

The road to recovery, Step 2: Where to get help when you hurt

Message for Sunday, January 15, 2012
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Hebrews 11:6 and others

Children's Message: John 14:21-24 love = obey.
Story of the horse which didn't want to be "gentled."

Hi, my name is Rebel. I'm a horse, and a rather proud one. You can tell by my name that I don't like anyone bossing me around. I'm my own boss; I don't listen to anyone else.

You should have seen my owners the last time they tried to put a saddle on me. I think the man was in hospital for a week; I kicked him right in the chest. I'm a rebel alright.

And then one day, I see a truck pull into the yard. A truck with a trailer. A horse trailer. Out come a man and a woman and a girl, about ten years old. The adults went inside the house to talk, but the girl came straight over to me.

"Hi, my name is Benjy. You must be Rebel." I reared up on my hind legs just to show her I wasn't interested in making friends with anyone.

"Would you like a carrot? I brought one with me." She put her hand through the fence, holding out a beautiful big carrot. I may be proud, but I'm not too proud to enjoy good food. I put my head down and gently took the carrot from her hand. I'm grumpy, but I'm not mean. I only hurt people who are asking for it.

"I've got some sugar cubes as well. Would you like that?" She held out her other hand. I nuzzled her hand, licking up the sugar cubes, and finally licking the last traces of sugar from her hand. But she surprised me: while I was licking, she reached up with other hand and rubbed my cheek. I was about to yell at her, but suddenly realized, that felt nice. So I let her continue.

The adults came out of the house, and one of the strangers backed the trailer up to the gate. Looks like I was headed for a new home. Well, if it's with this girl, it may not be too bad.

A couple of hours later, we arrived at their place, my new home. Still not sure about getting close to me, they just opened the gate so I could let myself out. The door to the barn was open, and inside there was a stall with fresh straw on the floor, and hay and oats to eat.

The girl – what was her name again? – oh yeah, Benjy – came up to the fence of my stall, and she had another carrot. While I nibbled on it, she rubbed my cheek again. Then there was another surprise: she took a brush and started brushing me. Mmm, that felt good! I whinnied to tell her how much I was enjoying it. She reached over further so she could brush more of me. I moved towards her so she could reach even more.

Benjy's parents came in the barn right then, and they were surprised to see us close together. My owner must have told them what a wild animal I was. But my owner had never given me carrots or rubbed my cheek.

The next day, I was out in the corral. Benjy climbed onto the fence, and I went over to see if she had any treats. Sure enough, she had a carrot. This time she got in the corral with me, and started brushing me all over. It felt so wonderful.

This became a daily routine: carrots and brushing. I found myself actually liking Benjy! Then one day came another surprise: while I was standing next to the fence, she climbed from the fence onto my back. No one had ever done that before, and I didn't like the feeling. But before I could do anything, she started brushing my back and my neck, and I let her do it.

Well, you can guess what happened next. Within a week, I was walking around the corral with her sitting on my back. I actually got used to the feeling, and it wasn't so bad.

Can you guess what came next? One morning there was a saddle perched on the fence where she always met me with carrots. I didn't like the looks of that, but she had a handful of carrots. While I was nibbling them, she was stroking my head and talking softly in my ear, and her father put the saddle on my back. If it hadn't been for Benjy sweet talking me, he would have got a kick just like my last owner. All I did was give a grumpy whinny to let him know I wasn't pleased.

Benjy got up on the saddle, brushing me all the time she was up there. Again, I got used to this, and even liked her being close to me. Within a week, we were walking all around the corral, with her in the saddle.

Next they put a bridle on me: that's where I have a harness on my head. Benjy pulls on the rein, turning my head the direction she wants to go. I didn't like this one bit, and I whinnied to let them know. No one bosses me around!

But Benjy didn't try to be bossy. She usually let me go wherever I wanted in the corral, only occasionally nudging me one way or the other. That was OK, I guess.

Finally, one more surprise: one day Benjy opened the gate of the corral, and climbed into the saddle. She coaxed me to go through the gate, and we were free to go out in the fields. We could go anywhere!

I walked over to a patch of green grass and munched a mouthful of delicious grass. Then I went over to the stream, and drank the clear cold water – it was nothing like drinking from that old pail!

Then I started towards the woods at the far end of the field. I wanted to go exploring, see what the world was like! But just as we got to the woods, Benjy said, “It’s time for supper, Rebel. Time to go back home now.” She pulled gently on the reins to turn me around.

“No,” I whinnied and kept going ahead. She pulled harder. Without even thinking, my old habit took over. NOBODY bosses me around! I reared up on my hind legs and shook my back. Benjy couldn’t hang on and was thrown down to the ground with a sickening thud. She lay there without moving.

Had I just killed the only friend I ever had? I had never called her that before – a friend – but it suddenly struck me that’s what she was. My best friend; my only friend. And I had hurt her, maybe even killed her.

Then she moaned, and moved a little. It wasn’t long before her parents came looking for her and found us at the end of the field.

Right then, I realized that I didn’t want to be a rebel any more. I wanted to be a friend. I wanted to be with her, and go exploring with her. I needed to listen to her, to obey her when she pulled the reins. She wasn’t being bossy; she was leading me so that we could have fun together, so we could enjoy life.

I’m glad they gave me another chance, a chance to prove that I was no longer the Rebel.

Do you like the story?

Sometimes we’re like Rebel the horse. I don’t want to do that! I want my way!

Jesus is like Benjy: he’s not being bossy. He wants to be our friend, to enjoy life together, to show us the right way to go. I’m glad Jesus gives us another chance when our old habits take over.

Sermon: “The road to recovery, step 2: Where to get help when you hurt”

Last week I said that the first step in recovery, the letter “R” is to first **Realize** I’m not God, admit I’m powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable. That is the first step, the reality step.

The second step is what I call the Hope step. Step 1 says, “I admit it. I’m weak. I’m powerless to change myself into the person I want to be.” Step 2 says, There is a power that’s available.

In the Alcoholics Anonymous tradition, Step 2 is this:

Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Like step 1, that is also based on the Bible. The Bible, however, gives a name to that higher power: God. So here’s how we can rephrase step 2.

Step 2: Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to him, and that he has the power to help me recover.

This is the Bible verse which summarizes step 2:

**Hebrews 11:6, New International Version:
Anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists
and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**

There are three parts to taking Step 2 in this road to recovery:

- Believe that God exists
- Know that God understands me and cares for me
- Accept God’s offer to help me

1) Believe that God exists

All around us are signs that God exists. The great scientist Isaac Newton is reported to have said, “In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s existence.”

**Psalm 19:1, New International Version:
The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.**

Every year, we are discovering more and more about the universe. From time to time we hear someone say, “There are billions times billions planets out there. What are the odds that the Earth is the only planet to support life?” The truth is, the fact that even the Earth supports life is amazing:

- The size of the planet: the exact size for gravity to hold the atmosphere, but not crush us
- The distance from the sun: the exact location for temperature to support life

- The moon at exactly the right distance to provide for tides, essential for the environment
- The tilt of the earth's axis: the exact angle to allow for seasons; otherwise, only a small area of earth would be habitable
- The atmosphere: exact concentration of oxygen to breath
- And more: the location in the galaxy, the size and composition of the oceans, the composition of elements in the earth's crust.

Every discovery reveals another example of how intricate this whole system fits together perfectly. In fact, today it takes more faith not to believe in a Creator than it does to believe in one. It takes a great deal of faith to say, "I believe all this just happened by chance." Where there is an effect there must be a cause. Where there is design there must be a designer.

The real issue for most people not, "Is there a God?" That's a given for most people. The real issue, "What is God like? The problem is we have some very strange ideas about what God is like.

Billy and Tommy were two little mischievous brothers who lived in a small town who were blamed for virtually every misdeed in town. For much of it they were rightly accused. Their concerned mom made an appointment for the pastor to talk with them. She took them to the church office for the visit. The pastor using a psychological ploy decided to talk with them one at a time.

Tommy was first. The pastor wanted to impress the boys with the importance of God in their lives. So he started by asking, "Tommy, Where is God?" The kid was frightened, scared to death by the question. He didn't know how to answer. He just sat there. The pastor asked him several times, "Where is God?" Finally, thinking that the boy was just playing with him, the pastor stood up, crossed his arms and said loudly, "Tommy, I know you know: where is God?"

Tommy bolted from his chair, ran out of the church and down the street. When Billy caught up with him, he asked, "Tommy, Tommy what is the matter?"

Tommy answered, "Billy, run hide, God is missing and they are trying to blame it on us."

Unfortunately most of you get your ideas about God by thinking he's like a parent, your father or your mother. That's tragic. Because if your father was aloof and unloving then you tend to think God, the Father, is aloof and unloving. If your parent was somebody to be feared, then you tend to think, "I need to be afraid of God." If

your father was abusive, then you tend to think God is abusive. If your parent was uncaring, then you transfer it over to God. Instead of God making you in his image, you make God in your image.

Every once in a while you hear "My idea about God is..." Rather than peddle our opinions, it would be better to see how God has revealed himself to us in the Bible.

2) Know that God understands me and cares for me

Did your parents tell you, "Don't trust strangers"? That works for God, too.

Until I know what God is really like, I can't trust him. Fortunately God wants us to know about what he's like. So he came to earth two thousand years ago. He came as Jesus Christ.

**Colossians 1:15, Today's English Version:
Christ is the visible likeness of the invisible God.**

If you want to know what God is like just look at Jesus. We're going to do just that. As we do so, we'll be learning about God.

a) God knows all about my situation

God knows all about my situation. He knows the good and bad. Some of you have had a tough week, or month, or life.

**Psalm 56:8, Today's English Version:
You know how troubled I am;
you have kept a record of my tears.**

Isn't that incredible? The Bible says that God knows you up close and personal. He's kept a record of your tears. "Nobody knows the torment I'm going through." You're wrong; God knows. "Nobody knows the depression and the fear that I'm going through." God knows.

**Psalm 69:5, Today's English Version:
My sins, O God, are not hidden from you;
you know how foolish I have been.**

He even knows why you did it, what motivated you, even when you don't even understand yourself.

b) God cares about my situation

**Psalm 103:13-14, New Living Translation:
The Lord is like a father to his children,
tender and compassionate to those who fear him.
For he understands how weak we are; he knows we
are only dust.**

God wants to be the Father many of you never had, tender and compassionate.

Jeremiah 31:3, New Revised Standard Version:
I have loved you with an everlasting love.

God says “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” How can that be? How can God love me and his love never quit? He loves me on good days, bad days, when I serve him and when I don’t, when I’m right, when I’m wrong. How does he keep on loving? Because His love is unconditional. It’s not based on your performance. Your parents’ love was. It’s based on God’s character. The Bible says God is love.

c) God can change me and my situation

If you are familiar with the Twelve Steps of AA, you know that this Step 2 is the “Higher Power” step. I’d like to introduce you to the Higher Power today. His name is Jesus Christ. Jesus is that power you can plug into, because he knows about your situation, and he cares about you. The best news of all, he’s got the power to change it.

Ephesians 1:19-20, New Living Translation:
I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.

Do you sometimes feel you don’t have the power to do what needs to be done? He has the power. He can restore broken marriages, and heal broken hearts. He can set you free from an addiction. He can help you close the door on the past so those memories stop haunting you, if you trust him.

Luke 18:27, Today’s English Version:
Jesus answered, “What is humanly impossible is possible for God.”

The Bible says nothing is too hard for God. You say, “You don’t understand my situation. I’ve tried to change but I can’t.” Nothing is impossible with God, and that situation that seems hopeless, isn’t.

Here’s the point. The longer you deny a problem, the further away recovery gets. We can keep on saying “It’s no problem, it’s not a big issue, I can deal with it, I can handle it,” then the fewer days you have on this earth being all God meant for you to be.

Some people get stuck in the past. Instead of facing up to the current problem, they get into Paralysis of Analysis, focussing on what caused the problem. It’s like driving a car by looking in the rear view mirror. It can be helpful

to remember the past, but only to the point that it helps us to live in the present.

3) Accept God’s offer to help me

It’s not enough just to believe in God. Most of you here believe in God. But that hasn’t wiped away the hurt. You’ve got to plug into the power and that’s more than just believing. Here’s what God has to offer.

Philippians 2:13, New Living Translation:
God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.

God says, “Willpower on your own is not enough. Good intentions are not enough. What you need is my will and my power to help you change. I will give you the willpower.”

What happens when I open up my life to God’s power? When I ask God to put the Spirit of Jesus Christ in my life? What does it do? Does it turn me into some kind of religious nut?

The Bible tells us exactly what happens when we invite God’s Spirit into our lives.

2 Timothy 1:7, Today’s English Version:
The Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.

That’s what I need in my life. First, I want power in my life. I want power to break habits I can’t break. I want power to do the things that I know are right to do but I can’t seem to do them on my own. I want power to break free from the past and let those memories go. We need power.

Then I want love. I want real love. I want to be able to love people and have them love me. I want to let go of hurts that make me afraid of being close to people. We need love.

I want self-control. We all want that. You’re not really in control until Christ is in control of your life. And then you understand what it means to get it all together for the first time in your life because you’re not trying to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Power, love and self-control.

There is a principle in the universe. This may sound real simple, but this is profound. I have learned that things work best when plugged in. Toasters, blenders, televisions, radios, things work best when they’re plugged in. Well, God meant for you and me to be plugged into him.

How do I plug into God's power?

Real simple. Believe and receive. First, I believe that God exists. I believe that he knows all about me, both the good and the bad, and he cares for me. Finally, I believe he has the power to help me.

Then I receive him into my life: Jesus Christ put your Spirit in me.

You can pray a simple prayer using a famous four-letter word. That word is HELP. It takes courage to pray that word.

I need help. God I need your help in my life. The Road to Recovery is not easy. It means facing up to some real problems I haven't wanted to deal with. It means taking some risks. It means being honest, trusting you. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Come into my life with your power, to help me be and become the person you created me to be. Amen.