

STEP 1

We admit that we are powerless over our addictions and codependence—that our lives have become unmanageable.

Those of us who struggle with addictions or codependence may have many reasons we pick up a book like this, show up at a support group or go to a counselor or treatment facility. Some of us have ruined our marriages, some have lost our jobs, some are despised by our children, and some are so depressed we have nowhere else to turn. There may be many different explanations, but all of us have one compelling, underlying motivation: a sense of abject desperation. For a long time, those of us who struggle with chemical dependence, sexual addictions, eating disorders, compulsive gambling and codependence have tried to hide our addictions. We lied to those who trusted us the most, and we excused ourselves by saying, “I couldn’t help it.” Our excuses and rationalizing succeeded for months and even years, but now, we have shattered homes, shattered health and shattered hopes. We’ve lost everything.

Unmanageable? Yes, we’re alone, hopeless and helpless. We’ve “hit the bottom,” but there’s good news: We’ve come to the one place where we’re ready to get help.

If you wonder if you have a problem with a substance or a behavior, read the stories about people who struggle with addictions, and look at the self-tests. You disconnected from others, he eats a whole pie and a box of cookies. In this stage, family members know something is wrong. Some of them avoid the person, but the compassion of others causes them to worry insatiably about the person who’s wrecking his life.

- **Dependence**—In this stage, the substance or behavior is the focal point of the person’s life. Money, time and relationships now exist only to provide the drug, pay for the prostitute, get a slimmer body, eat more food to feel warm inside or get enough money to win big and get out of debt. If substances are used, those using them develop a physiological tolerance. Now, more and more of the substance is needed to get the same feeling. Though their behavior is now having clearly negative effects on them and others, they rationalize, excuse and minimize the problems. Caring family members now are truly alarmed by the behavior of those they love. Sometimes they yell and demand change, and other times they remain quiet and hope the problem will just go away. When they can help the wayward person, they feel indispensable and powerful, but when they fail, they feel deeply ashamed. Gradually, they develop a compulsion to fix the loved one’s problems. All of family life revolves around the person abusing substances or behaviors, but they try to avoid the subject like the plague!

- **Addiction**—A person becomes addicted to alcohol and drugs when stopping their use causes withdrawal symptoms. The effects of tolerance now means they have to drink far more and use more or stronger drugs . . . not just to get high, but to prevent tremors, nausea, anxiety and seizures. For addictive behaviors, such as sexual addiction, compulsive gambling, overeating and codependence, the “drug” that keeps the person high is adrenaline. They are on constant alert, compulsively seeking the behavior and defiantly insisting they have no problem at all. In this stage, the life of the family is consumed by the addicted person’s choices and behavior, and others’ needs are often overlooked and neglected. Family members plead and threaten in attempts to control

the person who is clearly out of control. In response, the addict often makes dramatic promises to change, but after a few days, things are back the way they were—miserable and confusing.

People who find themselves in the first two stages (use and misuse) don't necessarily progress to the other stages. Those who abuse substances or behaviors, however, often progress to dependence and addiction.

- borrows money to gamble; debts escalate
- lies to hide behavior from family, friends and employer; becomes irritable
- negative impact on relationships, work and health

Codependence

- alternately excuses or explodes about the addict's behavior
- feels responsible for the addict's poor choices
- feels indispensable when successful at controlling the addict's life and ashamed when unsuccessful
- believes the addict's promises that "I won't do it again."

As we saw in the outline of the stages, each addiction or compulsive behavior can begin innocently, but as it progresses, it becomes the most important thing in the person's life. Every other priority, goal and relationship is pushed aside so the person can have the next high, the next sexual encounter, the next experience with food, the next win or the next experience of feeling good by fixing what's bad in others.

The first step in recovery is a simple one, but it requires courage to admit that our addictions are controlling—and ruining—our lives. If you are desperate for change, if you can't stand to walk down the path of destruction a minute longer and you are crying out for help, you are right where you need to be. That's what Step 1 is all about.

Each of the steps in this section contains several meditations to help you reflect on God's character, his grace and strength and our need for him to work powerfully in our lives. We have provided some space for you to write your answers. Take time to think, pray and write. The act of writing helps many people to clarify their thoughts and keeps them on track. If you need more room to write, use a notebook so you can keep your reflections confidential and in one place.

The resources listed after each set of stories in the color pages contain contact information about organizations that sponsor groups for each addiction, a brief list of books on each topic and options for treatment facilities. The stories, Twelve Steps and meditations in this New Testament are designed only to get people started in recovery. Take additional steps to get appropriate and effective help for you and those you love.

may find that you need more help than you thought! Here are some common problems of people with these addictions:

Chemical dependence (alcohol, drugs, inhalants, prescriptions, etc.):

- thinks that using will solve problems
- breaks self-imposed limits on using
- lies to hide using from loved ones, employer and friends

- negative impact on relationships, work and health
- has to use to feel normal

Sexual addiction

- can't control sexual appetite
- lies to hide behavior from others
- negative impact on relationships, work and health
- creates and lives in a fantasy world of sexual exploits

Eating disorders

- anorexia: intense fear of gaining weight, obsessive interest in what others eat, distorted perception of body shape and weight, excessive exercise
- bulimia: uncontrollable urges to eat vast amounts of food, coupled with the urge to purge by vomiting or the use of laxatives
- compulsive overeating: using vast amounts of food to feel safe and secure

Compulsive gambling

- always looking for the next "big win," unreasonable optimism
- What would it mean for you (in your shame and loneliness as an addict or codependent) to realize that Jesus, the King of kings, wants to spend time with you to show you how much he loves you?
- Jesus, like this sick woman, I'm desperate for you. I need you to touch my life.

MEDITATION

Desperate

Turn to Luke 8:40–48 (p. 94) and read the story of the sick woman who was desperate for Jesus to change her condition.

Luke tells us that this woman had tried everything she could try to change her life. For twelve years, she had gone to doctor after doctor to find a cure for her hemorrhage. But none could help her. In that culture, they believed sickness was a visible symptom of internal sin, so this dear, sick woman was also shamed by her community. Somehow, she heard that a traveling preacher who had miraculous powers was coming through her town. She joined the crowd around him, and when he walked by, she hid on the ground and stuck out her hand to touch the hem of his cloak. Her faith wasn't well informed; she didn't know much about this preacher. But her abject desperation gave her enough courage to try anything!

- Can you identify with this woman's sense of desperation? What are some reasons she felt desperate? What are some reasons you feel desperate for change?

As soon as she touched his garment, the woman was healed. She could have walked away with her need miraculously met, but that wasn't enough for Jesus. He wanted to have a relationship with her. Though he was in a hurry to go somewhere else, he stopped, turned, found her in the crowd and spent some time talking to her.

- How do you think she may have felt when Jesus stopped and walked back toward her? How do you think she felt as Jesus looked into her eyes

and showed how much he cared for her as a person?

This is expressive of our deepest feelings, but find ourselves emotionally withdrawn. We may promise ourselves that we will spend more time with our children, but continue to make work our highest priority. All of these gaps between our intentions and our actions are evidence of powerlessness.

Most of us attempt to bridge the gap between our intentions and our behavior by trying harder to do things differently. But trying harder doesn't always work. In fact, sometimes the harder we try, the more unmanageable our lives become. Twelve Step programs begin with the admission that we cannot make the changes that need to be made by using willpower alone. Whether we believe we are addicted or not, the lie that we are smart enough or competent enough or powerful enough to manage our lives on our own will eventually be shown for what it is—an attempt to play God.

It takes courage to face our powerlessness. Paul exhibits just that kind of courage in this text. He tells the truth about his powerlessness. He does things he doesn't want to do—just like all of us who are impacted by the addictive process. Amazingly, this admission of powerlessness can be the beginning of a dramatic spiritual change in our lives.

- In this passage in Romans, Paul talks about an internal warfare. It's the warfare between the part of us that wants to change and the part of us that resists change. How have you experienced this inner conflict?
- Paul says that doing good is not a simple decision. He continues to do what he does not want to do. There is a breakdown between his will and his behavior. He says, "The evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." What do you wish you could stop doing to yourself and to others?
- Most of us would prefer to believe that we can control our lives and manage our affairs without help. In light of your answers to the first two Immediately after Peter's prayer, Jesus reached out to steady his friend. Then Jesus asked him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"
- What do you think was the look on Jesus's face and the tone of his voice when he asked Peter that question?
- What was the response of others in the boat when they saw this scene of rescue and this encouragement to believe Jesus more? In what ways does this passage help you trust him with your desperate need to be rescued?
- Lord Jesus, Peter's prayer wasn't long and eloquent. Mine's not either. Lord, save me!