

**Life Change from the Heart**  
**“Step 10: Continued Humility, Part 1 of**  
**Three Focuses of a Vibrant Christian Life”**  
**John 21:15-19**



January 8, 2017

**Start Timer!**

**[Slide 1]** Happy New Year to all of you!

We are in a final part of a series called, **Life Change from the Heart**. This is a series about how God changes us from the heart through the gospel. We have showed you that the 12-Step Recovery Program does a great job distilling how gospel transformation works.

Now, this series is not just for people who are in recovery because of an addiction. This is for everyone who wants to be transformed by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Do you know how God transforms us?

We start with acknowledging our powerlessness to change ourselves. We start with acknowledging that we are messed up and need God to change us. The Bible talks about this as sinful nature that we are powerless to. **[Slide 2]** That's step 1: **We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.**

Then, we go on a spiritual quest to seek power greater than ourselves. We made the case that believing in Jesus is both intellectually credible and it restores us to sanity. **[Slide 3]** That's step 2: **Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

Then, we come to a point of surrendering our life to God who loved us so much that he came down and died for while we were still sinners, even when we were all messed up. **[Slide 4]** That's step 3: **Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.**

This is the point at which we start our Christian walk. We acknowledge we are messed up and we made a decision to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

We said that we are not zapped into life change after we surrender our life to God. A lot of people make a critical mistake right after they become a Christian. They get all legalistic. They starting looking to modify their behavior. They look to external behavioral change only, and don't spend the time to look deeply into their heart and clean their heart. That's what the Pharisees, the religious leaders, were focused on: External

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behavior. But, Jesus said that their hearts were rotten. Jesus called them to clean the inside of the cup. So, Step 4 is the start of the process of cleaning the inside of the cup, our heart. We go through an extensive process of self-examination to find self-indulgence in our heart. **[Slide 5]** That's step 4: **Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

Then, we confess what we find. **[Slide 6]** That's step 5: **Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

Then, we repent, which means change the posture of our heart. **[Slide 7]** That's step 6: **Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

**[Slide 8]** Step 7 says: **“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”** How does God remove our shortcomings? We said that it is by the power of grace. Going through the process of self-examination in step 4, confession in step 5, and repentance in step 6 leads our heart to humility. When we realize how messed up we really are, deeply acknowledged that, and change the posture of our heart, we can't help but to come to God in humility. And when we come to God in humility, we come to God like the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal son came back to the father. And we experience his extravagant grace. It is this grace that shocks our heart and changes our lives. Our lives change afterwards.

Steps 4-7 dealt with our relationship with God, see ourselves, confessing it, repenting, and experiencing God's grace. Steps 8-9 is about making amends with people we have wronged.

**[Slide 9]** Step 8 says: **“Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”** And in Step 9, we actually go and make the amends. **[Slide 10]** Step 9 says: **“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”** Steps 8 and 9 work together to bring reconciliation. So, now your relationships start healing.

Steps 1-9 are the heart of the twelve step recovery program. Steps 1-3 are about the process of surrendering to God. Steps 4-7 are about how God changes us from the heart and Steps 8-9 are about how we make amends with those we have hurt.

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Now, most of these things are about processing our past, confessing our sins of the past, and God changing us from the root cause of our addictions by cleaning our hearts. But, how do we sustain this for the long haul? How do we continue to grow and experience life change? How do we make sure we don't backslide into our old selves? How do we make sure we don't relapse?

**[Slide 11]** Well, Steps 10 says: **“Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”** It doesn't seem to let people off the hook. Rather, it calls them to continue in humility and continue to do Steps 4-9 over and over again on a daily basis. Then, we'll see that Step 11 calls us to live in a rhythm of prayer and meditation and get closer and closer to God. The call is to develop a daily relationship with God that is vibrant and growing.

If we try to live our lives on the experiences of the past, we are not going to be able to sustain our recovery. God calls us into a relationship with him daily. The experience of God in the past is awesome. He has changed us. But, left to our devices, the default mode of our heart is to move away from God and seek our own idols and get messed up again.

I want to ask you, especially as we start this new year, do you feel like your relationship with God is vibrant and growing? Or do you feel like your relationship with God is staled? How would you rate the condition of your relationship with God? Do you want to change? Sometimes, we often want to go to a conference or a revival something and get wacked by the Holy Spirit, have some sort of an emotional experience of the Holy Spirit to revive our relationship with God. I tell you, getting wacked by the Holy Spirit is pretty fun. But, it doesn't happen everyday. We need to create a daily discipline of applying the gospel to our lives.

This is important because for some of you, your recovery depends on it. How do we maintain a vibrant Christian life? How do we live to prevent relapse?

I want to answer this question by giving you a story of a man who relapsed in the Bible: Peter.

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Peter was very confident about his loyalty to Jesus. At the Last Supper, according to Matthew’s account, Jesus told all of the disciples that all of the disciples would fall away when Jesus gets arrested. In response, Peter said to Jesus (Matthew 26:33):

“**33** Peter replied, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.’” Then, Jesus said to Peter: **34** “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Peter was confident in himself. I think he really meant it. I am for you. I have your back. I am not going to fall away even if everyone else does. *I love you more than any of these guys.* That’s what he was saying.

We know, of course, that he does fall away. He denied Jesus three times. He didn’t just deny Jesus. He said it with an oath, and he called down curses and swore that he didn’t know Jesus. Then the rooster crowed. Luke’s account of the story says, Jesus looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered what Jesus said. And he wept bitterly.

You know, Peter surrendered his life to Jesus. He’d been following Jesus for about 3 years. He was passionate about Jesus, and he was so confident that he would never deny Jesus or fall away from Jesus. But, he didn’t. He relapsed. He did something he didn’t think he would do again. He went back to his old ways. But, the story doesn’t end there. Even a relapse does not end our recovery. The Gospel of John tells us the story of Peter’s restoration. This happens after Peter’s denial, Jesus death, and resurrection.

**[Slide 12]** John 21:15-19

**15** When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

**16** Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

**[Slide 13]** **17** The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

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Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

Jesus asked Peter three times, do you love me? Why three times? Peter denied Jesus three times. This is Jesus’ way of inviting Peter to examine his heart. But, that’s not all. The undercurrent of the conversation is very subtle and it is very hard to translate it. Our English translation is trying to do it best but is not as obvious as in the original language.

After the breakfast, Jesus asked Peter: “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Here, Jesus used the word “*agape*” for love. It is the same word used to describe the love that God has for us in John 3:16: For God so *loved*—*agape*—the world, he gave his only begotten son...” This is the highest form of love: unconditional self-sacrificial Christ-like love. So, Jesus asked Peter, do you *agape* me more than any of the other disciples? I don’t think he is saying, do you love me more than the fish? Or do you love me more than the boat? No. He left all that long ago. Jesus is bringing Peter to the moment when he said, “even if all the other disciples abandon you; I will not. I love you more than any of the other disciples. I am more loyal to you. You can depend on me!” Peter was completely confident of himself. And now, Jesus is saying, do you self-sacrificially love me more than any of the other disciples? Peter’s answer is interesting: he does not say, you know I *agape* you. That’s what the English text sounds like. But, in the original language, he responds: you know that I love you; but the word that he used for love is not *agape*: it is *phileo*. The word *phileo* is translated as love in English but it means friendship love, affection. It means I love you in the sense that two friends love one another. It’s not the same level as *agape*. When Jesus asked him, do you *agape* me? He said, I *phileo* you, meaning I can’t say that I am going to be better than anyone else. I

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don't know if I can sacrifice myself for others. I am a sinner. I am a broken man. I don't know if I can *agape* love you. I don't know if I can sacrifice myself for you. But, I want to be with you. I want to be where you are. I love *phileo* you.

Then, Jesus asked again: do you *agape* me? And again, Peter answered, I *phileo* you. He is humble about his ability to love. He is a man humbled by his past, and keeps himself humble.

Then, the third time Jesus asked, Jesus didn't ask, do you *agape* me? He asked do you *phileo* me. I find this completely fascinating. I think it is very intentional that Jesus uses a lower form of love for the third question. Jesus meets Peter where he is. He is not asking Peter to believe in himself, and have confidence in himself. And Peter responds again, I *phileo* you.

You know what this means? It means that Jesus is not expecting us to be perfect. He is not expecting us to be confident about our faith or even our ability to love him or sacrifice for him or live up to our recovery or be perfect. Peter was a broken man. He knew he failed. Yet, Jesus didn't restore him because Peter had confidence that he would not do it again, that he would sacrifice himself for God, that he would *agape* love God. Peter was just saying, I don't know if I can live up to what I really want to do; but I know want to be with you. I *phileo* you. And that was good enough. In fact, that's the kind of follower I believe God is looking for. He is not looking for people who are confident that they would sacrifice everything for God. He is not looking for people who are confident that their love for God is more than anyone else's love. He is not looking for people who are confident that they would be righteous. He is looking for leaders and followers who are humble, who acknowledge their sins, and their weaknesses, and but want to be with Jesus. That's where he meets us. He lowered the question to *phileo* the third time. He is asking us to be with him and follow him.

This is why we CONTINUE to do personal inventory, search our hearts for sins, and wrongs. This means we go back to Steps 4-9, and learn to do this everyday. We do this because we don't have confidence that we will prevail on our own. It is only through God's grace that we can continue our recovery and transformation in our lives. It is so

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important to keep our hearts humble. That’s why AA folks call themselves alcoholics even after decades of sobriety. It is this attitude of humility. And that’s what Jesus is saying: stay humble. Don’t get prideful about what you can do.

I have told this story before, but I think it’s a good illustration. I remember a TV show from the 90s called *Mad About You* starring Helen Hunt and Paul Riser. In one episode, the wife notices her husband slightly flirting with an attractive woman. She confronts him about it, and he denies it. He said, I would never ever cheat on you. He is saying that he is a good husband and he would never be bad. He promises her over and over again. But, the wife said, no don’t say that. Don’t ever say never. She wants him to see that he could do it. She wants him to acknowledge that he is not as strong as he thinks he is. So, at the end of the episode, he does acknowledge that he is not as strong as he thinks he is, that he could cheat on her. Then, she says, now promise to never do it. Promise that you will be open to me. She wanted him to have a humble attitude towards what he can do, and live in that humility instead of thinking that he is beyond that. Grace and I looked at each other and said, that’s the gospel. The gospel tells us to acknowledge that we are weak. That we can sin. Even though God has been and will continue to do great work in our lives, we are still more messed up than we think we are. So, we have to stay humble and continue to acknowledge our powerlessness. What Peter did was to think that he was beyond it. He was confident in his own loyalty. Jesus is saying, stay humble and continue to seek me for power.

Jesus was teaching Peter, and he is teaching us, that we don’t have to perfect to follow him or even lead his church. Despite his weakness, Jesus commanded him to feed his sheep. That is a relief to me. I don’t have to pretend like I am perfect. I fail all the time, but one thing is true: like Peter, I want to be with Jesus. I *phileo* Jesus. I don’t have enough confidence to say that I am going to sacrifice everything for Jesus, that I would die for Jesus, that my love for him is self-sacrificial. But, it’s not about how much I can love the Lord. It is about how much he loves us and what he has done for us.

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Do you know what the irony in the whole story is? Even though Peter didn't have the confidence that he would agape love Jesus, Jesus commissioned him to feed the sheep, and told Peter, he would indeed agape love Jesus and die a martyr.

**Questions for Manny:**

-How important is a posture of humility to recovery?

-Tell us when you started to do Step 10 work. How do you practice this daily?  
How do you go back and do Steps 4-9 every day?

This is a version of the five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius practiced.

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions. (Boredom? Elation? Resentment?  
Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings?)
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

-What would you say to people in recovery who fear relapsing? How about people who have experienced relapse in their recovery?