

Disciple Lifestyle

A Simple Plan For A Blessed Life

Sean Owen

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DEDICATION

I must dedicate this book to God, the one who inspired me to write it. This has been an act of faith and an overwhelming experience of waiting on Him for guidance. I am grateful for the opportunity to be of service.

I am grateful to my wife, Tonya, and the rest of my family for their support as I went through the process of relaunching Disciple Lifestyle. I know that much of my time was taken from them as this process developed.

I am very grateful to my home church, Cross Church in Cumming, GA. They have been supportive from the beginning of Disciple Lifestyle and guided me through the writing of this book. Thank you to Lead Pastors Josh and Monica, and a special thank you to Cornelius, our adult pastor, for his encouragement and support. I thank my longtime friend and hero in the faith, Mathew Slyman. His support and encouragement is more helpful and means more than he knows.

Finally, I dedicate this to all who discover this book and find it helpful in their walk as disciples of Christ.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous for showing me a way to live my life. Thank you to those who helped me learn a new way to live and grow in my relationship with Jesus. I know that these two programs are not Christ-centered for a reason. But I would have never found Jesus without them.

Preface

There are many stories of characters in the Bible who were reluctant to accept the calling, and some even ran from it. I never imagined that I would be someone who wrote a book like this. It seems like God is having me write a book for me. I have had many blessings that could be the subject of a book, but I also have a life that could be an example of what not to do. I was blessed to get clean and sober at 18. I worked in the music business for a lot of years, producing Christian events and festivals and managing Christian artists. I was blessed to become a youth pastor and an ordained minister. I spent two years at Bible College, earning a certificate in post-modern culture.

None of this helped me make the right decisions when it came to living life as a disciple. I had many great men and women of God who poured into me and taught me a great deal. But at the end of the day, I made decisions that, from a hindsight perspective, seemed to lead me in the opposite direction of living as a disciple. Before the COVID pandemic, I had been given a vision of starting a "lifestyle" brand. I had been in a grocery store having a bad day, and as I went down one of the aisles, I saw someone wearing a t-shirt with a scripture message. I do not even remember what the verse was. But I instantly looked up and thanked God

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for the message. I have no problem sharing my faith, but I know people who may not be comfortable doing that. But anyone could wear a hat, a shirt, or maybe a jacket that has a message on it that may do what that shirt did for me that day. It also may be a conversation starter that could lead to

someone hurting someone who is looking for hope. I had started putting things into place to get a disciplined lifestyle started, and then COVID hit and everything went into lockdown. I put it on the back burner.

As we began to go back to church, I wanted to restart the process. But in the last few years, a lot has changed. The influence of social media has taken over. So I began praying about how to restart, how to focus the message, and where God wanted to deliver the message. I have always liked being the guy behind the scenes. Even though I had plenty of experience giving a message, I thought that I needed to find some younger people to be "the face" of "Disciple Lifestyle." The problem was what I was thinking. I spoke with my pastors, Josh and Cornelius. They just kept telling me that God would guide me. Then I was driving around praying, and all of a sudden, I felt like God wanted me to write a book to launch Disciple Lifestyle. I am not arrogant enough to consider myself on the same level as those characters in the Bible like Moses or Jonah, but I kind of relate to the overwhelming feeling of being called to do something.

This book will not be a theological explanation. It will be what an ordinary guy who has made about every mistake you can make is doing today to try and live the lifestyle of a disciple of Christ. I will try to be as transparent as I can be in this process. I will hopefully be able to share some of my mistakes so you can avoid them. I will try to convey to you that through all the challenges and heartaches, the only thing that gets me through each day is my faith.

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When I got clean and sober years ago, I used to say that I could choose to either be a really good bad example or hopefully be a bad good example of how to become and live as a disciple of Christ and help to lead others to have a "disciple lifestyle."

Introduction

The 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have stood as a beacon of hope and recovery for countless individuals seeking freedom from the chains of bondage. Founded in Christian principles, these steps offer a profound road map for rediscovering purpose, healing wounds, and forging a new way of life. But what if these steps could extend beyond addiction recovery, bringing believers on a journey toward a more fulfilling Christian existence?

Welcome to *Disciple Lifestyle: A Simple Plan for a Blessed Life*. This book invites you on an exploration of the 12 steps, not as a recovery tool but as a guide for embracing a Christian way of living. As we embark on this spiritual journey, we will navigate the terrain of surrender, faith, and divine connection, drawing parallels between the wisdom of the 12 steps and the timeless teachings of Jesus Christ.

In the pages that follow, we will dive into the heart of each step, uncovering its relevance to a life devoted to Christ. Through introspection, prayer, and Christian principles, we will unearth the power within each step, offering a unique perspective on how these principles can lead to a life of purpose, integrity, and unwavering faith.

Whether you are someone seeking a fresh approach to your

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Christian walk or someone familiar with the 12 steps looking to deepen your spiritual connection, "Disciple Lifestyle" is an invitation to take on that journey. As we travel this road together, may you discover the profound intersections between the 12 steps of AA and the teachings of Christ, guiding you toward a life of redemption, grace, and a closer walk with the One who holds the keys to true freedom.

If you are struggling with an addiction, I fully endorse programs like AA, NA, and Christian programs like Celebrate Recovery. This is a book that takes what I learned in programs like AA and NA and shows how these simple steps are a great way to walk the path of a disciple of Christ. The person who helped me get sober also led me to the Lord. He showed me, along with countless others, how this program for living was the way to clean up my life and enable me to develop my relationship with Jesus Christ. The great thing about these programs is that one person is helping another, sharing our experience, strength, and hope. All of which come from my relationship with Jesus. I pray that you find this book helpful in your walk. A line in AA's "Big Book" called it "trudging the road to a happy destiny." I always liked that line. To me, it was honest that the road would not be easy, but if I took it, I could get to where I wanted to go.

Chapter 1

What is a Disciple and Lifestyle?

Before we can discuss a "disciple lifestyle," I am assuming that if you are reading this book, you have already decided to give your life to Christ as your Lord and Savior. Becoming a disciple is the next step. We need to define what a disciple of Christ is and what a lifestyle is. What does being a disciple mean? We have looked at what the dictionary defines a disciple as and what the Bible defines a disciple as. Disciple: Webster's definition of a disciple is "a pupil or follower of any teacher or school." [1] A true disciple is not just a student or a learner, but a follower—one who applies what he has learned. *Biblical meaning is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus, and is committed to the mission of Jesus* (Matt. 4:19). Disciple making is entering into relationships to help people trust and follow Jesus (Matt. 28:18–20), *18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

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20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” which includes the whole process from conversion through maturation and multiplication.

Now we need to ask what a lifestyle is: The definition of lifestyle is the interests, opinions, behaviors, and behavioral orientations of an individual, group, or culture. Wikipedia defines a lifestyle as the way a person lives. This includes patterns of social relations, consumption, entertainment, and dress. A lifestyle typically also reflects an individual's attitudes, values, or worldview.

There are many kinds of lifestyles. There have been very successful brands built on those lifestyles. Harley Davidson, Nike, and Lake Life are all brands built on a type of lifestyle. Harley Davidson was built on the love of riding the American motorcycle and the lifestyle that goes along with owning and riding a Harley. Nike was originally built on a love of running and expanded into sports of all kinds. Lake Life kind of speaks for itself. It celebrates enjoying lakes and donates money to protect them.

Living a Christ-centered lifestyle in the journey of faith and becoming a disciple of Christ is not just a title or a one-time commitment; it's a way of living. Amos 5:4 *For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek Me and live”*

It's about daily choices and constant growth in your relationship with Jesus. This book will try to explore how to live a lifestyle as a follower of Christ, drawing inspiration from His teachings and the example He set throughout His time on earth. I will also give examples of how this has evolved in my life as a disciple.

Embarking on a journey as a disciple of Christ is a profound and life-altering venture. It requires a relentless pursuit of

spiritual growth and a dedication to molding one's life according to His teachings. To embrace the disciple lifestyle is to commit oneself to a path that is seldom easy but is eternally rewarding. This introduction serves as a trail that lies ahead for those who choose to follow it. The life of a disciple is not passive; it is characterized by action, reflection, and a constant yearning for a deeper understanding of faith. As we set out on this journey, it's essential to lay a solid foundation, and that foundation is nothing other than faith itself. The entirety of a disciple's existence builds upon this cornerstone, and we must grasp its significance. The chapters to come will delve into the core aspects of this foundation and how they are interwoven into the fabric of a disciple's life. Understanding that the journey is relational is key to embracing discipleship. Our relationship with Jesus Christ stands at the helm, directing our course as we surrender to His lordship.

Through prayer and meditation, we learn to hear His voice and seek His presence, surrendering our desires to become vessels for His will. The following chapters will explore the crucial role of God in the disciple's walk and how to deepen our connection with the Divine. Just as any edifice periodically undergoes evaluation, so must our spiritual well-being. In discipleship, assessing our moral and spiritual constitutions is an ongoing practice. This evaluation is not for condemnation but for growth, for it is only in seeing ourselves clearly that we can move closer to who we are meant to become. We will address the necessity of moral inventory in the growth of a disciple and the ways to cultivate a lifestyle of confession and transparency. Fostering relationships with others grounded in love and forgiveness is a hallmark of discipleship. As we will discover in the latter discussions, seeking reconciliation and making amends is not merely about correcting wrongs; it's about embodying the essence of Christ's teachings. Forgiveness is the bridge we

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build to cross over from past hurt into healing and restoration, both for ourselves and those we've impacted.

The Word of God is not just a reference; it is sustenance for the disciple's daily walk. It offers insights, commands, and parables that help navigate the intricacies of life. Foundational to the disciple lifestyle is an engagement with Scripture, not as a duty but as a delight. The succeeding chapters will offer perspectives on diving into daily Scripture reading and applying its timeless wisdom to our modern existence.

Community life beckons us to a space where our journey is shared, understood, and celebrated. It is within the Christian community that we find the shoulders to lean on and the hands that lift us up. Therein lies a network of support and accountability that strengthens us as we strive to live out our faith. We will explore the importance of fellowship and how it bolsters our resolve to follow Christ diligently. Service to others is an extension of Christ's love through us. It's the earthly representation of heavenly grace, making tangible the abstract concept of love. Christ's example leads us as we learn to serve others not out of obligation but out of overflow from our own encounters with Him. Throughout this book, we will discover the enriching practice of love and sacrifice and how it enlivens our spiritual vitality.

Our spiritual journey is not a moment but a continuous stream, and regular reflection through confession and repentance keeps the waters clear. To embrace the disciple lifestyle is to recognize our need for ongoing spiritual maintenance. Humility and obedience become the rudders that steer us back on course whenever we drift. Through these practices, we maintain an open, receptive posture before God.

Seeking God's implies intentionality in discerning His direction in all aspects of life. The chapters that follow will delve into discerning this will and learning to align our desires with His grand design. It is a delicate dance between divine guidance and human choice, one that shapes the essence of discipleship. The joy and revelations discovered on this journey were never meant to be kept to oneself. A heart that has experienced God's love transforms naturally into sharing the good news. Evangelism as a way of life becomes not an assignment but an authentic expression of gratitude. In the wilderness of this world, our testimonies act as beacons that draw others to the hope we've found in Christ. Along the way, pauses are necessary to look back and acknowledge the distance traveled. Reflecting on the journey allows us to celebrate our spiritual milestones and recognize God's handiwork in our lives. Such reflection is a source of encouragement for the faithfulness of God throughout our discipleship. The following chapters will address approaching discipleship not only as a series of spiritual disciplines but as a way of life, encompassing all aspects of our being.

Dedicated to Christian living, the disciple's ultimate purpose includes imparting the legacy they've received. This legacy is rich with insights, growth, and encounters, much like a treasure to be passed on to future generations. As a continuation of Christ's work on earth, this responsibility is both a privilege and a calling, a powerful purpose for every disciple.

In these opening words, we're painting the broad strokes of what it means to embrace the disciple lifestyle. Through this lens, we will further explore the intricate details of nurturing faith, aligning oneself with God, living in a community, and serving others. Each chapter will provide you with the pieces to this divine puzzle, helping you to assemble a life picture

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that reflects Christ in every way. While this road may rise with trials and dip into valleys of difficulty, the disciple's journey is enveloped by grace and fueled by divine love. It is in traveling this path that one discovers the true essence of what it means to be a follower of Christ—the embodiment of His teachings, the hands and feet of His service, and the bearer of His hope to a world in need.

Understanding the 12 Steps and the History of AA

The 12 Steps, a framework that Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) originally developed, serves as a beacon of transformation as we continue on the path of living as disciples of Christ. These steps, grounded in principles of healing, admittance, restitution, and personal growth, have an enduring history of guiding souls through recovery and into a life of sustainability and purpose. Emulating such rigorous honesty and moral inventory resonates deeply with the heart of a disciple on a quest for spiritual wholeness. In the 12 steps of AA, if you work your way through the program, you end up with a "spiritual experience." And then you carry the message of hope to others. Most do not know that AA was originally a Christian-based program. The program for living is a kind of "Christianity for dummies." No offense was meant. They ended up deciding that it was better to use the principles to save people's lives, and they could work out their salvation later. The original draft of the steps was full of Christian influence being adopted from a group called The Oxford Group. It was decided that AA would do better to save lives and leave saving souls to the church.

Bill Wilson, commonly referred to as the man who started AA, is often seen as the visionary, and founding father of this influential movement. His story begins when he was struggling with alcohol addiction himself in 1935. Bill had

been sober for quite sometime before that night, but one failed business meeting triggered his deep craving for alcohol. Bill Wilson had been sober for about five months and traveled to Akron, Ohio, in 1935 for a shareholders' meeting. However, he lost the proxy fight that day and found himself all alone with nothing but time on his hands. He was drawn towards the bar at the Mayflower Hotel, where Bill immediately attempted to look up another alcoholic, only if they would talk him out of feeling so low. The introduction between Bill W. and Dr. Bob was a long time coming, but the two men finally met when they were introduced by an Akron surgeon who had struggled with alcoholism himself. The meeting proved to be life-changing as both individuals shared their stories about how alcohol affected them personally. They each listened intently to one another's struggles, which motivated each other into sobriety. Not too long afterward, Bill moved in with Dr. Bob and his wife. The doctor did relapse after their first encounter, but he took his last drink on June 10, 1935. This date is known as the official date of the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous. The 12 Steps have carried countless individuals from the depths of despair to the empowerment of living a fulfilled and accountable life. Such a steadfast dedication to personal and communal evolution channels the very essence of discipleship, where a life aligned with the teachings of Jesus Christ heralds a daily renewal of the mind and spirit. By understanding the heritage and power of the 12 Steps, we can glean insights that support our pursuit of a lifestyle that honors the Lord in every act, word, and thought.

Adapting the Steps to a Disciple's Path

Following these steps of a program that has ushered many into a life of recovery, we find a parallel journey for those seeking discipleship. These steps, initially laid out for personal healing, can be seamlessly woven into the fabric of

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our spiritual journey with Christ. This path calls for not only a recognition of the need for a Savior but also a pursuit of Christ-likeness. This is where discipleship aligns beautifully with the principles embraced by many who seek to overcome them. As we adapt these steps to a disciple's path, we embark on a journey that fosters a deep dependency on Jesus. The first step is acknowledging our need for Him, admitting that we are powerless over sin and that our lives have become unmanageable without God's saving grace. This realization is not about defeat; rather, it's about surrendering to a power greater than ourselves. This power, which is Jesus Christ, brings life and restoration.

Believing that God can restore us to wholeness is at the heart of the second step. This is a cornerstone of our faith: that God raised Jesus from the dead and, through Him, offers us eternal life and freedom from sin. As we place our trust in Him, we are taking a vital step in our spiritual journey, realigning our life's direction to fit His purpose for us. Faith, therefore, becomes the conduit through which His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Deciding to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as Jesus taught, calls for absolute surrender. As disciples, this step goes beyond mere understanding; it necessitates action. It is an active yielding of every area of our lives to God's authority. In doing so, not only do we honor Him, but we also find the true freedom that comes from living under His lordship. Our daily pursuits should echo the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

The journey continues as we then take a moral inventory, assessing ourselves against the character of Christ. This introspection isn't meant to condemn, but to illuminate areas in need of His touch. Confession follows naturally, as we

become transparent before God, admitting our faults and inviting His healing into our lives. Through confession, we acknowledge our human frailty and God's infinite mercy.

As disciples, we are invited to admit to God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. This step mirrors the biblical practice of confession and fellowship. It is not meant to be a burden but a liberating moment of honesty that can lead to healing and reconciliation. It requires humility and vulnerability, traits that Jesus embodied and esteemed.

Being entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character, we approach Him with a spirit of repentance. This step is less about us striving to be perfect and more about us surrendering to the one who is. Our readiness to let go of our shortcomings and take hold of His righteousness is a daily process that adjusts our beings to reflect His image more accurately.

Humbly asking Him to remove our shortcomings, we also learn to depend on His strength. This plea is a recognition of God's sovereignty and goodness. It's an expression of faith in His ability to change us from the inside out. His grace is sufficient for us, and in our weakness, His power is made perfect.

Making a list of those we have harmed and becoming willing to make amends with them all is a direct application of biblical teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus calls us to peace with our brothers and sisters, and so, as His followers, we seek to restore relationships where there is hurt and division. This step isn't easy, but it's essential for our spiritual growth and for maintaining unity within the body of Christ.

When we make direct amends to such people wherever

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possible, except when doing so would injure them or others, we live out the gospel's reconciliation power. This step teaches us grace in practice as we deal with the tangible consequences of our actions. It requires discernment and a heart that seeks to heal rather than defend oneself.

Continuing to take personal inventory and, when we are wrong, promptly admitting it keeps us vigilant in our discipleship. The Christian life isn't about reaching perfection but about growing in grace and truth. Just as Jesus taught us to pray for daily bread, we seek daily forgiveness and offer it to others, understanding that this is part of our sanctification process.

Through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, we seek to know His will for us and the power to carry that out. This is the relationship for which we were created, one of ongoing dialogue with our Creator. As His disciples, we are called to remain in Him, for apart from Jesus, we can do nothing of lasting value.

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs. Evangelism and discipleship are not separate callings but intertwined realities of a life lived in Christ. Our transformation becomes a testimony, calling others to the source of our hope and our strength.

Thus, adapting the steps to a disciple's path is not just a replication of one program into another but an integration of time-tested principles with the ancient call of following Jesus. It's a comprehensive approach to Christian living, as these steps encapsulate the very essence of what Jesus taught and lived.

Our journey is both personal and communal. As we walk this path, we do so alongside others, each of us in different stages

but moving toward the same goal: the fullness of life in Christ. The adaptation of these steps to our journey as disciples is an invitation to be intentional about our spiritual growth, being shaped ever more into the likeness of Christ.

While these steps offer a structured approach, the heart of discipleship remains a dynamic, living relationship with Jesus. It's in this relationship that we find our ultimate purpose, our deepest fulfillment, and our greatest challenge. As we continue to navigate the disciple's path, let us do so with commitment and anticipation for the great work God will accomplish in and through us.

Chapter 2

I Can't, He Can, I Think I Will Let Him

Accepting Jesus

In the journey of discipleship, there is a defining moment where one must transition from curiosity to heartfelt commitment—it's the act of accepting Jesus. The decision to follow Christ isn't merely an emotional response or a checkmark on life's to-do list; it's a pivot that aligns one's earthly walk with an eternal purpose. This act of surrender, where the heart yields to Jesus Christ, paves the path for a lifetime of discipleship. Through accepting Jesus, you invite the embodiment of divine love and grace into your daily existence, committing to a course steered by faith and marked by spiritual awakening. As we cross this threshold, our lives take on a new dimension as we become vessels for His love and beacons of His truth in a world that grapples with darkness. Embracing this step involves both surrender

and constant seeking—a balance between giving yourself to Christ and actively pursuing Him through diligent prayer and quiet meditation. In this chapter, we explore the profound simplicity and the life-changing complexities of accepting Jesus, setting the foundation for all growth, healing, and joy to come.

Surrendering to Jesus

Surrendering to Jesus Christ means laying down every aspect of our lives at His feet—a commitment that reshapes our hearts and renews our minds. It's a vulnerable yet powerful act of faith in which we give up control and trust that His ways are higher than our own. In this surrender, we find true freedom, for it is only after we cease striving in our own strength that the power of the Holy Spirit can move within us. As we yield to Jesus, we experience the paradox of the gospel: in losing our lives for His sake, we gain a life of fullness and purpose. With every step of surrender, we walk further into the light of His grace, love, and mercy.,

Step 1: Acknowledging Powerlessness: Honesty, Humility, and Surrender

So to be a disciple of Jesus, we first need to be willing to be teachable. This requires a level of humility that, when I began my journey with God, I was lacking. My walk with God began with hitting bottom as a drug addict and alcoholic. It is a common trait of people with addictions to be extremely selfish. Which I was. When someone tried to give me any advice or counsel, I would often reply, "I know." I was arrogant and self-centered, and I had no idea how much I did not know. What I quickly learned was a phrase I heard quite a bit in my days attending 12-step group meetings. "If you do not get humble, you will be humiliated." It turned out to be a true statement in my life. I was the kind of person who always seemed to have to learn the hard way. I was very

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blessed to have some great teachers as I was learning how to live sober, and after about 6 months of being sober, I gave my life to Christ.

By acknowledging that we cannot do this life by ourselves, we conclude that we need help. All of my best thinking went to the point that I was addicted to drugs and alcohol. I was involved with criminal behavior to support my addictions. From the outside, it was probably easy to see that I could not do anything good with my life without help. But it took getting in a lot of trouble to get me to see that for myself. At my bottom, I woke up in places, not knowing how I got there. I would show up to work and hear about things I did the night before and have no memory of what they were telling me.

It is a common thought that drugs and alcohol are the problem. But in my life, they were the solution. I did not want to feel the way I felt and did not know how to make a change. In the beginning, it worked well, and I was able to escape the pain that I felt and turn off the negative thoughts that I seemed to always have. In the end, I was drinking and using it to pass out. Just getting high or drunk no longer took the pain away; in fact, a lot of times it ended up making it worse.

The first step of our journey calls for a recognition of our human limitations and an acknowledgment of our powerlessness. In the context of recovery, this step urges individuals to admit their inability to control their addiction. But in the realm of Christian living, it goes beyond acknowledging powerlessness over substances; it beckons us to surrender to the divine, recognizing our dependence on God. *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13)

We stand at the threshold, humbly acknowledging that, left to our own devices, we are powerless to navigate the complexities of life. It's a pivotal moment, not of defeat but of surrender—a surrender to the One who holds the universe in His hands.

Step 2: Believing in Jesus: Faith

In addition to being teachable, being a disciple of Christ requires faith. At the heart of discipleship is faith. To follow Christ is to believe in Him, His teachings, and His mission. Faith serves as the foundation upon which all other qualities and actions are built. It is our unwavering trust that allows us to step onto this path, even when faced with uncertainty and doubt. Faith keeps us grounded, reminding us that we are not alone but walking hand in hand with the Savior. My faith began with being told that, in the beginning, getting sober would require faith in a higher power. I went to church as a child, mostly at Easter and Christmas. I knew the stories of the Bible. But it was hard to believe that God cared for me and was interested in me. He desired to have a relationship with me. I was told that I could start by believing what they believed. It seemed silly, but it was a starting point. About 6 months after getting sober, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. The Bible says in Hebrews 11:1: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* I have never seen or heard a better definition of what faith is than this. I can tell you stories of things I have experienced. I can try to explain why I believe, but everyone has their own journey to get there. Having faith does not mean that everything is going to work out how you want it to. It is believing that God is guiding your life if you allow Him to, and that is what your purpose is.

As it turns out, that was exactly what I needed. Having faith in God was difficult for me. I lost my father on Father's Day,

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just 10 days before my 7th birthday. I remember being mad at God for taking him. How could a loving God take a father away from his son? It is easy to question God and why this life doesn't make sense to us. Isaiah 55:9 tells us, "*As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" We are not meant to know why right now. That is why following Christ takes faith. We will talk more about this later.

With hearts open to the reality of our powerlessness, we move to the second step—a step that calls for belief in Jesus Christ. In the context of recovery, this higher power is often left open to interpretation, allowing individuals to find solace in a force greater than themselves. In our Christian journey, this higher power is none other than the God of our faith. "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*" (Jeremiah 29:11)

Our belief in God as our higher power is the cornerstone of this step. It's an invitation to trust in the divine plan and to believe that God's purpose for our lives far surpasses our limited understanding. As we take this action, we embrace the knowledge that a kind and benevolent Creator oversees our journey.

Step 3: Turning Life Over to God: Surrender

Once I have even a little bit of faith that God will help me, I need to ask Him. I learned this prayer in the 12-step programs I attended for years:

God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou will. Relieve me of the bondage of self so that I may better do Your will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help with Your power, Your love, and Your way of life.

It was a very profound prayer for me. It is a declaration that I am willing to let go of my way and have Him take over my life. It wasn't really that hard for me initially to start this process. At my best, I ended up hitting bottom with drugs and alcohol. It was harder later when I had to start letting go of the deeper security blanket parts of my personality that I had developed to protect myself. If you get to this stage and just begin to let go of even small parts of your life, you will be amazed at what God will begin doing.

A lot of people, me included, blamed God for a great deal of my life. The misconception that he was causing all the chaos in my life was misguided. I had not yet learned that, although He is all-powerful and all-knowing, He does not force Himself on us. God will pursue us, but He needs us to invite Him into our lives. God chose to give us free will to not worship Him. He wants us to choose to love and worship Him.

This is not a once-and-done kind of thing. I have learned that some days are a day at a time, and some of them are 5 minutes at a time. There are days that I am dealing with something, and I pray for Him to take it, and I take it right back. For me, it started slow, and I go through seasons where I do better than others by giving God my life. As I began to trust Him more, it became easier, and then, as I went deeper into my development, I had some things I did not want to let go of. Some sins I enjoyed. If sin was not enjoyable, it would not tempt us. It is the cost of sin that ultimately makes most of us give it up. As we mature in our faith, we realize that the benefit of sin is far less than the benefit of our relationship with God.

With newfound trust in our Higher Power, we reach the third step—a step that implores us to turn our lives over to the care of God. In the context of recovery, this involves a

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willingness to surrender one's will to the path of healing. In our Christian walk, it is an invitation to align our desires with God's will. "*Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.*" (Psalm 37:5)

Here, we pause to reflect on our intentions, desires, and ambitions. Are they in harmony with the divine purpose? This step challenges us to release the grip of control and, instead, entrust our lives to the One who knows the intricate details of our journey.

As we take these initial steps, may our hearts be open to the power of surrender, belief, and divine guidance. Our Christian way of living is not merely a path; it's a journey of profound spiritual discovery. In the chapters that follow, we will explore each step with depth and intention, unveiling the sacred connections between the 12 steps of AA and the rich tapestry of our Christian faith. May this journey lead us to a place of redemption, where the grace of God flows abundantly, and our lives reflect the beauty of His love.

Chapter 3

Search and Share Your Heart

Step 4: Moral Inventory

As we transition from the core principles of discipleship into the practical application of those principles, we come upon the critical task of conducting a moral inventory, a key step in nurturing our spiritual growth. It's a courageous act of self-examination where we consider our character and actions in light of divine truth. This process isn't about self-condemnation; rather, it serves as a mirror reflecting both our progress and the areas where God's power is most needed in our lives. By assessing our spiritual health through an honest inventory, we open ourselves up to the blessings of confession and the freedom that comes from transparency. It's here that we also learn to understand the weight of our imperfections while simultaneously embracing God's perfect grace. Through this chapter, we'll delve into the inner workings of our souls, identifying the aspects that

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align with Christ's teachings and those that call for meticulous work under His guidance.

Lamentations 3:40 states, *"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD."* One of the hardest things I was asked to do when I got clean and sober was to do what the program calls a fearless and thorough moral inventory. Taking an honest look at ourselves is not something anyone wants to do. I had done a lot of things I was not proud of and had hurt a lot of people in my life.

The thing I have realized after all these years is that God will be there through the whole process. If we are going to make changes in our lives, we need to know what we want to keep and what we need to get rid of. It can be an overwhelming process. Because I have always been an entrepreneur, it was explained to me that it is like a business taking inventory every year. A business needs to know what they have on hand, what they took in, and what the profit or loss was for the year.

This is not just for addicts and alcoholics. We all have things in our lives that we need to confess. I have learned that we are only as sick as our secrets. We cannot get the help we need until we are ready to bring light into our dark places. By exposing God's light into the dark, we can heal those hurts that we have tried to bury.

There are a lot of good resources for someone to take an honest moral inventory. I also suggest that you do not do this alone. It helps to have people in your life who can relate to you and your personal story. Having a person who understands where I am coming from helps with the feeling that no one understands me. The benefit of all the different 12-step programs is that you get to fellowship with people just like you who have been through what you have, maybe

a little worse or better, but having people you can relate to is key to overcoming the shame of whatever you have as a part of your story.

The part of this that most people forget is the good stuff. No one is all good or all bad. We are all sinners who have fallen short. But included in looking at ourselves is looking at our qualities as well. God has given all of us gifts that He wants to use for His glory. We need to acknowledge that we have talents that are not to be proud of but to be thankful for. I have been blessed to be able to use my talents to serve the kingdom in many ways. I am looking forward to seeing the results that, most of the time, we do not get to see in this world. As we continue our expedition through the 12 steps, our journey takes a contemplative turn toward the 4th step, which beckons us to embark on a moral inventory. In the context of recovery, this step entails a fearless and searching examination of one's actions and the impact they've had on others. It is an opportunity for in-depth reflection in our Christian walk, helping us to align our lives with the moral compass that our faith provides. *"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"* (Psalm 139:23-24)

The psalmist's words echo the sentiment of Step 4—a sincere invitation for God to search the depths of our hearts. It's a courageous act to examine our lives with honesty, acknowledging the areas where we've fallen short of God's standards. In the Christian context, this moral inventory is not merely a reflection of our actions but a probing exploration of our hearts and intentions.

We take stock of our relationships, our motives, and the impact of our choices on those around us. Are our actions in harmony with the teachings of Christ? Have we

demonstrated the virtues of love, kindness, and forgiveness that our Savior exemplified? This step calls for a willingness to confront the shadows within, recognizing that true transformation begins with a candid assessment of our lives. It's a journey into the depths of our souls, guided by the light of divine truth.

Step 5: Confession

Having completed our moral inventory, we arrive at Step 5—the step of confession. In the context of recovery, this involves sharing the inventory with a trusted person or, in some cases, with God. In our Christian journey, confession is a sacramental act, a humble opening of our hearts before God. *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* (James 5:16)

Confession is not a moment of shame but an opportunity for healing. As we lay bare our shortcomings, we find solace in God's boundless mercy. This step mirrors the biblical call to confess our sins and receive forgiveness, understanding that in vulnerability, we discover the power of God's grace. Once we can have an honest assessment of ourselves, we need to share it with someone. Having all this information, which can be overwhelming, can also be dangerous if we keep it to ourselves and do not share it. Proverbs 28:13 says: *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."* Once we know the truth about ourselves, we need to share it and acknowledge it. By having someone who knows everything about me, I have someone to be accountable to. They can help me as I am working to become a better disciple of Christ. This is not an overnight transformation, but a lifelong journey.

The first time I was able to sit down and share with someone everything about me, it was a scary thing to do. But the

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person I chose to do this with was very understanding and was able to share some of their past with me as we went through mine. This was a great help, because the things about me that I thought I needed to keep secret were things a lot of people went through. The enemy used the secrets to lie to us and try to keep us from fulfilling our calling. By bringing those things into the light, they become a testimony of God's goodness and a weapon against the enemy.

I have had times in my life where I made great strides, and then I have also had very difficult seasons. The more transparent I am with the people around me, the better they can help. It has also been part of my being honest with myself.

In the chapters that follow, we will delve into the subsequent steps, each building upon the foundation of self-examination and confession. As we navigate the intricate terrain of our spiritual journey, may the lessons of Step 4 and Step 5 resonate deeply within us, leading us toward a life of authenticity, humility, and the profound grace found in Christ.

Chapter 4

Conviction from the Holy Spirit Brings a Desire to Change

Step 6: Were Entirely Ready for God to Remove Defects of Character: Willingness and Humility

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10) Once I have taken an honest assessment of my life and shared it with someone I trust, it brings a desire for change that some call conviction. It is not a bad thing, but it is necessary to continue in my life as a disciple of Christ. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10 *As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.**

Our spiritual expedition through the 12 steps now leads us to a crucial juncture—Step 6. In the context of recovery, this step invites individuals to be “entirely” ready for God to remove their defects of character. In our Christian journey, we parallel the biblical call to seek transformation and renewal through God's redemptive power.

By adopting the attitude of repentance, we become willing for God to make the changes necessary for us to grow into our purpose. Being willing to change is the start of letting go of our old ways and becoming more like Jesus. This is an ongoing process that will last a lifetime. I have met a few people in my life who experienced one of those instantaneous miraculous transformations. The vast majority of those I have known have had more of a process of peeling the onion, slowly making changes over a long time.

The biggest part of changing into the person God called you to be is being willing for Him to change you. A prayer that I learned that helped me with this part of my process was this prayer: "God, thank you for removing my fear and for showing me the truth about myself. I need your help to become willing to let go of the things in me that continue to block me from you. Please grant me your grace and remove these objectionable characteristics, defects, and shortcomings from me. Amen."

In Psalm 51: *Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin,* David's plea resonates with the essence of Step 6—a heartfelt desire for God to purify and transform us. It's an acknowledgment that, on our own, we are flawed, and our character bears imperfections. Yet, with a willing heart, we invite God to remove these defects, trusting in His ability to reshape us according to His divine image.

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This step prompts us to identify those aspects of our character that hinder our spiritual growth. Are there resentments, pride, or selfishness that obstruct the path to living out Christ's love? As we lay bare these defects, we do so with a spirit of readiness, understanding that true change requires a surrender of our old ways. *"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit."* (Romans 8:5)

We embark on this step with a commitment to shift our focus from self-centered desires to the pursuit of spiritual virtues. It's a journey from living by the flesh to walking in the Spirit, recognizing that God's power is essential for this metamorphosis.

Step 7: Humbly Asking God for Change

Following the acknowledgment of defects, Step 7 beckons us to humbly ask God for change. In recovery, this involves seeking divine intervention to alleviate character flaws. In our Christian walk, it's a humble surrender, acknowledging our need for God's grace to refine us. *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."* (1 Peter 5:6)

True humility is not self-deprecation but a recognition that our true exaltation comes from God. As we approach this step, we do so with a sense of awe and reverence, understanding that God's work begins with a heart that is receptive and humble.

This is a prayer known as the 7th Step Prayer: *My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character that stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength as I go out from here to do your bidding.*

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In the chapters that follow, we will go deeper into the subsequent steps, each building upon the foundation of readiness and humility. As we navigate the landscape of Step 6 and Step 7, may our hearts be open to the refining touch of God, shaping us into vessels that radiate His love, grace, and power.

Chapter 5

Clean Up Your Side of the Street

Our pilgrimage through the 12 steps now leads us to Step 8 and Step 9, pivotal stages in our journey toward Christian living. These steps, emphasizing reconciliation and making amends, draw profound parallels between the path of recovery and the Christian call to forgiveness and restoration.

Step 8: Making a List of Those We've Harmed: Love and Responsibility

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18) This part of the process of my life as a disciple has been one of the hardest and most rewarding things to do. It is to go back to the inventory from chapter three. We need to do what I was taught: clean up my side of the street. In that inventory, I have a list of all of those who I harmed. To try and make things right. I need to go back

and make amends with those I have harmed. The life that I had lived hurt a lot of people, and going back and saying I am sorry is not all that is required. It may be enough in some cases, but I stole from people, lied to people, and caused a lot of damage. I was a one-man wrecking crew. This is a process that is absolutely in need of having someone to help determine if it is necessary and if it may cause more harm.

In Step 8, we undertake the task of creating a comprehensive list of individuals we have harmed and becoming willing to make amends with them all. This extends beyond acknowledging personal defects and calls us to recognize the impact of our actions on others. As Christians, we are reminded of the scriptural imperative to live at peace with everyone, fostering reconciliation and harmony in our relationships. This step challenges us to examine the consequences of our choices, recognizing that our actions may have caused pain, resentment, or estrangement. The list is not a catalog of guilt but a tool for self-awareness and accountability. Through it, we prepare our hearts for making amends.

Step 9: Making amends

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24) There are a few reasons for this process. One is the guilt we carry. One is to make direct amends to the ones we can. It is also an opportunity to share what God has done in our lives, and that can be a great message that someone may need to hear. The less we have from our past that is holding us back, the more it frees us up to carry the message of hope that we have in Jesus.

In my many attempts at making amends, I have had a variety

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of responses. Some don't remember and say it is not necessary. I have had doors slammed in my face and been hung up on by those who did not want to hear or see me again. I do not blame them. I also had many who were happy to see that I had made a change in my life for the better and wished me the best. We aren't sure we can help with the response or result of our amendments. It is our responsibility to attempt. God is ultimately in charge of the results.

Step 9 guides us in the process of making amends—a sacred act of seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. In the Christian context, this step resonates with Jesus' teachings on reconciliation before presenting offerings at the altar. It underscores the importance of mending broken relationships as an integral part of our spiritual journey.

Making amends is a courageous endeavor, requiring humility, sincerity, and a genuine desire for healing. It involves not only acknowledging our wrongs but actively seeking ways to repair the relational fabric we may have torn. As we extend apologies and restitution, we reflect the power of Christ's redemptive love.

In the chapters ahead, we will explore the subsequent steps, each building upon the foundation of reconciliation and amends. May our hearts be attuned to the divine call for forgiveness and restoration as we proceed through Steps 8 and 9, paving the way for a life that is characterized by repaired relationships and a reflection of Christ's reconciling grace.

Reconciliation and amends

In the light of His grace, as we walk further along our discipleship path, we come to realize the profound necessity of reconciliation and making amends. This chapter isn't just about mustering the courage to face those we've wronged;

it's a deeper journey into the essence of forgiveness that Christ exemplified on the cross. As disciples, we're called to reflect that same unconditional love, recognizing that restoration of relationships is not just for the benefit of those we've hurt, but it also releases us from the chains of unresolved guilt and shame. It's a step that requires earnest self-examination and sincere humility as we seek out those we've wronged to make things right. Remember, it's in our power to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, but the healing of the relationship depends on God's work in both hearts. Making amends goes beyond mere words; it's a transformational act that validates the sincerity of our repentance, heals wounds, and serves as a testimony of God's redeeming power in our lives.

The Power of Forgiveness

As we journey further into reconciliation and amends, we encounter forgiveness. In this holy act, we mirror the heart of Christ, who forgave even when it cost Him everything. Embracing forgiveness isn't merely about absolving others; it's about releasing ourselves from the burdens of bitterness and resentment that stifle our spiritual growth. You'll find that forgiveness is the key that unlocks the chains of the past, allowing you to step into the freedom of God's grace. It brings healing to relationships and offers a path forward. Do not be overwhelmed if this seems like a tall task, for it is not by might nor by power but by the Spirit of God that we are empowered to forgive. Remember, each step taken towards forgiveness is a step closer to the heart of Jesus, redefining your life's narrative from one of pain to one of purpose and redemption.

Making Things Right with Others

In our journey as disciples of Christ, we have come to understand that reconciliation is not a passive concept but

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an active process that requires our engagement and commitment. Part of this journey involves making things right with those around us. As we walk in obedience to God's commandments, we recognize that He deeply values relationships, and He longs for us to live in peace with everyone, as much as it depends on us. To make things right with others, our hearts must first be aligned with the heart of the Father. This alignment begins when we accept the profound grace offered to us through Jesus Christ, grace that empowers and compels us to extend forgiveness and seek forgiveness from others. In extending forgiveness, we reflect God's mercy, and in seeking forgiveness, we demonstrate humility—a key characteristic of a true disciple.

Approaching someone to make amends can be scary, but it's an act of obedience that can lead to healing and restoration. It's about taking responsibility for our actions without making excuses or minimizing the hurt we have caused. This also means we are to approach with a listening heart, acknowledging the other person's experience and feelings. It's not enough to simply say "I'm sorry" as a platitude; our apologies should be genuine expressions of our remorse.

There are instances where the damage done isn't as a result of our direct actions, but perhaps due to misunderstandings or circumstances beyond our control. In such cases, it is still an act of love and a step toward peace to address unresolved issues, bringing clarity and closure. By doing so, we promote reconciliation, which is close to the heart of God.

When making things right, timing and discernment are important. We should seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to know when to speak and when to remain silent, trusting that He can prepare the way and soften hearts. It might not always result in immediate reconciliation, but being obedient in taking the step to make amends is what counts. The way

we make things right with others should also extend to how we restore relationships. This often involves building trust over time through consistent and reliable behavior. Trust isn't rebuilt overnight; it requires intentional action. Sometimes, the other party may not be receptive to our efforts to reconcile. In such situations, we must remember that our responsibility is to act in obedience and extend the love of Christ, regardless of the outcome. We cannot control how others will respond, but we can ensure that our actions and intentions are pure.

It is also important to note that making amends is different from seeking restitution. While there are scenarios where restitution is appropriate, what's paramount is the heart behind the act. It's about rebuilding what was broken in the relationship, not merely compensating for wrongs. As disciples, being peacemakers means we are also called to facilitate reconciliation between others. We need to do so with wisdom and discernment, ensuring that we are not taking sides or enabling unhealthy behavior, but rather promoting authentic resolution and peace. Reconciliation can lead to powerful transformations, not only in the lives of those directly involved but also in the wider community. It is a testament to the power of God's love and the grace that flows from the cross. Therefore, making things right with others isn't just a side note in our spiritual journey; it is a vital part of our testimony and witness to the world. As we endeavor to make things right with others, we must guard our hearts against bitterness and resentment. These emotions can take root and cause more harm than the original offense. Instead, we are encouraged to "keep short accounts," which means addressing issues promptly and not allowing them to fester. Indeed, the act of making things right is a reflection of God's character. He made things right with us through Christ when we were still His enemies. In turn, he asks us to be agents of reconciliation in a broken

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world.

In conclusion, making things right with others is not optional; it's a vital step that underpins the integrity of our faith and witness. It is a direct reflection of our relationship with Christ, for as He has forgiven us much, so too must we forgive others and seek their forgiveness where we have caused hurt. Let's move forward, encouraging one another in love and good deeds, always seeking to build bridges of reconciliation that reflect the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

Living a Christian Life of Integrity

Our odyssey through the 12 steps continues, and now we stand at the threshold of Step 10. This step invites us to embark on a journey of continual self-reflection and accountability, aligning our lives with the principles of Christian integrity.

If we were able to do this perfectly daily, we would never have to go back through the process that we have gone through. But we will not do it perfectly and will need to periodically go back and revisit the process. As we go through it again and again, we will grow in our relationship with Christ. We will be able to learn and grow in the purpose that we have been made for. As we go through life and continually search for ourselves and grow in our relationships, being able to immediately make things right as opposed to waiting weeks, months, or even years will give us the ability to keep our side of the street clean daily instead of

letting things build up over time and fester. As a husband, father, friend, and employee, I try to quickly admit when I make a mistake. The great thing about being honest about being flawed is that there is no expectation that I will always respond or act perfectly. I try to set the precedent so that most people who know me know that I make mistakes all the time.

Step 10: Continual Self-Reflection

"Let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord!" (Lamentations 3:40) Step 10 is an invitation to regular introspection, a commitment to continually examine our thoughts, actions, and motives. It echoes the scriptural call to test and examine our ways, fostering a spirit of accountability before God. In the context of Christian living, this step becomes a daily practice of aligning our lives with the teachings of Christ.

Self-reflection is not a mere exercise in guilt but a pathway to growth and spiritual maturity. It allows us to course-correct, realigning our lives with the principles we have encountered on this journey. As we engage in this ongoing examination, we remain vigilant against the seeds of resentment, selfishness, and complacency that may threaten our spiritual integrity. *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (James 1:22) Step 10 challenges us to be active participants in our faith, not merely passive observers. It encourages a lived-out faith, where our daily actions reflect the power of Christ within us.

Ongoing Confession and Repentance

In this walk with Christ, we recognize that stumbling is part of our human condition, and yet, it isn't the fall that defines us, but rather our willingness to rise, to admit our shortcomings, and to strive to improve. Embracing the

practice of ongoing confession and repentance isn't an admission of defeat but a declaration of dependence upon God's grace and mercy. It's about acknowledging that even as we grow, the need for God's work in our hearts is constant. As disciples, we're called not to hide but to reveal our struggles, allowing light to shine in the darkest corners of our souls. This transparency before God and trusted companions in our spiritual journey breaks the chains of sin and brings a deeper intimacy with the Savior. By maintaining an attitude of humility and obedience, we become more attuned to the Holy Spirit's guidance, correcting our course and refining our character in the likeness of Jesus. Such a lifestyle of continual self-examination and alignment with God's will is essential, for it is through this process that we experience the fullness of redemption and the joy of a clear conscience before our Lord.

The Need for Continual Spiritual Maintenance

The journey with Christ is a process where the heart must be diligently tended to through acts of confession and repentance. Just as a gardener must regularly weed their garden to prevent the growth of unwanted plants, disciples must routinely examine their own hearts, weeding out sin to prevent spiritual stagnation. This continuous spiritual maintenance is a crucial aspect of the disciple's life, ensuring that one remains in true communion with God. It's not enough to rest on past experiences or former victories; the health of our relationship with the Lord demands perseverance in humility and a commitment to turn from sin. As we allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and reveal areas in need of His touch, we position ourselves for renewed growth and deepened faith, laying a foundation for all areas of our discipleship.

Step 11: Seeking God through Prayer and Meditation

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Having cultivated a practice of continual self-reflection, we move to Step 11, a step that resonates deeply with the Christian discipline of seeking God through prayer and meditation. "*Pray without ceasing.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Step 11 aligns with the apostle Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing. It urges us to maintain a constant connection with God, seeking His guidance, wisdom, and presence in our lives. Through prayer, we open a dialogue with the Divine, acknowledging our dependence on God's strength and grace. Meditation, in the Christian sense, involves contemplation of God's word and presence. It is a quiet reflection that allows the truths we have encountered to take root in our hearts. As we engage in prayer and meditation, we create sacred spaces for God to speak, guide, and mold us into vessels of His love.

In the chapters ahead, we will navigate the final steps of our journey, each building upon the foundation of integrity and communion with God. May Step 10 and Step 11 become integral practices in our Christian walk, fostering a life of authenticity, prayerful dependence, and a continual pursuit of God's presence.

Prayer is the way we communicate with God. It is an essential aspect of discipleship, allowing us to seek His presence, find peace in His presence, and offer gratitude. Through prayer, we deepen our connection with Christ and draw upon His strength. In the beginning, my prayers were simplified, but they worked. In my early days of getting sober and learning to trust God, I was taught the "serenity prayer." Here is the full version: *God grant me serenity. To accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; I trust that He will make things right if I surrender to His will, so that I may be*

reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever and ever in the next. Amen. This prayer made a world of difference in my daily life. The other prayer I learned while getting sober was "The Lord's Prayer." This is found in Matthew 6:9–13. *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.* It was Jesus instructing the disciples how to pray. I have listened to many sermons explaining the Lord's Prayer. I always enjoy studying the Bible, but I am not going to get into my thoughts on this prayer. I will let God give you revelation on that.

Prayer is something that evolves in each one of us. My prayer life today is very different from what it was even a year ago. When my faith was just beginning, it was mostly about me and getting through each day. When we are early in our faith, we are focused more on ourselves. It is natural because some of us do not turn to faith until we hit some kind of bottom. For me, it was being sick and tired of being sick and tired. I was taught that God wanted to have a relationship with me and that I could talk with Him just as I would a friend. Hopefully, as we develop as disciples, He will become our best friend.

The Bible has examples of more than 650 prayers and records 25 prayers by Jesus. There are different reasons for prayer. If you search for how many types of prayers there are, you will get a variety of answers. I am not here to give you the theological answer to how many types of prayer there are. I want to give you a practical variety of the reasons I pray. I have daily conversational prayers with God. With everything in my life, it seems that having this daily conversation with God makes things easier. Not that some

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magic keeps bad things from happening. But it makes my attitude better, so I respond better to daily life. There is a prayer of repentance that is important to me. Although my sins have been paid for in full, I fall short daily, and if I do not ask for forgiveness, it clouds my view and hearing of God. Maintaining a humble attitude makes it easier to hear from God and allows me to be guided by Him. Praying for my family and friends is an intercessory prayer. I am asking Jesus to intercede on their behalf. There are people in my life that I pray for daily. There are times when God will bring someone to mind, and I will pray for them. One of the most important prayers for me is a prayer of gratitude. Some call it a prayer of thanksgiving. As I was getting sober, I was told to keep a gratitude list and read it daily. It seems simple, but it makes a great difference if I keep my mind on the blessings in my life. There is a prayer of worship, which for me is what happens mostly on Sundays at church. I will sometimes put on worship music in the car or maybe at home. I also learned about having a relationship with the Holy Spirit. In John 15:14–31, Jesus gives us the promise of the Holy Spirit. He is one-third of the Trinity and is given to us to teach us all things and remind us of what Jesus has said. The Holy Spirit is not anything to be afraid of. He is there to help us and guide us. I will often pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide me, speak to me, and fill me with more to help me in my daily walk.

Seeking God's Will

In our pursuit to live a life that's pleasing to the Lord, understanding and seeking God's will becomes imperative. It's a path of surrender, a journey where we learn to set aside our own plans to embrace His divine design. We often stand at life's crossroads, yearning for directions, and in these moments, our soul's compass must point towards God. But how? Through prayerful discernment and seeking wise

counsel, we open our hearts to the whispers of the Holy Spirit. We're not just deciding between good and better; our pursuit is for the best, the plans God has made just for us. It's not just about the destination, but about aligning our daily steps with His blueprint. Seeking God's will doesn't ensure that the road will be without bumps, yet it promises that His presence will accompany us, transforming our travels into triumphs and our choices into testimonies of His faithfulness. So, as we begin discerning His will, we will find comfort in His promises.

Discernment in Decision-Making

Discerning God's direction is more than a choice. As you seek to align your decisions with His will, it's important to recognize that discernment isn't about a definitive yes or no from the heavens but rather about learning to sense the subtle nudges of the Spirit. It's about pausing in the daily hustle, making room for stillness, and attentively listening to the whispers that guide us. As you immerse yourself in prayer and Scripture, you develop the ability to distinguish God's voice. Remember, the Lord's guidance often comes as a gentle invitation rather than a command. Therefore, trust that He's equipped you with the Holy Spirit, who empowers you to make decisions that resonate with the heart of God. By humbly seeking His presence and being open to His leading, you'll find that discernment becomes a part of your decision-making process for His glory.

Aligning Our Desires with God's Plan

The journey to align our desires with God's plan is challenging. Our personal aspirations and dreams may conflict with the path God has laid out for us. It's natural to want certain outcomes in life, but true discipleship calls us to yield our will to the divine wisdom of our Creator. In seeking

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to match our desires with God's plan, we must first come to understand the heart of God. This understanding starts with Scripture. God has revealed His nature, His love, and His intentions through His Word. As disciples, we must dedicate time daily to this study, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform our understanding and refine our desires.

Prayer is another indispensable tool. Through sincere and open communication with God, we make room for Him to speak into our lives. It's not about presenting a wish list to God, but about entering a dialogue where we seek His guidance and express our willingness to be led by Him, even when it means setting aside our plans. Transparency before God is vital. He already knows the deepest desires of our hearts, but when we lay them bare before Him, we demonstrate our trust and our readiness to submit to His will. It's about coming to Him with open hands, ready to receive what He knows is best for us, not just what we think is best for ourselves.

Awareness of our ultimate purpose as disciples helps to frame our desires within the grand narrative of God's kingdom. Our personal ambitions should not eclipse our calling to love and serve. When our dreams align with the mission to be light and salt in this world, we start to desire what God desires for us. As we grow in faith, we must also regularly evaluate our priorities. Do they reflect a life that seeks God's kingdom first, or are they rooted in ephemeral worldly concerns? This reevaluation can often lead to a reshaping of our goals to ensure they are in harmony with leading a life that's pleasing to God.

There are times when our desires and God's plans clearly diverge. In these moments, we're presented with a choice: pursue our dreams independently of God's direction or submit them to His authority. The latter requires a deep trust

in God's goodness and His omnipotence, believing that He's capable of more than we could ever imagine.

Recognize that aligning our desires with God's plan is a dynamic and ongoing process. Patience and perseverance are necessary virtues. We must avoid the temptation to become despondent when things don't happen on our timeline. God's timing is impeccable, and His plans unfold in a way that ultimately contributes to our growth and His glory.

The community plays a significant role in this alignment. Fellow believers can offer wisdom, support, and sometimes challenge our perspectives. In the fellowship of the church, we find accountability partners who can help us stay on course and encourage us when our resolve falters.

Part of our transformation involves the Holy Spirit renewing our minds. When our thinking changes, so do our desires. We start to prefer what is good, pleasing, and perfect in the eyes of God, Romans 12:2: *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* This renewal is a lifelong process that involves gradual growth and rising spiritual maturity.

Submission to God's will, though at times daunting, should also be viewed as an act of worship. Each time we forego our plans for His, we're essentially saying, "You are God, and I am not." It's an acknowledgment of His sovereignty and an exercise of our faith.

One practical way to align our desires with God's will is to embrace service as a part of our daily lives. When we focus on serving others, our self-centered motives start to diminish, making more room for God-directed desires.

Moreover, as we look to Jesus's life as our perfect example,

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we learn the essence of divine desire—obedience. Jesus lived a life fully compliant with the Father's will, even to the point of death on the cross. His life was in ultimate alignment with God's redemptive plan, an example we are called to emulate.

Remember that God's plans for us are borne out of His immeasurable love. To align our desires with His, we must deeply understand that love. In doing so, our trust in Him deepens, and aligning our will with His becomes more of a joy than a sacrifice.

Aligning our desires with God's plan is not about losing our identity or stifling our dreams. It's about refining them, elevating them, and seeing them fulfilled in the grandeur of God's perfect design for our lives. It's a harmonization that leads to a peace that transcends understanding and a fulfillment that this world cannot offer. Let's commit to this pursuit with hearts full of expectation for what God will do through and in us when we're fully yielded to His plan.

Chapter 7

Sharing Our Faith

My Inspiration for "Disciple Lifestyle"

I have spent a great deal of my life inspired to help others. Initially, after getting sober, I was inspired to help others get sober. Later, I was led to share my testimony with others. This led me to become a youth pastor. I experienced great joy seeing young people experience a relationship with their savior. We had a great deal of success. I was later able to attend Bible College and earn a certificate in "Postmodern Culture." Basically, I learned how to reach people in today's culture. I became ordained by the church where I attended Bible college. I do not need to name the church, as they have had many challenges, including a change of leadership. My pastor, who oversaw me and my ministry, was from another country, and it was after 9/11. The United States was not renewing visas for any reason. He had to return to his home country, and I was left without any cover. I moved on to search for a new home church. It took quite a long time, but

I finally found my home at Cross Church in Cumming, GA.

Step 12: Carrying the Message to Others

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father, who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16 Our voyage through the 12 steps now arrives at a profound juncture—Step 12. This final step is a call to action, urging us to share the journey we've experienced with others. As we explore Step 12, we uncover the significance of carrying the message of "The Gospel" to those who may still be seeking their way.

Step 12 aligns harmoniously with Jesus' teachings on being a light to the world. It invites us to share our faith, not through mere words but by embodying the power of Christ in our lives. By carrying the message, we become vessels through which others may witness the grace, love, and redemption found in our Christian journey.

This step encourages us to be intentional in our actions, allowing our transformed lives to serve as a testimony to the work of God within us. Whether through acts of kindness, forgiveness, or selflessness, we become living expressions of the message we carry—a message of hope, healing, and restoration found in Christ. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"* Matthew 28:19-20. Step 12 resonates with the Great Commission, reminding us that our Christian journey is not solely for personal growth but also for the expansion of God's kingdom. By sharing our experiences and the power of God's love, we become instruments in the divine symphony of redemption, inviting others to embark on their own journey of faith. This is to be a witness to His love and

truth. Our lives should reflect His teachings, inspiring others to seek Him. Our actions and words should be a testimony to the power of Christ's grace and mercy. If we are living with the light of Christ in us, we will naturally have people attracted to us for reasons they may not even know. Mathew 28:18-20 Jesus tells the disciples, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Love is something I longed for but seemed to be out of reach for most of my early years. When I entered AA and NA and began to get sober, I started to experience love from others who had gone through what I had gone through. God gave us our testimony to share with others so that they would not feel alone. Growing up feeling unloved and alone, I thought I was the only one who felt like that. But as I began to get sober, I realized that I was not so unique. I used alcohol and drugs to gain acceptance; others used other things. I was searching for the love of the Father. As good as the love and acceptance were among my friends in sobriety, it was not until I experienced the love of God that I truly knew how great love can be.

I met the woman who would become my wife in an AA meeting in late 1997. We have been together off and on since. We got married in February of 2007. We have four children, ages 15 to 30. For a selfish person like me, learning to set aside what I wanted for the benefit of the family has not been an easy thing to learn how to do.

Becoming a husband and a father stretched me in ways I had no comprehension of prior to being either. Both have been my greatest joy and my worst heartache. I made every mistake you can make in my learning process of becoming a

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father and a husband. That is more than I can address here in this book about being a disciple. I can tell you that if it were not for my relationship with Jesus, I would have given up and missed some of the greatest lessons I have learned. One of the most important is the lesson of obedience, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Encouraging Others to Live a "Disciple Lifestyle"

Having carried the message, Step 12 challenges us to encourage others to live a Christian life rooted in the principles we've explored through the 12 steps. It involves fostering a community of support, guidance, and shared faith where individuals can find strength and inspiration for their own spiritual journey. *"Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."* 1 Thessalonians 5:11

As we encourage others, we create a ripple effect of transformation, extending the message of Christ's love to the farthest reaches. This final step is a testament to the interconnectedness of our Christian journey, a journey that not only transforms individuals but also radiates the power of God's grace to the world.

In the concluding chapters, we will reflect on the entirety of our expedition, celebrating the work of God in our lives and the lives of those we touch. May Step 12 motivate us to serve as messengers of hope, examples of God's atoning love, and catalysts for a culture that embraces the message of Christian living.

Spreading the good news

As a torchbearer of faith, you're not only called to walk in the light but also to illuminate the path for others. Evangelism isn't a chore; it's a celebration of the transformation you've experienced. This jubilant

responsibility goes beyond the confines of structured ministry; it's woven into the fabric of your daily interactions. Approach each day with the understanding that you've been graced with a story that can awaken dormant spirits. It's about sinking your roots deep into the compassionate soil of Jesus's teachings and allowing the fruits of that love to be visible and accessible to those around you. Live in such a way that your life begs the question, "What's the source of your hope?" When you speak, let His love be the melody that resonates, and when you act, may it be His grace that others feel. This isn't about mustering up courage on your own; remember, the Holy One who calmed the raging sea is at work within you. So let's step out with confidence, knowing that we're conduits of the greatest news ever received, entrusted to share it with every soul we encounter.

Evangelism as a Way of Life

Living out evangelism each day isn't about adding another task to our to-do lists; it's about weaving threads of the Good News into every interaction we have. Approaching evangelism as a way of life means recognizing that each moment presents an opportunity to reflect Jesus in our words and actions. It's not merely about grand gestures or elaborate presentations; it's found in the simple, genuine connections where we demonstrate the love and grace we've received. As believers, we carry the presence of Christ into the grocery store, our workplaces, and even into casual conversations with neighbors. It's in the intentional act of listening to others and engaging with their stories that we find the fertile ground for seeds of faith to be planted. Whether we're offering a word of encouragement, extending forgiveness, or merely exemplifying kindness, our lives send a consistent message of hope. By living as testimonies to the power of Jesus, we invite others to explore the depths of His love they see in us, making discipleship not just an aspiration but a natural outflow of our everyday experiences.

Sharing Our Testimonies and God's Love

The journey of a disciple of Christ is both personal and collective, and central to this voyage is the sharing of our testimonies and God's love. This act is not merely recounting stories but a powerful means of connection, invitation, and transformation, both for the teller and the listener. For in every testimony, the goodness and mercy of the Lord shine forth, beckoning others to discover the same grace that has altered our lives.

Testimonies hold within them the potential to break down barriers and illuminate paths for seekers in the shadows of doubt. As we narrate our encounters with the divine, emphasizing not our own strengths but the overwhelming faithfulness of God, we speak life into dry bones and hope into weary souls. The testimony is not a trophy of our accomplishments but a testament to God's unwavering love and power.

But how does one begin to share this treasure? It starts with recognizing that our testimonies are not for us to hoard but gifts to be given away. To do this effectively, we must listen attentively to the Spirit's prompting, share with humility and authenticity, and convey our stories with clarity and relevance to our audience. Whether it's a tale of healing, restoration, provision, or salvation, each account is a unique thread in the grand tapestry of God's redemptive narrative.

Remember, vulnerability begets vulnerability. When we share the depths from which we've been lifted, we invite others to open up about their struggles. This shared vulnerability can knit hearts together and provide fertile soil for seeds of faith to sprout and grow. It's in these moments of honest exchange that the Holy Spirit is often most palpable, turning hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

Even so, sharing our testimonies is not without its challenges. Some may reject the message, others might scoff, or you might feel your story is insignificant. Yet, it's crucial to stand firm in the knowledge that every testimony has value because it's a witness to the presence and activity of God in this world. Even the smallest encounter with the divine has the potential to revolutionize another's life.

Also, consider the command of Christ to let our light shine before others. In doing so, we glorify our Father in heaven. Sharing our testimony becomes an act of worship, a devotional offering that expresses our gratitude and recognizes the work of God in our lives. It's a profound way to celebrate God's love and share it with others.

God's love is the cornerstone of our testimonies—His unyielding, compassionate, sacrificial love that sent Jesus to redeem us. Every believer's story is a beautiful narrative of this love overcoming the world. The spoken account of divine love in our lives is a ripple that can grow into a tide of transformation in the hearts of listeners.

What's more, when we share, we fulfill the role of being ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His appeal through us. Our stories serve as a bridge, guiding those wandering in the dark toward the light of Christ. Our words become beacons of hope on their journey, highlighting the pathway to peace and joy found in a relationship with Jesus.

To be effective in this sacred endeavor, we must be prepared. This preparation involves knowing the Word, understanding our testimony, and being in tune with the Holy Spirit's guidance. This does not mean memorizing a script; rather, it means being so soaked in the presence of God that our lives naturally exude His love and our mouths overflow with the

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joy of our salvation.

As we prepare, let's also understand the power of our testimonies in spiritual warfare. Revelation speaks of being overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. Our stories have a spiritual authority that can shatter strongholds and liberate captives. Never underestimate the impact of sharing how Jesus has changed your life.

And let's not forget, that sharing is not a one-way street. As much as we speak, we must also listen—engaging in conversations, responding with empathy, and building relationships. The sharing of testimonies ought not to be reduced to mere monologue but should flourish as dialogues of faith where both speaker and listener grow in understanding and love.

Lastly, it's important to recognize that sharing our testimonies is a continuous process. As we walk with God, new chapters of our spiritual journey are being written, and fresh testimonies of God's love and faithfulness are being crafted. Holding onto these experiences without sharing them is like hiding a lamp under a bowl instead of placing it on a stand for all to see.

Therefore, as we venture through life as disciples of Christ, let's embrace every opportunity to share our testimonies and God's love. Let's do so with boldness, with love, and with a keen awareness that through our stories, the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work to break chains and usher others into the kingdom of light. For truly, there is no greater story to tell than the one of Jesus and His love.

Engaging in Community

In this shared journey with Christ, it's not merely our

personal growth that flourishes, but also the vital connections we make with others. Community: it's where Christian discipleship is strongest. Think of the early church—they broke bread, they prayed, and they shared everything with great joy (Acts 2:42–47). So, let's immerse ourselves purposefully in fellowship, understanding that here lie the support and the accountability structures that bolster us in our walk. This engagement isn't peripheral; it is central to the practice of discipleship. To thrive, we must interweave our lives with fellow travelers, sharpen each other as "iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17), and create a mosaic of relationships in which every piece is essential. In these communal sanctuaries, our collective worship, service, and care act not only as a beacon to the lost but also as an anchor for our souls, for it is in pouring into one another that we truly find the embodiment of Christ's love.

The Importance of Fellowship

Fellowship is the lifeblood of spiritual growth; it's the hands and feet of living as a disciple in unity. As you walk this journey, you can't overlook the profound impact of connecting with fellow believers. In fellowship, we find a platform for shared experiences, burdens lightened by mutual support, and joy multiplied in communal worship. It's in this togetherness that we mirror the Trinity's perfect relationship, embodying the church as Christ intended. As you engage in heartfelt relationships within your spiritual community, you're not just attending a social gathering; you're participating in a divine tapestry of lives interwoven by faith. Through each testimony shared and prayer whispered amongst peers, you are strengthened, not in isolation, but in a collective echo of commitment to follow Christ. This isn't just about finding your place in the pew; it's about knitted hearts and minds focused on a journey that far surpasses the individual, anchoring itself in the beauty of shared pursuit towards holiness and love.

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Finding support and accountability in the church plays a pivotal role in the life of a disciple. The call to follow Christ is not merely an invitation to believe, but to belong—to become part of a body of believers who journey together. The church is not just a place we attend, but a community we immerse ourselves in, contributing to its strength and drawing sustenance from its robust support system.

Community within the church provides disciples with a network of seasoned believers who can guide, support, and propel one another forward in spiritual maturity. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another (Proverbs 27:17). This sharpening is a vital part of discipleship, which unfolds in the context of genuine relationships built on mutual trust and commitment to growth.

In seeking support, a disciple should find individuals within the church who exemplify the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). These are believers who have walked the path, overcome obstacles, and can offer wisdom born from experience. They stand as pillars, displaying the power of a life dedicated to following Christ, ready to hold others up in their times of need.

Similarly, the role of accountability cannot be overstated. Accountability involves allowing others to hold us responsible for our actions and spiritual commitments. It doesn't come from a place of judgment but rather from a heartfelt desire to see each other prosper in the Way. As part of a church community, there can be structured accountability where disciples regularly check in with one another, sharing struggles and victories alike.

Small groups or Bible studies within the church are excellent forums for deepening these bonds. When we commune and study the Word together, we not only grow in knowledge but

also in love with one another. This environment of open sharing fosters a unique form of support where everyone's journey is validated, and valuable lessons are exchanged.

Prayer partnerships within the church can also be formed to intercede for one another. Prayer is a powerful tool that unites believers and invites God into our relationships. Committing to pray for others and asking them to pray for us creates a spiritual lifeline that can withstand life's storms.

It's also essential to join ministry teams or volunteer groups. As we serve together, we develop a sense of ownership and unity, creating a strong fabric that holds the church together. Service is a practical expression of our faith and a demonstration of our commitment to God and each other.

Mentorship is a cornerstone of church communities as well. Mature disciples need to seek to mentor newer believers, and newer believers should seek out seasoned Christians to mentor them. This creates a legacy of discipleship, where wisdom and experiences are passed down, enriching the whole community.

Church leadership should not be overlooked in a disciple's pursuit of support and accountability. Pastors, elders, and leaders are appointed to shepherd the flock, providing spiritual oversight and direction. They are equipped to guide through difficult decisions, provide counsel in trying times, and offer correction with grace when necessary.

Discipleship also calls for transparency within the church community. It's about being real with where we are on our journey—without pretense or masks. This kind of vulnerability can lead to true healing and growth, as it lays the foundation for real connection and support from others who understand that we all have struggles and can overcome them together.

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Church-wide retreats, conferences, and seminars also play a crucial role in building a supportive network. These events provide unique opportunities for disciples to refresh and refocus together, forging strong ties of fellowship and encouragement to continue pursuing the Lord.

Commitment to regular worship services cannot be separated from the disciple's life. It is within the celebrative atmosphere of corporate worship that we discover our communal identity. Together, we lift each other as we sing, pray, and respond to God's Word in unison.

Even as we embrace the support found in our church communities, disciples should reciprocate by being a source of support to others. It is a symbiotic relationship built on the principle of giving and receiving. As we pour into others, our lives become enriched, exemplifying the beautiful tapestry of interdependence woven by God Himself.

Disciples are not lone rangers but are called to walk in fellowship with a community that supports and holds one another accountable. The local church is the prime context for this journey, offering an array of resources, relationships, and opportunities for growth. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us is integral to the other, and together, we can pursue a life of discipleship that honors the Lord and edifies the church.

So, let's embrace the community of believers with which we've been blessed. Let's lean into the support and accountability offered within the church. And in doing so, let's grow not only in our personal relationship with Christ but also in our ability to strengthen and uplift the community of faith around us.

This is to be a witness to His love and truth. Our lives should reflect His teachings, inspiring others to seek Him. Our

actions and words should be a testimony to the power of Christ's grace and mercy. If we are living with the light of Christ in us, we will naturally have people attracted to us for reasons they may not even know. Mathew 28:18-20 Jesus tells the disciples, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

My responsibility in that is to try and carry that message to those in my path and influence. The idea behind creating "Disciple Lifestyle" was for that purpose. Not all of us feel comfortable sharing our faith at a moment's notice. Sometimes it is wearing a hat or shirt with a scripture on it or a bumper sticker. I was walking through the grocery store having a bad day when I almost bumped into someone who was wearing a t-shirt with a faith message on it. As I looked at the shirt, I got one of those nudges from the Holy Spirit, and I laughed, and my attitude immediately changed.

Christ's central message was love—love for God and love for each other. As disciples, we are called to replicate this love in every aspect of our lives. This love is not selective; it encompasses friends and enemies alike. It is a love that forgives, heals, and serves. Through love, we become vessels of Christ's grace, bringing light into the lives of others. If you come to God as I did, damaged, selfish, and arrogant, to name a few character defects, you have a hard time with love. I grew up watching TV shows that had loving families portrayed on them. I grew up in a family that was a blended family of my mother, two younger twin brothers, and a stepfather who was left with five sons and a daughter. With nine kids being thrust together in a situation that we were all unhappy about, it was not a loving home. Not that our parents did not try. My mom had watched her first husband

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die of a year of brain cancer. Jim, my stepfather, had just taken on a new wife and three kids on top of the six he was left with. Jim was one of the greatest men I ever knew. Sadly, we lost him in October of 2017.

Love is something I longed for but seemed to be out of reach for most of my early years. When I entered AA and NA and began to get sober, I started to experience love from others who had gone through what I had gone through. God gave us our testimony to share with others so that they would not feel alone. Growing up feeling unloved and alone, I thought I was the only one who felt like that. But as I began to get sober, I realized that I was not so unique. I used alcohol and drugs to gain acceptance; others used other things. In reality, I was searching for the love of the Father. As good as the love and acceptance were among my friends in sobriety, it was not until I experienced the love of God that I truly knew how great love can be.

Chapter 8

The Journey of Transformation

As we stand at the culmination of our exploration through the 12 steps, it is fitting to reflect on the journey we have undertaken. The steps, rooted in the principles of recovery and intertwined with the essence of Christian living, have paved the way for a profound metamorphosis of the soul.

Reflecting on the Journey

"And we all, with an unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." 2 Corinthians 3:18 In the words of the apostle Paul, our journey mirrors a process—a continual journey of being changed into the image of Christ. The 12 steps, like a masterful brush on a canvas, have painted a portrait of redemption, grace, and spiritual growth. We have traversed the landscape of surrender, belief, self-reflection, and reconciliation, discovering the profound connections between the principles of recovery and the teachings of

Christ.

Embracing a Life of Purpose and Integrity

The journey through the steps has not been a mere intellectual exercise but a call to embody the principles we've encountered. We have explored the significance of living a life of purpose, guided by Christian values and principles. The steps have challenged us to navigate the intricate terrain of integrity, humility, and continual self-reflection, urging us to align our actions with the truths of our faith. *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* Galatians 2:20

This journey invites us to echo the sentiments of Paul, recognizing that our old selves have been crucified with Christ. We emerge from this pilgrimage not as mere spectators but as participants in the ongoing narrative of God's redemptive work.

Gratitude for the Power of God

Our hearts swell with gratitude for the power of God that has been at work throughout this journey. In moments of surrender, God's strength became evident. In times of self-reflection, His light illuminated our path. In the acts of reconciliation, His grace flowed abundantly. This journey is a testament to the reality that our lives are not static; they are a canvas upon which God continues to paint His masterpiece of redemption. *"And I am sure of this: that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ."* Philippians 1:6

As we conclude this chapter, let us rest in the assurance that the journey does not end here. It is an ongoing process, a continual unveiling of the glory of the Lord within us. May the lessons learned from the 12 steps resonate in our hearts,

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guiding us on a lifelong journey of faith, transformation, and an ever-deepening connection with the One who began this good work in us.

Chapter 9

A Few More Things

Obedience is a process.

Obedience is the next thing on my list of things I need to be a disciple of. Discipleship requires obedience to Christ's teachings. Obedience is not a burdensome obligation but a joyful response to God's love. Obedience has been a process for me in my life. I have learned that God deals with everyone individually. Being an alcoholic, I cannot drink any alcohol at all. AA taught me that one is too many, and a thousand is not enough. I have friends that have great faith in God, and they enjoy a drink of wine with dinner or a beer while watching a game. Obedience for me will be different than it will be for you.

Humility and Obedience

In the walk of discipleship, there's a quiet strength that's often unseen yet pivotal in our spiritual growth. That strength is humility, paired with obedience. Within this beautiful coupling lies the core of what it means to follow

Christ and continue the work of self-examination and confession we've embarked on.

To embrace humility is to recognize our place before God. Not as slaves or groveling subjects, but as dearly loved children who are acutely aware of our need for the Father's guidance and grace. It's in humility that we see our faults and our potential, our sins and our salvation, with clear eyes. As we journey through the practice of discipleship, humility becomes the fertile soil in which the seeds of spiritual growth are sown. It allows us to accept correction, seek counsel, and submit to the authority of God's Word in every area of our lives.

Obedience, on the other hand, is the choice to walk on the path set before us. It's an active response to God's love, a sign of our respect and reverence for His will. When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, it wasn't just a call to walk alongside Him physically, but to align their will with His—to obey His teachings and commands. Obedience is our way of saying "yes" to God, even when it's challenging or leads us into unknown territory.

Understanding that obedience is not bondage, but liberation is crucial. When we yield to Christ, we are freed from the enslavement of sin and opened to a life of abundance in spirit. This paradox—that in surrendering we are empowered—lies at the heart of the Christian faith and is a mystery that we continually explore as believers.

In our service to others, humility teaches us to put others first, to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others, as Jesus did. This can't be done from a place of pride or a desire for recognition. Instead, it's done in the quiet acknowledgment that we serve because Jesus served, and we love because He loved us first. Humility

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informs our service, ensuring it's not about us but about Him working through us.

Obedience also has profound implications for how we engage with our faith community. When we submit to church leadership and to one another out of reverence for Christ, we build up the body of Christ rather than sowing division or seeking personal glory. A disciple understands the importance of unity and strives to preserve it through obedience to the biblical principles that govern Christian fellowship.

In embracing humility, we also grapple with our weaknesses. Acknowledging our limitations is not an admission of defeat but a statement of faith in God's power to work through our frailty. Our weakness becomes a conduit for His strength. Therefore, when we confess our sins and admit our need for ongoing transformation, we're made strong in the Almighty's hands.

But how do we practice obedience in a world that often champions autonomy above all else? We look to Christ as our example. His obedience to the Father, even unto death on a cross, serves as a stark template for our own lives. We study Scripture, meditate on its truths, and then apply them, knowing that true obedience is always grounded in love—for God and for others.

Humble obedience means we are also willing to wait on God's timing. It tempers our impatience, curbs our impulses, and helps us understand that His plan is better than any we could devise. We resist the temptation to run ahead or to carve our own path independent of God's guidance. We stand still when He asks, move when He directs, and trust in His perfect plan.

In obedience, there is a need for discernment because not

every voice that speaks to us has our best interests or God's purposes at heart. We must learn to identify the shepherd's voice amidst the clamor. This discernment comes through a deep relationship with Jesus, forged in prayer, worship, and the study of Scripture.

It's crucial to distinguish between false humility and true spiritual humility. The former is focused on appearances, while the latter is a matter of the heart. True humility isn't about self-deprecation; it's a balanced understanding of our worth through God's eyes. We're neither worthless nor are we the center of the universe—we are His creation, made in His image, and that affords us inherent value and purpose.

Similarly, godly obedience is not about legalism or following a set of rules to the letter. It's a response of love that seeks to honor God above all. It's the obedience that springs from a heart genuinely transformed by the gospel, not the begrudging submission of one who sees God's commands as burdensome.

As we strive to live out humility and obedience in our daily lives, challenges will arise. These are not merely obstacles but opportunities to grow and to choose the path of a disciple time and again. We'll be faced with choices that test our commitment to these principles, but it's in those moments that our faith can shine brightest.

Lastly, humility and obedience will bear fruit in our lives. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will grow and flourish, revealing to the world the power of living in Christ. We'll find that these fruits not only enrich our lives but also bless those around us, spreading the gospel most profoundly—through a life truly lived in the image of Jesus.

As we embrace humility and obedience, let's walk forward

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with confidence, knowing that it's not in our strength that we succeed, but in our surrender to His will. Let's allow humility to guide us to a place of genuine servitude and obedience to chart our course according to His loving and perfect will. In doing so, we will not only grow closer to the heart of God but also become more effective disciples, capable of impacting the world for His glory.

There are absolutes in God's kingdom, such as the Ten Commandments, but my experience has been that God lets me know when it is time to give something up. God's grace does not give us a license to sin, but we are not perfect, and if we try to be perfect, it can also lead to legalism. There has to be a balance to learning how to live in God's obedience. We will not get there overnight. I am not the same person I was at 18 when I first gave my life to Jesus. My road was not straight, and it was not easy. I made and still make mistakes every day. But hopefully, the life I live today is a better example of how we should be living.

Following Christ's Example of Love and Sacrifice

Sacrifice is hard for someone selfish like me. Sacrifice is a quality that a disciple will need to have. Christ's ultimate act of love was his sacrifice on the cross. Sacrifice is a significant expression of our commitment to Christ. Everyone will have a different sacrifice as a disciple. Luke 23-9 Then he said to them all, *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me."* Denying myself to me means that I need to deny things of the flesh. For some, it may be looking at a beautiful woman with lustful thoughts; for others, it may be the language they use. I am to try and deny looking to worldly things for my happiness and fulfillment. The statement about taking up my cross is an example that Christ's sacrifice was his life for us so we could be reconciled with the Father. My sacrifice will be different from yours.

We will each be asked to make sacrifices for our faith. Some become missionaries, and some sacrifice them.

The pathway to replicating the profound love and sacrifice that Jesus Christ exemplified in His earthly ministry is both monumental and humbling. Christ's unfailing love for humanity took Him to the most extreme form of sacrifice—laying down His life on the cross for our sins. As His disciples, we are beckoned to follow His footsteps not through mere admiration but through active emulation of His sacrificial love.

At the heart of Jesus' ministry was a love that transcended societal norms and cultural barriers. It was a love that dined with tax collectors, touched lepers, and forgave adulterers. The call to love, as He loved, challenges us to look beyond our boundaries and biases, to extend grace where it is least expected, and to serve and cherish those who are different or even antagonistic toward us.

This kind of love is not born out of sheer willpower or moral striving; it is a reflection of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life. As branches connected to the life-giving vine, our love is an overflow of our intimate relationship with Him. It is the surrendered heart that finds the strength to love in this divine manner.

Sacrifice in the kingdom of God often looks like service in the unseen and uncelebrated corners. It might be the quiet support we give a struggling neighbor, the forgiveness we extend to a family member, or the consistent effort to serve those less privileged. It is in these every day, seemingly small actions that love is truly lived out.

The sacrificial love of Christ was also manifested in His teaching about giving up one's rights for the sake of others. This concept is opposite to our self-preservation instincts,

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but it is the essence of the gospel. Being a disciple means we sometimes choose to disadvantage ourselves to advantage others, knowing that in the economy of heaven, this is the path to true richness.

Furthermore, love, as demonstrated by Christ, doesn't demand recompense or reward; it is given freely and without expectation. To love sacrificially means to let go of the desire for acknowledgment or repayment. It is to act in kindness with anonymity and joy, finding satisfaction in the act itself and in obedience to our Savior.

Jesus' sacrifice wasn't without pain or cost. Likewise, we cannot assume that our journey in emulating His sacrificial love will be void of hardship. It may mean enduring misunderstandings, facing rejection, or stumbling under the weight of our crosses. But just as Christ persevered for the joy set before Him, disciples are called to endure, knowing there is an eternal weight of glory that far surpasses these momentary afflictions.

Christ's love was proactive, reaching out, and engaging. It never sat passively but actively pursued the well-being of others. It is this proactive love that prompts us to seek ways to love others before they ask, to anticipate needs, and to respond with a giving heart.

Sacrifice is intricately tied not only to acts of service but also to the sacrifices of our pride and ego. In replicating Christ's humility, we are led to consider others better than ourselves, to serve instead of seeking to be served and to elevate those around us even if it means our demotion. This is a reflection of the heart that says, "Not my will, but Yours be done."

Being a disciple of Christ also requires a willing heart to forgive, which is perhaps one of the most potent forms of sacrificial love. Forgiveness releases both the offender and

the offended from the bondage of bitterness and paves the way for reconciliation. Our ability to forgive can be a profound witness to the forgiveness we have received in Christ.

Another aspect of sacrificial love is generosity. The Gospel narratives are rich with instances where Jesus teaches about the blessing of giving rather than receiving. As His followers, our finances, time, and resources are not to be clenched tightly but held loosely and given generously, as He has generously given to us.

The discipline and sacrifice of living a life of purity also mirror the love of Christ. In a world that often promotes self-indulgence, there's a divine strength that comes from choosing holiness, from making sacrifices in our daily choices that honor God and reflect His nature.

In our pursuit to embody Christ's love, we can't underestimate the power of prayer. It is in the place of communion with the Father that we are filled up to pour out. Also, it was Jesus Himself who, amid His most intense moment of sacrifice, uttered prayers for those who persecuted Him. In like manner, our sacrifices are often seasoned with prayers, not only for ourselves but for those we are called to love.

Lastly, living out sacrificial love means to love without the guarantee of earthly success or fruition of our efforts. Jesus' earthly ministry concluded with what many would deem a failure—the death of a would-be messiah. Yet, it was in His apparent defeat that victory was ultimately won. As disciples, our acts of love and sacrifice may not always be met with worldly success, but in the kingdom of God, every act done in love is never in vain.

To follow in the steps of Christ's sacrificial love is the highest

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calling for His disciples. It requires daily dying for ourselves, our desires, and our comfort. It beckons us to look to the interests of others above our own, and ultimately, it transforms us into the likeness of the One we serve. As we press on to imitate His example of love and sacrifice, the beauty of Christ's own love shines more brilliantly through us, impacting lives and drawing others into His embrace.

The Ministry of Service

Being of service is the next thing, as disciples, that I believe we need to practice. Service is the embodiment of Christ's teachings. As disciples, we are called to serve our neighbors, especially those in need. One of the great experiences of my home church is called "Love Because." It is a day of service that the whole church participates in. We may go and help clean up a neighbor's yard. One I participated in was taking over a gas station, and the whole morning, everyone who pulled up paid for their gas and handed them water. We did not ask if they needed it; we just gave it with no expectation. We also took over a couple of elementary schools one year and threw them a Christmas party. We filled the closets with snacks. We gave gifts to the teachers. It was an amazing day. Service is not limited to grand gestures but can be found in everyday acts of kindness, empathy, and selflessness. It is really in the way we treat people daily. At my job, I have a role and responsibilities that I am asked to fulfill. But if someone in the company needs help with something, I try to offer to help if I am able.

In the wake of engaging with our community and grounding ourselves in Scripture, we delve into serving others, a cornerstone of Christlike living. This service isn't just an activity—it's a transformation of the heart, compelling us to pour out love and assistance as Jesus did. Imagine the tenderness with which Christ healed the sick and the humility He embodied washing His disciples' feet; serving

isn't simply to help—it's to walk so closely in His footsteps that our paths become indistinguishable. We acknowledge that true service transcends obligation and arises from a wellspring of compassion within us—a yearning to see others lifted higher, burdens eased, and spirits emboldened. And as we serve, we find that the most profound changes often occur within ourselves. We become less as He becomes more, and in our selflessness, we uncover the very essence of God's kingdom on earth. Brace for a shift in your innermost being as this chapter challenges and equips you to live out the lofty call to serve as Jesus served, to love as Jesus loved, and to give as Jesus gave, with a heart resolute in bringing light into the lives of others.

In embodying the heart of Christ, we're called to a life of service, where the joy of giving eclipses the pleasure of receiving. This ministry isn't a task we check off our to-do lists; it's an outpouring of our love for God, manifested through acts of kindness and compassion. Whether it's offering our time at a local shelter, lending an ear to a friend, or simply sharing a meal with someone in need, our service is a reflection of God's grace. As His hands and feet on Earth, we're entrusted with the sacred responsibility to nurture and heal, to lift the downtrodden, and to give hope to the weary. Let's embrace this ministry with a spirit of humility, keenly aware that in serving the least of these, we're truly serving our King. Each gesture of love is a ripple in the waters of humanity, with the power to create waves of transformation that bear witness to the boundless love of Jesus.

Bible Study

In the heart of the "disciple lifestyle," the Bible stands as the guiding light in our lives. It is the compass by which we navigate through life. It offers us wisdom, relief, and

direction. In this chapter, we will talk about the importance of studying the Bible daily and provide practical examples of how to engage with God's Word. Studying the Bible is not just an act of dedication; it's the instruction manual for life. Just as our bodies need food, our spiritual selves require nourishment. The Bible serves as a source of spiritual food. When developing a relationship with God, the Bible is a place where we can learn and gain an understanding of God and His character, His love, and His desires for every one of us. Through His Word, we can cultivate a deeper relationship with God.

Daily Scripture Reading and Study

Immersing oneself in Scripture is not merely a task to check off but a transformational experience, a daily feast for the soul that we're invited to partake in. It's in the quiet moments of reflection, when the world's noise fades into the background, that the words of the Bible can truly resonate within us. Take up the Scriptures, not as a dusty tomb of ages past, but as the living, breathing Word of God, speaking into the here and now of our lives. Breaking it down, verse by verse, allows us to chew on the richness of its wisdom, letting it inform our actions and decisions. By crafting a habit of thoughtful study, not just reading, we allow God's Word to become the lens through which we view our days, shaping us more into the likeness of Christ. And as we commit ourselves to this practice, let's encourage each other, knowing that together, we're not just reading words on a page—we're being equipped to live them out in every aspect of our lives.

Living in the Word

Immersing ourselves in the Bible isn't just about reading words on a page; it's about letting those divinely inspired words transform us from the inside out. As we dedicate daily

time to scripture reading and study, we don't just gain knowledge; we're also drawing closer to the heart of the Father, understanding His nature, and recognizing our part in His grand design. It's a form of worship—silently meditating on His Word and letting it saturate every aspect of our lives. We learn not only to 'know' the scripture but to 'live' it, applying the biblical wisdom to our everyday decisions. It's in these moments that we uncover an intimate dialog with God, who speaks life and truth into our circumstances, guiding us through trials and triumphs alike. So, let's commit to this sanctifying practice, for it's through active and conscious living in the Word that we shine as beacons of His transformative love to those walking along this journey with us.

Applying Biblical Wisdom

Biblical wisdom is not merely about acquiring knowledge; it's about enabling transformation. This profound insight, animated through the Holy Scriptures, invites us into a continuous process of applying God's eternal truths to our daily lives. It's where the words of Proverbs, Psalms, and the teachings of Jesus become part of the fabric of our existence.

As we meander through the intricacies of life, one essential truth remains steadfast: applying biblical wisdom is a deliberate choice. It requires us to make conscious efforts to align our hearts, minds, and deeds with the principles taught by Jesus and reflected throughout the Bible. This surreptitious act of internalization can be seen in how we confront challenging situations, make decisions, and interact with others.

Often, the book of James is seen as a manual for practical Christian living. It teaches that genuine faith inevitably produces good works. James does not divorce faith from

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action; rather, he unites them, asserting that faith without deeds is dead. Thus, applying biblical wisdom necessitates actionable faith. It involves living out our convictions and rendering tangible expressions of our innermost beliefs.

Wisdom from above also prompts us to use our words with care and grace. As disciples of Christ, our language should mirror the love and respect Jesus has for all. The book of James highlights the power of the tongue—a vessel capable of both immense good and considerable harm. By applying biblical wisdom, we ensure that our words become sources of encouragement and truth, never weapons of harm.

In matters of conflict and resolution, biblical wisdom guides us towards a pathway of peace and understanding. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, for instance, paints a picture of peacemaking and reconciliation that surpasses the superficial constraints of human tendencies. As followers, we strive to embody the beatitudes, embracing meekness and showing mercy, for in this way, we shall be called children of God.

Moreover, applying biblical wisdom also speaks to integrity and honesty. Our financial dealings, business transactions, and personal commitments are all areas where temptations lurk. Yet, Proverbs frequently contrast the fleeting success of the wicked with the enduring prosperity of the righteous. By choosing honesty over deceit, we plant seeds for a harvest of blessings, though it may seem like a harder path at first.

The scriptures are rich with guidance on stewardship and generosity. The way we handle our resources is a testament to our trust in the Lord's provision. By applying wisdom found in principles of giving and sharing, we acknowledge that everything we have is a loan from God, and we are but stewards of His bounty. Generosity becomes a natural outgrowth of a heart inclined towards God.

Wisdom in scripture further shapes our understanding of suffering. It steers us away from the why of suffering to a more critical question—how do we respond? The apostle Paul's epistles illuminate the virtue of contentment in all circumstances, showing us that joy doesn't hinge on external factors but is rooted in our relationship with Christ.

In the pursuit of applying biblical wisdom, commitment to an ongoing dialogue with God through prayer is non-negotiable. It's through these precious moments of communion that we gain insight, strength, and guidance. Our prayer life serves as the anchor that secures us to divine wisdom, ensuring that God's will and not our ephemeral feelings guide our actions.

Discernment is a significant aspect of applying biblical wisdom; it involves recognizing truth amidst deception. This crucial skill safeguards our spiritual journey, keeping us aligned with God's will. It is developed through steadfast commitment to seeking God's guidance, regular engagement with the Bible, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our path with clarity and conviction.

Furthermore, relationships hold a place of prominence within the context of biblical wisdom. The directive to 'love your neighbor as yourself' is a powerful call to put the welfare of others on par with our own. Thus, in our interactions, whether familial, professional, or communal, this tenet plays a pivotal role in shaping a society founded on love, respect, and mutual support.

Forgiveness, too, is a profound gift we derive from biblical wisdom. It upends the world's tit-for-tat mentality, offering instead a tableau of unmerited grace. Whether we're seeking it or extending it, forgiveness is a divine catalyst that empowers us to sever the shackles of past mistakes and

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embrace the freedom found in Christ's redemptive work.

Applying biblical wisdom also entails a life of intentional simplicity—a contrast to the complexity and overwhelming noise of modern existence. It calls for a re-prioritization of our pursuits, focusing our attention on those that are lasting and significant. It's a life where one's gaze is fixed on treasures stored in heaven, not the fleeting allure of material gain.

A disciple of Christ knows that the application of biblical wisdom is not sporadic but a lifetime undertaking. Our walk with the Lord isn't marked by leaps and bounds, but by the steadfastness of our daily steps. Every moment is ripe with opportunity to demonstrate Christ's love, to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

In the end, the measure of our discipleship is intrinsically linked to how we apply the wisdom we glean from scripture in our own lives. It is the benchmark of a transformed and transforming existence, a beacon of Christ's presence within us. Through this application of divine wisdom, we become living testimonies to the grace and power of a life surrendered to Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of wisdom itself.

Life often presents us with trials and adversities. The Bible offers solace and comfort in times of trial. Studying the Bible has the power to change our lives. The insights gained from its pages can lead to personal growth, character development, and a deeper sense of purpose.

Studying the Bible may seem daunting, but with some simple suggestions, it doesn't have to be overwhelming. Here are some helpful tips to help you get started:

1. Find a quiet and comfortable room where you can focus

without distractions. Be consistent. Pick a specific time each day or week for your Bible study. This consistency will help you develop a habit and make it a natural part of your life.

2. Begin your study with a prayer. Open your heart to the message that the Scriptures hold for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you and help you understand what you are reading and how it applies to your life today.

3. Translations: The Bible is available in different translations. Common translations include the New International Version (NIV), the King James Version (KJV), and the New Living Translation (NLT). With computer and phone programs, you can often compare different translations of the same scripture; this may help you understand better.

4. Study with purpose: Before you start reading, set a specific goal for your study session. Whether it's exploring a particular topic, seeking guidance on a specific question, or simply finding inspiration, having a purpose will keep your study focused. There are also reading plans that have been developed that may help.

Another idea is to consider joining a Bible study group. The diverse perspectives and discussions within a group can enhance your understanding and provide a sense of community. I have been a part of many Bible studies over the years. It always helps me to have others to bounce things off of. The Bible's teachings are not meant to be mere knowledge. Use the lessons you learn in your everyday life. Practice the principles of love, compassion, and mercy in your interactions with others. Bible study is a journey, not a destination. Be patient with yourself and allow the wisdom of the message to unfold over time. Your understanding will grow as you continue to study and grow spiritually.

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Incorporating Bible study into your "disciple lifestyle" can be life-changing. It offers a road map to living a life of purpose, faith, and virtue. By dedicating time and effort to studying the Bible, you can nurture your spiritual health and find guidance in the tumultuous seas of existence.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

I wanted to add some closing thoughts on this plan for living that was taught to me more than 35 years ago. On September 6, 1986, I walked into my first AA meeting. I began my life by walking toward a relationship with God. Initially, I was not thrilled with the thought of needing God in my life. Today, it is the most important thing in my life. My life depends on God first. Then my family and my church.

I wanted to make sure that there is no expectations that this plan for living will solve all the problems in your life. It has not stopped me from having problems in my life. What it does is give me a biblical way of dealing with problems that all of us confront every day.

The beginning of each of our struggles starts with our admitting our brokenness. The first step in this plan calls for humility to accept that we can't do something, handle something, or deal with something.

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The things I struggle with today are much different than 30 years ago. My problems 30 years ago were focused on how to stay sober. Then it was the problems that caused me to drink and take drugs to deal with the way I felt. Today, I deal with many different problems. Although, the problems today can be just as stressful and difficult.

The second step in becoming more like Jesus is having faith that He can do for me what I cannot do for myself. In the beginning, my faith started with believing that others believe. I did not have my own faith, but these other people believed what they said. I began praying for God to reveal himself to me and over time, my faith grew. Six months after I got clean and sober, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

The third step of turning my life over to the care of Jesus was a difficult process. Knowing that I could not do life by myself and believing that God could restore me did not make it easier to surrender. My surrendering to God was more a process than a decision. I started trying to trust Him with parts of my life, a little at a time. But over time, I learned that God wanted to have a relationship with me. That this was not a controlling God that punished me for my sins. He Died for my sins.

The fourth step in the process of living is making a moral inventory. In AA they use the phrase “fearless and thorough moral inventory”. I do not know if any inventory I have taken completely met that high bar. The initial one was fearful and not very thorough. But, I learned to get more fearless and more thorough each time I went through the process. Over time I peeled away the layers of the onion that is my life that needed God.

Taking the fifth step meant trusting another human being with who I was. Sharing a fifth step with someone is the

beginning of learning to trust. It took me a long time to learn to trust people. I had a lot of people that hurt me growing up. By sharing my story with another person, I learned how to be open and honest about how I feel and the things that I did and that were done to me. Honestly, having someone who knows all about you and still loves and cares for you is an incredible feeling.

In AA, they say that the sixth step is the step that separates the men from the boys. That may not be very politically correct in today's world. But let's take it with the intended meaning. "Were entirely ready for God to remove these defects of character. This is a big step in trusting God. When I came to this step, I could not be entirely ready. I was told to pray to be as ready as I could. In my life change has been a rather slow process. I have also learned that Jesus is more interested in your heart than anything.

After I become as ready as I can be, the next step is to humbly ask Him to remove these shortcomings. It is an important step as Jesus is a gentleman and will not force you to choose Him. He will pursue you and He desires to have a relationship with you, but He loves us enough to let us choose Him or choose the world.

In the eighth step we go back to the inventory to get our list of all the people that we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all. This is where having someone who understands you and has more experience with being a disciple is a great asset. Being willing is the key to this step in the process. One thing I learned was to show God that I am willing to do what is necessary. If we are working through this process prayerfully and with help, we will be able to get through this process.

Step nine is difficult because we begin the process of being

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accountable for our actions. But we need to have wise counsel during this process. If I am a drug addict and I had stolen from my dealer, my making amends to that person would be nearly impossible. The ninth step says to make direct amends wherever possible except when doing so would injure them or others. I knew a young man that tried to go back and make amends to a drug dealer and the drug dealer shot and killed him. It was very sad. The young man had the desire to change, but needed wisdom from someone who could advise him on when direct amends are appropriate and when a non-direct approach is a better way of handling it. Non-direct forms of amends may be making a donation to a charity or offering to donate our time to a service project.

The tenth step in this plan for living if we were perfect would prevent us from having to do this process again. It is to take a daily inventory and when we are wrong, we promptly admit it. With age comes wisdom. And I have long ago learned that it is easier to quickly admit when I am wrong than it is to have to go back later. I mentioned it in the beginning that something I learned early was it is easier to be humble and admit I was wrong than to be humiliated. It isn't as formal today as it was in the beginning. Today, I do my best to make things right as quickly as possible. The inevitable reality is that we are not perfect. I have been formally through this process many times.

Step eleven in AA is “sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscience contact with God. Praying for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. This is one of the longer steps. It is also for me one of the most important ones. The Bible talks about praying without ceasing. We as Christians are to have a personal relationship with Jesus as our Lord and Savior. There are days that I feel like we are having a constant conversation and some days I

struggle to hear from him. Hearing from God is different for everyone. For me, it is usually the quiet voice inside that prompts me. Sometimes it is an idea like feeling the urge to write this book. For some, it is feeling the peace of His presence. From the beginning of believing that others believe to today knowing that He is my savior and depending on Him daily.

The final step is Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and practice these principles in all our affairs. If we live this plan, we will have a spiritual experience with Jesus. If you follow this simple plan, it will not be easy, but if you are honest and thorough, you will find and develop a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You will get all of your “stuff” out of the way so you can be of most usefulness to Him. I wish you all the best in your journey.

