

THE FIRST STEP TO HEALTH
Getting Healthy Again
Part 1 of 8
Rick Warren
May 5-6, 2001

What is Unhealthy in Your Life?

My pace of life	My diet	My financial situation
My thoughts	My worries	My relationship with
My overwork	My habits	My holding on to the past
My marriage	My family	My perfectionism
My addiction	My memories	My resentment or anger
My expectations	My regrets	My need to control

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“Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless.” Matt. 5:3 (GW)

REALIZE I’m _____ . I admit I’m helpless to control my tendency to do what I know is unhealthy and that my life is unmanageable.

“I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can’t! I do what I don’t want to – what I hate! I know perfectly well what I’m doing is wrong... but I can’t help myself.” Rom. 7:15 & 17 (LB)

The Bible calls this my:

I. THE CAUSE OF MOST PROBLEMS: _____

“In the pride of your heart you say, ‘I am a god...’ But you are just a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god.” Ezekiel 28:2 (NIV)

How we “play” God:

By denying our _____ & trying to _____

- Our problems
- Other people
- Our pain

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II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PLAYING GOD

1. _____

“It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong... but there is something else deep within me, my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight...” Rom. 7:21, 23 (LB)

2. _____

“My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them.” Ps. 32:4-5 (LB)

3. _____

“You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you.” Prov. 28:13 (GN)

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I admit I’m powerless to...
Change my past... control others... change my unhealthy habits

“We saw how powerless we were to help ourselves; but that was good, for then we put everything into the hands of God, who alone could save us, for He can even raise the dead.” 2 Cor. 1:9 (LB)

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule.” Matt. 5:3 (Mes)

“When we were unable to help ourselves, at the moment of our need, Christ died for us...” Rom 5:6 (NCV)

“God gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.” Isaiah 40:29 (NRSV)

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We're going to begin a new series this week I'm calling Getting Healthy Again. We're going to be in it for the next eight weeks. I'll begin with a little quiz. I have a list of eighteen areas where we commonly are unhealthy. Eighteen areas where we're out of balance. Underline the areas in that list that apply to you.

Which of these areas are unhealthy in your life? Is it my pace of life? My thoughts? My overwork? Is my marriage unhealthy? Addiction? Expectations? How about an unhealthy diet? Unhealthy worries or habits? Family? Unhealthy memories? Unhealthy regrets? An unhealthy financial situation? Unhealthy relationship with... and you can fill in the blank? If I haven't named yours yet, you can write in your unhealthy area. Unhealthy perfectionism? Resentment or anger? An unhealthy need to control?

Is there anyone here who claims ultimate perfection in all eighteen of these? We all need this. We're all going to need this series because we all have areas that are unhealthy in our lives.

Here's the good news. Regardless of which of these areas you happen to underline, the results, the answers are still the same. The solution, the steps to getting healthy again are the same in any case. The principles for getting healthy are in the Bible, God's word. But specifically they're in the first eight statements of Jesus Christ in His most famous sermon called "The Sermon on the Mount." We call these eight statements "The Beatitudes". These statements are not just principles for healthy living. They are actually steps. We're going to take them in order for the next eight weeks on how to get healthy again.

We covered this material about eight years ago. But about 9000 of you weren't here, so we're going to review this material because it's too important. The first step to health is in the first Beatitude of Jesus in Matthew 5:3 "*Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually helpless.*"

What does that mean? It means if I want to get healthy again here's what I have to do.

Realize I'm not God. I admit that I'm powerless to control my tendency to do what I know is unhealthy and my life is unmanageable. I admit that I'm powerless to control my tendency to do what is unhealthy. In other words, the things I know to do are right I don't do, and the things that I know are not healthy I end up doing anyway.

Just to clarify this I have a second quiz.

Have you ever stayed up late when you knew you needed sleep?

Have you ever eaten or drunk extra calories you knew you shouldn't have?

Have you ever made commitments that you couldn't possibly keep? (Some of you are lying. You're in denial!)

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Have you ever felt you ought to exercise but didn't?

Have you ever tried to control something and discovered you couldn't?

Welcome to the human race! The Bible has a word for this tendency. This tendency to not do what I know is healthy and the tendency to do what is unhealthy even though I know it's bad for me. The Bible calls this my sin nature.

We all have this. What it means is I often do things that are self-destructive. Even though I know they're bad for me, they're bad for my health, they're bad for my life, they're bad for my relationships, I still do them. There are other things that I know that are good for me that I don't do.

That happens not only personally, it also happens in relationships. I tend to respond to hurts in my life in a way that actually prolong the hurt rather than taking it away. I tend to treat people in ways that backfire and I expect a certain response. Instead I get the exact opposite of what I want from that person. I often try to fix a problem and in my fixing it I make the problem worse. You try to fix something but it ends up not working.

The Bible calls this my sin nature. In Proverbs 14:12 it says, *"There is a way that seems right to man but it ends in death."* You're always going to have this old nature with you. It doesn't matter if you're a believer, an unbeliever, a Christian or a non-Christian. Here on earth, you're always going to have this old nature. You're going to struggle with it all your life. Paul complains about it in the Bible. In Romans 7 he says this, *"I don't understand myself at all. For I really want to do what is right but I can't. I do what I don't want to do, what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I'm doing is wrong but I can't help myself."* Does that sound familiar? Sure it does. It's a common human experience that we often struggle with. The things we want to do are right and we end up not doing them and the things we know are wrong we end up doing them.

Today we're going to look at the cause behind most of your problems. Then we're going to look at the consequences of that. Then we're going to look at the cure or the first step of the eight steps of getting healthy again.

The cause of most of your problems can be summarized in two words – playing God. Whenever I try to play God it causes all kinds of problems in my life and my relationships.

I play God when I want to call my own shots, when I want to make my own rules, when I want to put myself at the center of the universe. I don't want to just control my own life, I want to control yours. Because I think I know what's better for you than you do. I want to control my wife and kids and everybody else. It causes all kinds of problems.

This is not a new problem. It's man's oldest problem, oldest temptation, trying to be God. When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and the devil comes through and tempts them and he says, "If you'll eat this fruit..." He didn't say, "If you'll eat this you'll be like me, the devil." He didn't say, "If you eat this fruit you'll be evil." He said, "If you eat this fruit that God told you not to eat, you'll be God." And Adam and Eve went, "That sounds great!" And ever

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since then men and women have been playing God. These guys were trying to control paradise. Even today we still want to be God ourselves.

This week I received in the mail an amazing direct mail ad piece. It's about 30 pages, a little booklet. It starts off, "Dear friend. This may be the luckiest day of your life. You are one of only a very few selected people to receive this personal memo." If it's personal why didn't he call me by name instead of "Dear friend"? Anyway, it says, "You're going to have prosperity in every area of your life – emotionally, physically, romantically, financially, personally. You'll learn how to control anyone and make any man or woman like you, admire you and love you." I read through this thing. I get to the end and there's a list of nine guarantees. "Thirty days after you receive this kit you will be doing this and much more. Guaranteed.

1. Regardless of physical appearance you can have sexual relationships with beautiful women of your choice in one week or less.
2. You will be such a superior lover that those women will fall in love with you and want to be yours forever.
3. You will be making thousands of dollars each week at first and each day eventually. Guaranteed.
4. You will get rid of all physical illnesses, all physical incompetence, pains, allergies and addiction.
5. You will lose all your fat.
6. You will become very smart quickly, and when you talk everyone will listen.
7. Everyone will become interested in you.
8. Beautiful women and powerful men will almost beg to be your friends.
9. You will get an instant promotion.

So you see, it's almost magical and mystical from this special power called Neo Tech, even an ordinary person, even a first rate nerd like I was, evolved into something with a super human life, the life of the god-man. I spent the past four years writing it all down, step by step, the secret power just as it lifted me from nerd to god-man. Now Neo-Tech will lift you too into a god-man who can take as much sex, power and money as you want from life. Receive my 458 turn-key manual called god-man: our final evolution."

The tragedy is there are people who will buy this. Why? Because deep inside everybody wants to be God. We would like to control it all. You're a little bit more sophisticated than that. You don't go around calling yourself the god-woman or the god-man. You don't run around calling yourself God. But let me tell you something you do. Every single day of your life you make choices and decisions that imply that you are smarter than God. You do it every day of your life. "I know God says to do 'this' but I'm going to do 'this' instead." "I know that God says 'this' is the smart way to handle my money or my life or my relationships but in this case I really think I know what's best." "I know what God says to do but in this case I think this will make me more happy."

Every day of your life you make choices that imply you're smarter than God, that you're wiser than God, and you willfully (and I do too) disobey God and say, "I'm going to do what I think is best." That's called playing God.

How do we do that? How do we play God? Two ways.

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1. By denying our humanity.
2. By trying to control everything.

The more insecure you are in life the more you're going to do these two things. The more insecure you are the more you deny your problems, deny your humanity, and deny your faults, failures and frailties. The more you cover up or put a mask on, you don't want people to get close to you. The more insecure you are the more you don't want people to see your insecurities, and the more insecure you are the more you try to control everything. The more you feel your life is out of control, the more you desperately grab for control and try to control relationships and try to control circumstances and try to control everything around you.

Three different ways we often waste so much time and energy trying to control everything.

1. We often try to deny or control our problems. We use phrases like, "I can handle this... It's not really a problem... I don't need any help... I don't need any counseling... I can quit any time... I can work it out on my own..." We try to deny or we try to hide or we try to control our problems.

We had a TV repairman over to our house a while back. I asked him, "What is the worse damage you've ever seen done to a television?" He said, "When people try to repair it themselves." And how many times have you tried to repair something in your life and made a bigger mess of it?

2. The second area we try to play God is we try to control other people. We do this all the time. Parents try to control their kids. Kids try to control their parents. Wives try to control their husbands. And husbands try to control their wives. Men try to control women. And women try to control men. We're all very familiar with the office politics and all the manipulating that goes on in the world when people try to control each other.

Every one of us has our own preferred mode or method of control. You learned this growing up. Some of you use guilt and shame to control. Some of you do the exact opposite. You try to use praise and affirmation to control but you're still trying to get your own way in that person's life by encouragement. Some of you use anger to control a situation and the threat of blowing up and your temper. Some of you use fear to control people. Some of you use that old time favorite the silent treatment to control. The truth is, everybody has their preferred method to try to control other situations and other people.

3. The other thing we try to deny and control is our pain. That only makes things worse. Have you ever stopped, slowed down long enough to realize how much of your time, how much of your energy, how much of your effort you spend in life trying to either avoid or postpone pain? So much of your life – and you don't even do this consciously – so much of what you do in life, the way you act, the way you respond, the way you deal with other people, so much of that is either an unconscious attempt to either avoid or postpone pain. What that does is it usually just makes the problem worse.

Again, each of us has our own favorite coping devices to deal with pain. It may be eating. It may be not eating. It may be watching lots of television. It may be reading fantasy novels. It

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may be pornography. It may be smoking or drinking or taking drugs or prescription meds. It may be sports. It may be traveling. It may be jumping from relationship to relationship to relationship to avoid the pain. It may be withdrawing yourself into a hole and building a protective wall of depression around you. The truth is everybody in this room has their own preferred method of medicating their pain. Every one of us does. You have a method that you use to try to deny and control the pain in your life. That's your medication.

It causes all kinds of problems. We're going to talk about that. As we look at these beatitudes for getting healthy again each week we're going to hear some stories of people who are working on each step. I'd like for you to hear Debbie's story.

Debbie: Growing up in an abusive and alcoholic home I learned a lot of unhealthy attitudes that plagued my life for years. Being constantly criticized and shamed I became a people pleaser who tried to make everyone else happy and hide my own feelings. Then when I was twelve I was molested by two men in our neighborhood. I'd been taught to never say no to an adult so I hid this secret for fear that I would be blamed and shamed. That only created more unhealthy feelings and actions. I felt bad about myself and would sometimes cut and hit my body because I thought I deserved punishment. My unhealthy attitudes began to affect my physical health and I began to be chronically sick. That only made me feel more needy, more insecure, and more incompetent. Whenever I would ask my mom for help she would yell at me as if I were a big burden to her. Feeling abandoned I eventually just stopped asking for help. I escaped by reading fantasy books which gave me hope that there was something better out there.

By high school I had an extremely low self-esteem and was anxious and depressed all the time. I couldn't recall ever receiving a kiss or a hug or an "I love you," from my folks. I was dying for affection. As a result I got pregnant at fifteen. My parents' response was to shame me with what the neighbors would think and insisted that I get an abortion. It was never mentioned again. When I left home for college I thought I could leave the shame of my childhood behind. I worked very hard at trying to control everything in my life to prove that I was ok. I mean I tried to control every detail of my life. I became a perfectionist thinking that if I could avoid mistakes then no one would find out just how defective and messed up I really was. But the pressure of pretending overwhelmed me and I dropped out of college. That made me feel like an even bigger failure.

Running from all my pain I eloped with my boyfriend Ken. We started a family but as the kids grew my depression worsened. Ken was a workaholic and I felt abandoned again. I told a friend that I was thinking about leaving my marriage. She invited me to her church where they were starting a new series on marriage. We came to Saddleback that Sunday in 1989 and from that moment we knew that we had found our church home.

With all my unhealthy ideas about myself I could never relax at home because of the constant feelings of shame and guilt. I became compulsive just like my mom and drank in the evenings just like my dad did. I was sure that Ken wouldn't love me if he really knew me so I would often ask him to reassure me of his love. In 1993 Pastor Rick taught the Road to Recovery series. I listened to those tapes over and over. I learned that the first step back to health was to stop denying my problem and to stop trying to control everything. I realized that I had been trying to play God in order to control my pain, stop my hurt and hide

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my insecurities. I committed my life to Christ and was baptized. I took class 101 and 201 but in Class 301 I heard a verse that changed my life. Romans 9:21 says, "*What right do you have, a human being, to cross examine God? The pot has no right to say to the potter, 'Why did you make me this shape?' The potter can do what he likes with the clay.*" That really spoke to me because I didn't like how God had made me. All my life I wished I could be anyone but me. That night I realized that God had made me exactly the way He wanted me to be and He had a good plan and purpose for my life.

With great apprehension I decided to start attending Celebrate Recovery here on Friday nights. I knew that I had to stop living in denial. I just couldn't stop the grief, hurt and anger any longer. One night in my small group a woman shared exactly what was on my heart and I was too afraid to share. She gave me the courage to share my story too. I shared about my shame and anxiety and was relieved when they didn't make fun of me or draw attention to my nervousness. I was even more surprised when more people talked to me afterwards than ever before. This place is filled with unconditional love. With my background it was hard to learn to trust people and open up and admit all I was feeling inside. I had built up a pretty big wall of denial and protection. One night I went home and leaned my head up against the shower wall and cried, "Lord, I just can't do this any more." At that moment I felt an incredible inner healing and knew for the first time what it meant to truly let go and let God. The chains of guilt and shame just seemed to fall off of me.

I'm so grateful for this church because it was here that I experienced God's grace for the first time. I got a glimpse of how God sees me and I felt acceptable to Him and to myself for the first time. When I took an honest look at my life it all began to make sense. As I've continued to grow and work the steps on the road to recovery and health I've discovered that everyone is on a journey to spiritual maturity and healing. Even people who seem to have it all together have hidden unresolved issues that cause them to hurt others and themselves. I wish everyone could take the first step towards healing. It is humbling to admit you need help from God and others. But I would have never changed if I had not done it. I used to wish that I could do my life over again. Now I can see how God wanted to use even the bad things of my life for good. The Bible says in Isaiah 61:7 "*Instead of their shame My people shall receive a double portion and instead of disgrace they will rejoice.*" For me that was God's promise of healthy, shame free living. With God's help I am now becoming what He wants me to be. Two years ago I got my college degree and I've been accepted into graduate school for next fall. My husband Ken has become my best friend and he has given me all the things I missed in childhood and more. Ken and I are both leaders at Celebrate Recovery and this year we'll celebrate our 22nd wedding anniversary. Taking the steps of getting healthy again has taken us to a whole new level of intimacy. Finally God is using me to share His grace and make peace with both of my parents. My dad came to my graduation and said, "I love you," to me for the first time. Then two months ago my dad passed away while I was by his side. I know that if it were not for God's healing I would not have been able to even attend my dad's funeral let alone be a light and source of support for my family.

In closing I want to encourage you to stop hiding your hidden hurts, regrets and resentment and stop trying to control everything. Just admit that you need God's help, the first step to getting healthy.

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If the cause of most of your problems boils down to you trying to control everything and denial and playing God, then what are the consequences of playing God? There are three.

1. The first consequence of playing God is frustration.

It is frustrating trying to play a role that you weren't meant to play. Paul talks about this in Romans 7. *"It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right I inevitably do what is wrong. There is something else deep within me, my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight."* He says there's a war going on inside of me. There's a conflict, a struggle, a frustration going on inside of me and the things that I know I want to do that are right and good and healthy I end up not doing. And the things that I know are wrong and unhealthy and mess up relationships I end of doing. But I can't change. I can't stop. And I can't control all my problems. It's frustrating.

Have you ever been to Chucky Cheese? There's a great game called Wacka Wacka. It has this big mallet and these little moles pop up and you beat them down. When you whack one down, three more pop up. You whack those down and three more pop up. You whack those down and five more pop up.

Folks, that machine is a parable of life! I don't know a better description of life. You've got a problem in your life and you whack it down and just about the time you whack it down, three more pop up. Then you whack down those three problems and five more pop up. It is so frustrating because you can't keep up.

If you're so "in control" how come you can't even unplug the machine? You are not in control. Face it. You don't control a single problem in your life. Most of those come at you from the outside and you just don't know they're coming. You don't know what problems you're going to have tomorrow much less next week or next year. You are not God and you are not in control. The more you try to pretend you are the more frustrated you're going to get. The problems just keep coming at you and you can't handle them all at once. You weren't made to handle them all by yourself. Frustration.

2. The second indicator that you're playing God is fatigue.

When you get tired that is a warning sign that you're trying to play God again. It's tiring playing God. It's tiring trying to control everything. It's trying to be the manager of the universe. It's tiring trying to pretend that you've got it all together. Denial requires enormous amounts of emotional energy. Energy that could be used in problem solving is actually diverted and used in problem-denying and problem-hiding and problem-avoiding. It's a waste of your energy because it doesn't work. When you try to hide it increases fatigue in your life.

David says in Psalm 32: *"My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide them."* Circle "stopped trying to hide them."

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That is the whole point of Step One in Getting Healthy Again. That's the whole point of the first beatitude. *"Blessed are you when you admit that you are spiritually helpless."* Stop trying to hide them.

Denial is just as old as Adam and Eve. They blew it. They made a mistake. They sinned. So they run off and hide behind a bush. God had made them, God had made the fruit, God had made the bush and they think they're hiding?? In fact, you say to someone "Have you ever talked to God about your hang up?" They answer, "I wouldn't want Him to know." Who are you kidding? He knows. Stop denying.

We hide a lot of things. We hide our fears. We hide our faults. We hide our frustration and most of all we hide our feelings. One of the ways we try to run and hide from the problems in our lives is by staying busy. If I stay busy then I don't have to think about that pain, that hurt, that background. We stay busy.

Now you can stay busy with a lot of good or bad things. You can stay busy with work and be a workaholic. You can stay busy at home with your family. You can stay busy with hobbies, with sports. You can stay busy with church. You can stay busy with ministry and helping other people. You can stay busy with travel. There are a thousand ways to keep yourself busy so when you go home at night you don't have to think about the pain. You don't have to face it. You keep running and running.

If you're always tired, if you're always fatigued, if you're always out of energy you might just stop and ask yourself one question: What pain, what problem am I really running from? What pain or problem is driving me to be so busy like this that I'm tired all the time? Fatigue is a really good indicator that you're playing God. That you're either a) denying your humanity or b) trying to control everything.

Frustration. Fatigue. There's a third indicator when you're playing God.

3. Failure.

There is one job in life you are guaranteed to fail at. Playing God. Because you're not big enough. Solomon says in Proverbs 28 *"You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up then God will show mercy to you."*

We're going to fail if we try to play God but since none of us wants to be considered a failure we invest enormous amounts of time and energy in what I call Image Management. We don't want people to really know what we're like. So we wear masks and we play games and we assume roles and we kiss up and we cover our blemishes. I read a quote the other day from super model Cindy Crawford. She said, "Even Cindy Crawford doesn't look like Cindy Crawford without three hours of make up and hair." Nobody really looks that good. They have to cover it up and airbrush everything. We don't just cover up our physical blemishes. More important we cover up our emotional blemishes because those things scare us far more than the way we look. We want to cover up all of our emotional blemishes. We don't want anybody to see the hurts, the habits and the hang-ups that are messing us up on the inside. We run around living in denial and as a result we have frustration, fatigue and failure.

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What's the solution? What is the first step to getting healthy? We're going to look at all eight steps and I hope you'll stay with me all eight weeks. The first step to help is to admit I need God's help. Stop the denial and admit I need God's help.

Admitting that I'm not God means recognizing three facts of life that are true whether I want to admit them or not.

1. I admit that I am powerless to change my past. No matter how much I regret it and no matter how much I resent it, I cannot change my past. My past is past. It's over. All that regret and resentment do is just make me more miserable now. All the regret and all the resentment in the world isn't going to change it at all. I am powerless to change and control my past.

2. I admit that I am powerless to control other people. I can't control myself much less other people. I'm not responsible for other people's actions or decisions in life. I am responsible for me. Responsible means response-able. I am able to respond. You may do something bad to me but I am able to respond right back. That's my responsibility. I am not responsible for all the hurts you do to me but I am responsible for how I respond. That's my choice.

3. I am powerless to change my unhealthy habits, because willpower is not enough.

Some of you think, "I can do this. I can solve all my problems." No, you can't. If you could have you would have but since you can't you won't. You say, "This next time is going to be different!" It's not going to be any different because willpower is not enough. You need God and you need the steps to getting healthy again. It takes God and His steps to getting healthy. All the willpower in the world isn't going to change you. You'll do it for a while and then you'll relapse no matter what it is.

Paul admitted that he was powerless to change. He admitted his weaknesses. In 2 Corinthians 1 he says this "*We saw how powerless we were to help ourselves but that was good for then we put everything into the hands of God who alone could save us for He can even raise the dead.*" God can do what you can't do.

I want you to hear Larry's story:

Larry: When I was in school I wanted to excel at everything. I had to be the best athlete, the smartest student, the most popular. I was elected to numerous positions in student government. I held many school records for my athletic skills. I received many awards for scholastic achievement. I received a scholarship to a local university. Everyone said I was destined for greatness.

But in spite of the success and the accolades my life was really empty inside and I was full of rage and fear. During my senior year in high school I went out one night with a friend and drank until I passed out. I loved the way that booze made me feel. It made life bearable. It became my habit and nothing else mattered. Needless to say I lost my scholarship and I flunked out of school. Shortly after that I had an idea and decided to get married. I figured out that if I got married my life would straighten out. My best thinking! We had two children within the first four years. My drinking and drug use got worse. Needless to say it created marital problems. I was convinced that if my wife would just get

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off my back and quit nagging everything would be fine. She was the problem, not me. I refused to face and admit my unhealthy habits and my marriage ended six years later. With no accountability my abuse progressed quickly and I went from one relationship to another with no regard for the other person's feelings or needs. I roared through people's lives like a tornado leaving wreckage in my path. I then met a woman who loved to party as much as I did so I married her. But after several years of life in the fast lane she threatened to leave me if I didn't clean up my life. I didn't and three months later she filed for divorce.

My heart was broken. I wanted to get healthy again but I just couldn't do it on my own. My love affair with alcohol and drugs was stronger than my willpower. Three months later I had what I call a moment of clarity. I realized that I was powerless to change my life. Nothing, absolutely nothing worked. So one night I knelt down on the floor of my lonely bedroom and I said a simple prayer, "God, if You're real I need help." One week later I got a call from a fellow employee who asked me to come down to his office and see him. He said, "I don't know what's happening in your life but I do know you're looking for an answer. I want to share something with you that has brought more peace, more comfort, more direction to my life." With that he reached down and pulled a Bible out of his desk. He said, "I want you to have this." I was overwhelmed by emotions. I began to sob. John came around the desk and just held me for what seemed like an eternity. Then he whispered, "Jesus wants to change your life." A few months later while I was backpacking in the Sierras I sat on a bolder next to a creek and I made a conscious decision to turn my life over to Jesus Christ. But at the time I didn't realize it was a daily decision.

Over the years I've had many ups and downs and victories and defeats. One time I relapsed after being sober for eighteen months. The next thirteen months were the worse time in my life. I knew the right thing to do but I couldn't seem to do it. The loneliness, the guilt, the remorse, the self-hatred was more than I could stand. I often thought of the wonderful, intimate fellowship that I had had with God. How I missed that. My lowest point happened a few days before Christmas in 1983 when I found myself standing on the eighth floor balcony of my office building wondering whether I should jump. That scared me! The next morning I made a telephone call to get some counseling. It was tough admitting that I needed help. I ended up joining AA and I have now been sober for over seventeen years. Eight years ago most people would have thought I had all the things you needed for joy and happiness. I had a beautiful wife, a house. We belonged to the country club. I had a successful business. I wasn't drinking anymore but I was miserable. I needed something more than to just be sober. My relationship with God had taken a back seat to everything else. I rarely prayed, I rarely read my Bible. I didn't go to church. One day my AA sponsor said to me, "I want you to get involved in a church." So my wife and I began attending Saddleback. Little did I know how badly I would need the spiritual support in the days ahead.

In 1996 I faced three major crises in my life. First I lost the hearing in one of my ears overnight. We eventually figured out that I had a brain tumor. Second, my wife and I separated because of what seemed to be insurmountable problems. Then just four days after we separated my son called and said, "Dad, would you help me with my alcohol and drug problem?" By now, I knew I couldn't handle it on my own. So my son and I started attending Celebrate Recovery here at Saddleback together on Friday nights. As we worked each of the steps toward getting healthy again, Troy committed his life to Christ. And I

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found a level of strength and encouragement and hope that I never had before. My wife and I were separated for ten months. It appeared as though we would never reconcile. Circumstances gave us no hope. My secular friends suggested that I get a divorce. But God's word had made it clear that divorce was not an option. I'd often cry out to God, "First, make me spiritually and emotionally healthy then restore our marriage." I was forced to live God's words where He says, "My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in your weakness."

God wanted to teach me some lessons and the vessel He wanted to use was my wife. Early last year we decided to reconcile our marriage. This never would have happened if I hadn't learned the steps of getting healthy again here at Saddleback. As we followed His instructions, God began to miraculously heal our dead marriage. We've still got a long ways to go but God saved our relationship and we're building a healthy marriage on the right foundation now.

As I was writing this testimony upstairs I heard her laughing downstairs as she watched a movie on TV. It brought tears of joy to my eyes. Because for many years there wasn't any laughter in our home. Jesus has replaced our frustration and failure with genuine joy. That's why today I have a passion for encouraging people to not give up on their marriages. If your marriage is unhealthy or dying, please don't give up on it. All things are possible with God. Just admit to Him that you can't control it, you can't change it and you can't make it healthy on your own. Then, both of you, turn it over completely to Him and watch Him perform a miracle in your hearts. The love will return. God can do for you what you can't do for yourself.

You may be thinking, "My problem isn't that bad." Let me ask you a question. How bad does it have to get before you ask for help? How bad does it have to get before you realize it's not in control by you?

It is the stupid habit of human nature that we rarely change until the pain exceeds the fear of change. Finally. We just deny it until it gets so bad that we get crushed and then think, "I guess I'd better get some help." Well, *duh!* Why don't you save yourself a little bit of misery and admit now what you're going to inevitably admit. You're not God and you need God because your life is unmanageable without Him. You will learn that someday if not now. Why don't you just admit it?

One guy said to me, "The acid of my pain finally ate through the wall of my denial." Pretty good analogy. Pain is God's megaphone. God shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's way of getting our attention. Something is not right in your life. Something is unhealthy. Something is out of whack. A relationship, a habit, a hurt. Something needs to be corrected. Pain is the warning light.

So my question is: How's your pain level? Not too bad? Congratulations. Why don't you listen to the little pain you've got before it turns into some massive pain years from now?

Some of you are feeling enormous pain. I have no doubt about that. You feel like you're at the end of your rope. May I say to you congratulations you're at Step One. "*Blessed are those who*

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realize they are spiritually helpless.” Or as The Message paraphrase says of the first beatitude “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule.” This is why Jesus Christ came to earth.

“When we were unable to help ourselves at the moment of our need Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ came to earth to give you grace and grace is the power to change. It’s the power that you don’t have. It’s the power to change the things that you don’t have control of in your life. He offers it to you. So what happens if I come to God and say, “I admit I’m not God. You’re God and I’m not. I’ve been trying to act like God by denying my humanity, by trying to pretend like everything’s under control. But it’s not. And I need to ask Your help. I admit I’m helpless.” What will happen if I admit that?

“God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless.” What a deal!

Prayer:

I’m going to pray for you but before we close let me ask you, What is unhealthy or out of balance in your life? Is it your pace of life? Is it your diet? Is it your financial situation? Is it a relationship that is unhealthy? Is it holding on to the past? Perfectionism? Is it unresolved resentment or anger? Is it your need to control everything or to please other people? What’s unhealthy in your life? Your worries? Your habits? Overwork? Addictions? Memories? What needs changing?

I want to invite you to join the rest of us for the next eight weeks as together we take these eight steps of getting healthy again. But I want to ask you will you take the first step today? For many this will be the hardest step – admitting it. Why? Why is it so hard? It means being honest and facing up to issues that you have not wanted to face and have scared you to death. And they’re so painful and scary you have run from them for maybe years. It’s going to take courage. So that’s what I’m going to pray for you right now. I’m going to pray for courage for you. Then you can follow me in a prayer.

Father, because none of us is perfect we all have areas in our lives that are unhealthy and are out of balance. Some of these areas are so painful we can hardly even stand to think about them. I know that there are people here today who have struggled with shame and low self-esteem like Debbie. And there are others who are here in a marriage that’s stuck or cold or dying or maybe even separated like Larry went through. There are many others here who are struggling with habits or hurts or memories or the fear of being out of control. Give them the courage to take the first step to health right now.

Now you pray. Say this. Follow me in this prayer in your mind. “Dear God, I want to take the first step to getting healthy again today. I realize I’m not God. I’ve often tried to control things like I was God and I’m sorry. I’ve tried to deny my problems by staying busy or doing other things. But I’m not running any more. Today I’m asking You for help. Please help me get healthy again. I admit that I am helpless to control this tendency to do things that I know are unhealthy for me. I humbly ask You to take all the pieces of my unmanageable life and begin the process of healing. Help me to stick with this process for the next eight weeks. In Your name, I pray. Amen.”