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Workshop 5

“The Four Stages of Sobriety”

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Introduction (available on CD and DVD)

Stage 1 – “The Trouble Stage”

Not all situations are the same. However, in most cases the majority of people that I have dealt with begin trying to get clean (sober) because they have created some sort of trouble as a result of their addiction. Things have been building for a length of time, and the bottom is either beginning to drop out or it has dropped out all together. The trouble can be legal matters, family break-ups, the loss of employment, the loss of children, loss of homes – the list of problems and losses can go on and on – they recognize they are in trouble.

We describe this stage as the window of time that God is using to get their attention and give them an opportunity to get help. For the person that chooses to take God at His word, there is help. We see that the Lord has said in His word that those who want help out of their trouble, must call upon God.

- **Psalms 31:9 KJV – “Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly.”**
- **Psalms 9:9 KJV – “The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.”**
- **Psalms 50:15 KJV – “And call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”**

So then, the most important thing that we can teach anyone is that when their experience lines up with Scripture, there is hope!

In this stage, as in all four stages, motives play a very important role in staying clean. There is NOT a wrong reason to get clean, but there can be wrong motives for doing so. It is God that searches the heart (1 Chronicles 28:9) -- if we ask, He also gives us discernment when helping people.

We will learn that there is a common thread that we are looking for in each of the “Four Stages” – sincerity. When a person is sincere about getting help, they will be willing to do whatever it takes. When they begin to make excuses for what they are NOT willing to do in order to get help, it is often a sign that they are not being sincere.

Note: Making excuses to not get clean is not uncommon. However, when we continue to provide solutions for every excuse they have and they still oppose the help being offered, then it is likely they are still deceiving themselves and trying to deceive others.

While in the “Trouble Stage” people often display the following behaviors when they are not being honest about their addiction:

- False humility, which usually displays itself in agreeing with everyone in order to get them to stop pressuring them and give them another chance.
- Overkill with asking for forgiveness and begging for another chance without having to go to further treatment.
- Making promises that they have never kept in the past in order to avoid further trouble.
- To avoid further treatment, suddenly they become concerned with things that never concerned them in the past. For example: They can't go to rehab because of a job; they don't want to leave their children; they do not know how they are going to make ends meet financially – as if any of these things mattered before.

Fortunately, many people make it out of the “Trouble Stage.” Some, do it willingly, and for others they make it by force. There is obviously no bad reason to get out of this stage; if they do not, it will only get worse.

We remember that God's discipline is not always pleasant and is very seldom invited. On the other hand, the correction of the Lord can be the saving grace for anyone that responds in a godly manner by submitting to the will of God for their lives (Hebrews 12:6).

- **Proverbs 3:11 KJV – “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction: ...”**
- **Job 5:17 KJV – “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: ...”**

Stage #2 – “The Happy Stage”

The “Happy Stage” begins when the trouble begins to subside. There still may be court dates and other requirements that have been placed on the individual to fulfill, but for the most part things are looking much brighter than they have been in the recent past. They are attending meetings and Bible studies, reading their Bible more consistently, and beginning to develop a structured prayer life. For many people, things have never looked better for them at this time in their lives. What must be understood by everyone is that when leading and assisting people in this area of ministry, the “Happy Stage” will not last forever as an everyday thing. Happiness is an emotion that comes and goes. On the other hand, joy is a constant in spite of the circumstantial pressures of life – there WILL BE new pressures down the road.

Here are a few reasons for understanding why the “Happy Stage” does not last forever:

- The Bible does not teach that circumstantially we will always remain on the mountain top of life; there WILL be times when we go through the valley. When a person, especially a new believer, begins to experience a “valley situation”, they can easily be thrown off because of their spiritual immaturity. Their typical response can be, “I am finally doing everything right, why is this happening now?”
- There are many things that are still being done for them and they haven’t been handed all the responsibility that they will soon have.
- There is the unawareness that things will very likely get harder again between the times they get better.
- They will soon learn that the novelty of being clean wears off, and that it is not what keeps them clean.

Stage 3 – “The Determined Stage”

This stage begins when a person begins to see that it will not be as easy as they thought it would be to stay clean. It has been said that anyone can get clean, but it takes a whole lot more commitment and effort to stay clean.

In “The Most Excellent Way” at First Baptist Church, Panama City, we always teach people that there are two very important ingredients that people need to be aware of for their success: (1) God’s Power and (2) our participation! God does lack Power – it is only when we do what we can to participate in the sanctification process that we will have success.

I have observed that the “Determined Stage” is when most of the failure occurs that leads to relapse. The happy, emotional days begin to separate themselves, and the novelty of being

clean begins to wear off. They are not getting as many pats on the back for being clean, and there is also much more expected of them in the way of responsibility. Many people that should have gone to rehab to help them get started often fail in this stage. They had the appearance of having it together, but their old thinking sometimes kicks which can cause them to assume they can use old tricks to move things along faster.

Note: If they are not consistently growing in the Lord, they are only going to continue doing things in their own strength, using their own wisdom. With the absence of spiritual growth there is no change on the inside – which produces change on the outside – and before too long it may get too difficult to remain clean and sober.

This is also a time when the temptations of old relationships are often becoming more frequent. Without the proper instruction in the beginning of their sobriety, many people allow unhealthy relationships to linger in their lives giving Satan an opportunity to use them to their own downfall. Even with proper instruction concerning how to handle the allurements of unhealthy relationships, that in itself does not stop their old “friends” in active addiction from trying to stay in touch with them.

Satan is very clever to send what he knows to be a counterfeit replacement for the presence of the Lord that has produced peace and contentment. He will, very often in this stage, play on a person’s loneliness and emotions to tempt them into thinking that they have been abandoned by the Lord. This again is where the Word of God stands in their defense: “He will never leave us nor forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5).

Some negative behaviors are noticeable when people are in the “Determined Stage:”

- Overkill when trying to convince you that they are doing well.
- Inconsistency in their attendance to meetings and Bible studies.
- Being defensive when questioned about certain situations or subjects.
- A lack of excitement for spiritual things.

Stage #4 – “The Reality Stage”

This is the stage we are trying, with God’s help, to have everyone reach. This happens when a person recognizes that using is something that they can never do again for the rest of their lives, and they continue to take the necessary steps to see that it never happens again.

There is no specific timeline for Christian growth, HOWEVER, when a person finds themselves in the “Reality Stage,” it is because of their Christian growth and maturity.

The Most Excellent Way ~ Christian Solution for Addictions: Jesus!

- They have decided that they would rather please the Lord than please themselves.
- They have decided that God's people are their people.
- They have decided that their lives will be a trophy of God's grace for the entire world to see.
- They have decided that Satan has had his way long enough, and it is time to allow the Lord to have free reign in their lives.
- They have decided that church, prayer, Bible study and meetings, are things that take priority in their lives.
- They have decided that their role as a godly Mom or Dad is vital to the future of their children.
- They have decided that because of what Jesus has done for them, they are now ready to give it all up for Him and do whatever He desires for them to do.
- They have decided that there is now a life that is called the "abundant life", full of meaning and purpose.
- And, they have decided that there is NOTHING they left behind in their past that will ever be worth going back for.
- **They have decided to sell out, stand out, live out, speak up, stand up and LIVE OUT LOUD, JESUS!**

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