

Repentance and Recovery (part 2)

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[0 : 00] Well, today is our last day for this series. And as I come to the end, realize there's so much more that could have been shared, but I trust we've given some information that is helpful to you as you face some of those challenges, those areas of your own life where you're struggling, and what you might be, quote-unquote, addicted to.

But as we finish up this series, we finish with a look at living out godly repentance. That's where we've been focused these last couple classes.

And how we can restructure life in the pursuit of Christ and godliness. We've come to the knowledge of the truth. It's become ours. We believe that.

It's become precious to us, the person of Christ and his counsel to us. And out of that new desire, that inner change, that repentance, there's flowing out from us this desire to restructure my life so that it brings honor and glory to God.

And it is really for my welfare, my blessing, but not mine alone, but also for those who are around me, those I'm in relationship with. There's a new way to live.

[1 : 16] I have a new orientation to life, as Paul told Timothy. Orient your life. Discipline your life toward godliness, because this has value in all things.

So this new orientation is on the person of Christ, worshiping him in all spheres of life. This is what we're looking to do. This isn't just a Sunday thing, but it's in my work.

How does this affect change in the way I work, the way I am as a husband or as a wife or a daughter or son or grandparent? All spheres of life are restructured so that I can bring glory to God and enjoy who I am as a saint, as we heard last Sunday in, I think, was morning service.

Well, we have this example of walking in newness of life in 1 Thessalonians 1. Paul was writing to the believers there in Thessalonica.

In verses 4 through 10, this is what he writes, For we know, brothers, loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

[2 : 35] And verse 6 picks up, You became imitators of us and of the Lord in spite of severe suffering. You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your faith in God has become known everywhere.

Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. So much in that passage that we could unpack in this lesson or in another message. But here, these believers, we see this example of the outworking of true repentance, faithfulness of God, the work of His Holy Spirit.

If they heard the message of the gospel, that good news, they believed it, and then they became imitators of Paul. There was a genuine interchange in their hearts, in what they were loving, and in the way they thought about God, themselves, and creation around them.

[3 : 55] And that had a dynamic effect on their outward lives, and what they were doing in each sphere of their lives. The people spoke of how they turned from their idols to serve the living and true God.

Now, I expect that there were some real enslavements to certain practices associated with their idolatry. Sometimes we don't think about that when we're reading things like this.

We think, oh, they got saved and, you know, life went on. Well, they were involved in some idolatry, some practices, I'm sure, that had a real hold on them and affected what they were doing every

day.

But their lives were changed. Even in the face of great opposition, this change was happening. So I would have enjoyed seeing and hearing them work through some of those initial changes when they heard that good news and believed it.

And how others described that, and how Paul wrote about these other practices that they were supposed to bring into their lives more and more.

[5 : 12] Just again, seeing here how they would work through that. This is what Paul says now should be a part of our lives. How does that become a part of our lives every day? Well, what does that mean now in regard to what we used to do over here?

And this is how we're supposed to behave now toward one another. Real changes would have been, again, exciting and interesting to hear them and see them working through that.

Well, they learned these new ways of speaking and living. They listened to Paul and observed his life and became imitators of Paul and of the Lord and therefore became a model for others who also believed the gospel.

What a wonderful progression that we see there, really, as they came to faith in Jesus Christ and were learning new ways of living according to the counsel of God and wondering, what does that look like?

Well, here's Paul teaching us, watch him. And as they watched him, they imitated him, but not just him, they were really imitating the Lord as Paul was seeking to be that example of godliness too.

[6 : 22] So they had this visual representation of what life was to be like now. And so they were able to put some things together and restructure their lives in this direction of godliness that they were called to.

Well, so it still happens today. That's what we are going through as we come to this inner change within us, this change of loves in our hearts for God and a new understanding of him, Jesus Christ, his counsel, ourselves, and creation around us.

And we have this eager anticipation to do what is good now for the glory of God and our welfare and the welfare of others around us.

So people who are caught in bondage, whether it's to addiction of some kind, we can come to Jesus Christ in true faith and repentance and really walk in newness of life.

Paul was commanding the believers there in Rome that they could walk in newness of life. And so we need to be reminded of that, that we are not in bondage and slavery anymore to this old master, this old way of doing things, but we can.

[7 : 45] We can walk in newness of life. There's times we're going to fail, but we have to be careful that we don't come to this conclusion in times of failure. Maybe multiple failures that we say, oh, that's the way I am.

That's just the way it's going to be. Well, it's the way it is now maybe, but it doesn't have to define our future because we're not defining who we are based on our experience.

We're defining ourselves based on who the scriptures tell us we are and the reality of all that we have in Jesus Christ. So part of the ongoing reorientation of life does involve identifying aspects of my past or even my present life and any of those things, those practices that made it or make it easy for me to be tempted to return back to my former way of living.

A quote that we had in our lesson last week that I'll repeat this morning from Brad Hambrick's Lessons on Overcoming Addictions, the longer you've struggled with an addiction, the more things in your life become associated with the addiction.

Activities, locations, times of day, people are just a few of the everyday things that get associated with addiction or this bondage, enslavement to a substance or activity.

[9 : 07] One important way to manage your temptations is to rearrange your life, to eliminate or limit your exposure to these temptations. And sometimes we have to be strong by actively resisting temptations, but more often than not, we should be strong by wisely avoiding the temptation.

And just a little break here. This is what we as parents or grandparents can be doing with our children, helping them understand, well, what does this look like? You know your children struggle and wrestle with certain things.

You find that you're correcting them over and over again with something. Well, again, it's a redemptive opportunity bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ there in that situation with them so that they're understanding, well, it's true, you're struggling here if they're unbelievers yet.

Let me help you understand why. You're up against an enemy that is beyond your ability to resist. Christ, and God has sent, and I won't go through all that.

On and on we go with that presentation of the gospel. If they're believers, then you're helping them understand. What are some of the elements that lead to you doing this over and over again?

[10:21] Let me help you understand. Let me share with you that I don't struggle with the same thing, but there's an area that I wrestle with, and let me help you understand how I do that, and you can follow my example.

So taking these opportunities to help our children by the time they leave home, they're familiar with this ongoing process of reorienting our lives in this direction of godliness.

Well, last week we looked at some of these areas that would be wise to examine and to check out to see if in what way they might be contributing to the ease of my temptation and giving in to temptation.

Relationships was one of those areas. People we are in relationship with have influence in our lives. I mentioned that verse Proverbs 13, 20, He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

So there's wisdom when possible to cut off relationships with those who influence us to pursue the addiction instead of Christ and godliness.

[11:39] And in place of those relationships, connect with those who would encourage you to pursue Christ and the way of godliness in all spheres of life.

That's the importance of the body of Christ. You're seeking to make those kind of connections. And whether it's in group settings like this, in a Sunday school class, or morning other teaching opportunities, taking advantage of those, maybe connecting with a mentor, someone that you can really establish some accountability with one-on-one on a weekly basis, early on quite possibly, or even a daily basis initially.

But then as you go on and grow, moving that back a little bit more until you're at the point where now you can be this model, just like the believers in Thessalonica were.

Initially, they needed that real close contact with Paul and to observe his life on a daily basis and to imitate him.

But eventually, we're able to move away from that. Paul was able to go away. But he did check back in with them. You know, I wanted to send so-and-so here to check in, see how you're doing.

[12:56] It's good to hear you're doing so well. But let me take the opportunity to encourage you on. Well, don't be satisfied with that. Move on more and more. Let more of these things become part of your life.

And so that kind of relationship is an ongoing relationship. So the importance of establishing those kind of relationships early on.

We also took a look at, sorry, roots and routines. Determine whether temptation emerges at predictable times and places in the rhythms of your life.

What habits of the use, the abuse of the substance or activity were part of your life that you need to change, whether certain times of the day that you found yourself turning to that substance and certain places.

My friend that I mentioned to you in the past that was addicted to a substance as we initially met, he was describing certain times of the day that he turns to his substance and certain places that he would do that.

[14:04] Well, we had to identify those and then help him restructure his life and give himself to other things at that time. Instead of looking for opportunities to serve himself by turning to his addiction, we had to help him see how he could turn to serving others and show love for others and put in those kind of routines in his day.

And initially, he said, I can't believe that I'll ever not want this and I'll never not turn to this. But in time, he was able to with the help of God, the grace of God, encouragement from other people.

So we give thanks for that. Another similar area would be home life. Our home should be places of rest and refuge, but also mutual encouragement and pursuing Christ and godliness.

But because of addictions, home often becomes our place of greatest temptation. I mentioned last week that that's usually the place that we kind of let our guard down instead of really still being on guard.

So we need to examine and determine how we've used our home setting to cater to ongoing practice and this bondage of addictions and then begin to restructure how I'm using my time at home and how I view my time at home.

[15 : 33] What can I devote myself to that will help me live out Christ-like love and service in the home? What's my God-designed role in the home and how have I neglected that in the past?

What are specific ways I can begin to glorify God in fulfilling my role in helping others do the same in the family? So there's a reorientation in our thinking about the time that I use at home and what home is really all about.

It's not all about me and my comfort before I go back to work or wherever else I would go. It's about me glorifying God and serving those in this smaller sphere of life at home and enjoying that.

Well, those are just some of the areas we took a look at last week. This week we continue that by looking at, first, some irregular events and activities.

By events, I mean one-time events that might be closely associated with, in this case, alcohol and drug usage. It might be weddings, graduations, New Year's parties, birthdays, whatever it might be.

[16 : 48] Approaching these kinds of events is different from relationships and routines. Again, there's things that aren't happening on a daily basis, but they are things that maybe or events that you've gone to in the past that have usually turned out, ended up or resulted in you turning back to your addiction.

So the question is, are you willing to forego attending any event that is unwise for your recovery? An important question to answer. This is the first and foremost question.

If your answer is no, then irregular events are likely to derail your recovery. If yes, well, you may miss things that are important to you as you pursue sobriety or your freedom, new life, new orientation of life, but it's better to intentionally miss small portions of life for a time than to miss large chunks of life because of your ongoing enslavement to this addiction or activity.

So here's some questions that might help you assess the wisdom of your attendance at maybe some irregular events. And these are from Brad Hamrick's lessons as well.

He titles the first one, Awareness. Have I talked about this event with people in my support network? If no, then don't go. It's that importance of accountability in those early stages of your reorientation of life, your restructuring.

[18 : 26] The next would be journey. Where am I in my journey of recovery? Am I at a point where I've established some success in resisting temptation so that I can reintroduce an event like this without the threat of me relapsing and going back, returning to some of these addictions and exposing myself to a temptation that I'm really not ready to face just yet.

So where are you on your journey? Companion, will there be someone in my support network or someone committed committed to my recovery at this event?

Again, we're looking to how God can use other people at this stage of my recovery so that I may be weak, I need to be there, but I know so-and-so is going to be there.

In fact, I've called them. Yep, I've confirmed that they're going to be there. I've expressed my concern being there and they're committed. Listen, I'm going to be there.

I'll be right there ready to encourage you, to help you at certain times during the event so you're not standing alone in this situation. What about energy?

[19 : 43] Where are my current emotional and relational reserves? Am I walking into this depleted? You're really tired and exhausted and you're at a point where I'm really striving with the help of God in this, but I'm really at this point where I'm down today.

Maybe I failed the day before, whatever. It wouldn't be wise to put myself in that situation. I really don't have the energy right now, whether it's even physical energy, emotionally, spiritually, at this time to put myself in that situation.

So it would be best not to go. And plan. Do I have a plan for how to avoid the temptation and accountability for key junctures in the event?

Say if a person has struggled with alcohol and you're at a wedding or someplace where there's a toast with an alcoholic beverage, how are you going to handle that? Be ready with a plan in order to deal with the time of temptation or when the time of temptation will be strongest.

Maybe it's something at home that you struggle with. And how am I going to handle that event, that situation? This is what I've usually done at this time of day.

[20 : 59] Well, make a plan. Have a plan in place. Don't go in without that kind of plan and that kind of forethought so that you can be ready.

You can be prepared. I can't think of the passage. I think it's in 1 Peter. You could correct me. Prepare your mind for action.

Peter was telling the people that he was writing to. Be sober-minded. You've thought it through. You've considered this carefully and again, you've made a plan for how you're going to handle that time of temptation.

There's nothing unspiritual about that. That is wisdom as far as and really as far as our spiritual growth and godliness is concerned.

So those kind of events. What about activities? There are certain particular activities that might be triggers for various temptations.

[21 : 57] In particular, our performance in certain activities, let's say. The weight that we place on our performance in particular activities can become so significant that it becomes a reason to act out.

How we perform in a sporting event or on an exam at a task at work in front of particular people or during a once-in-a-lifetime moment activity can be the measure of who we are.

And it could go either way. Well, that went over great. You know, I deserve a reward. Or that was terrible and I'm a total failure and go back to, again, practices in the past that you participated and that you did when you were feeling down or whatever and looking for that substance or activity to give you some relief to be your pick-me-up and to get you going again.

So you're being careful about how you view activities and your performance in those activities. Let's move on to another area of responsibilities.

Something that came up over and over again was this matter of stress, whether it was in some of the testimonials we heard or other information, how people handle stress.

[23 : 16] It's a near-universal temptation to use substances or activities to escape stress. Eliminating responsibilities from our lives is not the ultimate answer, certainly, in dealing with stress.

It's not the activities, the responsibilities that create the stress. It's our mindset, our thoughts and how we view them and how we respond to these responsibilities that really brings on the stress.

But, there may be times that it would be wise to eliminate some unnecessary activities and commitments from our lives that might be influencing us to sinful anxiety and worry.

So, there could be valuable insights gained and success is gained by cutting back on some of these unnecessary responsibilities and commitments in your life.

And, it would be wise also to examine why have I overcommitted myself? Another thing to help us understand what really drives me for all the things that I'm involved in.

[24 : 28] We won't go there, but there's a lot of reasons that could drive that and we get ourselves overcommitted for wrong reasons. But, we're asking ourselves what activities or commitments in your life are contributing more stress really than blessing?

What activities or commitments are contributing to your stress that you can eliminate or defer to another time when you're really better able to handle them? And, identifying these things doesn't mean that these are bad activities to be involved in or bad responsibilities.

It means that they're likely a bad investment at this time during what you're trying to do in restructuring your life. There's only so many things that you can do well in each season of your life.

And, during this season of life, one of the big things you need to do well is recovery, restructuring your life. And so, there's nothing wrong with cutting back on some of these responsibilities.

And, as you progress in your growth and godliness, you can make decisions about what things to reintroduce in your life as items or practices or responsibilities that should be priority in your life, whether it's in your growth and godliness or for the welfare of others around you.

[25 : 50] So, you just need to be careful that you don't use it as an excuse of not taking on any responsibility. Hey, I enjoy this. Life goes good when I don't have anything to do.

Let others do it. No, then you've lost focus again on what really the purpose of life is in regard to your service to God and your service to others.

So, some of those responsibilities. Another area would be your energy level. Fatigue impacts temptation and even temptation in regard to addictions.

When we're tired, our capacity for self-control is diminished. Also, when we're tired, we often think we deserve a break or reward, something that I've talked about earlier.

We need to be careful that we don't develop this mindset of, I deserve a reward. I've been good today. I've worked hard all day today. I deserve to come home to a home that's quiet and comfortable or whatever.

[26 : 56] I haven't indulged in this for long. I deserve a little reward and give myself back to that. That's a wrong mentality for us to develop.

Is there time to enjoy rest and quiet? Well, certainly, there is. But we need to be careful that we're not associating that with something that I deserve this because of what I've done.

we deserve reward. Let that up to the Lord and given to us or you be the one ready to reward someone for something that they've done.

So, question to ask when it comes to energy level, what about your sleep? Are you managing your life so that you have time and the mental freedom to get adequate sleep?

Important thing to consider as you move through your day. Maybe it's you're struggling because you're not getting the right amount of sleep. You find yourself exhausted. You're looking for something.

[27 : 56] Oh, here's something at the register. It says five-hour energy. You know, just pop that down or take another cup of coffee, whatever it is, and that'll get me going. Well, day after day after day doing that, what are we becoming dependent upon instead of taking the wise step of getting some sleep?

What about your diet? Are you eating a healthy diet so that your body has the nutrition it needs to be nutritionally balanced? And not just nutritionally balanced, but you have the strength and energy to serve others.

So again, while it's important that you are a good steward of your body and how you eat and eating properly, and I know there's all kinds of discussions about what that looks like, but at the same time, we are trying to use foods and what God has provided and the resources of food, not just for our pleasure, although God has given us food and taste buds so that when we do eat, we can enjoy.

I'm glad for that. Pies that I referred to earlier or whatever else, that I can enjoy that, but I'm not eating just for the pleasure. I'm eating to restore the energy of my body so that I can serve God and others and at the same time, God's given me that blessing of having the pleasure of eating it while I'm eating it.

So how good is God to do something like that? He could have done it differently, but I'll throw in these taste buds for them and they can enjoy eating the food that I've designed and it turns out to be an even greater worship time of God and I'll extol the Lord at all times, even while I'm eating.

[29 : 38] God, you gave me these taste buds, you know what I'm saying, on and on. So, but I'm eating properly so that I have the energy I need through the day and I'm not looking for some substance to make up for my unwise choices in my eating.

What about exercise? Are you getting the cardiovascular exercise to help your body eliminate the chemical byproducts of stress? So there are times that when you're having a stressful day, it could be good to go out and get some exercise.

There is some benefit in doing that, but you need to also examine and see, well, what's causing the stress in the first place? exercise. But a good thing to be part of your schedule, that regular exercise, again, gives you the ability to serve God and others more effectively.

And the older we get, the harder that will be. Our body is more on the deteriorating side of things, so any way that we can get some good exercise that will help us serve my wife or family or church members or people in my community more effectively.

Well, that could be part of my schedule and be wise to be part of my schedule so that I can accomplish those things. Are you engaging with activities you enjoy so that your morale for healthy life remains high?

[31 : 10] So there is good reason to be involved in some of those activities that are enjoyable, that you find beneficial and rewarding as far as bringing joy.

I had a wise pastor tell me once that it's good for a pastor to be involved in some sort of activity where he sees the end product in a short period of time.

Because much of what he's doing in ministry involves long periods of time that he might not see the fruit of his labors in the lives of people that he's ministering to.

And so it's good to be involved in something like that, where you could enjoy that sense of accomplishment and you can stand back like God did and say, oh, this is good.

This is very good, in fact. And I think that really is something that God has built within us as image bearers of himself that we can step back and see what we have created or made and enjoy that and even turn that into a worship time.

[32 : 16] God, how good you are to give us that creative ability that I can think these things through and work on this project or make this, so on and so forth, and just take a quick time.

I'll extol the Lord at all times. His praise will always be on my lips. And so we're doing that and enjoying God in that kind of situation. Well, our last area would be what I could just call sources of life counsel.

Again, you're looking and examining your past life. What needs to change in my past life that led me down this path of a life of enslavement and bondage to addiction, a life that wasn't pleasing and glorifying to God?

And so in regard to the sources of life counsel, what needs to change? What were the voices and the sources that I was turning to for my decision making in my daily life that led me to these kind of conclusions?

And so I just kind of wrote down a number of questions that really just start with what sources did you turn to for counsel for life? What sources did you turn to for understanding and making sense of life and circumstances when you do experience a failure at work?

[33 : 39] What are some of the sources, the voices you listen to, co-workers, that guy's a jerk, you know, you have every reason to be upset and discouraged, you're never going to get that here at work and so on and so forth.

All these voices here that are saying that in these circumstances, whatever they might be. What sources did you turn to for making decisions? What sources did you turn to to understand your purpose for that day?

All things that when a person is addicted to some substance, they're turning to these sources and drawing conclusions about what their purpose is for the day or what they have to decide in regard to where they go from here, how to get their peace, security, safety, so on and so forth.

What sources did you turn to to understand yourself and others? What sources did you turn to to understand the source of your trouble and strife in your life?

So if you sit down with your mentor and you examine some of these sources and some of the conclusions you came to from listening to some of those sources, you can identify the progression, the downward progression that led you to this bondage and enslavement and now start looking at what are the sources of life counsel that God has provided for you now that you have to take advantage that you need to take advantage of that will lead you in this new way, this life of abundance, this life of living as an image bearer of God, this life of blessing and on and on we could go to describe it.

[35 : 22] Well, what are some of those sources? Well, those sources are calling on God. Prayer. We have prayer for our time in our time of help and need, calling on him as sympathizing high priest that we have and giving thanks to him, extolling him, thinking of the virtues of God and what he has done in my life, so calling on him in prayer and being exposed to and taking in or listening to the counsel from God's word and you can think of many different resources that you can take advantage of there, your own personal Bible reading, scripture memorization, meditation, times like this, morning service, other services that we have set aside here, being with a mentor who would lead you through a Bible study, on and on.

So many ways that you can hear the voice of God that will give you the counsel for life that you need, that will really lead you in this new way and help you restructure your life so that it's headed in the direction of godliness.

And Timothy, Paul told Timothy that godliness has value for all things. And that's what we need to look at when you get discouraged and to remember, you get discouraged thinking there's godliness, this direction I'm going and has value in all things.

It holds promise for this life. It's not just something for eternity. It does hold promise for this life and the life to come. But let's not forget that it holds promise for this life now.

This whole direction of godliness. So the believers in Thessalonica, they were living new lives in Christ. And Paul encouraged them to continue on.

[37 : 11] Don't give up. You know, you have a, what we would call, relapse or a failure, a sin. Don't give up. Even for those times, God has provided a way for you to pick up and go on.

If we confess our sin, it's faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So don't have a pity party. Don't think you've got to beat yourself up in order to pay for your sin.

Jesus Christ was the one who absorbed all of that wrath of God. You don't have to pay for it. Pick up and continue to reorient your life in that direction of godliness.

And to excel in it, Paul told the believers there, don't quit. Excel more and more in this direction.

Well, as we finish this lesson, we finish with what Paul finished with to the believers in Thessalonica.

After he commended them for what he saw, as he encouraged them to continue on and on, the hope that he left them with was, may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

[38 : 20] May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Isn't that great? That's a glorious promise, really, as we're involved in this whole process of restructuring, repentance, growing in godliness. That's our hope, really.

The one who called us, he'll be faithful to do it. So let's extol the Lord at this time in prayer. Father, this morning, we thank you so much for this promise that we have here.

Father, that comes out in other scriptures as well. What you've begun, you'll be faithful to carry out. Give us eyes to see that, Father, what you're seeking to do.

Give us that great affection, that love for you and others around us so that we cooperate and listen to you and keep in step with what your spirit is doing in our lives.

[39 : 27] And Father, we'll just thank you now for what you're going to do in our lives as we move in this direction and pray that again we'd be faithful to extol you at all times and praise you with our lips at all times as well.

In Jesus' name, Amen.