

Lesson 2

POWERLESS

Principle 1: Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." (Matthew 5:3)

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 7:18)

Introduction

In Principle 1, we realize we're not God. We admit we are powerless to control our tendency to do the wrong thing and that our lives have become unmanageable. As soon as we take this step and admit that we are powerless, we start to change. We see that our old ways of trying to control our hurts, hang-ups, and habits didn't work. They were buried by our denial and held on to with our false power.

Tonight we are going to focus on four actions: two things we have to stop doing and two things we need to start doing in our recoveries. We need to take these four actions to complete Principle 1.

Four Actions

In Lesson 1 we talked about the first action we need to take.

1. Stop denying the pain.

We said that our denial had at least six negative effects: It disables our feelings, wastes our energy, negates our growth, isolates us from God, alienates us from our relationships, and lengthens our pain.

You are ready to accept Principle 1 when your pain is greater than your fear. In Psalm 6:2 –3 (TLB) David talks about a time when he came to the end of his emotional and physical resources: “Pity me, O Lord, for I am weak. Heal me, for my body is sick, and I am upset and disturbed. My mind is filled with apprehension and with gloom.” When David’s pain finally surpassed his fear, he was able to face his denial and feel the reality of his pain. In the same way, if you want to be rid of your pain, you must face it and go through it.

The second action we need to take is to:

2. Stop playing God.

You are either going to serve God or self. You can’t do both! Matthew 6:24 (GNT) says, “You cannot be a slave of two masters; you will hate one and love the other; you will be loyal to one and despise the other.”

Another term for serving “ourselves” is serving the “flesh.” Flesh is the Bible’s word for our unperfected human nature, our sin nature.

I love this illustration: If you leave the *h* off the end of *flesh* and reverse the remaining letters, you spell the word self. Flesh is the self-life. It is what we are when we are left to our own devices.

When our “self” is out of control, all attempts at control —of self or others — fail. In fact, our attempt to control ourselves and others is what got us into trouble in the first place. God needs to be the one in control.

There are two jobs: God’s and mine! We have been trying to do God’s job, and we can’t!

On the flip side, He won’t do our job. We need to do the footwork! We need to admit that we are not God and that our lives are unmanageable without Him. Then, when we have finally emptied ourselves, God will have room to come in and begin His healing work.

Let’s go on now to the third action we need to take:

3. Start admitting our powerlessness.

The lust of power is not rooted in our strengths but our weaknesses. We need to realize our human weaknesses and quit trying to do it by ourselves. We need to admit that we are powerless and turn our lives over to God. Jesus knew how difficult this is. He said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

When we keep doing things that we don’t want to do and when we fail to do the things we’ve decided we need to do, we begin to see that we do not, in fact, have the power to change that we thought we had. Life is coming into focus more clearly than ever before.

The last action we need to take is to:

4. Start admitting that our lives have become unmanageable.

The only reason we consider that there's something wrong, or that we need to talk to somebody, or that we need to take this step is because we finally are able to admit that some area — or all areas — of our lives have become unmanageable!

It is with this admission that you finally realize you are out of control and are powerless to do anything on your own. When I got to this part of my recovery I shared David's feelings that he expressed in Psalm 40:12 (TLB): "Problems far too big for me to solve are piled higher than my head. Meanwhile my sins, too many to count, have all caught up with me and I am ashamed to look up."

Does that sound familiar? Only when your pain is greater than your fear will you be ready to honestly take the first step, admitting that you are powerless and your life is unmanageable.

Tonight our acrostic will help us to focus in on the first half of Principle 1: powerless.

Powerless

Our acrostic tonight demonstrates what happens when we admit we are POWERLESS. We begin to give up the following "serenity robbers":

Pride
Only ifs
Worry
Escape
Resentment
Loneliness
Empiness
Selfishness
Separation

The first letter in tonight's acrostic is P. We start to see that we no longer are trapped by our PRIDE: "Pride ends in a fall, while humility brings honor" (Proverbs 29:23, TLB).

Ignorance + power + pride = a deadly mixture

Our false pride undermines our faith and it cuts us off from God and others. When God's presence is welcome, there is no room for pride because He makes us aware of our true self.

Next we begin to lose the ONLY ifs. That's the O in Powerless.

Have you ever had a case of the "only ifs"?

Only if they hadn't walked out.

Only if I had stopped drinking.

Only if this. Only if that.

How reluctantly the mind consents to reality. But when we admit that we are powerless, we start walking in the truth, rather than living in the fantasy land of rationalization.

Luke 12:2 –3 (GNT) tells us: "Whatever is covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. So then, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in broad daylight."

The next letter in powerless is the W, which stands for WORRYING. And don't tell me that worrying doesn't do any good; I know better. The things I worry about never happen!

All worrying is a form of not trusting God enough! Instead of worrying about things that we cannot possibly do, we need to focus on what God can do. Keep a copy of the Serenity Prayer in your pocket and your heart to remind you.

By working this program and completing the steps, you can find that trust, that relationship, with the one and only Higher Power, Jesus Christ, so that the worrying begins to go away.

Matthew 6:34 (TLB) tells us, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time."

The next thing that happens when we admit we are powerless is that we quit trying to ESCAPE. That's the E.

Before we admitted we were powerless, we tried to escape and hide from our hurts, habits, and hang-ups by getting involved in unhealthy relationships, by abusing drugs such as alcohol, by eating or not eating, and so forth.

Trying to escape pain drains us of precious energy. When we take this first step, however, God opens true escape routes to show His power and grace. "For light is capable of 'showing up' everything for what it really is. It is even possible (after all, it happened to you!) for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also" (Ephesians 5:13 –14, PH).

The R in powerless stands for RESENTMENTS.

If they are suppressed and allowed to fester, resentments can act like emotional cancer.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:26 –27: "'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

As you continue to work the principles, you will come to understand that in letting go of your resentments, by offering your forgiveness to those who have hurt you, you are not just freeing the person who harmed you, you are freeing you!

But if we try to maintain our false power, we become isolated and alone. That's the L in powerless: LONELINESS.

When you admit that you are powerless and start to face reality, you will find that you do not have to be alone.

Do you know that loneliness is a choice? In recovery and in Christ, you never have to walk alone again.

Do you know that caring for the lonely can cure loneliness? Get involved! Get involved in the church or in your neighborhood or here at Celebrate Recovery! If you become a regular here, I guarantee that you won't be lonely.

“Continue to love each other with true brotherly love. Don't forget to be kind to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!” (Hebrews 13:1 –2, TLB).

When you admit you are powerless you also give up another E, the EMPTINESS.

When you finally admit that you are truly powerless by yourself, that empty feeling deep inside —that cold wind that blows through you —will go away.

Jesus said, “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, TLB). So let Him fill the emptiness inside. Tell Him how you feel. He cares!

Next you will notice that you are becoming less self-centered.

The first S stands for SELFISHNESS.

I have known people who have come into recovery thinking that the Lord's Prayer was “Our Father who art in heaven ... Give me ... give me ... give me!” Luke 17:33 (TLB) tells us, “Whoever clings to his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall save it.” Simply said, selfishness is at the heart of most problems between people.

The last thing that we give up when we admit that we are powerless is SEPARATION.

Some people talk about “finding” God —as if He could ever be lost. Separation from God can feel real, but it is never permanent. Remember, He seeks the lost. When we can't find God, we need to ask ourselves, “Who moved?” I'll give you a hint. It wasn't God!

For I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from his love. Death can't, and life can't. The angels won't, and all the powers of hell itself cannot keep God's love away.... Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he died for us (Romans 8:38 –39, TLB).

Wrap-Up

The power to change only comes from God's grace. Are you ready to truly begin your journey of recovery?

Are you ready to stop denying the pain? Are you ready to stop playing God? Are you ready to start admitting your powerlessness? To start admitting that your life has become unmanageable? If you are, share it with your group tonight.

I encourage you to start working and living this program in earnest. If we admit we are powerless, we need a power greater than ourselves to restore us. That power is your Higher Power —Jesus Christ!

Let's close in prayer.

Dear God, Your Word tells me that I can't heal my hurts, hang-ups, and habits by just saying that they are not there. Help me! Parts of my life, or all of my life, are out of control. I now know that I cannot "fix" myself. It seems the harder that I try to do the right thing the more I struggle. Lord, I want to step out of my denial into the truth. I pray for You to show me the way. In Your Son's name, Amen.

PRINCIPLE 1 TESTIMONY

My name is Greg, and I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ who struggles with drug addiction.

For the first thirty-eight years of my life, I did everything possible to run from my fears, insecurities, and worries. I chose to follow the ways of the world and not live the life Christ wanted me to. I was the guy who drove intoxicated but never got a DUI. I was the guy who used way too much drugs and alcohol but never had an overdose. I was the guy who participated in many illegal activities but never got arrested. Having used alcohol and drugs for over twenty-four years, my luck seemed to be running out, and my life was beginning to catch up with me. Fueled by my denial and the attitude that I was untouchable, I continued with the insanity of my addictions.

I was the firstborn son to my two loving parents. We lived in a picture-perfect new development in Westminster, California.

When I was four years old, our family was blessed with the birth of my baby brother. He was born with a narrow valve and two holes in his heart. At eighteen months old, he went in for open heart surgery. The surgery was a success and the doctors assured my parents that he would be fine. As my brother grew older, my

mom began to notice that he was not developing at the normal rate. When he was three, it was confirmed that my brother was severely developmentally disabled.

My early years with my brother were amazing. We played and enjoyed each other like brothers do. At this time, I did not realize that my brother was different. The older we got, the more and more I noticed our relationship was changing. Instead of being brothers, I was more like a third parent to him. My brother's mental capacity was that of a five-year-old, and he really would never exceed that. A lot of the time, I felt like I was an only child with nobody to talk to. I spent a lot of time occupying myself with games and activities. I loved and will always love my brother, but the reality of not being able to connect with him emotionally was tough. I felt confused and alone.

Life in our household felt quite chaotic. I remember many nights as a kid when I would be down in the family room and my parents would be fighting and yelling at each other. I would put pillows over my ears or turn up the TV to block out the chaos. It made me feel alone.

One of the ways I would occupy my time as a kid was by playing sports. Whatever season was in, I would play. I was the kid who would play outside until the street lights came on or until my parents would yell for me.

As my brother grew older, I watched as his behaviors made it more stressful and difficult for my parents to take care of him. They had to spend an excessive amount of time with him, and I didn't want to bother them with my problems. Honestly, I was afraid to approach them because I thought they were too busy with my brother.

This is when I decided to do things on my own. I decided to start living for myself *and* my brother, and be the best son for both my parents. I wanted to help my parents forget about the troubles of my brother. This put a lot of pressure on me to excel. I dreamed that I would one day become a professional athlete, which would allow me to take care of my brother for the rest of his life.

Having a severely mentally disabled brother made me feel so different from other kids. Some of the friends I hung out with would ask questions about my brother. There were even times when some of them would make fun of him. I was very protective of my brother and would get into fights with whoever said mean or negative things about him.

In junior high, I started to act out. I was the star athlete but was struggling in school. So in my attempt to keep pressure off of my parents, I began cheating on tests, forging notes, and lying about everything.

At the end of my eighth grade year, I was introduced to alcohol. I liked the way that the alcohol made me feel or not feel. My fears and insecurities seemed to go away when I was drunk, and I felt more at ease around my friends and, for the first time, felt like I fit in.

In high school, I was labeled the jock and was expected to do great things. I felt a great deal of pressure and did not like the attention that it brought me. I just wanted to be like everybody else, so I started hanging out with all sorts of kids. I would hang out with the jocks, surfers, student government kids, and partiers. I became a chameleon and wanted to be accepted by everyone. Unfortunately, I did not know who I was or who I wanted to be.

I began living a double life. I would try to keep this image of a good kid during the school days and would party hard on the weekends. I was out of control on the weekends. Everybody wanted to party with me, and I never had any limits of how much I drank or when NOT to drive. I thought I was indestructible and could not be stopped.

My senior year, I developed as one of the best basketball players in southern California and even received a full scholarship to play Division 1 basketball. This brought me one step closer to my childhood dream of becoming a professional athlete. My double life continued and I began to occasionally use marijuana. This drug made me feel very uneasy and uncomfortable. But, of course, if somebody had any, I would partake just to be cool and fit in.

Leaving for college was an exciting time for me. I thought I was going to be the superstar on the basketball team and have the freedom to do whatever I wanted. I would practice three or four hours a day, maybe go to some of my classes, and party at night. After my first semester, my GPA was 1.7 and I was put on academic probation.

My basketball career did not start like I had planned. During the fifth game, I hurt my knee and was out for the rest of the season.

I fell into a depression as my basketball season was cut short. I remember going into the head coach's office. He explained to me that he did not know if I "fit into" this program. I was hurt and confused. He told me that I could work off my scholarship in the locker room by cleaning up after the basketball team. I felt like a complete disgrace and failure.

It was Christmas break and I was all alone. I decided to end my life. I went to my dorm room and took a bottle of pills and drank a lot of beer. I felt like I had let everybody down in my family, and did not want to live anymore. I believe God (who I knew nothing about) was with me that night. It was not my time, and instead of dying, I got really sick and had one horrible hangover.

I would attend three more colleges to play basketball, go to school sometimes, and continue to party a lot. Something I am not proud of is that I played college basketball at every level: Division 1, 2, 3, and junior college. Not a lot of stability in my life.

After college, I got a job in my father's industry. This industry was perfect for me; everybody worked hard and partied hard after hours.

For the next four years, I lived in Newport Beach. I wanted to fit in with the hip crowds down in the peninsula so I started to experiment with drugs. I participated in underground raves and the club scene and used ecstasy, acid, and other types of drugs. When I saw one of my roommates going out of control, I told myself I needed to slow down.

One night while hanging out in a bar in Hermosa Beach, I met this wonderful woman. She was not like any girl I had ever met. I enjoyed talking to her and knew deep down she was the perfect match for me. She was beautiful, funny, hardworking, mature, and a loving Christian woman. All the qualities that she possessed were what I was not. It was hard to believe she did not want me at first, and this is where I began the manipulation and lies to persuade her to like me. I would tell her everything she wanted to hear. Church was very important to her so I told her that I was a Christian. I even started attending church with her on Sundays. I knew deep down inside, she was the perfect person for my life. Unfortunately for her, she did not know that I was fake, a liar, and the person she should NOT be with.

It was easy for me to keep the truth from her as her schedule was filled with school and work. I would hang out with her a couple of days during the week and party with my friends on the weekends.

After about a year of dating, we got engaged and six months later were married. I thought at the age of thirty, it was time for me to grow up, settle down, and start a family. I honestly thought that if I got married, I would change.

I would like to say our marriage was the fairy tale, but it was far from it. At our beautiful wedding, I would leave her alone to hang out and party with my friends. Even our wedding night, which was supposed to be this special time, was not to happen. I was too intoxicated.

We were trying to live the American dream. We each had great jobs and we bought our first home in Rancho Santa Margarita and had two dogs. On the outside, everybody thought we were the perfect couple. They had no idea that we were struggling and drifting apart.

My wife started to have panic attacks and became very depressed. I was confused and frustrated about how to help her. Thoughts were coming in my head that I was going to have to take care of her like I had to take care of my brother. Since I felt I failed with taking care of my brother, I was afraid I would do the same thing to my wife.

During this time, I began to hang out more and more with a group of my partying friends. I continued to run away from my stress by numbing out on alcohol. I started opening up to these friends about the pressures in my life. The bad thing was, I was spending less time with my wife, and we were drifting further and further apart.

On August 21, 2005, we were blessed with the birth of our daughter. I thought that her birth would make life easier and, hopefully, straighten me out. When I held this little girl, I wanted to give her everything she deserved. On the outside, we looked like the happy family. But I was not happy, and soon I would find a new way to help me ease the stress in my life.

At age thirty-five, while playing poker at a friend's house, I was introduced to cocaine. I remember telling myself, *Nobody my age gets hooked on drugs*. That was a lie. For the next three years of my life, I would put this demon into my body.

My double life was continuing as I chose to add my drug addiction into the equation. It took a lot of work and lying to hide this secret. I would work from 6 a.m. till noon and meet up with my drug buddies until it was time to go home. To finance my habit, I would cash my expense checks from work. I was stealing from my family.

One of my biggest regrets is that I would pick up my daughter from preschool while I was under the influence. I was placing my daughter in harm's way. There were even times when my wife would work late, and I would be using drugs in the kitchen while my daughter was in the family room watching TV. At the time, I thought I was only hurting myself. I had no idea I was affecting my wife and child.

Unfortunately, life was getting very difficult, the economy was changing, and we were heading into a recession. For me to be successful, I would have to work even harder to succeed, but my addiction would not allow me to.

Our marriage had gotten so bad that we were on the verge of a separation. Our finances were out of control and we lost our home. My wife insisted that we see a marriage counselor, and I agreed to go. I took no ownership of my part in our relationship, and at times I would even go to the therapy high. The constant lying was getting heavier and heavier to maintain. I felt like I was on the verge of having a breakdown from living this double life.

I tried and had two months of sobriety (white knuckling it) by myself, cutting my ties from my drug friends, and trying to get my life back to normal. Who was I kidding? I could not handle my life for thirty-eight years, and now I was going to stop using drugs by myself?

The time came when I had an opportunity to use again and I did. The bad, or you could say good thing, was my wife found drugs and confronted me. I sat with her in her car and she persistently asked me what was going on. Then something came over me, and I knew I could not lie anymore. I broke down to her and told her I was addicted to cocaine. The feeling of getting this off my chest was a huge step for me and for my relationship with my wife.

The next step was for me to get help. Sitting down with our marriage counselor, we discussed a plan. Our counselor told me of this place called Celebrate Recovery that is a Christian-based recovery program. Deep down I knew I needed help, but I

had no personal relationship with Christ and was not sure if this was the place for me.

I was terrified the first time I went to Celebrate Recovery. I was not like these people (denial), and I was petrified somebody would recognize me as one of those “sick” people. I sat in the back, singing a little bit and looking around. That night a woman who was a drug addict gave her testimony. As I was staring at her, I realized my worst fears. Her son was in the same class as my daughter. I attended several more weeks, hiding from this lady, making sure she did not see me.

I would like to say that I never saw the blonde lady again, but one day my wife asked me to go to our daughter’s field trip. And guess who was there? Yep, the blonde lady. Something inside of me was pushing me to talk to her. How do you approach somebody and say, “Hey, are you that drug addict who gave her testimony?” I did my best not to sound creepy and asked her if she went to church on Friday nights. From there, I opened up about myself and told her about my problems with drugs. We talked for thirty minutes and she told me that I needed to meet her husband.

My wife and I decided we needed to go to Celebrate Recovery as a family since she was struggling with her life as well. We started attending Celebrate Recovery together and from the first night we knew we found a home. This is when I met my sponsor. The first time I heard him talk, I knew I needed this guy in my life. He has been a huge impact on my life. I finally had that person who I could sit down with, pour out my junk, and not feel judged.

Principle 1 says, “Realize I’m not God; I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.” “Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor” (Matthew 5:3).

A few months later, I was driving to lunch when I saw all these cars turning into a church. For some reason I felt I needed to go to this service. As I walked up alone to this strange church, I was informed that this was Good Friday. I sat in the church with hundreds of people and learned about the death of Jesus Christ. I was floored by this service and at that moment, I accepted Jesus Christ in my life and nailed my sin (drug addiction) to the cross. I remember sitting down by myself crying and realizing it was God who led me to church that day to start my relationship with Christ.

Principle 3 says, “Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control.” “Happy are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).

It began with submitting my life to Christ and as I continued attending Celebrate Recovery I learned even more tools to help me on my road of recovery. I created a bucket list of goals I wanted and needed to accomplish in my life. I wanted to attend two meetings a week (check). I wanted to get into a step study —

this is where the rubber meets the road (check). I wanted a sponsor and accountability team (check). I wanted to become a member of Saddleback Church and take classes 101 to 401 (check—all four with my wife). And finally I wanted to get baptized (check). For once in my life I had goals and I accomplished them.

After being eight months sober, life was getting better. But there was something deep inside that was eating me up. One night at Celebrate Recovery I felt like God was speaking directly to me. The focus question for the night was “What one thing are you holding on to, that you are afraid to let go of?” I had a secret that I thought I was going to die with. That night I broke down to my small group: in the past I had twice been unfaithful to my wife.

I knew I needed to sit down with my wife and finally tell her the truth. I knew she would be hurt and I feared that she would leave me. I sat with her that night and told her everything. I was trusting in God and knew in order for our relationship to work, I had to be honest. I remember a long pause and she looked at me and said, “I forgive you.” She told me that she had been seeing a real transformation in me and this was why she was able to forgive me. She truly is an amazing woman. After everything I have done to her with the lies, drug use, and now cheating, there was NO way I was going to turn back.

Since I have been attending Celebrate Recovery, my life has changed dramatically for the better. I needed a program that would not only get me sober, but also a place where I was going to become a better husband, father, friend, brother . . . person. First and foremost, I needed to find Christ. For thirty-eight years, I was not a Christian. Finding Jesus Christ was the way I was going to get sober and stay sober.

I struggle with opening up and expressing my thoughts and feelings. Through this program, I have met men who have similar struggles, but who I can freely open up to without feeling ashamed or embarrassed. I have developed meaningful relationships with my sponsor, accountability partners, and other godly men who are there for me. Celebrate Recovery gave me and my family a place where people love us for who we really are.

I came to Celebrate Recovery as a drug addict, but through the process of attending the meetings, small groups, and step study I learned that I struggle with anger, lust, and basically life in general. I am a grateful addict because my addiction led me down the path to Christ and set me up to become a healthy person and deal with the demons that I pushed down for so many years.

I now give back to the program that gave me so much. I help lead the men’s chemically addicted group on Thursday nights in San Clemente and am a coleader on Friday nights at The Landing (tenth-and eleventh-grade students) in Lake Forest. I also have the privilege of sponsoring men, and I can see the Lord work miracles in their lives as He did in mine.

First and foremost I owe this to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I would also like to thank my beautiful wife for not giving up on me and being there through our ups and downs. I could not have done this without them.

I know that I am a work in progress and have only scratched the surface, which is why I keep coming back. I have a passion to be of service for the next person who is struggling with life. I want to give that struggling person a hope that Celebrate Recovery works.

When I introduced myself, I told you I was in recovery for drug addiction. When I was writing my testimony, I realized that I used alcohol a lot during my life. I now choose to never drink alcohol again, because I do not want to go back to how my life was. The greatest part is, my daughter will never see her father ever put a drink or a drug in his body!

My life verse is 2 Corinthians 5:17: *“When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun.”*

Thank you for letting me share.