Lesson 21

Relapse

**Principle 7**: Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

**Step 11**: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.

*“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)*

**Introduction**

(Note: It’s a good idea to start with Lesson 1 in January. Which will result in teaching Principle 7 in November. That’s why this lesson begins with a reference to Christmas.)

Tonight, we are going to start working on Principle 7. We are going to look specifically at how to maintain the momentum of your recovery during the approaching holidays!

Holidays can be tough, especially if you are alone, or if you are still hoping your family will live up to your expectations. This is a key time of the year to guard against slipping back to your old hurts, hang-ups, or habits. A key time to guard against relapse!

Therefore, tonight we are going to talk about how you can prevent RELAPSE. You don’t have to start your Christmas shopping yet, but it’s not too early to start working on a relapse-prevention program.

**Preventing Relapse**

Tonight’s acrostic is RELAPSE: **R**eserve a daily quiet time

**E**valuate

**L**isten to Jesus

**A**lone and quiet time

**P**lug in to God’s power

**S**low down

**E**njoy your growth

The first letter in relapse stands for Principle 7 itself: RESERVE a daily quiet time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and gain the power to follow His will.

As I said, during the holidays, it’s easy to slip back into our old hurts, hang-ups, and habits. The alcoholic goes back to drinking, the overeater gains back the weight, the gambler goes back to “lost wages” (Las Vegas), the workaholic fills up his schedule, the codependent goes back to an unhealthy relationship. The list goes on and on.

The first step in preventing a relapse is to admit that you will be tempted, that you are not above temptation. Jesus wasn’t, why should you be?

We find the account of Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4:1 – 11 (TLB):

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:“‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’ Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."

The test was over; the devil left. Jesus was tempted. He never sinned, but He was tempted.

Mark 14:38 tells us: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Remember, being tempted isn’t a sin. It’s falling into the action of the temptation that gets us into trouble. You know it’s odd, temptations are different from opportunities. Temptations will always give you a second chance!

Temptation is not a sin; it is a call to battle. When we are tempted to fall back into our old hurts, hang-ups, and habits we need to say to Satan as Jesus did in Matthew 4:10: “Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only. ”

The next word in our acrostic reminds us of Step 10: EVALUATE.

Let me just recap what we have talked about in the last two lessons. Your evaluation needs to include your physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual health.

As Pastor Rick (Warren) says, don’t forget the value of doing a “H-E-A-R-T” check. Ask yourself daily if you are

**H**urting

**E**xhausted

**A**ngry

**R**esentful

**T**ense

If you answer yes to any of the above, just use the tools you have learned in recovery to help get you back on track. We find specific instructions for this step in Psalm 16:7-10: “I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.”

Daily practice of Step 10 maintains your honesty and humility.

The *L* is LISTEN to your Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

We need to take a time-out from the world’s busyness long enough to listen to our bodies, our minds, and our souls. We need to slow down enough to hear the Lord’s directions.“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:1–3).

Let’s look at the letter *A*, which stands for ALONE and quiet time.

The first part of Step 11 says: “We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God.”

In Principle 3, we made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to God’s care; in Principle 4, we confessed our sins to Him; and in Principle 5, we humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Now, in Principle 7 in order to keep your recovery growing, you need to have a daily quiet time with Jesus. Even He spent time alone with His Father; you need to do the same. Set a daily appointment time to be alone with God, so that you can learn to listen carefully, learn how to hear God!

In Psalm 46:10 “He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I

will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Step 11 uses the word *meditation*. Meditation may be new to you, and you may feel uncomfortable. The definition of *meditation* is simply “slowing down long enough to hear God.” With practice, you will begin to realize the value of spending time alone with God.

The Enemy will use whatever he can to disrupt your quiet time with God. He will allow you to fill your schedule with so many good things that you burn out or do not have the time to keep your appointment with God. The Enemy loves it when he keeps us from growing and from working on the most important relationship in our lives —our relationship with Jesus.

Psalm 1:1 – 3 tells us: “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”

The next letter is *P*: PLUG in to God’s power through prayer.

I can’t tell you the number of people who, in counseling, have asked me, “Why did God allow that to happen to me?”

I reply, “Did you pray and seek His will and guidance before you made the decision to get married, before you made the decision to change jobs?” or whatever their issue might be.

You see, if we don’t daily seek His will for our lives, how can we blame Him when things go wrong?

Some people think their job is to give God instructions. They have it backward. Our job is to daily seek His will for our lives. You see, God’s guidance and direction can only start when our demands stop.

Don’t misunderstand me here. I’m only suggesting that we must stop *demanding* things of God, not stop *asking* things of Him. Specific prayer requests are another way to be plugged in to God’s power.

In Philippians 4:4-6, Paul tells us to pray about everything asking for God’s perfect will in all our decisions: ““Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The verse says *His* answers, *His* perfect will —not mine or yours. Ours are imperfect and most often self-centered. We often use prayer as a labor-saving device, but I need to remind myself daily that God will not do for me what I can do for myself. Neither will God do for you what you can do for yourself.

Let’s look at the *S* in our acrostic: SLOW down long enough to hear God’s answer.

After you spend time praying to God, you need to slow down long enough to hear His answers and direction. We can become impatient. We want God’s answer now! But, we need to remember our timing can be flawed and God’s timing is always perfect! “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: " (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Psalms 130:5 tells us: "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits and in his word I put my hope."

Finally, the last letter in relapse is *E*: ENJOY your growth.

You need to enjoy your victories. Rejoice in and celebrate the small successes along your road to recovery! First Thessalonians 5:16–18 tells us to "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus."

 And don’t forget to share your victories, no matter how small, with others in your group. Your growth will give others hope! With daily practice of these principles and with Christ’s loving presence in your life, you will be able to maintain and continue to grow in recovery!

**Wrap-Up**

Honestly, sometimes I wish I could take a vacation from my recovery, especially during the holidays. I’m sure you all have felt that way at one time or another. But let me assure you that relapse is real. It does happen! And it can be very costly. I urge you to take the actions that we talked about tonight to prevent relapse.

Let’s get practical. Here are some things to do to prevent relapse during the holidays:

1. Pray and read your Bible daily. Establish a specific time of day to have your “quiet time.”
2. Make attending your recovery meeting a priority. Stay close to your support team. If you find yourself saying, “I’m too busy to go to Celebrate Recovery tonight,” make time. Flee from whatever you are doing and come share your recovery.
3. Spend time with your family if they are safe. If they are not, spend time with your church family. We are going to have Celebrate Recovery every Friday night throughout the holidays. You do not have to be alone this holiday season.

4. Get involved in service. Volunteer! You don’t have to wait until you get to Principle 8 to start serving.

These are just a few ideas and suggestions. Share tonight in your small groups on ways that you, with God’s help, can prevent relapse in your recovery.