



STEP BY STEP

STEP 6: WERE ENTIRELY READY TO HAVE GOD REMOVE ALL THESE DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.

STEP 7: HUMBLY ASKED HIM TO REMOVED OUR SHORTCOMINGS.

Thomas Edison tried 1100 experiments, and they all failed. Someone was like, “Wow what a waste of time,” to which he responded, “Oh no, I found out 1100 ways how not to do things.” Here at Jacobs’ Well we are a community of people who are experts in what not to do. Like those of you who have found out that giving your addict whatever they want and trying to fix them and keep their addiction from hurting them doesn’t lead to their recovery. You’ve practiced 1000 experiments on it and they’ve all failed. Or those alcoholics who think that this time they can drink successfully. We’ve got to come to terms with how people work and how the universe works or we’re going to get hurt. We can’t break the laws of the universe, but we can break ourselves on them. God gave us freedom to choose and you can make a choice to jump from a 10 story window, but you’re not going the break the law of gravity, you’ll only illustrate it. When we get ready for God to remove our character defects and ask Him to free us from sin, we are lining ourselves up with God’s law and the way things were meant to be. Because we’ve used our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh for so long, we’ve made a mess of our lives. We like to find out how to live the hard way. We’ve tried to find an easier, softer way but we could not. Now at the crossroads we are ready to try it God’s way. And soon we’ll find that freedom in Christ is more glorious than we could ever have imagined.¹

In step 5, we confessed our sins and ways that we have tried to find fulfillment in things that do not satisfy. This has been a big step for some and can lead to several different responses. Some of us will realize that it was way worse than we thought and we get to work trying to fix ourselves. Others go in the opposite direction. We discovered that when we confess our sins, we are forgiven. “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” So we stop trying to improve ourselves. And then there are those who have found forgiveness for their sins and this has led them to seek true freedom. Does anyone in here want freedom? Is anyone tired of living in bondage to other people and other things? Good news. Steps 6-7 are all about seeking freedom from all of our sins. But first, we’ll look at three false freedoms that we need to watch out for. Turn to Galatians 5:1-6.

Fear-based Freedom - *For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

Most of us began working the steps to find freedom because of the pain that our sin was causing us. Fear of going back to how things used to be is a good motivator in the beginning. A lot of people question why God allows pain and suffering, but we were created with pain sensors to let us know what’s good for us. When your kid touches a hot stove, pain tells her to get off so that she’s not permanently scarred. The problem with an addict is that she keeps doing the same thing expecting different results. Tell your neighbor, “That’s insane in the membrane.” But in Step 2 we came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves who could restore us to sanity. And we’ve stopped touching that hot stove and have started to experience different results. The memory of getting burned helps us not to go back. Pain is a good motivator, but it will not last. Galatians 5:1 warns us not to go back into slavery. If we have thoroughly worked steps 1-5, we have started to find freedom from that which holds us back. But if we stop here, we will almost certainly go back. It is vital to move to a place where we are inspired to do good by something better than fear and pain. When we are trying to fix ourselves out of fear, we’ll never get to the root, but only dwell on the symptoms. What if instead we were galvanized and propelled by what God has done for us. This frees us to focus on those sins that are causing us pain *and* those that we are enjoying.

¹ E. Stanley Jones. *The Way*. p. 10

APPROVAL-BASED FREEDOM - GALATIANS 5:2-6

As we continue to read Galatians 5, we find that fear isn't the only motivator to get clean from our sins. The Galatians were willing to go to any lengths to follow Christ. And one of the biggest issues in this letter is whether they needed to be circumcised or not. And throughout the letter, Paul warns against trying to be good and moral *in order that* others (or even God) would approve of us. If we seek to be saved by being religious, then we'll have to follow it perfectly. The Galatians used to be pagans and worshipped many idols. Those who worked on the sea worshipped the sea-gods, those who loved to party worshipped Bacchus, the wine-god. Yet now they are seeking to be religious, even to the point of getting circumcised. Paul warns them that trying to be good in order to be approved is just as much slavery as idolatry. "Neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts as anything." It's not that God loves you because you work steps 6-7, but you work steps 6-7 because God loves you. I'm talking to those of you who used to give in to those desires of the flesh that led to lots of sin, and now you're trying to make a turnaround. You're working hard to become a good person. Praise God! I'm excited for you and am glad you're here. But be careful that religion and morality don't become a different kind of god. That is what happened to the Pharisees and Galatians, don't let it happen to you.

SELF-CENTERED FREEDOM - GALATIANS 5:13 *-For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. . .*

The last kind of false freedom that we read about in Galatians 5 is self-centered freedom. Some would define freedom as the removal of obstacles so that we can do whatever we want (as long as it doesn't hurt others). The problem with this is obvious. Tell your neighbor, "You can't do whatever you want." Some disagree, so let me explain. I may want to live a long life but also like to eat at Roxie's Grocery every week. The two desires are not compatible. *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* Gal. 5:17. This kind of freedom, to do whatever we want, is never possible because we are not God—we can never do *whatever* we want. When we realize that we've been forgiven, soon we find out that we can mess up again and be forgiven again, so our freedom becomes an opportunity for the flesh. This is a false freedom and causes us to stall when we get to Step 6. Why go all the way if we don't have to? Why give up all my sins if I can get into heaven without going that far? That's the wrong question!!! It's not how much you have to do for God, but how much God has done for you!

"What has God done?" . . . He died for you! Jesus stood in your place, took your punishment, and forgave you and freed you from your sin! That means you don't have to keep doing the same thing and expecting different results! Because of what Jesus did, the chains holding you down are broken! Praise Jesus for breaking the chains! Somebody shout, "Yeah!" Tell 7 people, "The chains can be broken!" They are made of iron and linked together, but the chains can be broken in the name of Jesus. They may have imprisoned your daddy, but you can be free. That sin got your momma, but the power over you can be broken. It got your uncle but it doesn't have to get you. The devil's been tying you up with financial strains. He's been tempting you by raising your stress levels. He's been chaining you down with expectations from people all around you, but in the name of Jesus those chains are broken! Encourage your neighbor and tell them, "Freedom is to be had!" Tell the devil that you are free in your marriage, in your recovery, in your ministry, in your finances, in your life! Freedom! The devil doesn't like it, but the chains are breaking. He doesn't want you to believe it, but the chains are breaking!

HOW DO WE SEEK TO FIND FREEDOM FROM SIN?

ATTITUDE: **BECOME ENTIRELY READY** ACTION: **MAKE A LIST OF ALL CHARACTER DEFECTS, GOOD, BAD, AND UGLY**

Later in this amazing chapter Paul writes these profound words that much of the idea of this study are based on: “walk by the Spirit so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh.” But how do we do this??? If we confess our sins, God is sure to forgive them, but he never says that He will keep us white as snow without our cooperation. “Walking in the Spirit” requires us to take certain steps. And the step we are focusing on tonight is to become entirely ready to have God remove our sins and character defects. This doesn’t mean instantaneously, though. We might find freedom from a few sinful habits immediately, but most will come through patient, persistent prayer. This is a spiritual journey that will last a lifetime. We have to start somewhere, and that starting place is to become entirely ready for God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The 12 and 12 of AA encourages us to gather up all the honesty we can summon and try to have this willingness. Even the best of us will find that there is one or more things out there that we say, “No, I can’t give this up yet.” But the truly dangerous place is when we hear ourselves think, “This I will never give up!” Such is the power of those desires within us, these instinctive drives going 100 mph. No matter how close to Christ we get, there will always be desires that oppose the grace of God.

Some of you really spiritual people might argue with this. You probably feel like you pretty much have everything under control. So let’s try to think it through a little further. Pretty much everyone wants to get rid of the biggest, baddest, and ugliest sins. Nobody wants to be so proud that eyes start rolling every time he brags, or so promiscuous that people have names for her. No one wants to be angry enough to murder, lustful enough to rape, gluttonous enough to ruin their health. No one wants to be agonized by the chronic pain of envy or to be paralyzed by sloth. The problem is that we usually don’t hit rock-bottom in all these areas. And since we haven’t gone to these extremes, we tend to pat ourselves on the back for such a righteous life we live. But can we? Hasn’t it been self-interest that has made it possible for us to escape these extremes? Not much spiritual effort is involved in avoiding excesses which will bring us punishment anyway. When looking face-to-face at the less violent aspects of these same sins, then how righteous are you? That’s why the Sermon on the Mount gets to us so bad when Jesus says that it isn’t when we murder that we should be worried, but when we think how stupid that guy is. It’s not when you find yourself in bed with her husband, but when you accept his flirtation and realize you like how it makes you feel. And

If we’re honest, we really kind of like some of our sins. . .if we’re really being honest, we kind of *love* some of them. Who, for example doesn’t like to feel just a little superior to the next guy. . .or even a lot superior? Isn’t it true that we like to let greed masquerade as ambition or being competitive? I’m not even going to get into how lust plays a part of Christians’ lives. Self-righteous anger can also be pretty enjoyable, can’t it? In a perverse way we can actually take satisfaction from the fact that some people annoy us. It brings a comfortable feeling of superiority. They say gossip is a polite form of murder by character assassination, yet it brings satisfaction too. We have a P.C. term for gluttony called, “all-you-can-eat.” Sure food tastes good, but sometimes we’re feeding something much deeper within. We live in a world riddled with envy. If we really examine our hearts, it’s often not as much about what we have as much as what we don’t yet have. Think about procrastination, which is really sloth in five syllables.

But these are only a few! Pretty much anyone could sit down and write a list like this of their own sins and character defects, but not many would be ready to give them up until they cause excessive misery. But there are a few of you who are genuinely ready. But I'll warn you that when you actually sit down to write your list of sins and character defects, you will surely find a *few* that you'll want to hang on to. Yet we are faced with Jesus' bold command to become "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" in Matthew 5:48.

Many will exclaim, "What an order, I can't go through with it, how could I ever be perfect in this life?" Is it possible for one of us in this room to become perfect in this life? I don't know, I've never met anyone who has reached that ideal. But that's not what I'm asking you to do. What I'm challenging you to do tonight, is to become willing to start the journey. The only urgent thing is that we get started and keep trying. Can you become entirely ready to have your sins removed from you? Yes. So as you make your list of sins that you are going to begin asking God to remove, start with the ones that you are most ready to let go of. Move your favorite sins down the list to be dealt with when you are more ready. But I've got to warn you about two things. One is to not put this off too long. You might need to deal with the defect of procrastination first. I've heard people say, "Why that's easy! Sure, I'll head toward perfection, but I'm going to take my jolly good time getting there. Maybe I can postpone dealing with some of my problems indefinitely." Of course this isn't any good. Get together with someone who you trust to hold you accountable to keep at it. This is not easy work, but it is highly rewarding. The final caution, is to be careful not to say, "I will never give this one up!" Remember, the moment we say, "No, never!" our minds close against the grace of God. Delay is dangerous, and rebellion may be fatal. The important thing is to keep moving, to get as close as we can to being ready.² Is anybody in the house ready to be free? Then you're finished with Step 6 and onto 7.

FREEDOM IN CHRIST - GALATIANS 5:14

As we return to our Galatians passage, read the end of 5:14 and 15. In that little verse is the solution to the problems of the universe. Within this sentence is the power that can break the chains to truly set you free. The problem is that our English translators have been too chicken to actually say what it means. We read that we are to "serve one another in love," and we probably imagine preparing a meal and bringing it out to someone who is hungry, or something like that. But the word is not *serve*, its *slave*. . . *doulos*. The first verse talks of being enslaved to our sins, but now we learn about a new kind of slavery, to God and to one another. We think that freedom equals independence, but freedom from oppression is not *in*-dependence. Let's take romance as an example. When you meet somebody and "fall in love," you are freed from loneliness, isolation, and all kinds of other things. But in your freedom you are certainly not independent! As soon as you get married—or even when you move in together or the relationship gets serious—you can't just go out with the guys. Instead, you have to ask, "Would it be alright if. . ." Because when we are freed from one thing, we become dependent upon another. What have you exchanged your dependency for? Some of you were once chemically dependent, and now you're dependent upon meetings or religion. This is a much healthier option! You are freed from the cravings for drugs, but you have to go to meetings to keep it up. Or in the process of going through these steps on Saturday nights you have found freedom from anger or resentment or having to rely on what others think of you for approval. Have you exchanged these things for another kind of dependency? The goal of the 12 steps is to help you to exchange your dependencies for a deep dependency upon God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

² Inspired from Step 6 in AA's 12 & 12

ATTITUDE: **BECOME HUMBLE**ACTION: **ASK GOD TO REMOVE ALL OF THESE DEFECTS**

Steps 1-3 helped us to break free of our addictions and ground our relationship in a loving God through repentance, belief, and surrender. Steps 4-5 then helped us to reflect on our relationships in light of this God's love, which helped us to see that we have been enslaved to dysfunction and disharmony due to our sins. Now, in Steps 6-7 we find freedom from our sins so that we can enslave ourselves to our God and our neighbors in love. This is extraordinarily humbling. Step 7 is about realizing that we could never keep ourselves clean or make ourselves perfect, but we serve a God where all things are possible. That's humility. Humility comes out of an accurate picture of God and an accurate picture of ourselves. Some of you have come a long way from where you used to be and you're starting to think you did it, that you are God. Let me remind you who God is. God is the ruler of the universe. He is all-knowing and has never been challenged with a question that he didn't know. This is God the creator of all things, the one who figured out photosynthesis and osmosis, the one who designed pollination and hibernation. God said his ways are higher than our ways, the wisdom of man is the foolishness of God. He has all power, all authority, no court can judge him, no power can overcome him. God alone is God. He is everywhere all at once. In the highest heaven or deepest pit we find ourselves in, God is there. Time is under him because God is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. The earth is filled with his glory. The ancient of days, the sovereign one, the ruler of all. Never weak, never broken, never desperate, never needy, this is our God! Yet this same God came off of his throne and came down to be born in a manger, that which the animals ate from. He poured out his omniscience, his omnipotence, and his omnipresence and he came down and became one of us. The glorious majestic king of heaven became the humble and poor carpenter of earth. God became flesh. The Lord of all became a little child. The one who carried us now had to be carried. The prophet said, "Unto us a child is born and the government shall rest upon his shoulders." This is the mystery of heaven that the One who holds all things together became a little child who had to be held. This is humility. This is love. God came down and humbled himself to become one of us. I've heard it said that once a fish and a bird fell in love, but where would they live? The fish couldn't fly up in the sky and the bird couldn't swim down in the sea. Once upon a time a man and a God fell in love, but where would they live? The man couldn't climb up to where God is because he had fallen too deep in the sea of sin. But God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, he humbled himself and came down to where we are. He came down into the mess with us. Like a bird learning how to swim, he wrapped himself in flesh and hungered and experienced thirst for the first time. And he did it for you, because he is madly in love with you, and desperately longs for you to live a life of freedom filled with peace, love, and joy. And we cannot truly be free until we experience this relationship for which we were born for. A fish cannot be free to live on land, even if a fisherman frees him from the water. A fish is only free in the environment in which it was designed for.³

True freedom is to have the obstacles removed to live in the environment for which we were designed.

Environments like worship, recovery, mediation, fasting, serving. And in those environments we will love God, love self, and love neighbor (Gal. 5:13-14). The obstacles that keep us from this are our sins, or character defects.

Freedom doesn't happen simply from becoming aware of our character defects. We must replace our passions with another. If we replace our obsession with alcohol with an obsession to be a good person, we will fail. But if we exchange our sinful desires for a passionate love affair with Christ, then we are transformed from the inside out.

³ Inspired from T.D. Jakes in his sermon, "A Lesson in Humility."