

STEP 2

We believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

A common definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results. Those of us who struggle with addictions to chemicals, food, sex, gambling and fixing others' problems often fall into the category of being insane because we keep drinking, drugging, starving, bingeing, looking for the next big win or trying to control uncontrollable people, and we assure ourselves, "This time, it'll be different." But it's not.

Addicts and codependents live in a world of confusion. We don't know why we keep doing the same destructive behaviors over and over again, but we can't stop doing them. We feel tremendous shame for being out of control, and we find ourselves in the pits of guilt for what we're doing to those we love. But we can't quit on our own. In Step 1, we admitted that we need help. In fact, we're desperate for it! Now in Step 2, we turn to God, a Power greater than ourselves, to provide the help we need.

But who is this God we turn to? What is he like? How can we relate to him? Those questions have been asked for centuries. Thankfully, they are answered in the pages of Scripture and the testimonies of countless believers who have been transformed by the God they have found. The Old Testament tells us that God created the universe, "and it was good"—at least for a while. He created people with the freedom to choose, and sadly, they chose to walk away from God. He could have been bitter and washed his hands of them (and us!), but he didn't.

Many psychologists say that the stages of grief take at least two years to resolve a significant loss, and most of us who struggle with addictions have suffered very significant losses. This insight gives us patience and persistence to keep going through the painful memories and emotions until we arrive at the last stage.

- **Acceptance**—God made us with the capacity to grieve losses so that we can learn valuable lessons and move on with our lives. This process can be excruciating, and there are no shortcuts. If we keep taking steps down this path, we eventually realize that the wounds heal, the brokenness mends and we have learned tremendous lessons about God, others, ourselves and what really matters in life. We no longer are haunted by the pain of the past. Yes, we still bear the scars of those wounds, but scars are signs of healing. We no longer have gaping wounds that demand our attention and make us feel threatened by any and every bump in life's road.

The stages of grief aren't clean, simple and smooth. We lurch forward at one point with a fresh insight, but we stay stuck for a while as we process new information. We drift back and forth from bargaining to resolve the pain as quickly as possible, to fury over a fresh memory of our pain. Through it all, we sometimes feel that God is as close as our breath, but at other times, he seems to have forgotten us entirely. Throughout this journey of resolving past hurts so they don't control the present, we can be confident that God knows, God cares and God is with us.

- **Denial**—This is the normal condition of addicts and codependents. We believe our pain, our attempts to numb that pain and our futile attempts to control others are "normal." Instead of facing the painful facts of our lives, we say things like, "Oh, it wasn't so bad when Mom was drinking so much," or "Sure, Dad beat me a lot, but he couldn't help it," or "I guess I

must have deserved to be molested. I must have caused it somehow.” And to avoid painful, present realities, we apply those same techniques of minimizing, excusing and rationalizing to our addictive behaviors.

- **Bargaining**—When we come face to face with the reality of our pain, the most common response is to try to swap something to fix the problem as quickly as possible. We are incredibly creative in our emotional swap meet! We might try going to church to buy relief, we might try to be nicer to somebody we’ve hurt, or we might try even harder to put a lid on our anger around our spouse and kids. Bargaining is certainly a step forward beyond denial, but it looks for a quick fix, not genuine resolution. Sadly, many people never get past this stage, and they stay stuck trying to make deals with God and people for the rest of their lives.
- **Anger**—Sooner or later, some of us give up on making deals, and we come face to face with the full force of our loss. At that moment, we become furious . . . at those who hurt us . . . at those who failed to protect us . . . at ourselves for taking so long to come to grips with it and ruining our lives with our addictions . . . and with God for allowing it all to happen. Please don’t misunderstand. Hurt people are angry at every stage of the process, but in the third stage, their anger is intense and focused.
- **Grief**—After weeks or months, the tidal wave of anger is spent. Now, we face the gnawing hurt that has been under the surface of our anger all along. We feel deep sadness, often bordering on depression, when we realize how much we’ve lost and can never regain. Drugs, sex, gambling, food or fixing problems distracted us and numbed us for years, but in this stage, we aren’t using these anesthetics any longer. In one of the most poignant moments recorded in the gospels, John tells us that Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. The Son of God, who knew he was going to raise his friend from the dead, was still overcome with grief over the loss. Jesus understands our sense of loss, too. In this stage, we grieve the wounds we can easily identify, such as beatings, abuse, verbal lashings and lies. A more difficult task, but one that is just as necessary, is identifying the losses that aren’t connected with memories: a parent who wasn’t there or being ignored and forgotten.

Many psychologists say that the stages of grief take at least two years to resolve a significant loss, and most of us who struggle with addictions have suffered very significant losses. This insight gives us patience and persistence to keep going through the painful memories and emotions until we arrive at the last stage.

- **Acceptance**—God made us with the capacity to grieve losses so that we can learn valuable lessons and move on with our lives. This process can be excruciating, and there are no shortcuts. If we keep taking steps down this path, we eventually realize that the wounds heal, the brokenness mends and we have learned tremendous lessons about God, others, ourselves and what really matters in life. We no longer are haunted by the pain of the past. Yes, we still bear the scars of those wounds, but scars are signs of healing. We no longer have gaping wounds that demand our attention and make us feel threatened by any and every bump in life’s road.

The stages of grief aren’t clean, simple and smooth. We lurch forward at one point with a fresh insight, but we stay stuck for a while as we process new information. We drift back and forth from bargaining to resolve the pain as quickly as possible, to fury over a fresh memory of our pain. Through it all, we sometimes feel that God is as close as our breath, but at other times, he seems to have forgotten us entirely. Throughout this journey of resolving past hurts so

they don't control the present, we can be confident that God knows, God cares and God is with us.

MEDITATION

As We Are

Read Titus 3:3–7 (p. 295) and think about the kind of people God loves. In this passage Paul gives a not-too-pleasant description of people apart from God. He pulls no punches as he paints the picture of people who made foolish decisions and lived entirely self-focused lives. Then, he uses an important word: “But.” Our condition apart from God couldn't have been worse, but God loved us enough to reach out to us through Jesus Christ to rescue us and change our lives.

- Which of the words in the first verses of this passage best describe your condition as an addict or codependent who tries to control others' behavior?

The great news is that God doesn't demand that we “clean up our acts” before we come to him. No, we come to him as broken and needy people. We are a mess, and he cleans us up. We are headed down the wrong path, but he points us in a new direction. We come like we are, and he changes us from the inside out.

- What are some reasons it's important to you that “he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy”?
- God, this passage really encourages me! Thank you for accepting me as I am and not demanding that I clean myself up before you'll have anything to do with me.
- What are some differences between some of the common concepts of Jesus (the stiff guy in the stained glass, a nice guy who got a bad deal, a misunderstood leader who was betrayed by those closest to him, etc.) and the description of Jesus in this passage of Scripture?
- In what ways is Jesus “the true light that gives light to everyone”? In what ways do you need light in your life right now?

John tells us that Jesus was “full of grace and truth.” These two traits balance, temper and enhance each other. Grace alone could be sentimental and condescending, and truth alone can be harsh and condemning. But the truth of our desperate need for change is coupled with God's amazing grace to love us even at our worst moments. That's the measure of Jesus's character, and he's the one we trust in Step 2 to give us sanity.

- What are some ways Jesus's grace and truth are essential to your recovery from your addiction?
- Jesus, you are awesome, but you're also approachable. I'm not sure I grasp how great your power and your kindness are. Help me believe both so that my faith in you grows.