

ACTIVATING THE 12 STEPS IN MY LIFE

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. . . ." (Proverbs 3:5, NIV)



"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Matthew 5:5

step three

Made a decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of Christ.

To be ready to stop attempting the impossible is a step toward sanity. And since we have acknowledged that we are powerless, we know there has to be a Power greater than our powerlessness. We Christians in recovery recognize Him as our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, and our Healer. By associating with others who have taken the 12-Step path of recovery, we will see many examples of how God has "restored their sanity." We must conclude that God can, and will, do the same for us--if we ask Him and then let Him.

Our will is what we think, our power to reason, learn, make decisions, experience. Our will is our consciousness. Our lives are the ability to breathe, touch, taste, see, hear, smell and exist. Our will and our lives together are all that we are--body, soul and spirit. Without them we are nothing--we wouldn't exist. What is suggested to us in Step Three is that we turn everything we are, our very existence, over to the care of God (whom we probably have had difficulty understanding).

Now then, most of us have been taught to pray to God, to petition Him for help or guidance in managing our lives. The problem is, we have been taught to make a servant out of God and get Him to help us attain goals and do things we have already decided upon before we turned to Him for assistance. That's a lot different than turning our very fiber and essence of being over to Him to do with whatever He wants without even consulting "our own desires" (Psalm 37:4). Frankly, we have been taught to pray for people, places, and things--not to surrender ourselves completely to God the Father and trust Him for what will become of us (Matthew 6:10). This is a tough proposition for many of us who are taught from childhood to specify exactly what we want God to do for us.

The Third Step is very similar to the third Beatitude (Matthew 5:5).

"Meekness in the Beatitudes means waiting on the Lord. Meekness is being like soft clay. Meekness is being ready and willing, and with God's help, able to do His work in the world, but broken and needing Him to make us whole. In

the word 'meek' is the reality of our smallness and the understanding that, without God, we will stay poor and broken. . .

A recovering alcoholic has made this decision to turn self-will over to God's will. this is also what a meek person does--it's what Moses did--and what Jesus and Peter and Paul did. It is becoming available to the power of God." (Wilson, Journey of the Beatitudes, p.18)

The meek person will say "I'm not in charge anymore." What stands in the way of our saying this? Often it is pride, because pride serves me. Our prideful self has to step out of the way so that God's will can be worked out in our lives. It may also be our lack of trust. Trusting God means waiting on Him, and most of us don't like to wait (do we feel useless when we wait?). Trusting God is waiting and preparing--reading God's Word prepares us; praying prepares us; becoming open to a change in our attitudes prepares us. This takes time. "Are we hopeful? Are we expectant? Do we believe miracles can happen our lives? Yes is the meek answer" (Wilson, p. 19).

Ultimately, the question of meaning facing us is a spiritual one. The second and third steps ask us simply, " Who do you trust?" In whom or what do you have faith? Note that how much we trust God often parallels how much we have trusted other people in our lives. This is a major problem for people entering recovery. If you have, or had, trouble accepting help from others and insist on handling things alone (a victim/survivor mindset), the chances are you will be resistant to the true help of God in your life. And many people who are addictive or obsessive/compulsive who have worked the program realize that if they refuse help after admitting they were "powerless" and damaged, they will stay stuck in their insanity (the opposite of reality). Make your decision today. Decide to let God have His way with your life, and watch the miracles unfold (Proverbs 3:5,6).

Here are two exercises that may help you in activating Step Three in your life:

- I. One Year to Live Exercise -- An exercise in confronting your own death, your own "mortality." This will provide you with a perspective on spirituality and meaningfulness in your life.
- II. A Letter To The Lord -- This gives you a specific, concrete way to express your spiritual decisions.

I. ONE YEAR TO LIVE EXERCISE

Our road back to reality starts with a clear sense of our limitations as human beings. However, we live in a culture that denies these limitations. We are constantly urged to overextend ourselves--e.g. to spend more than we earn, work more than we need to, eat more than we should, or drink more than is healthy for us. We live in a manner that acts as if there will never be an end. We literally deny our own mortality.

A powerful exercise to illustrate to you your own limitations is to picture your own death. Why? Because looking at death provides vital perspectives about what gives your life meaning, what priorities you are ignoring, and just who God is in your life. Set aside some uninterrupted quiet time to work through this

exercise and answer the questions at the end.

The Situation

You are in your physician's office. Your doctor comes in and tells you that results from the tests are in--you have a terminal illness. All other doctors consulted are in agreement. They believe you will maintain your physical ability for about a year--but at the end of the year you will die. Reflect on what this means to you.

Consider your first reactions as you walk out of the office. What do you do? How do you spend those first few hours and days? Do you tell anyone? Reflect on this for awhile. As you start to adjust to your dying, do you change your life? Do you stop work? Do you do something different? Reflect on this for a time.

Maybe you want to do something different. Perhaps you want to travel? Where would you go? Picture yourself traveling--whom would you bring with you? Reflect on this for awhile. Perhaps you would want to do things you have never done before? Activities like skydiving, scuba diving, race car driving, mountain climbing--things that seemed to be too dangerous before, but now it doesn't make any difference. What have you always wanted to do but been afraid to do? Picture yourself doing them. Who is with you? Reflect on this for awhile.

Almost all of us have "unfinished" parts of our lives--a book we are writing, a family room to finish, a family project like getting the family album in order for the kids, etc. What unfinished projects would be important enough to finish before you die? Picture yourself doing them, and reflect on it for awhile.

For some of us, the unfinished parts include things unsaid to others--like "I'm sorry" or "I love you." Picture yourself saying the things you would need to say before you die. Reflect, meditate and pray about this.

It's now about three months before you die. You can start to feel your health failing. While you can still function, you decide to try one last thing. What would that be? What would be one of the last things you would want to do before you die? Who is with you? Reflect on this awhile.

It is now just a matter of weeks before you die. Where do you go to die? Your home? A family farm? A lake? The mountains? The seashore? The city? Reflect on this. How do you spend those last days? Who is with you? Reflect on this.

As you think about the events of this last year of your life, what were the most significant for you? Reflect on this. In fact, think of these and all the events of your life--which stand out now as the things that made it worthwhile? Reflect on this. And as you reflect on these events, be aware that you are working on this exercise--and you are very much alive.

About the Exercise

Quite often this exercise helps people to touch their own grief about losses in their lives. If you feel sad, don't avoid the feelings. Rather, use them and let them support you in coming to terms with the losses. Sharing this exercise and your feelings about it with your sponsor(s) can deepen your understanding of the issues this exercise raises for you. First, record the details of your exercise in journal form as suggested below; then answer the questions that follow.

1. Your first reactions --
2. Changes you would make in your life --
3. New things you would try --
4. Unfinished things you want to complete --
5. Things you need to say before you die --
6. Describe your "last fling" --
7. Describe your spiritual preparations --
8. Where and how you would spend your last days --

Questions

1. Throughout the exercise there were key moments to involve significant persons in your life. Whom did you involve and what did you learn about your relationship priorities?
2. If during the exercise you found yourself doing things significantly different from how you live now--why? If they were so important to get done, what prevents you from doing them now?
3. How do you feel about facing your own death?
4. Thinking about death provides a way to look at what is real and what is important in our lives. Delusion, balance, focus, self-responsibility, dependency, meaning--all that addicts and co-addicts (codependents) wrestle with--are seen in a new light. Now, go back to your Loss of Reality Inventory. How do you view your denial and delusion when you reflect on your own death?
5. Is there anything important that you need to say or do at this point? Why?

II. A LETTER TO THE LORD

Steps Two and Three become very concrete when you write a letter to Jesus Christ. By writing the letter, you make your belief and trust into an active process. You will find it helpful to include in your letter how you "came to believe" and what the "decision" to turn over your will and your life means to you. Be specific about what you are turning over. Remember, the Second and Third Steps are acts of confidence/trust, commitment and faith.

People use many different names in addressing their "Higher Power." We Christians also have many names that we can use that are given to our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know some of them? What seems to work the best in this type of letter is when you make it as personal as possible.

When you have written the letter, read it aloud to your sponsor(s). It might be a good idea to do this in the sanctuary of a church of your choice. Remember, we need to share our spiritual experiences with others in order to make sense out of them.

How, then, do you begin your letter?

Dear _____,

"I've sometimes thought of this step as the most exciting step, because of the commitment meekness demands. It's something like being on a diving board. Once you get up on a diving board, you're almost committed to diving or jumping into the pool. Jumping, though you may be filled with fear, is a natural conclusion to getting on the diving board. . . .Being meek isn't the act of diving into a pool of relationships; it is being ready and willing to take that dive and that risk. And even though we don't know how it's going to be, we have faith and we are as ready as we can be for this new direction. . . .In our meekness, our willingness, our losses are fewer. There we glimpse the life God has in store for us. We don't see into the future, but we do feel a sense of God's will going out in front of us. Our lives are led in a single direction." Wilson, pp.20-21).

Reflect on the quote from Richard Wilson above and how you feel about the Second and Third Steps in your life.

[Portions of the previous material have been adapted and modified from Carnes, Patrick. A Gentle Path Through The Twelve Steps. Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1989, pp 86-96.

BEEN THINKING... ABOUT SURRENDER



THIRD STEP PRAYER

"God, I offer myself to Thee — to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!"

I cringed as I listened to "A" counsel "B." "B" had expressed a deeply felt need for the Lord's help to overcome feelings of unhappiness and hopelessness.

"A" asked for permission to test "B's" oneness to the Lord. "A" asked "Would you be willing to pray, 'Lord, please do what You have to do to bring me to the place I need to be. If that means taking my health, my job, or my most valued possessions, then, Lord, have Your way with me. I give You permission to do whatever You want to do with me.' Are you that willing?" "B" hesitated for about 3 seconds, then responded, "Yes, I'd be willing to pray that."

While seeing the need for surrender to God, I shuddered at the thought of inviting Him to have such freedom in my life. My prayers would be more inclined to be, "Lord, go easy on me. Please don't lead me into testing. I'm not ready to ask for trouble.

I'm still not ready to ask for trouble. But in the meantime, I've worked through some issues of surrender that have brought a new peace and sense of the Lord's presence.

First, I concluded that the Lord can do whatever He wants to do with me, whether I "give Him permission" or not. Second, it became clear that it was also an issue of trust. Do I really believe that He loves me and can be trusted to do what is best?

As I expressed a prayer of surrender, something inside me relaxed. With the peace came the awareness that maybe I had been trying to protect myself from the Lord.

The battle is not over. But the "living sacrifice" of Romans 12:1 had taken on new meaning for me.

--M. DeHaan, Times of Discovery, Feb. 1988.

From The Scriptures

Romans 12:1-2 (Phillips Translation.))

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable to him and perfect.

IS MEEKNESS WEAKNESS?

Blessed are the meek...for their power is controlled by the Master.

Our home Bible study on Jesus' third beatitude was to begin within the hour, and I was stumped. How could I communicate the modern perception of meekness?

I began frantically pacing the carpet, searching for the much-needed creative spark to an otherwise undramatic presentation. Spying my trusty tape recorder, an idea flashed across my mind. Recorder in hand, I dashed out the front door, scurried a few blocks down the street, and began to accost whomever I could find with the query, "What does the word *meek* mean to you?"

Granted, it was an unscientific interview process. But playing the tape back to my Bible study group that evening proved to be most enlightening. The compiled results are best reflected in the statement of a young man sitting with his girlfriend in a local cafe. "*Meek*," he offered as he gazed into his brew, "*means wimp.*"

The response was a common one. In the eyes of our world, the meek top the list of those least likely to succeed. In this age of self-assertion and self-centered pursuit of happiness, it is pretty hard to believe that the meek will inherit the earth. Yet that is precisely what Jesus promises. Saints of every age, having found Him to be right on target, would echo John Wesley's sentiment that "there is no disposition which is more essential to Christianity."

If we are to understand this beatitude, it is crucial to examine it against the backdrop of Jesus' culture. The Greek word for meek was commonly used to describe wild animals that had been domesticated--trained, tamed, and otherwise harnessed--so that the savage beast became capable of working profitably alongside man. The image that presents itself in this definition is not lack of energy or strength; rather, power under control.

Gerald Mann illustrates this insight with the story from Greek antiquity of a young soldier writing to his sweetheart concerning a gift he longed to present to her; a silver stallion. "He is the most magnificent animal I've ever seen," related the soldier, "but he responds obediently to the slightest command. . . He allows his master to direct him to his full potential. He is truly a *meek* horse.

A PICTURE OF MEEKNESS

Desiring to understand more about this critical trait of godliness, I asked an avid horse trainer from Texas about the qualities of a meek horse. A picture emerged that provides a wealth of insight into the Christian's proper relationship with his Master.

POWER UNDER CONTROL

"Once broken, a good horse doesn't require much correction," She informed me. "He has learned to accept the reins of his master, and a gentle tug is all that is needed to urge him one direction of the other."

The process, she noted, does not remove that power and verve that used to make the animal wild; rather, it places the energy under control. The phrase, "channel their spirit," is commonly used to describe this process. Appropriately channeled, the horse is generally able to jump higher, run faster, and even work harder than an uncontrolled animal.

LEARNING THE MASTER'S MIND

Second, said my friend "A special relationship develops between horse and master. After years of working together, they develop a rapport that becomes second nature to both of them. Thus trained, a good horse can sense a bad rider and will resist false guidance."

An intimate kinship evolves, and it is not long before the horse acts according to what it knows the master would do, even if the master does not give explicit instructions.

PARTNERSHIP

Third, teamwork is crucial. "A rodeo rider may leave his horse temporarily during a calf-roping event," the trainer explained. "He is not there beside the horse, telling it what to do and personally directing every move. The horse knows its job and is capable of working even when it doesn't feel the immediate presence of its rider." They work as a unit, even when physically apart.

LOYALTY

Fourth, the meek horse has an elevated sense of loyalty and commitment. "Think back to the days of the Wild West and the Pony Express," my friend said. "The lives of the mail carriers depended upon the horses they rode. A Pony Express horse needed to be swift and hardy, with a certain measure of grit that enabled it to keep going, no matter what.

"Those horses would die in the running if that is what it took. They were bent upon completing the course. And despite the heat,

the parching thirst, raging storms, Indian attacks, and injury, horses of that caliber never whined or whinnied in protest."

Meek horses are like that. They have learned the secret of submitting to the control of their master. They trust that rider enough to follow uncomplainingly wherever he leads them.

PERSEVERANCE

"One more thing," she told me. "A horse doesn't become that way overnight. It takes a long, hard period of training."

Horses often must be captured, broken, and made accustomed to the instruments used to harness their potential and lead them to productivity. It takes patience, sweat, and a view toward the promising future. But with these vital ingredients, the effort pays rich dividends.

THE MEEK CHRISTIAN

What does it mean, then, for us to become truly meek? My friend's description of a meek horse could well define the characteristics of a dynamic Christian. Willing to undergo a lifetime of training so that no coercion to obedience is required--just a gentle tug from the Holy Spirit. A special relationship with the Master that gives him the ability to sense the false and confusing direction of the Evil One. Working with the Master in tandem--even when His immediate presence is not felt. Unshakable commitment and loyalty.

Human nature will often fight to retain autonomy and refuse to bow to any master besides itself. But humility can only benefit us. Luther, in the sixteenth century, may have said it best. "I have held many things in my hands," he mused, "and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." This man of faith knew that to let God reign in his life was to give Him the reins. And to yield to God that responsibility was only to benefit self and the Kingdom of God.

"Blessed are the meek," Jesus declared. Those who have placed the rein of their lives in the guiding hand of the Master may give up control. But in its stead they will receive the guidance and protection of One whose vision is far higher than theirs. Instead of spending their energy in frivolous pursuits, their lives will reach their full potential--and they will inherit the earth.

Friedeman, Matt T., Discipleship Journal, p. 19-20.
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