Lesson 1 – Denial

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.

I know that nothing good lives 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

Tonight we begin a journey together, a journey down the road of recovery. This journey begins with Principle 1, where we admit that we are powerless to control our tendency to do the wrong thing and that our lives have become unmanageable, out of control. But before we begin this exciting journey together, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- Am I going to let my past failures prevent me from taking this journey?
- Am I afraid to change? Or, what are my fears of the future?

Let's look at Hebrews 12:1 (TLB):

Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us.

Hebrews 12:1

There are two things I would like to point out in this verse. First, God has a particular race, a unique plan, for each of us. A plan for good, not a life full of dependencies, addictions, and obsessions.

The second thing is that *we need to be willing* to get rid of all the unnecessary baggage, the past failures, in our lives that keep us stuck. Again, it says, “Let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up.”

For many of us, our past hurts, hang-ups, and habits hold us back, trip us up! Many of us are stuck in bitterness over what someone has done to us. We continue to hold on to the hurt and we refuse to forgive the ones who had hurt us.

You may have been **hurt deeply.** Perhaps you were abused as a child, or maybe you were or are in a marriage where your spouse committed adultery. Or just is unwilling to forgive you.

I want you to know that I hurt for you. I’m truly sorry for you, sorry that you had to go through that hurt. But holding on to that hurt and not being willing to forgive the person who hurt you in the past is allowing them to continue to hurt you today, in the present.

Working this Christ-centered recovery program will, with God’s power, allow you to find the courage and strength to forgive them. Now don’t get all stressed out. You don’t have to forgive them tonight! But as you travel down you road to recovery, God will help you find the willingness to forgive them and be free of their hold on your life.

Some of you are bound by **guilt**. You keep beating yourself up over some past failure. You’re trapped, stuck in your guilt. You think that no one anywhere is as bad as you are, that no one could love the *real* you, and that no one could ever forgive you for the terrible things that you have done.

You’re wrong. God can. That’s why Jesus went to the cross, for our sins. He knows everything you’ve ever done and everything you’ve ever experienced. And there are many here tonight that have faced similar failures and hurts in their life and have accepted Christ’s forgiveness. They are here to encourage and support you.

The apostle Paul had a lot to regret about his past. He even participated in Stephen’s murder. Yet in Philippians 3:13 (TLB) he tells us:

> *No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.*
>
> **Philippians 3:13**

Here's the bottom line if you want to be free from your past hurts, hang-ups, and habits: You need to deal with your past bitterness and guilt once and for all. You need to do as Isaiah 43:18 tells us:

> *Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.*
>
> **Isaiah 43:18**

That doesn't mean *ignore* the past. **You need to *learn* from your past, offer forgiveness, make amends, and then release it. Only then can you be free from your guilt, grudges, and grief!**

Let's face it, we have all stumbled over a hurt, hang-up, or habit. But the race isn't over yet. God isn't interested in how we started, but how we finish the race.

You may worry about your future and are afraid to change. We all worry about things that we do not have any control over and do not have the power to change. And we all know worrying is a lack of trust in God.

The truth is, we can say without any doubt or fear:

> *The Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me.*
>
> **Hebrews 13:6**

You may have been in your hurt, habit, or hang-up for so long that it has become your identity. You may be thinking, "What will happen if I really give recovery a chance? Will I change? If I give up my old hurts, hang-ups, and habits, what will I become? Who will I be?"

You may have been abusing alcohol, prescription drugs, or food. You're afraid of what you will do without your substance of choice.

You may have been enabling someone in a dysfunctional relationship for years. Perhaps you wonder, "What if I change and my alcoholic husband gets mad at me?"

God doesn't want you to stay frozen in an unhealthy relationship or a bad habit. He wants you to do your part in becoming healthy.

Even if our past was extremely painful, however, we may still resist change and the freedom that can be found in really working this program. Because of our fear of the unknown or because of our despair, we just close our minds because we think that we don't deserve any better.

As you work the steps remember 1 John 4:18 (NCV):

> *Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear.*
>
> **1 John 4:18**

You are not here by mistake tonight. This room is full of changed lives. It is my prayer for each of you that you will not let your past failures or your fear of your future stop you from giving Celebrate Recovery a real try.

Are you wearing a mask of denial tonight? Before you can make any progress in your recovery, you need to face your denial. As soon as you remove your mask, your recovery begins—or begins again! It doesn't matter if you're new in recovery or have been in recovery, working the steps for years. Denial can rear its ugly head and return at any time! You may trade addictions or get into a new relationship that's unhealthy for you in a different way than the previous one. So this lesson is for all of us.

What is DENIAL?

Denial has been defined as "a false system of beliefs that are not based on reality" and "a self-protecting behavior that keeps us from honestly facing the truth."

As kids we all learned various coping skills. They came in handy when we didn't get the attention we wanted from our parents and others or to block our pain and our fears.

For a time these coping systems worked. But as the years progressed they confused and clouded our view of the truth of our lives.

As we grew, our perception of ourselves and our expectations of all those around us also grew. But because we retained our childish methods of coping, our perceptions of reality became increasingly more unrealistic and distorted.

Our coping skills grew into denial, and most of our relationships ended up broken or less fulfilling than they could have been.

Did you ever deny that your parents had problems? Did you ever deny that you had problems? The truth is, we can all answer yes to these questions to some extent. But, for some of us, that denial turned to shame and guilt.

Denial is the "Pink Elephant" sitting in the middle of the living room. No one in the family talks about it or acknowledges it in any way. Do any of the following comments sound familiar to you?

- "Can't we stop talking about it? Talking only makes it worse."
- "If we *don't* talk about it, it will go away."
- "Honey, let's pretend that it didn't really happen."
- "If I tell her it hurts me when she says that, I'm afraid she will leave me."

- “He really doesn’t drink that much.”
- “It really doesn’t hurt when he does that; I’m fine!”
- “Paul drinks more than I do.”
- “Joan has been married three times; I’ve only been married twice.”
- “I eat because you make me so mad!”
- “If you didn’t nag me all the time, I wouldn’t ...”
- “Look honey, I have a tough job; I work hard. I need a few drinks to relax. It doesn’t mean that I have a problem.”

Folks, that’s DENIAL.

As I said earlier, before we can take the first step of our recovery, we must first face and admit our denial. God says in Jeremiah 6:14 (TLB):

> *You can’t heal a wound by saying it’s not there!*
>
> **JEREMIAH 6:14**

Okay, let’s look at tonight’s acrostic:

DENIAL

Disables our feelings

Energy lost

Negates growth

Isolates us from God

Alienates us from our relationships

Lengthens the pain

DISABLES OUR FEELINGS

The *D* in denial stands for DISABLES our feelings. Hiding our feelings, living in denial, freezes our emotions and binds us. Understanding and feeling our feelings is where we find freedom.

Second Peter 2:19 (GNB) tells us:

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of destructive habits—for a man is a slave of anything that has conquered him.

Peter 2:19

For me, the basic test of freedom is not what I'm free to do, it's what I'm free not to do! I'm free not to take that drink.

We find freedom to feel our true feelings when we find Christ and step out of denial.

Energy Lost

The next letter in denial is *E*, which stands for ENERGY lost.

A major side-effect of denial is anxiety. Anxiety causes us to waste precious energy dealing with past hurts and failures and the fear of the future. As you go though this program you will learn that it is only in the present that positive change can occur. Worrying about the past and dreading the future makes us unable to live and enjoy God's plans for us in the present.

We let our fears and our worries paralyze us, but the only lasting way we can be free from them is by giving them to God. Psalm 146:7 (TLB) says:

He frees the prisoners,... he lifts the burdens from those bent down beneath their loads.

Psalm 146:7

If you will transfer the energy required to maintain your denial into learning God's truth, a healthy love for others and yourself will occur. As you depend more and more on your Higher Power, Jesus Christ, you will see the light of truth and reality.

Let's move on to the *N* in denial.

Negates Growth

Denial NEGATES growth.

We are as sick as our secrets and, again, we cannot grow in recovery until we are ready to step out of our denial into the truth. God is waiting to take your hand and bring you out. The Bible says:

They cried to the Lord in their troubles, and he rescued them! He led them from the darkness and shadow of death and snapped their chains.

Psalm 107:13–14

As you travel the road of your recovery you will come to understand that God never wastes a hurt; God will never waste your darkness. But He can't use it unless you step out of your denial into the light of His truth.

Isolates Us From God

Denial also ISOLATES us from God.

Adam and Eve are a great example of how secrets and denial separate us from true fellowship with God. After they sinned, their secret separated them from God. Genesis 3:7 tells us that Adam and Eve hid from God because they felt naked and ashamed.

Of course, good old Adam tried to rationalize. He said to God:

> *The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree.*
>
> **Genesis 3:12**

First he tried to blame God, saying, “The woman you put here with me ...” Then he tried to blame it on Eve: “She gave me some fruit.”

Remember, God’s light shines on the truth. Our denial keeps us in the dark.

> *God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*
>
> **1 John 1:5–7**

Alienates Us From Our Relationships

Our denial not only isolates us from God, it ALIENATES us from our relationships.

Denial tells us we are getting away with it. We think no one knows, but they do. But while denial may shield us from the hurt, it also keeps us from helping ourselves or the people we love the most. We don’t dare reveal our true selves to others for fear of what they will think or say if they knew the real us. We must protect ourselves—our secrets—at any cost. So we isolate ourselves and thereby minimize the risk of exposure and possible rejection from others. But at what price? The eventual loss of all our important relationships.

What’s the answer? Listen to Ephesians 4:25:

> *Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves.*
>
> **Ephesians 4:25**

Remember it is always better to tell the ugly truth rather than a beautiful lie.

Lengthens The Pain

Finally, denial LENGTHENS the pain.

We have the false belief that denial protects us from our pain. In reality, denial allows our pain to fester and grow and to turn into shame and guilt. Denial extends your hurt. It multiplies your problems.

Truth, like surgery, may hurt for a while, but it cures. God promises us in Jeremiah 30:17:

> *I will give you back your health again and heal your wounds.*
>
> **Jeremiah 30:17**

Tonight I encourage you to step out of your denial! Walking out of your denial is not easy. Taking off that mask is hard. Everything about you shouts, “Don’t do it! It’s not safe!” But it is safe. It’s safe at Celebrate Recovery. Here you have people who care about you and who love you for who you are—people who will stand beside you as truth becomes a way of life.

Jesus tells us:

> *Know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*
>
> **John 8:32**

Step out of your denial so you can step into Jesus’ unconditional love and grace and begin your healing journey of recovery.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS:

DENIAL

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MATTHEW 5:3 (GNB)

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

"I know that nothing good lives 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 (NIV)

D_____

"They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of destructive habits — for a man is a slave of anything that has conquered him."
2 PETER 2:19 (GNB)

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"He frees the prisoners ... he lifts the burdens from those bent down beneath their loads."
PSALM 146:7-8 (TLB)

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"They cried to the Lord in their troubles, and he rescued them! He led them from their darkness and shadow of death and snapped their chains."
PSALM 107:13-14 (TLB)

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"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."
1 JOHN 1:5-7 (NIV)

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God's promise: "I will give you back your health again and heal your wounds."
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