

The Road to Recovery, Step 3: Letting Go

Message for Sunday, January 22, 2012
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Romans 12:1; Matthew 11:28-30

Children's Message: Romans 12:1-2 “Give yourself to God as a living sacrifice.”

Did you know that a hammer is a very useful tool? You can do almost anything with a hammer.

(enthusiastically!) Here, I'll show you! It can be used to hammer a nail into wood. *Demonstrate.*

But did you also know a hammer can be used as a screwdriver? *Hammer a screw into wood.* There! That's not coming out.

Let's say I'm building some fine furniture, but the piece of wood I have is too big. I could walk all the way back to the garage where the saw is... but why bother, when I've got my hammer?! *Smash the piece of wood until it breaks apart.* There!

And not just in the workshop! A hammer is useful around home. Here is a padlock, and I need what it has locked. But the key is way upstairs. No problem — I've got my hammer! *Bang on the hasp of the lock until it breaks open.* Wasn't that easy?

Here is a jar of jam, but the lid is stuck. In our kitchen we have one of those rubber cloths you can use to get a better grip on the jar, to help open it. My way is faster: watch this! *Swing the hammer down on the glass jar, stopping just before hitting it!*

Whoa! — maybe I better stop there. I was going to show you how you can open a window with a hammer, but I think you get the idea.

Some of these jobs a hammer really isn't very good at. It cut the wood in half, but the edges are all rough. And I can't use that lock ever again.

That's the problem when we try to make something do a job it was never supposed to do.

When God made us, he had a plan in mind. God made us so that we would love him and obey him. When we do that, things work out well. When we disobey God, that's when people get hurt. All of the wars going on in the world, all of the pollution, all of the crime — these are the result of people not doing what God wants us to do.

This verse in the Bible tells us to give ourselves to God. In other words, we now live for God, and follow God's way. That's the key to life.

A boy had reached the age of four without giving up the habit of sucking his thumb. His parents had tried everything from bribery to reasoning to painting it with lemon juice to discourage the habit.

Finally his mother warned her son, “If you don't stop sucking your thumb, your stomach is going to blow up like a balloon.”

Later that day, walking in the park, mother and son saw a pregnant woman sitting on a bench. The 4-year-old studied her for a while, then spoke to her, “Uh-oh...I know what *you've* been doing.”

Sucking your thumb is minor compared to of the habits and hang-ups that many of us have. The question we're working on is: How do you break out of that rut? That's what this series of messages “The Road to Recovery” is all about.

Step 1: Admit that I've got a problem. This is the Reality step.

Step 2: This is the Hope step. Believe that not only am I powerless to do what I want, but God has the power and is willing to help me.

But it's not just enough to know that God will help you. You got to take action. You've got to make a decision. You've got to walk across the line.

1) Step 3: Surrender to Jesus

Now we come to Step 3. The “C” in RECOVERY starts this sentence:

Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.

It's slightly different from Step 3 in the Alcoholics Anonymous tradition: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.”

Like the first two steps, this step is also based on principles in the Bible, particularly what Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28–30, Today's English Version:

“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.”

What a deal! Why would anybody turn that deal down? Yet some of you have heard this before and you've never acted on it. It's like having an unopened gift. God says I want to give you this gift of relief, and release and recovery and you've done nothing about it. What keeps us from taking this Third Step, this important step? What causes me to procrastinate giving my problems to God and to delay surrendering my life to the care and control of Christ?

Many people are like the person who says he wants to swim, but refuses to let go of the edge of the pool. He may dangle his foot in the water; he may even splash around for a while. It is fun, but he is quickly bored. He walks away and says, "Swimming is boring; I've got better things to do." But you see, this person has never really been swimming. He has never enjoyed playing in that refreshing water on a hot day.

I wonder how many Christians have put their little toe in, but have never let go of their lives? They have asked Jesus into their life, and even attend worship, but have never gone further into the Christian life than that. Soon they get bored and lose interest in the things of God. They have never really known what it means to walk with God, to be on the exciting mission of living for God's purposes.

2) Reasons for not surrendering

a) Pride

Pride can keep me from admitting I need help.

Proverbs 16:18, Today's English Version:
Pride leads to destruction, and arrogance to downfall.

Proverbs 18:12, Today's English Version:
Arrogant people are on the way to ruin.

Maybe you're not ready to take this step. Maybe you're not ready to say, "Jesus, I want you to be the master of my life, instead of me." You'd rather keep on running things your way. That's fine; God does not force his way into anyone's life. It may be that you need to make more mistakes, have more failures, experience more pain before you are ready to admit you need help. God will graciously allow you to have all the pain you need to get your attention.

b) Guilt

Guilt can keep me from taking this step. I may be ashamed to ask God to help me.

Psalms 40:12, Living Bible:
Problems far too big for me to solve are piled higher than my head. Meanwhile my sins, too many to count,

have all caught up with me, and I am ashamed to look up.

Ever felt that way? "I've asked God for help, and I made a promise, but then I broke the promise. And I've done it over and over and over. I'm too ashamed and embarrassed to ask God for help."

Or maybe you've done something which you think is just too horrible for God to ever forgive. I was visiting with a woman who is in her 80s, and she opened her heart to me. She had been tormented for years by the thoughts of something she had done when she was much younger. She had had an abortion, and she thought she was forever condemned because of that. I didn't get into the debate about whether abortion is a sin or a woman's right; instead, I just wanted to help her find peace with God. So I opened her Bible to this passage.

1 John 1:8-9, New International Version:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

There's no sin, or no amount of sins that God cannot forgive. And he wants to help you. Don't let pride or guilt keep you from taking this step. He wants to forgive you.

c) Fear

Fear can keep me from taking this step. I'm afraid of what I might have to give up.

I heard about a man, who didn't trust God, in fact, he didn't believe in God. Until one day he fell off a cliff and was hanging by a branch 1,000 feet above a rocky gorge. And in that moment he had a change of heart. He said, "God if you're up there, please help me!" And he heard a voice say, "I'm here!" And he said, "Oh that's great, can you please help me?" And the voice said, "Let go of the branch." "What was that?" "Let go of the branch. Trust me." And the man thought for a second, looked down and said, "Is there anybody else up there?" Some of you are hanging on for dear life by that branch and saying "This isn't that bad. No problem, really, I'm fine."

What are you afraid of if you commit your life to Christ? What are you afraid will happen if you give God care and control of your life? "He'll tell me to go and live among the head-hunters in the Amazon jungle. He'll take all my fun away. I don't want anyone controlling me."

Who are you kidding? You're being controlled all the time. It's just that you choose who you're being controlled by when you let God be your master. You're controlled by the opinions of other people. You're controlled by hurts you can't forget. You controlled by habits, hang-ups, by the way your parents brought you up.

Do you know what freedom is? Freedom is choosing who controls you. When you give your life to the care and control of Christ He sets you free.

John 8:34, 36, Today's English Version:
Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin... If the Son sets you free, then you will be really free."

Real freedom is choosing who your master will be. So what are you afraid of? What are you holding onto that you think, "I can't let go of this in order to give my life to God?" A relationship, ambition, a habit, a life style, a possession.

Matthew 16:26, New Living Translation:
"How do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

When you take this Third Step you give up everything and then you never had it so good, because Jesus takes what you've given him, he turns it around, he adds new meaning, new significance, new vitality, gives it back to you in a whole new way.

3) How do i take this step?

This is the most important thing I'll say today. The Christian life is a decision followed by a process. Same with recovery. It is a decision followed by a process. All I'm talking about today is the decision. OK let's do it, let's go for it.

The process of how we live that out, that comes afterward. It will be a lifelong process. Does it mean everything in my life is perfect? Absolutely not. It means God is in your life, and he's going to start working on you. He's going to be setting you free, little by little by little. It's a process. So don't worry about it. Just trust God.

Maybe you worry that in this battle you couldn't hold on and hold out. God says "Don't worry." It's not your job to keep it. He says, "I do the keeping."

Philippians 1:6, Today's English Version:

I am sure that God, who began this good work in you, will carry it on until it is finished on the Day of Christ Jesus.

a) I take Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.

What does that mean? It means committing as much of myself as I understand at this moment to as much of Christ as I understand at this moment. Is that good enough? Yes, that's good enough.

b) I take God's commands as my standard for living.

From now on I've got a manual that I'm going to live my life by.

c) I accept God's will as my strategy, as my goal in life.

God, what do you want me to do? Let that be the first question you ask when you start the day. "Lord, you woke me up this morning. It obviously means you have another day for me, a purpose for my life. That's exciting. Help me to do my best as I live for you today."

d) I accept God's power as my strength.

Philippians 4:13, New Living Translation:
For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.

You don't need more willpower. You need willingness to receive God's power.

Prayer of surrender:

Lord Jesus,

I give you myself as a living sacrifice, dedicated to you. This is a total, complete and unconditional surrender of my life: all that I am and all that I have – it all belongs to you.

I turn away from all that is wrong in my life, and I turn to you, to follow your ways. I thank you for giving your life so that I can be cleansed from all sin.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so that I will have the power to keep this promise. Change not just my outside behaviour; but change me from the inside out. Mold me and shape me to become the person I was meant to be.

This is my prayer, my heart's desire. Thank-you, Lord Jesus. Amen.