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Celebrate Recovery[®]

365 Daily Devotional

HEALING FROM HURTS,
HABITS, AND HANG-UPS



The First Step

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

ROMANS 7:18

No one gets to start in the middle—we're all beginners in one area of our lives or another. But for many of us, what we need is more like a new beginning, a fresh start, a walking journey from chaos to wholeness that is accomplished one step at a time. We call that journey "recovery." Let's look at that first step:

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors. That our lives had become unmanageable.

Our first step is a big one. We are finally ready to admit that we are powerless to control an addiction or a behavior. The harder we try, the more unmanageable it becomes. Our lives have descended into chaos. When we take that first big step—giving up control—we are stepping away from denial and acknowledging our own need.

There is hope in that first step, for we can't be helped until we admit that we need help. Until then we are trying to be God in our own lives, and really we just aren't up to the task. We are powerless to control much of anything by our own power. Step 1 allows us to find freedom from ourselves.

PRAYER

Father God, today I take that first important step toward healing and wholeness. I admit to you that I'm powerless over the strongholds that have taken over my life. I desperately need your help. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Single Step

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

HEBREWS 12:1

I can remember being at a point when I knew my life was spinning out of control. I knew there were a lot of things I needed to change. But I didn't want to alter my current lifestyle too much. So I looked for ways to get some help without having to make drastic changes. I attended some secular meetings, for example, but didn't really commit to their programs. Then when nothing happened, I would say, "Why isn't this working? Maybe God doesn't love me. Maybe I don't deserve to change."

The truth is, I didn't need one more thing to cram into my messed-up life. What I needed was something to *replace* my messed-up life. I needed to let go of my old life and hand it over to God. I finally did that and now, twenty years later, I can't imagine why it took me so long to do something so right and true and amazing.

A race begins with a single step, and so does recovery. The only way to run with perseverance is to hang on to God's hand and let him take the lead. True change comes only when we die to ourselves and allow Christ to set the pace.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for taking charge of my mess and helping me run my race with confidence. You are responsible for everything I am and ever hope to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

On a Mission

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4

We had a full house this year for Thanksgiving dinner—kids and grandkids everywhere. Once all our guests had been served, we got our plates and went to find a place to sit. My wife chose to join the ladies, and I sat down with the grandkids. The kids finished quickly, put their dishes in the sink, and hurried outside to play. And I found myself sitting all alone at the table.

I wasn't alone for long, though. In just a minute, our oldest granddaughter came back in and sat down with me. "I really don't want to go out and play right now. I think I'll just stay here with you, Grandpa," she said sweetly. It touched my heart to know that she was already learning how important it is not to leave people alone. We had a great conversation as I finished my meal. Then she went outside to play.

When we see someone sitting alone, we ought to be the ones who go over and sit down beside them. We don't even have to say much. Just our presence means more than we will ever know. God has promised that he will never desert us or leave us alone. Let's thank him for his faithfulness by being there for others.

PRAYER

Father, you have promised never to leave us alone. Help us to be that comforting presence to others as we have opportunity. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Best-Laid Plans

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

JAMES 4:13

We all know that our plans don't always go the way we expect them to. For example, recently I was sitting in an airplane, listening to the couple in front of me. They were upset, and with good reason. They had been delayed getting through security and missed their connection, which caused them to lose a day of their vacation in Mexico. Now they were sharing their experience with anyone who would listen. "We have to get a hotel when we land and wait until tomorrow to make our connection." You could tell they were trying to have a good attitude about it, but finding it hard to accept any kind of positive spin.

Such occurrences are just facts of life. We've all made plans and watched them collapse around us. Those are the times we need to leave space for God in our lives. He always has a reason when he disrupts our plans, but he won't necessarily share that reason with us. A traffic tie-up, an unplanned phone call, or a missed connection is very often God's doing, even if it ruins our own carefully laid plans.

I don't know if that couple on my flight will have a God moment as a result of a long TSA line, but I know this: If God decides to mess with our plans, get ready. He will almost surely have something better planned for our day.

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, order my day, direct my steps, make my plans conform to yours.
I long to do your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

What Is Freedom?

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

JOHN 8:32 NCV

Many years ago when I was in the service, the Fourth of July was approaching. It was the job of my squadron's safety officer to develop a slogan and put up posters discouraging drinking over the holiday weekend.

We had no accidents that year, and it was attributed partly to the slogan this guy came up with: "He who comes forth with a fifth on the fourth may not come forth on the fifth."

What comes to mind when you hear the words *Fourth of July*? *Independence Day*? *The Declaration of Independence*? *World War II*? When I think of the Fourth of July, I think of freedom. But what is true freedom?

Abraham Lincoln said, "Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and, under a just God, cannot long retain it." And we have all heard the great quote from Patrick Henry, "Give me liberty or give me death." But, here again, what is true liberty?

The basic test of freedom is not in what we are free to do but rather in what we are free *not* to do! Today, I am free not to drink! For me that's a very precious freedom.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I want to celebrate freedom in my life. Help me to openly and honestly deal with those things that take away my freedom to live in a manner that pleases you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Anti-Sway

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

JOHN 14:16–17

My wife and I were traveling from Louisiana to Colorado, pulling a trailer behind our truck. We weren't on the road long before the trailer started swaying almost uncontrollably. Two hours later, after driving well below the speed limit, we pulled into a trailer company to see what could be done.

One of the employees said he could install an anti-sway bar on the trailer, and that should solve the problem. One hour and \$120 later, we were back on the road. And lo and behold, the trailer tracked right behind the truck perfectly. We had stopped, admitted we had a problem, taken the advice of the technician, and made the application. Now we could travel on and do it safely.

In Celebrate Recovery we learn that we can't walk the road to recovery alone. Just like the trailer, we can develop a "sway" that will throw us off track and back into our addictions. So we start by stepping out of denial and admitting that we do have problems. Then we turn our lives over to Jesus Christ, the Great Technician. He gives us the Holy Spirit, who takes up residence within us and serves as an anti-sway Counselor-Comforter. The Holy Spirit keeps us safe and assures us that we never have to walk this road alone again.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Holy Spirit who keeps us safe in this temptation-filled world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Baking Cakes

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’”

LUKE 14:28–30

Right now my wife and my mother are decorating a birthday cake for my daughter. It’s a pretty princess cake. When I peeked in earlier, they were getting everything ready, checking to be sure they had everything they needed.

The whole cake business seems pretty simple to me—you bake it, frost it, eat it. But apparently, to do the job right, there are steps, lots of steps. For instance, my wife just told me that a cake needs to cool down before it’s decorated. Who knew? They aren’t just putting some frosting on the cake and hoping for the best. They’re being very methodical, thinking through each step.

That commitment to doing things right can be applied to all of us. Whether we’re building or baking or rebooting our lives, we need to take the time to do the job right. It’s important to make sure we are set up, ready to go, at each place in our lives *before* we move on to the next step.

Let’s take a moment to stop and think about the process. What is it God wants to do in our lives next?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me to be wise as I walk through the steps of my life. Show me how to prepare my heart for each step in its time. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

What's a Nickel Worth?

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

MATTHEW 6:24

It's impossible to serve two masters—really, just physically, mentally, and emotionally impossible. Those who foolishly try will find themselves failing at both. Why? The heart that pursues money and possessions will never be satisfied. It will always want more and more—a big house, a new car, a six-foot big-screen TV, trips, and all the other things money can buy.

When those things have been obtained, other things will pop up until finally, they push out everything else in our lives. We find ourselves running around pouring all our time and effort into protecting and maintaining our money and possessions. At that point, what we think we own really owns us!

I know, because this is how I tried to live. All I got for my trouble was an insatiable emptiness on the inside. But that changed when I surrendered my life to Christ! I set my heart in pursuit of God and found all I had been looking for.

I finally understood that the only lasting thing that could fill my emptiness was a personal relationship with the Savior! I began to see that everything I had was a gift from God. Today, I attempt to live my life by using the treasures God entrusts me with to help others. The joy and fullness I experience from living this way is truly indescribable!

PRAYER

Thank you, Father God, for filling me with your presence. You are all that I desire, all I could ever want or need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Even When I'm Cranky

Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

ISAIAH 49:13

As my wife and I boarded a flight for London to teach at a training seminar, we were told that there would be a delay. The plane was full, and after two hours on the runway, most of us were hot, tired, sweaty, and becoming more and more cranky and agitated. But seated in front of us was a woman who provided a much-needed example of Christlike behavior in uncomfortable circumstances.

This woman was a grandmother, who was juggling a screaming toddler. Though the baby cried for the full two hours, the woman never once lost her composure or let the smile slip from her face. Instead she continued to try to comfort the child. Once the plane finally took off, the baby went to sleep. But the grandmother continued to hold her for the next nine hours. Never once did she complain, set the baby down, or hand her to someone else.

Long after the flight was over, I thought about how our heavenly Father is much like that grandmother. He puts up with us when we are cranky, tired, crying, complaining, and just plain no fun to be around. He never loses his cool or his desire to comfort us. He's right there carrying us, never putting us down or handing us off to someone else. No matter what we're going through, we can trust that he will always be there for us.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I'm thankful for your faithful watch-care over us. You have promised never to leave us no matter what circumstances we encounter. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hide and Seek

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

REVELATION 3:21

I was watching my wife play hide-and-seek with our grandkids. All the kids ran off to hide—except one. Our three-year-old grandson ran around a little bit and then put his hands over his eyes. Apparently, he thought that if he couldn’t see anyone else, they couldn’t see him.

That sounds silly, but when it comes to spiritual things, I sometimes do the same thing. I have been known to reason that if I can’t see the devil, maybe he isn’t there. Of course, I find out pretty quickly, as did my grandson, the error in that way of thinking. When we cover our eyes, we only make ourselves more vulnerable.

Instead of hiding our eyes, we must stand up and fight—for our recovery, for our relationships, for our lives. Jesus didn’t take a seat until he overcame the enemy’s most powerful weapon—death! We can’t stop fighting either, not until we sit down with our Father in heavenly places.

PRAYER

Lord God, strengthen me as I stand to fight the good fight of faith. I want to take my stand against the enemy until the day you take me home to be with you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

What Makes It Work?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4

Benjamin Franklin said, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” That’s a big reason why Celebrate Recovery works. The program acknowledges that just listening—tell me and I forget— isn’t enough. Even remembering—teach me and I remember—won’t do the trick. The only way to be successful is by doing—involve me and I learn.

We all begin at the same place: acknowledging that we are completely dependent on God’s power, surrendered to his will, and committed to working the program’s principles and steps. Once we’ve learned how to break free from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits, we must get involved and start giving back what we have learned by helping others.

As stated in Step 8, we are to yield ourselves to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by our example and our words. Step 12 requires that once we have had a spiritual experience as a result of taking the program’s steps, we are to carry that message to others and practice those principles in all our affairs.

Healing and wholeness are more than a state of being. They are also a state of doing as we constantly renew our commitment and demonstrate our thankfulness by giving to others.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help me once again to acknowledge my dependence on you and confirm that commitment by sharing it with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Casting Anxiety

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 PETER 5:7

Sunday nights in our house have a predictable pattern. Right around bedtime we'll have at least one meltdown. Usually it's our oldest daughter. She worries about school, which is strange because she's really smart. The problem is that she doesn't feel that way.

Every Sunday she worries that there will be something she won't be able to understand. She stresses out about it, cries, begs to stay home. It's sad to watch her struggle so unnecessarily. On Monday afternoons, I usually ask her about her day. Did the things she was worried about happen? Almost always her answer is no.

Many of us carry around a similar weight of anxiety, working ourselves into a ball of tears over things that will never materialize. This is not how God wants us to live. He looks down on us, his precious children, and asks us to turn all those things that are worrying us over to him. He loves us, and he's much more capable of handling those things than we are.

My wife and I have noticed that after our daughter tells us about her worries, she feels better. Nothing has changed, of course, but she no longer feels she is carrying those burdens alone. She knows that we love her and will always be there to help her. We can have that same security by sharing our worries and fears with God. He will always be there for us. He will always help us.

PRAYER

Dear Father, thank you for walking with us and helping us to carry all our burdens, real and imagined. Thank you for loving us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Nutcracker Ballet

*Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.
Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

ROMANS 12:10–11

In recovery, we talk a lot about relationships and the importance of rebuilding and repairing the damage that we've done to ourselves and those we love. In order to be devoted to one another and honor one another above ourselves as the Bible instructs, we must change the way we think and operate. Often that means doing things that aren't in our comfort zone. This can be tough, but there is a bonus. Sometimes we find something enjoyable that we never thought we would.

During the holidays, my wife and I attended a production of *The Nutcracker* ballet. A ballet? This is something I never thought I would do. But my granddaughter was a cast member, and that made all the difference. Instead of an event that I would do just about anything to get out of, it was transformed into an event that I wouldn't miss for the world. In fact, it is one of my most enjoyable family memories. And for our granddaughter, our presence made her night complete.

These kinds of events are essential for building meaningful relationships with those we love. They show our devotion and that we are honoring others above ourselves. Sure, it takes some effort to get out of our comfort zone, but the rewards are worth it.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the uncomfortable choices we make for others that become uncommon blessings for our lives and theirs. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PUSH—(P)ray (U)ntil (S)omething (H)appens

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18

Max Lucado once said, “Prayers aren’t graded according to style.” That is so true. In fact, our prayers aren’t graded at all! God hears all our prayers, spoken and unspoken. I saw the PUSH acrostic in a tweet, and I love it. It reminds me to “pray continually” as the Bible tells us.

I’ve noticed that we sometimes ask God for something, feeling at the moment like it’s a very important request. But then we quickly forget about it and move on to something else. We don’t follow through. In order to have a successful prayer life, we need to stay focused on sharing our needs with God. Why? Does God forget? Certainly not, but we do. Sometimes we act like children, running through the store begging for everything we see. We must learn to bring our requests to God after careful consideration, fully prepared to wait for his answers.

And he will answer. It may not be in the way we want him to, but he never leaves us hanging. His answers come in one of three ways: yes, no, or not yet. Let us determine today to pray with purpose in mind and follow through until we receive what we have asked of him.

PRAYER

Lord God, forgive me when I am foolish and demanding. Thank you for showing me that you take all my requests seriously, and I must do the same. Thank you for hearing and always answering. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Pulling Out the Weeds

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8–9

I woke up one morning to another day of overcast skies at our Louisiana home. It had been pouring rain for two days, and frankly, I wasn't looking forward to more of it. But as I looked over at my garden spot, I was reminded that God uses the rainy, overcast days just like he uses those soaked in sunshine.

During the rains, the soil becomes soft and more pliable. The task of pulling out the weeds becomes much easier. In the same way, God uses the rainy seasons in my life to pull weeds and prepare the soil of my heart to receive his promptings. God confirmed this to me when I ran into a friend who had recently completed his recovery steps.

My friend told me his car had run out of gas one night, some distance from the nearest gas station. It was a big inconvenience, and he was thinking, *Why did this have to happen right now?* Minutes later, an old friend pulled up, someone he hadn't seen since becoming a Christian. As he greeted his friend, he knew exactly why he'd run out of gas at that time and place. He was able to tell his old friend about his new life in Jesus.

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the rainy weather as well as the sunny days. I will savor those days when you are removing the weeds in my life and preparing me to hear your voice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Celebrate Your Recovery

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

PSALM 30:11–12

Have you ever wondered why Celebrate Recovery is called *Celebrate Recovery*? Well . . . people usually seek help when things are bad. Which means none of us has much to celebrate when we first enter the program. That isn't always the case, of course, but usually people begin coming to Celebrate Recovery when things are far from ideal.

But soon, God begins to change things. He takes our pain and gives us purpose. He takes our crying and turns it into praise. He gives us joy and peace and freedom from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. He gives us reason to celebrate.

Of course, it doesn't happen all at once. There will still be days when we hurt, feel stuck, or don't believe there is much to celebrate. There are sure to be hard times in recovery—pain we have to face, amends we have to make, forgiveness we must offer. But for those who hold on, there is hope and healing. There is reason to celebrate!

The important thing to remember is that we must hold fast to our commitment. We must refuse to quit. Each day we actively work toward our recovery, we will be able to thank God and share our testimony with someone who needs to hear it. Each day, we come one step closer to complete healing for our lives.

PRAYER

Father, I feel stuck right now. Please give me the resolve to continue to seek recovery. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Change Is Possible

*Outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly
we are being renewed day by day.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16

Some words are like oxygen to my soul: “I was struggling in hopelessness but now have hope.” “God is changing me.” “I could not have made it through this storm without Christ.” “I have a new family for life now.” “I have learned so much about myself, and for the first time I like what I see.” “I am now the spouse I know I was called to be.” “My relationship with my kids is growing healthier!”

There is nothing sweeter than seeing life change up close and personal. None of us is “fixed” but one thing is for sure: growth and change are becoming daily realities in so many lives. God has lifted me up and taught me some incredible lessons, even through times of hurt and pain. It has been said, “You can forgive what hurt you in the past. Just never forget what it taught you.”

When we get to that place of surrender where we can say to God, “I’m tired of doing this on my own,” then we can begin the process of allowing him to change us. No matter what we find ourselves in the middle of, no matter what poor choices we’ve made, no matter what struggles and hurts we’ve experienced, God still loves us and desires to comfort, protect, and guide us out of our mess and pain. In the process, he teaches us how to live more fruitfully.

PRAYER

Lord in heaven, thank you for teaching me even through the hurt and pain in my life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Small Changes

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

EPHESIANS 4:22–24

Sometimes big changes come in the smallest ways. When I first entered recovery and began my new life in Christ, my sponsor told me change was essential to my sobriety. This is how he instructed me: “It’s best to start small. If you shave the left side of your face first, then tomorrow morning, start on your right side. If you put your right shoe on first, put your left shoe on first. If you step into your left pants leg first, then step into the right leg first.” You get the point. Making small changes, he assured me, would make it much easier to make big changes when I needed to.

Change is still not easy for me, but I’ve seen the positive results it brings. I’ve seen how it has helped me to get rid of negative thoughts and mind-sets. So today I’m open for any change God wants to make in my life. It will be hard work, because my mind still fights change. But today I will choose to hear and implement God’s direction and will.

Remember, too, that God often sends the message of change in the form of another human being. If our ears and hearts are open, though, we will be ready to hear God’s voice in their words.

PRAYER

Holy Father, soften me, make me more flexible, more easily able to bend to your will and your purpose. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Hitting Bottom

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

MATTHEW 11:28

A few months ago, someone told me, "I'm ready to hit bottom. When will I get there?" This is how I answered: "When you stop digging!" It's simple, really. We hit bottom when we finally get tired of being beat up by ourselves and others. Then and only then, at the point of complete surrender, do we find rest. This isn't the sitting and doing nothing kind of rest—it's peace of mind.

Peace of mind is the greatest rest of all. But before we can get there, we have to wave the white flag and say, "I give up!" It's not easy, but there are a few things that can help you. First, surround yourself with people who are having victories and making progress in their recovery and in their lives. Second, stop digging your hole deeper by flooding your thoughts with the bad thinking that has gotten you where you are. Third, fill your mind with good things by memorizing Scripture and reading encouraging books.

Peace of mind is attainable, but it requires a new lifestyle, new habits, new behaviors, and relationships that are strong and upright. With God's help, we can all find our way, but nothing less than complete commitment will get us there.

PRAYER

Father, I want peace of mind. I have been a captive to my painful, troubling, disobedient thoughts for far too long. As I surrender to you, surround myself with good people, and flood my mind with your Word, I pray that you will bring me the gift of peace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Power of Forgiveness

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

LUKE 6:31

A guy once told me, "John, you won't catch me getting ulcers. I just take things as they come. I don't ever hold a grudge, not even against people who have done things to me that I'll never forgive." Right! Forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it.

There are a lot of jokes about forgiveness, but forgiveness is not something that those of us in recovery can take lightly, because forgiveness is clearly God's prescription for the broken. No matter how great the offense or abuse, forgiveness lies along the path to healing.

We all know that one of the roots of compulsive behavior is buried pain. So facing our past and forgiving ourselves and those who have hurt us, as well as making amends for the pain that we have caused others, is the only lasting solution. Forgiveness breaks the cycle! It doesn't settle all the questions of blame, justice, or fairness, but it does allow relationships to heal and possibly start over.

In order to be completely free from our resentments, anger, fears, shame, and guilt, we need to give and accept *forgiveness* in all areas of our lives. If we do not, our recovery will remain incomplete. God wants much more than that for us. He wants us to walk in wholeness, ready to follow the path he planned for us before the beginning of time.

PRAYER

Father, what a gift I've found in forgiving and receiving forgiveness. Thank you for your goodness to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.