we may wrongly think that we must be perfect (or near perfect) to be loved and respected. If that were true, nobody could be loved or respected. So, if we cannot be perfect, what can we be? **We can be known.** We can be honest about who we are. We can admit our mistakes. We can stop hiding. When we do these things we become trustworthy because we are not trying to fool others. We are not being deceitful. You can trust that I am what I appear to be. **I am known by you.** You accept me for what I am. Good and bad.

Since I do *not* have to be perfect, I do *not* have to pretend. Because I am *not* pretending, **I am practicing the truth.** I am loving the light. I am not loving the darkness.

“But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

1 John 1:7

If you have been pretending to be someone you are not, you have been loving the darkness. Today is the day to love the light.

- You do not understand, my _____ would leave me.
- I am too ashamed.
- I cannot. I want to keep doing what I have been doing.
- Things are not that bad.
- This is more than I can do because _____

- I am ready. I am scared, but, I want to live differently.

WALK IN THE LIGHT

Proverbs 6:23

STEP FOUR..... CHOOSE TRUTH

Psalm 15:1-2

*O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?
He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth
in his heart.*

This step **seems** obvious. Some of us view ourselves as truthful. Well, maybe not perfectly truthful, but compared to others we do pretty well.

Some of us might be insulted if someone questioned our truthfulness. But, if we stop and think about it we may have to conclude we are not the honest person we think we are.

Have you stopped and considered whether you are accurate? Do you exaggerate? Do you mislead by failing to disclose? When asked a direct question about alcohol, or drugs, or porn, or (your sin problem) do you lie? Do you fudge? Do you change the subject? Do you minimize? Do you try to make things look better than they are?

When was the last time someone questioned your honesty? Were you angry? The more important question is whether you were telling the truth at the time. Or, maybe the accusation was true and it hurt. Sometimes we think we have to defend ourselves, even if we have not been truthful.

Scripture says we don't even know ourselves. *Jeremiah 17:9 says: "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick."*

In other words, we don't even know how deceitful we are. We fool ourselves.

We could try to evaluate everything we say to make sure we are telling the truth. That is a good start. But, even the best of us would stumble. To choose the truth sounds almost impossible. How can we do it? We have not done it perfectly so far.

The Bible says we must lay aside falsehood. *Ephesians 4:25: Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*

Falsehood does not work. It does not give us the result we want. You would not use a saw to clean your table. It is the wrong tool. You want a different result. Lay falsehood aside.

But, we also must not suppress the truth. *Romans 1:18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*

In our hearts we can seek the truth or reject the truth. Our hearts reveal the truth. If our heart rejects God we tend towards unrighteousness. On the other hand, if our hearts incline toward God we tend towards righteousness and integrity.

Look at *Psalms 15:1-2*:

“O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.”

Did you notice who can live with God in His tent? Who can dwell on His holy hill with Him? The person who walks with integrity, works righteousness ... and speaks truth in his heart.

There is an everyday benefit to being truthful. We become trustworthy. People can start to believe us.

But, there is the eternal benefit in seeking the truth and choosing truth. We get to hang out with God.

Let me ask you something. What sense does it make to strive to be truthful about the everyday things and then not care whether you were deceived about eternal things?

What if you reported things accurately but you rejected the truth of the Gospel? That God loves you. That God wants a relationship with you. That God sent His son to die for your sins. That you could be washed white as snow. *Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.*

Beyond telling the truth, the ultimate example of choosing truth is to choose Christ. Choosing truth is not just about saying things without error. Choosing truth is about choosing Christ. In *John 14:6: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."*

So, Jesus is the truth. We need to choose Jesus.

In *Romans 1:25* Paul tells us: *For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.*

Have you been choosing something that is created instead of choosing the Creator? Whatever you have been choosing to worship in place of

the Creator has taken you off the path of life. If you keep choosing the wrong things God will “give you over” to them.

Romans 1:24: Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (NIV)

Romans 6:12: Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.

When you worship things that are not God you will miss the most important thing in life, a relationship with God.

We may even be choosing our self instead of God. Are you going through life doing what you think is best ... what you want? Or, do you ask the Lord what would He have you do?

When we try to do things on our own we reject what is best for us. We make decisions every day. What time to get up? Where to work? What to eat? We can do pretty good. We may be supporting ourselves—and maybe others. When things are not terrible, it is really hard to accept that we are still “falling short” of what God would have for us. We tell those who ask that we are doing “great!”

Are you really? Do you think things are good because they are not really bad? Or, things must be good because your life is like many other people?

There is the way. It is with Jesus Christ. It is the best way. Are you “all in”? When you live for Jesus, you surrender yourself and your life will

not be just like everyone else. It will be more than you imagined. He will bless you beyond what you could imagine. You will enjoy living for Him. Walking with Him. Talking to Him.

It is not about doing things. Scripture tells us that even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)*

So instead of trying to justify ourselves with our deeds, we should look at our justifier ... Jesus Christ. Because we “...*knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*” Galatians 2:16. (NKJV)

So, we choose Christ as our Lord. Then, our life will be different. Better, much better because He knows us, loves us and wants us to have joy in Him. He wants us to have a relationship with Him.

Christ is the way and the truth and the life. John 14:6

When we choose Christ, we have made the best choice. We finally come to the point where we stop looking at substitute gods or solutions. Choosing Christ is choosing the truth.

“I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

3 John 1:4.

- What is truth?
- I am as truthful as the next person.
- The truth is not always the way to go.
- I need to pursue truth.
- I choose Christ. He is the truth. And, I definitely need a Savior because I fall short, I cannot do this by myself.

CHOOSE TRUTH

Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philipians 1:6 (NIV)

STEP FIVE.....DENY SELF

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear “deny self”? That you have to quit living?

To some people this step sounds like we have to stop everything we enjoy. Maybe give up entertainment. Watch what we eat. Perhaps go on a fast. Stop having fun.

That is not what this step is about. In fact, it is about **receiving** more than we ever imagined.

In the past we may have fought to get what we wanted. Even if it was not good for us. But, Scripture tells us that if we **deny self** we can start living.

We might have a hard time believing that anyone cares more for us than we care for ourselves. If we are going to have any happiness in this life we think it will come from what we do for ourselves. So we think we have to look out for “number one” ... ourselves. But, we are making two mistakes. The first mistake we make is thinking that we know what is best for us. (See Step One). The second mistake is not trusting that God will provide for us *abundantly*. More than we could provide for ourselves.

Ephesians 3:20: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.

First we need to give up our plans and our strategies.

Remember the woman who was bleeding for 12 years. She had endured much in the hands of many physicians and had spent all she had and was not helped at all. She had grown worse. After it became clear that there was no hope from any doctor ... she heard about and came behind Jesus and touched His cloak, because she believed He was the answer. Faith in Christ healed a problem that had lasted years. *Mark 5:25-34.*

Only Jesus can give newness of life.

The Bible also talks about the man who had been disabled and sick for 38 years. *John 5:1-7.* He wanted to get well. He laid by a pool called Bethesda for 38 years because no one would help him get into the pool. He had been looking in the wrong direction. He had looked to the water for years. It never helped. But when Jesus asked if he wanted to get well he turned to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. John 5:8-9 (NIV)

In these stories there was **no** hope apart from God.

If you have problems that never go away. If you are struggling with immorality, or an addiction, or a sin issue, you need help. The real issue is whether you again will turn to things that have limited effectiveness. Or, will you turn to God who has unlimited power.

In Luke 9:23 Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

When we first hear what we need to do this it sounds stark, serious, and unpleasant. It sounds like we can't get what we want, we may have to die. If Jesus loves me, why can't I have what I want? He loves me just the way I am. If Jesus loves me, why would He want me to die?

But if we look closer, earlier in the chapter, we find a clue to what Jesus really meant. A crowd was following Christ. At the end of the day the 12 disciples suggested that the multitude be sent away so they could find places to sleep and something to eat. They were in a desolate place. Instead, Jesus instructed the disciples to give the multitude something to eat! The disciples responded that they had very limited resources. They only had five loaves of bread and two fish.

Jesus had made the disciples aware that they did not have the means to address the need. They could not provide what was necessary for life.

Jesus could provide.

He instructed the disciples to have the multitude get ready to eat. He blessed the food and kept providing until the entire multitude was satisfied. Jesus provided more than enough. Even after everyone had eaten there was 12 baskets left over. *Luke 9:17.*

Jesus wants us to give up our ways which do not provide. He wants us to deny our man-made solutions. He wants us to die to our plans, and then follow Him. When we do that, we have access to the Creator of the universe.

Our relationship with Christ has infinite value. More value than anything we can imagine. When we deny self, we get Jesus!

Instead of trying and failing to be King or Queen for a day ... we get to hang out and walk with the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” forever.

Instead of making mud pies on the side of the road we are invited to a “lavish banquet” prepared by the Lord.

Isaiah 25:6: The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain...

Jesus Christ offers life change. But, we have to give up our plans.

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew ... they left their nets. They received a new life. A life with Christ. A life that became more meaningful. A life with eternal significance.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector and rich. He was also lost. He knew something was missing. He went to Jesus to see Him as He was passing through Jericho. Zacchaeus had to climb a sycamore tree just to catch a glimpse. Jesus looked up and said. “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house. Zacchaeus received Jesus gladly. Salvation came to the home of Zacchaeus that day. He gave half of his possessions to the poor and paid back those he had defrauded. Zacchaeus gave up his old life. He received Jesus. He became a new person. Instead of living just for himself he started caring for others. His eyes were opened to relationships. For the first time he thought about the needs of others. *Luke 19:1-10*

... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10.

Our life does not have to be dry, desperate and dying. There is another choice. We can choose abundant life. But we cannot have abundant life

unless we choose to deny ourselves. Deny our plans. Deny our schemes. Deny ourselves.

We also **pick up our cross, and follow Jesus.**

When Jesus picked up his cross it is clear that He was doing the Father's will. Remember in the garden? Jesus prayed to His Father that if it was possible, to stop what was about to happen.

Yet Jesus prayed, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will. Mark 14:36

Jesus was showing us that even when we have a strong desire to eliminate a painful experience, we still need to accept God's will. So when we pick up our cross we need to be prepared to do God's will. No matter what. Even if we would prefer something different. Even if it would be easier to do something else. Even if it does not feel safe. Even if ... even if.

So, we follow Jesus. Our Savior. The Son of God. The One Who works miracles. Jesus. Our Deliverer. Our Fortress, Redeemer and Friend.

Deny self. Find more Jesus.

- I do not want to give up anything. I cannot “deny myself”.
- Maybe I could just cut back a little.
- I could give up some things, but not everything.
- I am willing to open the door to the “knock” of Jesus (*Revelation 3:20*) but, some rooms in my life I really do not want Jesus to see ... or mess with.
- I get it, if I deny self, and follow Christ in exchange I get a whole new life where I am blessed more than I ever imagined.

DENY SELF

STEP SIX..... LIGHTEN LOAD

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Anything we do is made more difficult when we have to carry something. The path of life is already narrow.

For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Matthew 7:14

We certainly do not need to make things more difficult than they are.

When we try to travel with too much it can cause problems. Sometimes we over pack for our vacation and end up wrestling with our luggage. Other times we take everything we could possibly use on our backpacking trip and find out we are lagging behind because we are trying to carry too much. Some of these decisions can result from good intentions. Even if that is the case, we can make our travel more difficult than it needs to be.

We may try to hang on to stuff because we have decided it will make our life better. So, we think if we work really hard then maybe we will have enough money to buy that toy, or luxury item, or gadget. And, we want the new stuff. Some of us already have so much we can't remember what we have. Some days we have trouble finding the stuff we thought was so important. Really, we have too much. We think we are improving things, but it is possible we are making things more complicated.

This new life in Christ requires focus. It is compared to a race. You do not run a race with all your stuff. How far will you get with a suitcase in each hand? Or, trying to carry all your hunting or fishing gear? When you run a race you put on as little as possible. You certainly do not pick up stuff.

“Therefore ... lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ...” *Hebrews 12:1-2*

Most people know it is a mistake to “worship” something that is not God. *Romans 1:21-23: For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*

But, do we act like we believe it? What controls our life? What are we always thinking about? What do we have to have? What will we fight for?

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.

James 4:1-2(NIV)

At times, we hang on to stuff because we are fearful to let go. Perhaps money. Or, people who are bad for us. Some of us hang on to our resentments for years.

Why do we cling to these things? Maybe we think we can control our life if we can just hang on to these things. Fear makes us want to control, so it is not so scary.

We stay angry. We paint the other person “bad”. They did the bad things. They were mean. They were disrespectful. If we stay angry at them we do not have to look at our part. We overlook our part. We are too focused on the other person.

We will hang on to this anger, this fear, this resentment because ... we are afraid to trust God.

But, we also choose things that are bad for us. Sometimes to dull the pain of rejection. To forget our fears. For relief. Relief of our anger. Relief from resentments. Relief from emotional pain.

Drunkenness, immorality, outbursts of anger, stealing and similar conduct (drugs, lust binges, cutting, purging, sadism, cruelty ... there is really no telling what we might do).

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...”

Galatians 5:19-21

Regardless of the source of the thing we carry around with us the instruction remains the same. We need to “...lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us..”. *Hebrews 12:1*

As Paul said in *2 Timothy 2:4*: *No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.*

What does this mean? Where do we start? Certainly this means that we should stop doing the things that God tells us we should not be doing.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed ...”

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

God wants us to enjoy life. God wants us to live the best life we can. He tells us how in Scripture. It is our roadmap. If we are off the path and find ourselves in the ditch we need to get back on track. Get out of the ditch. *“Flee immorality...” 1 Corinthians 6:18.*

We should do an inventory. What are the things we are doing that God would have us avoid? List them, be complete:

Are we rebelling? Are we hurting ourselves or others? Are we in sin? If so, we need to stop.

Do we do things that make it more difficult to live in meaningful and healthy relationship with others?

Are my choices interfering with a meaningful relationship with the Lord? If so, those things we need to change.

And to the extent we have done people wrong, we need to make that right. That does not mean just telling someone you were sorry. While that is a good place to start, you really need to do more.

We are supposed to confess our sins. *1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* That means you agree with God about your conduct. If God thinks your behavior is wrong—it is!

So, confess your part and apologize to the person(s) you hurt.

Beyond your apology, you need to treat all others with **active kindness**. We are told to “...*put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*” *Colossians 3:12.*

So, apologize and then be kind. Act like you mean it!

We are instructed: “*be kind to one another, tender-hearted, **forgiving** each other, just as **God in Christ also has forgiven you.***” *Ephesians 4:32.*

We are to be **reconciled** to our brother. “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with all men.*” *Romans 12:18.*

Jesus told us that before we go to worship we should be reconciled with our brother. *Matthew 5:23-24: Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to you brother; then come and offer your gift. (NIV)*

In Ephesians we are told that we should not let the sun go down on your anger, and ... give the devil an opportunity. *Ephesians 4:26-27: In your anger do not sin*": *Do not let the sun to down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (NIV)*

And then we are told: *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."* *Ephesians 4:31. (NIV)*

When we lighten our load with respect to relationships we put down (refusing to carry) our resentments and grudges. One way we can do this is by looking for any contribution we may have made to the problem, however small.

Another thing we can do is realize that we need to forgive others even though they seem unforgivable. Scripture tells us that while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. We were the ungodly.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6

Before we were justified, while we were helpless, while we were enemies with God, Christ died for us. We have been forgiven. How can we not forgive others?

"But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions." *Mark 11:26*

When we change our habits and attitudes that keep us from living the way God intended ... we lighten our load. We quit struggling with those things that hold us back. We quit being tangled up in our sinful choices.

Then we can “...run with endurance the race that is set before us.”
Hebrews 12:1

Today is the day.

- I have things in my life that slow me down in the race.
- I am entangled in sin.
- I am holding on to resentments or hurts.
- God is not a priority.
- I do not know how to run the race.
- Today I choose to lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that easily entangles so I can run the race as God intended.

LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

STEP SEVEN.....PUT ON THE NEW

Ephesians 4:24

*and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created
in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

It will not do you any good if you get rid of one problem only to replace it with a new problem.

Jesus tells the story of the unclean spirit that goes out of a man. It goes in search of rest and does not find it. Then the unclean spirit says it will return to the house from which it came. When it comes and finds the house unoccupied, swept, and put in order, it goes and takes along with seven other spirits more wicked than itself and they go in and live there. And the last state of the man becomes worse than the first.

Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation. Matthew 12:45

We are to **put aside** the old: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech. We are not to lie to one another.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

Colossians 3:8

We are to **put on** the new self:

And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. Colossians 3:10

He created you. He knows you. He loves you. **You are being renewed by your CREATOR!!!!**

*We ...**put on** a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:12-14*

We are told: “*that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside** the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and **put on** the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*” Ephesians 4:22-24.

It is not enough to lay aside the old. When we set aside our old ways and our old habits we make room for something new. Scripture tells us to put on our new self.

Can you imagine wearing the same clothes for years? Living in the same clothes, walking in muck and filth? Then the day comes when you decide to lay those clothes aside. You get to lay those old clothes aside because you have been washed by the blood of the Lamb. That makes you whiter than snow. The song based on *Psalm 51:7; Isaiah 1:18* and *Revelation 7:14* says it well.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow.

It would not be fitting to put back on your old clothes. Instead put on your new robe.

But, we are talking about something more significant than just outward adornment or coverings. You see, when you make a decision to make Jesus the Lord of your life you are “born again”. *John 3:7*. It is not just your outward appearance that is changed. You start a new life. You are different.

Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

So, we start to act different. We want to do what God would have us do. What is it that God wants? One way we can know is by reading His word. We start reading scripture. The Holy Spirit teaches us **when** we read God’s word.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. John 14:26.

The Holy Spirit will guide us into truth.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but

whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. John 16:13.

We start to understand that we are called by God to be different than we once were.

In the book of Romans it is expressed this way:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Romans 12:1-2

We renew (make new) our mind when we read and think about God’s word.

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” Joshua 1:8

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. Psalm 119:9-11

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6

When we read the bible we should remember to apply it to our lives. Ask yourself these questions:

- (1) What does the passage teach concerning *God’s will*?
- (2) How can I apply this to my life? Is God telling me something about my life? Do I fall short?
- (3) What steps of action do I need to take to be in *God’s will*?

If you have reached the point where you want to put off the old – great! Just remember the other step – ***Put on the new!***

- I don’t have a Bible.
- I tried reading the Bible. It is too hard for me.
- I read the Bible once. I would never be able to do the stuff Jesus says.
- I have another plan. I will _____

- All I know is that I want to change. I will read my Bible and ask God to help me do what He would have me do.

PUT ON THE NEW

STEP EIGHT DRAW NEAR

Hebrews 4:16

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

This may be the most important step.

Remember back in Step One we were asked to “CHOOSE LIFE”. When we choose life we give up the ways that may seem right to us but the ways that ultimately lead to death or a death kind of life.

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Proverbs 14:12.

All the steps in this program require relationship and cooperation with God. In other words we yield or surrender to God’s plan. If we try the steps in our own strength we will continue to fall short of God’s plan. More importantly, we will fall short of God’s unconditional love for us.

The only way the 12 steps of this program will work is if we are in a meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. When we are in a relationship with Jesus we are also in a relationship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The passage *Romans 8:11* refers to the Father, the Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11

Our new life is possible because we have been born again. The steps of this program can be accomplished because the Holy Spirit teaches us.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. John 14:26.

Remember the Holy Spirit also guides us into all truth.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. John 16:13.

In other words, we can act different because we can think different. We think different because the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the truth.

One of our main concerns is to make sure we are not relying on the misconceptions of our past. In other words, when we did not know the truth we sought comfort or answers in things that could not provide comfort or answers.

So now we seek peace. We seek peace through faith in Jesus Christ.

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is the answer to all our problems.

Where are you right now? Do you realize that wherever you are, God is near? He is with you. That is one of His attributes. He is where you are ... completely as if He were nowhere else.

But, in your mind or heart you may be far from Him. That is why we are told to “draw near”.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16.

Whether you feel close or far away, you can always draw near.

Right now your mind may be on stuff that happened at work. Or, perhaps you're thinking about that next time you are going to be on the river or in the mountains. Maybe you are thinking about that person who said something critical of you. Or whether you should have done something different in that conversation an hour ago. And, how do you ever stop thinking about all the financial concerns?

Have you noticed that at times you may not be fully present with someone? Our mind wanders. People sense it. They want to connect with you. But, you are thinking about something else. You are not focused on what they are saying. No real relationship connection.

But, when you can be fully present with the person you are with they almost always feel they have received a gift. You. Your attention. Your concern.

God is the same way. He wants our attention. He is pleased when he receives it. And, no matter how close you think you are in your relationship with Christ — you can move closer. Draw nearer.

In fact, Scripture tells us that is exactly what we should do in our time of need. **Draw near.** Since we always have some need that means we should always draw near.

Mercy means that we will receive kindness or forgiveness instead of the punishment we deserve. Grace means unmerited favor. God favors us even though we did not earn it.

This Hebrews passage telling us to “draw near” (Hebrews 4:16) is very similar to the “faith” verse found later in *Hebrews 11:6*. There we are told:

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

This passage teaches that faith means we believe in God and that we believe we will be rewarded when we seek Him. What is the reward? One reward is grace. Unmerited favor as we saw in *Hebrews 4:16*.

More importantly, we are rewarded with God Himself. As Jeremiah said:

“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

There is more.

“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” Jeremiah 33:3

If someone wanted to have a relationship with the God of all creation it is available.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you...”

James 4:8.

We need to be careful. Sometimes we may seek God because we want something. It could be almost anything. A relationship. A new job. Health. So we seek God for what He can do for us.

If we seek God for only what He can do for us we will probably be disappointed. First we decide what it is we need. Then we tell God what we want. That is putting ourselves in the position of God. That is backwards.

Even Jesus said “...*yet not what I will, but what You will.*” *Mark 14:36* God knows what is best. We need to ask for His will just as Jesus did.

We should not tell God what we have decided and then ask Him to bless our decision. We should ask God what He would have us do. What is His will for our lives?

The more we seek God, the more we draw near, the more we know God and the more we know what God wants us to do.

But another thing happens when we draw near. We begin to know God. And, real knowing involves more than head knowledge. It involves relationship. It involves the heart.

*...**God is love.** 1 John 4:8.* One can encounter divine love only up close and personally. His love for you. And, your love back. **Both** will only be experienced if you draw near.

Do you think you can love another person by only reading about them? You might respect them. You might like their character. But, you need

to be with someone to really love them. Hang out. Spend some time. Go through things together. Talk. Share your hurts and fears. Tell Him what you long for. Ask questions. Think about Him. Laugh with Him. Cry with Him. He is right beside you, waiting to hear from you. Draw near to Him.

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3.

God loves sinners. He redeems failures. God delights in second chances and fresh starts. He never tires of pursuing lost sheep, waiting for prodigal children, or rescuing those damaged by life and left on the side of the path.

God unconditionally cherishes human beings. You do not have to earn His love. You cannot earn it. It is the **free gift of God**.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift of God** is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23.*

God offers us something we could never earn – forgiveness of our sins and the embrace of His love.

Scripture teaches us that God is worth knowing. A relationship with Jesus Christ is worth more than everything else.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field.”

Matthew 13:44

Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Isaiah 55:6

God will walk with you. God will talk with you. God wants to put His arms around you. God wants to be with you. If you want a relationship with Jesus Christ you must seek him for who He is — not for what he can do. You must draw near.

How do you draw near? Can you think of any ways to do that? What if you wanted to draw near your wife/husband or friend, what would you do?

- I do not know how to draw near? Can someone help me?
- I would rather not draw near because _____

- I have been close to God all my life (or a long time), so I am good.
- Starting today I will choose to draw near to God.

DRAW NEAR

STEP NINE..... BE A WALKER NOT A SCOFFER

Galatians 5:16

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Once again we have a choice. There is a “Y” in the road. We can walk with Jesus Christ or we can sit and scoff.

If you are a scoffer it means you mock or ridicule. You show contempt.

Some of us may think that we may not be walking with Jesus but we really are not a scoffer. Maybe we are somewhere in between. Not really walking with Jesus but not really ridiculing those who are.

If you do not trust Jesus in your life then you probably are a scoffer. You may be a secret scoffer, but if you do not believe in Jesus Christ enough to walk with Him then you are showing contempt for Christ. He is God. He died for you. If you do not care about that you are disrespecting who He is and what He did for you.

You do not get to be neutral. Jesus said: “*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*” *Matthew 10:38.*

Psalm 1:1-3 tells us:

*“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat **scoffers!** But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”*

In other words we can hang out with and believe in the world or we can believe the truth. God’s law. His revelation through the Bible.

In Acts Chapter 13 Paul gives a warning. In Verse 41 Paul paraphrases *Habakkuk 1:5*. The original verse says: *“Look at the nations and watch-and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.”*(NIV)

In *Acts 13:40*, Paul warns us to take heed that the things spoken of in the Prophets (Habakkuk) may not come upon you.

The thing that Paul is warning about is **unbelief**. Unbelief turns into **scoffing**. If you are in unbelief you may resist changing. You start mocking those that believe. You ridicule those that trust Christ. The reason is simple. You want to stay where you are. You do not want to change. You are justifying yourself. Standing still, alone. You would like others to join you.

There is another way. Walking. Walking is pretty basic. You start moving in a particular direction.

This program is about walking the Path of Life. Moving. Changing. Walking with Jesus.

If you are sitting you are not walking. Also, you cannot experience God's life giving plan for you if you are complaining and scoffing at God's plan for you.

Jesus said:

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” Luke 11:23.

Jesus wants to help you in your walk with Him. But, you will not be in God's will without faith. Faith is *“... the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:1.*

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6

So, when you ask in faith you can expect God to be generous. As long as you are not asking **and** doubting. The one who doubts (or **scoffs**) should not expect anything.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:5-8

But, what God decides is best for you may not be what you think. Instead of money or health or things ... you may receive a closer relationship with Him.

“You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

John 15:14

“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Romans 8:14-17

Do you want to be **led**? Then ask Him in faith. Listen. Learn.

“Let me hear Your loving kindness in the morning; For I trust in You; Teach me the way in which I should walk; For to You I lift up my soul. “ Psalm 143:8

“Walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16.

The reason is simple. They are opposites. If you are walking by the Spirit you are not acting out of fleshly desires. In other words, if you are walking north you will not at the same time be going south.

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. Galatians 5:17(NIV)

Right now we are headed somewhere. We are going through life. We are either facing and walking toward our Lord or we may have our back to God. We may be seeking separation and distance.

If we are seeking His face then we can walk by the Spirit. If we turn our back on God we can expect to carry out the desires of the flesh.

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things like these ...” Galatians 5:19-21

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

Where you are headed, that is probably where you will end up.

Where are you headed?

We were formerly darkness, but now we are light in the Lord and we are to **“walk as children of light.”**

For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Ephesians 5:8-10

In *Matthew Chapter 9* we are told a story about a man who was paralyzed. He was being brought to Jesus. Jesus understood that he was being brought so that he could be healed. In other words the man was being brought to Jesus because of faith in Jesus. Jesus had a curious response. He said “take courage My son, your sins are forgiven.” Some of the onlookers said to themselves that this was blasphemy. Jesus knew their thoughts. So he asked him which was harder. To forgive sins or to say “Rise, and walk?” Showing he had the authority and the ability to do both, he told the paralyzed man to “Rise, take up your bed, and go home.” And the man arose, and went home. He walked because Jesus had healed him. But, doing as Jesus had instructed, he left his former broken life and went home healed.

Even if we have never walked on God’s path before we can start now. Through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit we can walk in newness of

life. Jesus died for our sins. Similarly, we need to understand that as transformed followers, “...*our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.*” Romans 6:6.

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might **walk** in newness of life. Romans 6:4*

We saw where Paul warned us that some will not believe.

*“behold, you **scoffers**, and marvel, and perish; for I am accomplishing a work in your days, a work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.”*

Acts 13:41

Instead of being scoffers we should walk with Christ.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

John 10:27

- I'm not there, I'm a scoffer, I just don't believe all this God stuff.
- I believe God is real but I've got to make my own decisions about where I go and what I do.
- I can only trust myself.
- Okay, I give up. I have tried my way long enough. I don't completely understand this but I've decided to walk where God wants me to walk.

BE A WALKER NOT A SCOFFER

STEP TEN.....CONSIDER OTHERS

Philippians 2:4

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Many of our problems come from being self-centered. That means you are focused on yourself. You are interested in you. You want to make sure you are happy.

When you act like you are God, you only care what you think. And, when you are self-centered you do not consider how your actions might hurt others.

Remember when you had to have that drink, (drug, video, pleasure, relationship, etc.)? You might stop if it hurt **you** enough. Did you ever stop because you were hurting **someone else, someone you love**?

Would you avoid immorality, adultery or porn because it would cause someone you love to be devastated?

Or, would you even stop because it could threaten your family financially if you lost your job or went to jail?

What if your behavior threatened relationships that were important to you? Would you change? Or, would you try to change the other person?

Maybe you say: “I should be able to do what I want.” or “What they don’t know won’t hurt them.”

Or you might justify yourself. Because people were hard on you, or you had a hard life or because life is hard now or because _____.

(Fill in the blank for your justification)

The great Commandment in the law is:

“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” The second is like it “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Matthew 22:37, 39.

So first we love God. This is not just a commandment but it also makes good sense. When we really love God we do not have all of our desperate needs. God meets our needs. God loves us. We feel loved. Because we feel loved we do not have to pursue things that may hurt us or our loved ones. We do not have to settle for shallow relationships.

You probably know what we are talking about. Perhaps you felt so needy that you pursued a relationship (or money, or recognition, or euphoria) that was not good for you and was not leading anywhere.

Another dead end.

Or, the ache of loneliness, or the pain of life, leads you to try things that dull the pain. You want to forget about the pain for just a little while. But it always comes back. Not only does the pain come back but, because you made a bad choice you probably have new problems and complications.

The solution, as we have seen in these steps is to get on God's path and to stay close to Him. When we do that we feel fulfilled. When we feel loved we now have a reservoir to draw from. We now have something to give others.

Many of us are not familiar with this concept. We have only been interested in ourselves for so long we do not know how to look out for others. So, we have to stop and think about it. Reading Scripture helps us.

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”

Romans 12:10-16

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35.

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.”

Philippians 2:3-8.

At this point we see another way to live. We actually start to consider the other person. But, what about those we hurt? What do we do about the people we let down? Some people we lied to. We took what was not ours. We were thieves. Immoral. We committed adultery.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

We need to make amends. Pay those we owe. Confess where we were wrong. Take responsibility. Correct the wrong.

But, we never take the path that only looks at our benefit or gain. We need to be cautious if our decision might harm another. We can be

quick to accept consequences for our behaviors. But, we should avoid behavior that may wound another. This is a great time for counsel from someone mature in the Faith.

“...in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

Proverbs 11:14

So now that you are on this step you should start looking at your behaviors. Perhaps nothing is more reflective of your walk than how you treat others. Do you spend your day thinking about yourself and how you can arrange things to please you? Do you think about those around you? How you can help them? What are their needs?

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” 1 John 3:14-18

Jesus asked Peter *“...do you love Me?”* Peter said, *“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”* Jesus said to him, *“Tend My sheep.”* John 21:17.

If you were charged with being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you? Do you show love and concern for others?

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. James 2:14-17

God has loved and blessed you. Instead of looking at your losses, what have you been given? Like the song says, "Count your blessings one by one."

Then, how can you not bless and help others?

Here is another way to look at this. Would you like things to go well? Less fighting? More peace? Like the bumper sticker: "More wag, less bark?"

Well, do you think your home life (work life, friendships, employment, relationships) will be better if you consider yourself more or if you consider the other person more? Will you really have the home life you want by seeking those things that only benefit or amuse you?

I have thought about this, I have decided.

- We all have to look out for number one.
- No one ever thinks about what I want, I am not going to think about them.
- There are things in my life I need, I am not sure I want to live without _____ and my time is spent on those things.
- Today, when I am about to choose something for me, I will consider whether my choice will hurt another. I will look out for the other person. I will think about how I can help them.

LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS

STEP ELEVEN..... LOVE OTHERS

1 John 3:18

Little children, let us not love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth.

Remember the last step? **LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS?** So what have you been doing this week? What did you think about? Work? What really interests you? What do you think about when you have time? List a few things.

Maybe you think about the things that make you happy. Or perhaps you are having problems. You think about what you can do to get out of trouble or fix things.

You may first think about what you like.

Or, what is hurting you.

How much time do you think about what your family would like?

Or, what is hurting them?

When we are transformed we love others.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:34-35

When you love others, you think about them. What they would like. What they need. And, if you love others you help others.

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. James 1:27

We are to practice hospitality, even to strangers.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

We are to love everyone. Not just those who love us.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-gathers do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:46-48

Jesus specifically tells us to even love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44

What does that look like? *1 Corinthians 13:4-7* suggests that love is not a feeling. It is what we do:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Paul tells us in Romans how we are to love:

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but, associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Romans 12:10-16

John also tells us:

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

1 John 3:17-18

John is saying that we do not get a pass just to talk about it. We need to do something when we see a need and we have the means to help. We go from just looking out for ourselves to actually helping others.

So, we should love others. We can do things for them. We can walk with them. Provide an ear to listen.

But, if we experience life change, we should also share our story.

Have you ever experienced the joy of a new baby? Did you keep it a secret? Or, did you tell someone?

Have you ever noticed the new plant come up in your garden or watched an apple form on your apple tree?

The miracle of new life is exciting. It is for all of us. Why would we not share with someone else the miracle of our new life?

The Dead Sea is dead because it has no outlet. Water flows in from the Jordan River. The Dead Sea continues to receive. But the Dead Sea never gives. It remains dead.

There is a story about a man who was demon possessed. *Mark 5*. He was so wild he could not be restrained, even with chains. All day and

all night he cried out. He was so tormented he even hit himself with rocks. He saw Jesus from a distance. He ran up and bowed down before Him. Crying out in a loud voice he said, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, son of the most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” Jesus healed this man. Then the man who had been demon possessed wanted to go with Jesus. As Jesus was getting into a boat he told the man, “go home to your people to report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in town what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled.

Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and joy are in His place. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name ...”

1 Chronicles 16:24-29

We are told we are witnesses for Jesus in the New Testament.

“... but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Acts 1:8

The great commission is found in the last chapter of Matthew. Jesus tells us:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, **I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***

Matthew 28:19- 20

It is clear what we should do. We should love others. One way is to tell others about Jesus. We are to make disciples.

We may be afraid of the response. So we hesitate. Or, we refrain and never experience the joy from sharing our lives with others.

Here is a helpful hint. If you cared about the other person, if you really wanted their best, it would show in multiple ways. You might spend time with them. You might invite them for a meal or to go for a walk. Then, as a part of showing your love for them, if you told them about your new life, very few would reject your love for them.

If your friend cut their finger, would you refuse to give them a band-aid? If you had a cure for their sickness, would you share it with them? If you have found eternal life, and freedom from addictions, are you going to keep it to yourself?

Your new life should not be covered up. It should be put on a lamp stand so it can give light to all who are in the house.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. Matthew 5:15. (NIV)

- Every time I love others I get nothing back.
- I do not even have time for myself.
- I could never love my enemy.
- Being impatient or jealous or unkind is sometimes necessary in this world.
- I cannot love others because _____.
- I believe my life and my beliefs are personal and private.
- I can't wait to tell others. I wonder if I could get some pointers.

LOVE OTHERS

STEP TWELVE.....PERSEVERE

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Many things are started. Sometimes we mean well but, we just can't seem to continue.

The path of life is not always easy. There will be difficulties. Obstacles. We may stumble. But, *"For a righteous man falls seven times and rises again..." Proverbs 24:16.*

We only have to worry about today.

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33.

In this passage Jesus tells us that our Father in Heaven knows what we need. We do not need to worry about what we will eat or what we wear. We are told not to:

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
Matthew 6:34.

We are not alone. As transformed followers of Christ we have the Holy Spirit. Our Helper. He abides with us and will be in us.

“that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

John 14:17.

He will be with us forever.

He will guide us into all truth. The things of Christ the Holy Spirit will disclose to us.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you.

John 16:13-15.

With help from the Holy Spirit we can start looking at things from a new perspective. God is talking to us. *He* speaks to us through *His* Word. *He* talks to us through circumstances. What is *He* saying? What does *He* want us to learn? Where would *You* have us go? What would *He* have us do? What is my next step today? This hour? This minute?

Has God loved me enough to send me warning signs? Am I willing to listen? Do I need to make a course correction back onto the path of life?

We cannot do this alone. We already know that left to ourselves we stumble. We fall.

The 'Path of Life' is meant to be walked with others.

*Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17*

It is not wise to attempt to climb Mt. McKinley by yourself. You may need help. It's not wise to attempt life alone. You may need help.

*And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.
Ecclesiastes 4:12*

It is clear that in this world we will face tribulation.

"...tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope. Romans 5:3-4.

So we have hope because of what difficulties we have survived. We persevered even in hardship.

We are blessed when we persevere under trial. We will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. James 1:12.

To persevere, we need to understand that we need to strive every day. We need to practice the things of God "... for as long as you practice these things [diligence in faith; moral excellence; knowledge; self-control; **perseverance**; godliness; brotherly kindness; love] (2 Peter 1:5-7) you will never stumble."

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8.

But, we are not alone. God is with us.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9.

Those who persevere are a testimony to Christ. Perseverance speaks of His love and power and presence in your life.

If we do not persevere, we have left the 'Path of Life'. Things will not be the way God intended. We will not enjoy all of what He wants us to have.

We must persevere.

- I know I might be tempted. I do not have a plan. I will just deal with it when it happens.
- I have phone numbers of people who will walk with me and help me.
- I only plan on staying on the 'Path of Life' until _____.
- I realize if I do not persevere, I am back to square one. Trying more dead ends.
- My plan is to live differently, forever, with Christ ... one day at a time.

PERSEVERE
