



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.
E	Happy are those who are merciful to others. (Matthew 5:7, GN)
	Principle #6: Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.
R	Happy are those who work for peace. (Matthew 5:9, GN)
	Principle #7: Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

- **Mark 14:38 (NIV)** Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.
- **Mark 14:38 (MES)** Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don't enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don't be naive. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire.

- We've been talking in this series about coming out of the dark, exposing our problems to the light of God's love, and watching Him heal those habits, hurts and hang-ups that have messed up our lives.
- Today, let's take our RECOVERY one step further by answering this question: HOW DO I MAINTAIN MY MOMENTUM? How do I not lose the progress I am making in my Christian life?
- The fact is that spiritual growth is not smooth. The Road to Recovery is jagged, sometimes two steps forward and one step back. It isn't easy. Sometimes we even fall back into self-defeating patterns of behavior. That's called a RELAPSE. The alcoholic goes back to drinking. The overeater gains the weight back. The gambler goes back to the casino. The workaholic fills up his schedule again. If we're not careful, we tend to repeat the patterns of our past. It's very easy to slip back into old hurts, old habits, and old hang-ups.

FOUR BACKWARD STEPS

Relapses happen in a very predictable pattern, with four steps:

- **COMPLACENCY:** You start getting comfortable with short-term gains instead of long-term changes. You say, "I don't need any more help, my pain has been reduced, and I can live with it now." Instead of seeing your recovery all the way to the end, you abort it.
- **CONFUSION:** You start rationalizing, "Maybe my problem really wasn't so bad after all. I think I can handle it myself now." You start developing "selective memory"!
- **COMPROMISE:** You go back to the place of temptation, the risky situation that got you in trouble in the first place. It doesn't really matter whether it's the bar, the casino, the mall, or the fridge! Playing with temptation is always a losing game.
- **CATASTROPHE:** You give in to your old habit and the addiction comes back; you give in to your old hurt and the resentment comes back; you give in to your old hang-up and the insecurity comes back. You need to understand that the collapse is not the relapse. The catastrophe is not when the relapse happens; it started much earlier. The catastrophe is simply the result of the pattern you initiated.

Why, even when we know the right way to go and the right thing to do, do we tend to go back to what we know is wrong? There are several factors that can cause a relapse; let's look at four of them:

WHAT CAUSES A RELAPSE?

1. Reverting to willpower.

- **Galatians 3:3 (TEV)** How can you be so foolish! You began by God's Spirit; do you now want to finish by your own power?
- Isn't it human nature that just as soon as I let God make some changes in my life, I start taking the credit for it? I soon start to revert to my own willpower and of course that doesn't work (if it did, I would never have developed the problem in the first place!) I have a few successes and suddenly think I'm all powerful and all knowing. It's about then I need someone to say, "Who are you kidding? You're just you, and you can't handle everything!"
- God will let you relapse until you realize that you can't do it on your own. He'll let you fall until you say, "God, I can't do it."
- **Zechariah 4:6 (LB)** Then he said, "This is God's message to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty--you will succeed because of my Spirit, though you are few and weak.'

2. Ignoring God's process of recovery.

- **Galatians 5:7 (TEV)** You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth? How did he persuade you?
- Sometimes we get in a hurry on our Road to Recovery, and we want to skip a difficult or uncomfortable step. (For example, last week we talked about making amends to those we have hurt. That's both difficult and uncomfortable!) But we need to take all of the steps or the process doesn't work – there is no quick fix. You didn't get into this mess overnight, and you're not going to get out of it overnight.
- The Beatitudes give us the Biblical steps to recovery, but we must make the choice to put ALL of God's plan to work.

3. Trying to recover without support.

- **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (TEV)** Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it's just too bad, because there is no one to help him.

- "I'll just get well by myself; I don't need anyone else's help." You're asking for a relapse! You can't conquer this problem alone – if you could have you already would have. But you can't ... and you won't.
- **Hebrews 10:25 (TEV)** Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.
- You can see short-term gains in your life without involving other people, but you cannot have long-term recovery without relationships. **The root of your problem is relational!** It's like driving a car at sixty miles an hour and taking your hands off the wheel; you won't crash immediately but it will happen inevitably.
- In order to avoid a relapse you need to get support in your life. Because of denial we often can't see our own problems, so we need others to serve as a mirror. That's why testimonies are important – when you share your story, I see some of myself in it (that I may never have seen otherwise!).

4. Becoming prideful.

- **Proverbs 16:18 (GW)** Pride precedes a disaster, and an arrogant attitude precedes a fall.
- We need to stay humble or we eventually stumble. Pride gets us in all kinds of trouble:
 - It blinds us to our own weaknesses.
 - It keeps us from seeking help.
 - It prevents us from making amends to other people.
 - It causes us to blame other people for our problems.
- **1 Corinthians 10:12 (LB)** So be careful. If you are thinking, "Oh, I would never behave like that"--let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin.
- The secret of lasting recovery is to live with humility. It's the best protection against a relapse. I don't have it all together, but I am in the process of getting it all together! Stay humble!
- **Your greatest weakness is often an unguarded strength.**

HOW DO I PREVENT A RELAPSE?

In our text, Jesus tells us that it is human nature to have a relapse, to go back to things that mess us up even though we know they mess us up! It's human nature to let old habits, hurts and hang-ups come back to haunt us. That's why the Word of God gives us these SAFEGUARDS:

1. Evaluation.

- **2 Corinthians 13:5 (LB)** Check up on yourselves. Are you really Christians? Do you pass the test? Do you feel Christ's presence and power more and more within you? Or are you just pretending to be Christians when actually you aren't at all?
- **Lamentations 3:40 (LB)** Let us examine ourselves instead, and let us repent and turn again to the Lord.
- **FOUR INVENTORIES:**
 - a) **PHYSICAL:** What is my body telling me? It is a barometer of what is happening inside.

H	Am I hurting?
E	Am I exhausted?
A	Am I angry?
R	Am I resentful?
T	Am I tense?
 - b) **EMOTIONAL:** Am I allowing my true feelings to surface, or am I just denying them? Denying your feelings is like shaking up a pop bottle; as soon as you take the top off, it's going to explode.
 - c) **RELATIONAL:** Am I at peace with everyone? Do you realize that you let some people live rent free in your mind? They hurt you 20 years ago and they live 1000 miles away, but you wake up thinking about them. You are preoccupied with it, so it has the power to control you.
 - d) **SPIRITUAL:** Am I maintaining a close and open relationship with God?
- When you do an evaluation, you need to confess your failures, but you also need to celebrate each victory, no matter how small.

- You need to practice SPIRITUAL BREATHING. That's when you make a mistake, you confess it (breathe out) and receive God's forgiveness (breathe in). You need to learn to do that on a moment-by-moment basis, a thousand times a day if necessary. It should become as natural as physical breathing. Keep short accounts with God – don't let those sins stockpile! (How often do you need to take out the garbage?!)
- **Galatians 6:4 (NIV)** Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else,

2. Meditation.

- Meditation is a good biblical word that has been co-opted by a lot of other people. It simply means: **Slowing down long enough to hear God.** That's all it is!
- Busyness stifles recovery and growth. This is the secret of spiritual strength, and Satan fights nothing harder in my life than making sure I don't get time alone with God.
- What are some of the distractions that Satan uses?
 - Noise
 - Hurry
 - People
 - Crowds
 - Entertainment
 - Work
- **Psalm 1:1-3 (LB)** Oh, the joys of those who do not follow evil men's advice, who do not hang around with sinners, scoffing at the things of God. But they delight in doing everything God wants them to, and day and night are always meditating on his laws and thinking about ways to follow him more closely. They are like trees along a riverbank bearing luscious fruit each season without fail. Their leaves shall never wither, and all they do shall prosper.
- The key to spiritual growth is to have roots deep in God's Word.
- **Psalm 119:11 (LB)** I have thought much about your words and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin.
- **If you know how to WORRY, then you already know how to meditate!**

3. Prayer.

- A final tool that will help you maintain your spiritual momentum is PRAYER. Prayer is the way you plug into God's power. **PRAYER CAN DO WHATEVER GOD CAN DO!**
- Many Christians don't realize that you can pray about ANY need in your life. God is your Father (maybe the loving Father you never had), and you can take ANYTHING to Him in prayer.
- Chuck Swindoll once got a letter from a lady who didn't get married until she was middle-aged. She said she never worried about getting married, she just trusted God with her future. However, she said that every night she hung a pair of men's pants on the end of her bed and prayed this prayer:

*Father in Heaven hear my prayer, and grant it if You can.
I've hung a pair of trousers here, please fill them with a man.*

Chuck told that story to his church and got a big chuckle from the congregation, but he noticed a teenage boy sitting near the front who was not laughing at all. About four weeks later he got a letter from the mother of that boy saying, "Pastor Chuck, I don't know if this is serious or not. I was just wondering what you thought about it, because every night when my boy goes to bed he hangs a bikini at the end of his bed."
- The Lord's Prayer is not WHAT we should pray (a ritual prayer), it is HOW we should pray (a model prayer) ...
- **Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)** After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
- Notice that this prayer contains all the steps to RECOVERY:
 - **R**ealize that I'm not God – He is!
 - **E**arnestly believe that God will help me
 - **C**hoose to commit my life to His care
 - **O**penly confess my faults
 - **V**oluntarily submit to what God wants
 - **E**valuate my relationships and grant forgiveness
 - **R**eserve time with God so I don't fall into temptation (relapse)