

# The Road to Recovery 1: The first step to freedom

Message for Sunday, January 8, 2012

**Scripture:** Isaiah 57:18 and others

There was a father trying to take a nap on a Sunday afternoon on the couch in his living room, but his little boy kept bugging him saying, "Daddy, I'm bored." So his father, trying to make up a game, picked up the newspaper he had just been reading, and turned to the page where he had seen a map of the world. He tore it into about 50 squares and said, "Son this is a puzzle. I want you to put it all back together." He laid down to finish his nap, thinking he was good for an hour's sleep.

How many of you like to enjoy a nap on Sunday afternoon? How many of you like to enjoy a nap on Sunday morning at church? ☺

In about 15 minutes the little boy woke him up saying, "Daddy, I've got it finished. I put it all together." "You're kidding!" He knew his son didn't know the names of all the nations of the world and where they were located. He asked, "How did you do that?" He said, "Dad, there was a picture of a person on the other side of that page, and when I got my person put together the world looked just fine."

Friends, when your person is put together the right way, it's amazing how much better the world looks. We're beginning a new series of messages today called "The Road to Recovery." It's about getting our persons working the right way.

We're going to look at some of the problems that we all face and how to overcome them:

- the habits that mess up our lives;
- the hang-ups that cause trouble in our lives;
- the hurts that bring pain in our lives.

Two things I want to tell you up front:

- 1) These messages are just as much for me as they are for anyone else. I often tell people, "I don't preach a message unless I'm preaching it to myself." That's particularly true in this case. I've got this problem of playing games on the computer, and it really causes me problems. That's a habit that I want to deal with.
- 2) I didn't come up with these messages myself. I'm using what another preach by the name of Rick Warren wrote. I want to give credit where credit is due.

The theme verse for this series is from the prophet Isaiah, the prophet is passing on God's message. The people of Israel, whom God loves so very dearly, have once again chosen to live their own way instead of God's way. Under the new covenant with Jesus, this promise is for us as well as the people of Israel. Listen to what God wants to do in our lives.

**Isaiah 57:18-19, Today's English Version:**

**"I have seen how they acted, but I will heal them. I will lead them and help them, and I will comfort those who mourn. I offer peace to all, both near and far! I will heal my people."**

This is a great promise of God. Notice there are five parts to recovery that God wants to do in your life.

- First, if you have been hurt, God says "I want to heal you."
- If you're confused, "I want to lead you."
- If you've ever felt you were helpless to change anything, "I want to help you change that."
- If you've ever felt no one understands your problem, "I want to comfort you."
- If you feel anxious and worried and afraid, "I want to offer peace to you."

The principles for recovery are found in the Bible. It's the original recovery manual. In 1935 a couple of guys formulated the classic Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. They were members of the Oxford Group, a Christian organization, and the Twelve Steps grew out of that foundation.

We're going to take the Twelve Steps, and see how they correspond to the Scriptures. Some steps are similar, so we'll combine them, and it all comes out to eight principles, eight messages. Each principle is abbreviated with a letter, and the eight letters spell "RECOVERY."

## 1) "R" stands for "Realize"

Realize I'm not God.

In AA, the first step is: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." But we're talking about more than just trouble with alcohol. So I'll rephrase that to: "I admit I am powerless to control my tendency to do wrong things and my life is unmanageable."

*Powerless to control my tendency to do wrong things? Unmanageable? You might be thinking, isn't that a little strong?*

Well, let me ask you:

- Do you ever stay up late when you know you need sleep?
- Do you ever eat or drink more calories than your body needs?
- Do you ever feel you ought to exercise but you don't?
- Do you ever know the right thing to do but you don't do it?
- Do you ever know something is wrong but you do it anyway?
- Have you ever known you should be unselfish but you're selfish instead?

If your answer is “Yes” to any of those questions, welcome to the human race. We're all in need of recovery.

## 2) Root of the problem: my sin nature

The Bible has a phrase for this. The Bible calls that tendency my sin nature. You will always have this sin nature with you, this desire to do the wrong thing. You're going to always have it with you till you get to heaven. Even after you become a Christian, you still have desires that pull you the wrong way.

Paul knew this very well. In his letter to the Romans, he wrote about his experience:

**Romans 7:15-17, New Living Translation:**

**I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.**

Can you see yourself in that picture? It's common to all of us.

The first step to freedom is to understand the cause of the problem. Then we can see the consequences, and finally learn the cure.

What's the cause of our sin nature? The cause of all our problems is this — we want to be God.

Maybe you don't think of it that way. But every time we think, “I know I should do this, but I'm going to do that instead,” we are putting ourselves in the place of God. We are saying, “I know what's best for my life. God may say this, but I say that.” That's called “playing God.” And the result is a messed up life.

## 3) What are the consequences of playing God?

### a) Fear

In the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, God asked Adam where he was, Adam said, “I heard you in the garden; I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked” [Genesis 3:10].

We are afraid somebody's going to find out who we really are, that we're fakes, we're not the complete and happy and everything-is-fine people we pretend we are.

### b) Frustration

It's frustrating trying to be the general manager of the universe. Have you ever played the Whack-a-Mole game at a fair? These things pop up and you knock them down with a bat. But as soon as you get rid of one, another pops up to take its place. That's life. We whack down one problem and another one pops up. We whack down one relational conflict and another pops up. We walk around pretending we're God — I'm powerful, I can handle it. But inside it's frustrating.

King David understood this.

**Psalm 32:3, Living Bible:**

**There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration.**

Frustration is a symptom of a deeper problem: you're trying to control everything, but it doesn't work. Because you're not God.

### c) Fatigue

It's tiring playing God. Trying to control everything, pretending you've got it all together, denial takes a lot of energy.

King David goes on to say:

**Psalm 32:4-5, Living Bible:**

**My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them.**

### d) Failure

When we try to play God that's one job description we're guaranteed to fail at. It leads to disappointment, disillusionment, doubt.

## 4) The first step to freedom: Confession

When David finally came to his senses and confessed his sin, this was the result:

**Psalm 32:5, Living Bible:**

I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess them to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.

This is similar:

**Proverbs 28:13, Today's English Version:**

**You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.**

We need to be honest and open about our weaknesses and our faults and failures.

God's plan for the Church is that it is a safe place where people, real people, can talk about real problems, real hurts, real hang-ups, real habits, and not be blown away by judgement. We realize that we are a family of fellow strugglers.

There's not a person in this room that has it all together. We're all weak in different areas and we need each other.

**We resist confession: "My problem is not that bad. I can handle it."**

That's called denial. How bad does it have to get before you admit that you need some help? Unfortunately it is human behaviour, human nature, that we never change until our pain becomes greater than the fear of change. We change when we feel the heat and the marriage starts falling apart or the kids start going off the wrong way or you get that phone call in the middle of the night. God whispers to us in our pleasures but he shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone. Let it motivate you to face the facts, to get help.

## 5) Realize I am not God

The first step on the road to recovery is to admit my powerlessness. God teaches us in the Bible that admitting our weakness, realizing we are not all-powerful like God, is the key to strength — not our strength, but God's strength working in us.

The apostle Paul prayed to God repeatedly for healing. This tells God's answer to his prayer, and how Paul responded.

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10, New International Version:**  
**But God said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in**

**hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Admitting I'm not God means I recognize three important facts of life.

- 1) I admit that I am powerless to change my past. It hurt, I still remember it, but all the resentment in the world isn't going to change it. I'm powerless to change my past.
- 2) I admit that I am powerless to control other people. I can try, I like to manipulate them, I use all kinds of little gimmicks, but it doesn't work. I am responsible for my actions, not theirs. I can't control other people.
- 3) I admit that I am powerless to cope with my harmful habits, behaviours, actions. Good intentions are not enough. How many times have you tried and failed? Willpower is not enough. You need something more than willpower. You need a source of power beyond yourself. You need God, because he made you to need him.

Let's open ourselves to God now, in prayer...