



LifeNIGHT
 Whole People In A Broken World
 An Interactive Bible Study Series for Summer 2002

R	Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor. (Matthew 5:3, GN)
	Principle #1: Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and my life is unmanageable.
E	Happy are those who mourn. (Matthew 5:4, GN)
	Principle #2: Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.
C	Happy are those who are humble. (Matthew 5:5, GN)
	Principle #3: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.
O	Happy are the pure in heart. (Matthew 5:8, GN)
	Principle #4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.
V	Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires. (Matthew 5:6, GN)
	Principle #5: Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.

- **Romans 12:1-2 (TEV)** So then, my friends, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect.
- We all have hurts that are hard to forget, hang-ups that are hard to get rid of, and habits that are hard to overcome. That's why we're studying the subject, "RECOVER ALL!" It is not only God's will to redeem my soul for eternity, but also to redeem my life on earth!
- Our text tells us that the way we are transformed is by having our minds changed. Unless I can think differently, any changes I make in my life are only temporary, because I will eventually revert back to my old thought patterns. They are also only an illusion, because they are just an image I project instead of a reality I live.

1. Where do my character defects come from?

- The scholars would tell us that our character defects come from three sources – biological, sociological and theological. Let's make it easier – chromosomes, circumstances, and choices. That's where your defects come from.

a) MY CHROMOSOMES

Your mother and your father contributed to you 23,000 chromosomes each, and so you inherited some of their weaknesses. You inherited some physical defects from your parents, and some emotional defects from your parents.

This explains your predisposition towards certain problems, but it doesn't excuse your sin.

For instance, because of my parents I may have a tendency to have a hot temper, but that doesn't excuse me to go out and murder somebody. I may have a tendency to be lazy, but that doesn't excuse me from doing nothing with my life. I may have a genetic tendency toward certain addictions, but that doesn't excuse me to go out and make the choice to become addicted.

b) MY CIRCUMSTANCES

You were raised a certain way, and you learned a lot of your ways of relating, your preferences and your habits from your parents (and other people). You learned to respond in certain ways, to cover for yourself, and how to handle hurt and rejection.

A lot of your character defects are simply self-defeating attempts to meet unmet needs.

Everyone has a legitimate need for respect. But if you didn't get RESPECT early in life, you settle for ATTENTION – and you figured out various ways to get it! Everyone has a legitimate need for love, but if you didn't get LOVE you may have settled for SEX, to obtain emotional closeness. Everyone has a legitimate need for security, but if you didn't get SECURITY, you may have tried MATERIALISM to prove to yourself and others that you are a worthwhile person.

c) MY CHOICES

If you choose to do something long enough, it becomes a habit. And once it becomes a habit, you're stuck! Things you never intended to develop in your life are created because you chose to do a certain thing long enough that it became a habit.

Character defects are often positive qualities taken to an extreme over time because they were misused.

Sow a thought; reap an action.

Sow an action; reap a habit.

Sow a habit; reap a character.

Sow a character; reap a destiny.

2. Why is it so hard to change the defects in my life?

a) BECAUSE I'VE HAD THEM SO LONG.

You didn't get your character defects overnight – it took years! That's why you're not going to lose them overnight. Many of the habits, patterns and responses you have were developed during your childhood. They may not be comfortable and they may even be self-defeating, but at least they are familiar. It's like an old pair of shoes – maybe they're not the best for running, but they're comfortable. You've had them so long that it's hard to let go.

b) BECAUSE I IDENTIFY WITH THEM.

Many times we confuse our identity with our character defects. We say, "That's just the way I am." But you don't have to be that way – you can change! When you say, "That's just the way I am," you're associating your identity with your defeats.

Complete this sentence: "It's just like me to _____." (i.e. be a workaholic, be undisciplined, be worried, be passive, be a procrastinator, lose my temper, be depressed, be lonely)

You're setting yourself up! When you identify yourself with your character defect, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You say, "I'm always nervous when I get on planes." What's going to happen the next time you get on a plane? You're going to be nervous! You set yourself up by saying, "That's who I am."

Psychologists tell us that one of the reasons we can't change is that we're afraid: "If I really let go of this defect, will I still be me? This has always been a part of me. I've always been like this. If I let go of it, will I still be me? What would I be like without it?"

c) BECAUSE THEY HAVE A PAYOFF.

Every character defect has a payoff. It may mask my pain, it may give me an excuse to fail, it may allow me to compensate for guilt, it may get attention for me, it may allow me to control other people. Any time a negative behavior is repeated, even though it's self-destructive, there's always a payoff somewhere.

We don't do things that don't get rewarded!

In a weird sort of way, your character defect “works” for you, and you subconsciously don't want to let go of that payoff. Again, you're setting yourself up for repeated failure.

d) BECAUSE SATAN DISCOURAGES ME.

Satan is called “the accuser” and he does his job well! He constantly suggests negative thoughts: “This will never work, you can't do it. Who do you think you are? If you think you're going to change, forget it! Other people can change, but not you. You're stuck, it's hopeless. Don't even think about changing.”

The Bible says that Satan is a liar, but it also says that the truth will make us free! So, let's look at the truth ...

3. How do I cooperate with God's change process?

- Paul tells me in Romans to be transformed by the renewing of my mind. **My thoughts are the auto-pilot in my life.** If you want to change your life you've got to change the way you think. The Bible teaches that your thoughts determine your feelings, and then your feelings determine your actions.
- Imagine that you're in a boat on a huge lake, with an auto-pilot that is set to go due east. You can grab the wheel and temporarily force the boat to go west, but as soon as you get tired of forcing it and let go of the wheel, it's going to head east again. The boat has been set to travel east, and so the whole time you are holding the wheel you're under tension.
- Only by sheer willpower can you go the opposite way that you're naturally inclined to go. You make decisions, resolutions and promises. “I'm going to _____.” But the problem with all of them is that you eventually get tired and let go of the wheel!
- IF I REALLY WANT TO CHANGE, I HAVE TO CHANGE MY AUTO-PILOT. What's my auto-pilot? “It's just like me to _____.” That's my auto-pilot! **MY THOUGHTS ARE MY AUTO-PILOT.**

SEVEN WAYS TO CHANGE YOUR THINKING:

a) Focus on changing one defect at a time.

Proverbs 17:24 (TEV) An intelligent person aims at wise action, but a fool starts off in many directions.

“Pastor, this series on Recovery is great – I've got fifty things that I want to change in my life.” Don't do it! You'll get overwhelmed and discouraged – and you'll end up not changing anything! You don't just pray, “God, I'd like to be a better person.” That in itself can be denial. You've got to be specific: “God, this is what I want to work on ...” Go to God in prayer and let Him show you which one is damaging your life the most, then let Him start working on that first. **ONE DEFECT AT A TIME (OR IT WON'T WORK)!**

b) Focus on victory one day at a time.

Matthew 6:11 (KJV) Give us this day our daily bread.

Give us this year ...? Give us this month ...? NO! Give us this DAY our daily bread. God wants to give you enough strength to change for one day, not a year, the rest of your life, or eternity. He wants you to take it one day at a time so you will trust in Him.

- How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!
- By the yard, life is hard; by the inch, life's a cinch.

You didn't create your problem overnight, so don't try to conquer it overnight. Break it down into bite-size pieces and work on it one day at a time with God's help.

“Lord, just for this day, I want to _____.” This will keep you from making any rash vows. (“I promise to never do it again ...”) You're doomed to failure if you say that!

Matthew 6:34 (MES) Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

As you're working through your problems, thank God every day for every victory, **NO MATTER HOW SMALL.**

c) Focus on God's power, not willpower.

Jeremiah 13:23 (LB) Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin? or a leopard take away his spots? Nor can you who are so used to doing evil now start being good.

We already know that willpower isn't enough, because if willpower worked we would already be changed. In fact, depending on your own strength actually blocks recovery in your life. But here's the good news ...

Philippians 4:13 (JB) There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength.

d) Focus on what I want, not on what I don't want.

Philippians 4:8 (LB) Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about.

- Whatever you focus on is what you move toward.
- Whatever you focus on is what dominates your life.
- Whatever has your attention has you.

Not once in the Bible does God command you to resist temptation. Why? Because whatever you resist will persist. The harder you push against it, the harder it pushes back. (The Bible does say to resist the tempter, but not temptation.)

Instead of resisting, the Bible teaches refocusing.

Don't just sit there saying, "I don't want this" – turn the mental channel of your mind! This is the power of affirming the Word of God. There are over 7,000 promises in the Bible for you to claim! Saturate your mind with them so you can use them to counteract the negative thoughts the devil and other people throw at you.

Once you become a Christian, your identity is based on your relationship with God, not your character defect!

e) Focus on doing good, not feeling good.

Galatians 5:16 (GW) Live your life as your spiritual nature directs you. Then you will never follow through on what your corrupt nature wants.

If you do the right thing, your feelings will eventually catch up with you. But if you wait until you feel like changing, you'll never change, because the devil will make sure you'll never feel like it.

It's always easier to act your way into a feeling than to feel your way into an action.

Fake it until you make it! It will feel very awkward, maybe even terrible, when you begin to change. Why? Because you're so used to feeling abnormal that normal doesn't feel normal!

f) Focus on people who help me, not hinder me.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (NCV) Do not be fooled: "Bad friends will ruin good habits."

If you don't want to get stung, stay away from bees! Don't hang around the things that mess you up.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (LB) And one standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer; three is even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

You can't recover on your own, because recovery always happens in a relationship, when you're accountable to other people.

Proverbs 27:17 (NCV) As iron sharpens iron, so people can improve each other.

g) Focus on progress, not perfection.

Philippians 1:6 (LB) And I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns.

"Pastor, I've been trying to do what you've been teaching, but I don't see a whole lot of change yet." Don't worry about it.

Recovery is a DECISION followed by a PROCESS.

Some of you may be thinking that God will only love you once you get to a certain stage, once you conquer a certain problem. WRONG! God loves you at each stage in your spiritual growth.

**God will never love you any more than He does right now.
God will never love you any less than He does right now.**

Wise and loving parents enjoy their children at each stage of their development, and GOD IS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER!

He loves you when you're right, He loves you when you're wrong
He loves you when you're weak and when you're strong
He'll never ever change, He's every day the same
For God is God, and God is love.