Lesson 7

Sponsor

**Principle 4**: Openly examine and confess my hurts, hang-ups, and habits to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8)*

**Step 4**: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” (Lamentations 3:40)*

**Introduction**

Last month, we talked about the importance of having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which you found when you made the decision to turn your life and your will over to the care of God.

Now you will see that the road to recovery is not meant to be traveled alone. You will find that you actually need three relationships. Most important is a relationship with Jesus Christ. In addition, you need the relationship of your recovery group or a church family. Last, you need the relationship of a sponsor and/or accountability partner. Identifying a sponsor and/or accountability partner is especially important before you begin Principles 4 through 6, in which you work on getting right with God, yourself, and others.

Principle 4 is all about being honest and truthful about our past! Proverbs 15:14 tells us, “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.”

Our past can get pretty heavy at times, so I don’t want you to handle it alone. You need a genuine mentor, coach, or, in recovery terms, a sponsor and/or an accountability partner. Some of you may still be unconvinced that you really need another person to walk alongside of you on your road to recovery, so tonight we are going to answer the five following questions:

1. Why do I need a sponsor and/or an accountability partner?
2. What are the qualities of a sponsor?
3. What does a sponsor do?
4. How do I find a sponsor and/or an accountability partner?
5. What is the difference between a sponsor and an accountability partner?

**Why Do I Need a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner?**

There are three reasons why you need a sponsor and/or an accountability partner.

***Having a Sponsor or Accountability Partner Is Biblical***

Ecclesiastes 4:9 –12 tells us, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor; If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone” Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

Proverbs 27:17 tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

***Having a Sponsor or Accountability Partner Is a Key Part of Your Recovery Program***

Do you know that your recovery program has four key elements to success? If your program includes each of these areas, you are well on your way to the solution, to wholeness.

The first key is maintaining your honest view of reality as you work each step. I have yet to see this program fail for someone who could be completely honest with himself or herself. I have, however, seen some give up on their recoveries because they could not step out of their denial into God’s truth. Having someone help to keep you honest is a real plus in successfully working the steps.

The second key element is making your attendance at your recovery group meetings a priority in your schedule. This doesn’t include taking the summer off or not going to a meeting because it’s raining outside. Don’t get me wrong, it’s great to take a vacation, but after the two weeks are up, come back to your meetings. Remember, your hurts, hang-ups, and habits don’t take vacations. You need to make Friday nights here at Celebrate Recovery and other meeting nights that you attend a priority. A sponsor and/or an accountability partner can encourage you to attend your meetings.

The third element is maintaining your spiritual program with Jesus Christ through prayer, meditation, and study of His Word. We are going to focus more on this in Principle 7, but you don’t have to wait until you get there to develop your relationship with Christ. Your sponsor can pray for you and help to keep you centered on God’s Word.

The last key element to a successful program is getting involved in service. Once you have completed Principle 8, you will be able to serve as a sponsor. Until that time, however, there are plenty of other service opportunities to get you started.

If you want to get involved, see me, give me a call, or speak to your Open Share Group leader. Your sponsor can also suggest ways for you to serve.

Without exception, everyone here needs a sponsor and/or an accountability partner.

***Having a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner Is the Best Guard Against Relapse***

By providing feedback to keep you on track, a sponsor and/or an accountability partner can see your old dysfunctional, self-defeating patterns beginning to surface and point them out to you quickly. He or she can confront you with truth and love without placing shame or guilt.

Ecclesiastes 7:5 tells us that “It is better to heed the reubke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools.” The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.

**What Are the Qualities of a Sponsor?**

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.” (Proverbs 20:5).

When you are selecting a sponsor, look for the following qualities:

1. **Does their walk match their talk**? **Are they living the eight principles?** I have known many people who have the 12-Step “lingo” down pat. But their lifestyle doesn’t match their talk. Be certain that the person that you choose as a sponsor is someone whose life example is worthy of imitation.
2. **Do they have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?** Do you see the character of Christ developing in them?
3. **Do they express the desire to help others on the road to recovery?** There is a difference between helping others and trying to fix others. We all need to be careful to guard the sponsorship relationship from becoming unhealthy and codependent.
4. **Do they show compassion**, **care**, **and hope but not pity?** You don’t need someone to feel sorry for you, but you do need someone to be sensitive to your pain. As Pastor Rick Warren says, “People don’t care about how much you know until they know about how much you care!”
5. **Are they a good listener?** Do you sense they honestly care about what you have to say?
6. **Are they strong enough to confront your denial or procrastination?** Do they care enough about you and your recovery to challenge you?
7. **Do they offer suggestions?** Sometimes we need help in seeing options or alternatives that we are unable to find on our own. A good sponsor can take an objective view and offer suggestions. They should not give orders!
8. **Do they share their own current struggles with others?** Are they willing to open up and be vulnerable and transparent? I don’t know about you, but I don’t want a sponsor who says they have worked the principles. I want a sponsor who is living and working the principles every day!

**What Is the Role of a Sponsor?**

1. **The most important role of a sponsor is to continually point you to Jesus as your Higher Power. They do not work the steps for you!** A good sponsor will help you create a dependence on God for your recovery and healing, not on them.
2. **They can be there to discuss issues in detail that are too personal or would take too much time in a meeting.** This is especially true with Principle 4. You don’t share your complete inventory in a group setting. “I’m the lowest form of life on the earth” might be a phrase said by someone doing their inventory. Others may deny, rationalize, and blame: “Okay, I admit I did such and such, but it’s not as if I killed anybody”; “Sure, I did a, b, and c, but my spouse did d through z; compared to my spouse, I’m a saint”; “All right, I admit it, but I never would have done it if my boss wasn’t such a jerk.” The sponsor can be there to share their own experiences and to offer strength and hope, to model Christ’s grace, forgiveness, and to offer some perspective.
3. **They are available in times of crisis or potential relapse.** I have always told the newcomers that I have sponsored, “Call me before you take that first drink. You can still take it after we talk, if you decide to. But please call first!” Remember Ecclesiastes 4:12: “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”
4. **They serve as a sounding board by providing an objective point of view.** This is especially true in Principle 6. When you are dealing with the sensitive area of making amends and offering forgiveness, you need a good sounding board.
5. **They are there to encourage you to work the principles at your own speed.** It is not their job to work the principles for you! They can coach your progress, confront you when you’re stuck, and suggest you slow you down when you’re working too fast.
6. **They attempt to model the lifestyle that results from working the eight principles.** It’s difficult to inspire others to accomplish what you haven’t been willing to try yourself. A good sponsor lives the principles.
7. **A sponsor can resign or be fired.** Sponsorship is not a lifetime position.

**How Do I Find a Sponsor and/or an Accountability Partner?**

The responsibility of finding a sponsor and/or an accountability partner is yours, but let me give you a few final guidelines to help you in your search.

1. **First and foremost, the person MUST be of the same gender as you.** NO EXCEPTIONS. I don’t think I need to expand this one.
2. **Can you relate to this person’s story?** If you are choosing someone to be your sponsor, do they meet the qualities of a good sponsor that we just covered?
3. **Attend the fellowship events.** Invest some time in fellowship and get to know others in your group. That’s the main reason we have these fellowship events.
4. **If you ask someone to be your sponsor and/or an accountability partner, and that person says no, do not take it as a personal rejection.** Remember that their own recovery has to come first. Some of you may have asked your Open Share or Step Study group leader to be your sponsor. They may be sponsoring others, and the responsibility of leadership is great. If they turn you down, it’s not personal. Their plate is simply too full! If someone turns you down, ask someone else! You can even ask for a “temporary” sponsor and/or an accountability partner. Remember, these are not lifetime commitments.
5. **Most important, ask God to lead you to the sponsor and/or an accountability partner of His choosing.** He knows you and everyone in this room. He has someone in mind already for you. All you need to do is ask!

**What Is the Difference between a Sponsor and an Accountability Partner?**

A sponsor, ideally, is someone who has completed The Journey Begins Participant Guides and has worked through the eight principles and the 12 Steps. They meet the seven requirements that we talked about in the “Role of a Sponsor.” The main goal of this relationship is to choose someone to guide you through the program.

An accountability partner is someone you ask to hold you accountable for certain areas of your recovery or issues, such as meeting attendance, journaling, and so forth. This person can be at the same level of recovery as you are, unlike a sponsor, who should have completed the eight principles or 12 Steps. The main goal of this relationship is to encourage one another. I recommend forming an accountability team of at least three or four. The accountability partner or group acts as the “team,” whereas the sponsor’s role is that of a “coach.”

If you are unable to find a sponsor, the best thing you can do is to focus on building your accountability team. The most important thing is that you do not walk your recovery journey alone.

You can start forming accountability teams in your small groups tonight. When you share, just ask if anyone is interested. Let God work and see what happens. I can guarantee this, though: nothing will happen if you don’t ask.

Start looking for and building your support team tonight! Let’s close in prayer.

*Dear God, thank You for this group of people who are here to break out of the hurts, habits, and hang-ups that have kept them bound. Thank You for the leaders You have provided. Thank You that You love us all, no matter where we are in our recoveries. Show me the person You have prepared to be my sponsor. Help us to establish an honest and loving relationship that honors You and helps both me and my sponsor grow stronger in You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*