



# STEP BY STEP

## STEPS 10 & 11: SANCTIFICATION

CONTINUED TO TAKE PERSONAL INVENTORY AND, WHEN WE WERE WRONG, PROMPTLY ADMITTED IT.

SOUGHT THROUGH PRAYER & MEDITATION TO IMPROVE OUR CONSCIOUS CONTACT WITH GOD, PRAYING ONLY FOR KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL FOR US AND THE POWER TO CARRY THAT OUT.

Welcome to Step by Step. The first nine steps are all about reforming and rehabbing our lives in order to walk in the Spirit. The last three steps show the pilgrim how to maintain the new life that comes as a result of committing one's life and will to God, working the steps, and giving away what one is finding. The Big Book of AA makes this promise for those who have thoroughly worked steps 1-9:

*If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.<sup>1</sup>*

If you have worked the steps with honesty and thoroughness, you have started to experience the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. . .and tonight we'll learn how to grow in self-control. "It is appropriate for self-control to be last because it is a product of the previous eight, for if you have love and joy in your heart, peace and patience in your soul, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in your behavior, then self-control will likely reign over your body.<sup>2</sup> And on the other side of the coin, self-control might be what is needed in our life to begin exhibiting the other fruit of the Spirit. Either way, self-control is something that every one of us needs more of. Let's take a little test. As each of the following images appear on the screen, think about whether they challenge your self-control. (images are shown to illicit temptation)

### **Epithumai vs. Egkrateia**

In the very beginning of this series I taught you guys a Greek word that probably best characterizes our addictive tendencies, *epithumia*. *Thumia* means desire and *epi* is over, and this word describes how we go overboard in our desires. God has placed good desires within each of us, the desire to be accepted and belong, the needs to be comfortable and secure, and a certain level of desire for control. But too often we let these unmet needs control us and our desire for things other than God to satisfy us becomes insatiable. Our lives are filled with *epithumia*, literally an "unrestrained desire for something forbidden."<sup>3</sup> Paul, Peter, John, and James all use this language as the

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<sup>1</sup> Big Book of A.A. pp 83-84

<sup>2</sup> Green, Win. *All You Ever Wanted: A Devotional and Small Group Study on the Fruit of the Spirit*. Tate Publishing, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Friberg Greek Lexicon

catch-all for what is wrong with us.<sup>4</sup> Without a deep grasp of the gospel, we believe that fulfillment/happiness/salvation comes by meeting one of these “desires of the flesh” with something other than Jesus. Now, how do we “walk in the Spirit so as not to gratify the desires of the flesh?” The final fruit of the Spirit gets at this with another e-word, *engkrateia* (eng-krat-i-ah), which means self-restraint. Do you see the contrast? *engkrateia* = “self-restraint” while *epithumia* = “unrestrained desire.” Which one characterizes your life? Ever desire that forbidden fruit and find that you’re incapable of restraining yourself? Think back to the images we saw before.

The point of the steps is to get you ready for the hour of temptation. When Peter insisted that he would never deny Jesus, he really intended to do it, but the road to hell and the road to relapse is paved with good intentions. Peter had lived his whole life doing what made him feel good and being influenced by what other people thought. Of course he denied Christ! But Peter found that he could change. Tell your neighbor, “You can change!” There is a man with a rebellious teenage son and he complained that he just cannot stop himself from exploding in anger when talking with him. Of course he can! Tell your neighbor, “You can change!” He may not be able to stop himself in the moment, but he can do some things differently when he’s not around his son that can lead to acting differently when he is around his son. For instance, he can work the 12 steps about it. He can spend some time in solitude and mediate about it. He can pray and ask God throughout the day for serenity to accept the things he cannot change, and through time, this man will become a different person, one who doesn’t get angry as much. Tell your neighbor, “You can change!” You do what’s under your control so that you can do what’s not under your control. The trial of temptation may be too great for you to overcome, yet when you have worked the proper steps, the one within you shows Himself to be more powerful than the one who is in the world. It’s like playing sports or music. Gameday doesn’t happen without day after day of practice. Yet somehow we think spirituality just happens by osmosis. Steps 10 & 11 offer a game plan to practice so that when the hour of temptation strikes we are ready and equipped to win.

## LEARNING CIRCLE

Step 10 suggests that we continue to take personal inventory and continue to set right any new mistakes as we go along. This is not something we finish overnight, but should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these pop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We’re also looking for opportunities to serve and ways that God is calling us to act. I want to encourage you to take some daily time of solitude to do this. Whether it be getting up a little earlier in the morning, turning the radio off in the car, or carving out some time in the middle or end of the day. Recently, through a ministry called 3dm, I was introduced to something I found to be big-time helpful for this process that I want to introduce to you. It’s called the learning circle. Who was here for John Kilzer last week? You can tell he’s really smart, and he takes it to a high intellectual level, then has a way of just dropping a bomb that went beyond the brain to the heart. One of those was about kairos vs. chronos time. Those are the two words in Greek for time. We live our lives in chronos, the hours and days tick away and we go throughout our day. But sometimes we hear a word from God and experience Kairos. It’s a different kind of time. It happens when we take time for solitude or take time to be part of a prayer group. Steps

<sup>4</sup> Gal.5:16ff; Eph.2:3, 4:22; I Pet.2:11, 4:2; I John 2:16; James 1:14ff

10-11 are designed to create an environment for kairos to happen. So when we are praying or meditating and we a light bulb goes on, that's kairos. When we're going through our day thinking about things we said or did and we realize that we hurt someone we love, that's a kairos moment. It could be something that God wants us to do, or something we should stop doing. Or maybe we don't immediately know what to do with this idea or thought, but sense that it is from God. That is kairos. But what do we do with that? Usually nothing, so I want to teach you a way of responding through the Learning Circle. Jesus entered into human history as the greatest kairos moment ever and his primary message was two-fold, repent and believe. Embrace what God is saying, turn away from the old ways, and enter the new way that God has for you. Think about what the kairos is for you right now. What is God saying to you? It will usually lead us to repent. And to that we first need to observe, maybe right it down, then reflect on what it means. Usually we cannot fully see it ourselves, so we need to discuss it with someone else. If we have a sponsor, that would be who we go to first, or if we're part of a prayer group or band of brothers or sisters who we keep accountable with. This is where Christians usually stop, but we're only half way through. After we repent, we are invited to believe that things can be different. So we must plan for how we will be different, then invite our sponsor or friends to keep us accountable to do that which we sense God calling us to. Finally comes the hard part, we actually do it. Tell your neighbor, "Just do it." We make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. We make that phone call the first chance we get. If we're going to go to two NA meetings this week, then we decide on which two days, put it in our calendar, and do it. Please don't make this learning circle more complicated than it is. Basically we are just asking two questions: What is God saying to me? What am I going to do about it?

### **Inviting the Spirit to come alongside**

As we do this, we are inviting the Lord to search our hearts to the depths. We boldly pray the words of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."<sup>5</sup> Without apology or defense we ask to see what is truly in us. It's for our own sake that we ask these things. It's for our good, for our healing, for our happiness. I want you to know that God goes with us in step 10. The Holy Spirit is talked about in the bible as the "one who comes alongside." We do step 10 together with God. This is extremely important for two different and opposite reasons. To begin with, if we are the only examiners of our heart, a thousand justifications will arise to convince us of our innocence. But since God goes with us on our search, we are listening more than we are defending. Our pitiful rationalizations and evasions of responsibility simply will not tolerate the light of His presence. He will show us what we need to see when we need to see it. At the other end of the spectrum is our tendency to beat ourselves up. If left to our own devices, it is so easy for us to take one good look at who we truly are and declare ourselves unredeemable. But with the Spirit of God alongside us we are protected and comforted.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 139:23-24

<sup>6</sup> Richard Foster. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. pp. 49-50

## SOUGHT CONSCIOUS CONTACT

Ok, so we've been focusing on Step 10, getting real introspective and focusing on ourselves. Step 11 moves us outside of ourselves and into the presence of God. *Sought through prayer & meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

It begins with "sought." This has always been a blah word for me until in a meeting this week I saw it and realized that it is just the past tense of seek! I don't know about you, but I'm a seeker. I used to be constantly seeking dope, and ways and means of getting more. When one drug became too much I switched to another, then I would lean on my math skills and divide, add, and multiply, but it was never adequate. I was constantly on a search, kill, and consume mission, seeking to be high all day, every day, and it was never enough. Can anybody relate? I was thirsty and the stuff I was drinking didn't quench it. I was hungry, and that which I was consuming didn't fill me. I was seeking but couldn't get no satisfaction. But now I'm on a different kind of search! Because I met a man who said, *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.* Jesus is my higher power and He showed me how to live life on life's terms. This kind of life he offers is called *abundant life*, where I don't have to get high to cope, because Jesus is so much better than dope! When I was thirsty, he gave me Living Water. When I was hungry, he offered the Bread of Life. When I was homeless, He went to prepare a place for me in His Father's house. In response to this amazing grace and the great gift of God in Jesus Christ, I am on a search for more of Him. I am not satisfied with just going to church, I want to be the church. I'm not content with praying once in the morning, I long for a conscious contact with God. And that's at the heart of Step 11, we sought a conscious contact with God.

When we first begin to walk with God, He answers our little egocentric prayers all the time and we say, "Wow, God really is real!" But after some time of maturing, when we try to push this button again, we sense God saying, "I want to be more than your Provider. I want to be your Teacher and Friend." We begin to see how God desires us to find freedom from the bondage of greed, fear, and pride that make us so miserable. He seeks to show us the more excellent way. As we begin to follow these nudgings of the Spirit we begin to change from the inside out. Our prayer becomes more and more frequent until we can characterize our lives with the term, "conscious contact." This can seem totally out of reach for most of us, just like entire sanctification. But we've got to stress spiritual progress, not perfection. God desires to mold us more and more into Christ's way.

## THROUGH PRAYER & MEDITATION

But how? Through prayer and meditation. Let's talk meditation first since it might be most unfamiliar. If prayer is talking, meditation is listening. Christian meditation is pushing all the thoughts and noise in your head out so that you can get quiet enough to hear God. It's different than Eastern meditation in that we aren't trying to become one with the universe, we're trying to become one with Christ. So I would encourage you to meditate on scripture. Actually, I'll do more than encourage you. I'll give you a chance to do it, right now. After taking a moment of silence to just clear your mind of all thoughts, worries, and distractions, I'll read part of Psalm 119 for us to meditate upon. As I read it, listen for God's word for you, specifically just one word that God might have for you tonight.

*How can a young person keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. . . . .*

Now, what word or phrase stuck in your mind? Shout it out. You just meditated! Give your neighbor a high five. Need to learn how to pray? There is no better school of prayer than the one that happens when we go to our knees day after day. Prayer is not complicated, but we try to make it that way. The religious leaders of Jesus' day would try to impress one another by their fancy prayers that lasted way too long. So Jesus taught us how to pray, join with me if you know it. *Our Father who art in heaven, halloweth be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, the glory, forever and ever. Amen.* Prayer is where we get to know God as our Father who provides what we need each day. He's not that oppressive disciplinarian you may have been taught as a child and he's also not Santa Clause. When you first start to pray, do what Jesus instructs, ask for forgiveness, and help to forgive others. Pray about help with temptation and strength for the day. And move towards the central part of the Lord's prayer becoming the central part of your life. *Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* Or in other words, knowledge of God's will, and the power to carry that out. The purpose of conscious contact is to know God's will and become empowered to do it.

## **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL AND THE POWER TO CARRY IT OUT**

And that brings us full circle. As we are meditating on scripture in the morning or evening and we hear God's voice, Or as we are going about our day, praying for knowledge of God's will, and then discover it, we are in kairos time. That's when we need to enter the learning circle. Way too often, we hear God speak, and do nothing about it. Again, this circle gives us a helpful tool to find out what God is saying and what we will do about it.

And I believe that there is someone in here tonight who is aware of some aspect of God's will for your life. Maybe its something that you need to do, or something that you need to stop doing. But maybe you have no idea where you'll find the power to carry it out. Hear the good news. There is a Power greater than you that has come to restore all things. And there is no place where that power of God was stronger than on the cross of Jesus Christ. Like John shared last week, this is not about doing more and becoming stronger. His power is made perfect in our weakness, and no clearer is this than when we celebrate holy communion. In the table is etched the correct order of Jesus' words: "This do in remembrance of me." Yet we reverse it. When we figure out God's will, we want to go and do it, forgetting the second half of step 11, the power to carry it out. This - do, not Do - this. And so as we partake in the body and blood, present your ideas on what God's will is for your life. Surrender to His ways, and embrace the power made perfect is Christ's weakness. Let us draw close to the cross, repenting of our sin and believing the gospel. Let us move away from our will and center in God's will. Let us turn away from our desires of the flesh and turn wholly and completely towards God's desire for us. Let us pray.