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“Road to Recovery” Part 5 – “Making Changes”

The presentation/drama this morning, you might say was very graphic and very ugly because that's what sin is. Sin is ugly; it's unpleasant to watch. It makes us uncomfortable. We have all at some time in our life felt like that young man. We have felt in bondage, just strapped. We have felt the spiritual influences at work in our lives. We've tried to fight them as best as we can, and we've failed. We've tried to enlist the help of others around us, and we find out they are just as bound as we are. They're just as destitute and hopeless as we are. Who is going to rescue us? Who is going to save us? Then we come to find that there *is* a power that is greater than our own, that is outside of ourselves, and that we need His help and His intervention to get back on our feet again. We know we can't do it on our own, and we find out we need others, caring people, loving people of like mind who also want recovery around us. It's a team effort; it doesn't happen alone. Through the help and the care of Christ, and the help and the care of our brothers and our sisters, and through faith, we are able to break free from those chains. The young man in that video was Phil Chapen. The video was rather lengthy I know, but there's much more to it than that. It was put out by Dave Reeve, Evangelistic Association. This tells a story of Phil Chapen at age 6. By age 6, he was hooked on drugs and had become a cocaine addict as a very young man. He lived a life of torment. That was really his life story. When you see those demonic forces tormenting him and teasing him, that was his life. He was a heroin addict; he was a crack cocaine addict. He was an alcoholic for many, many years. About nine years ago, God delivered Phil Chapen through the help of Dave Reeve and Reggie Dabs, and the other brother who was in that video. Today, he is serving the Lord, Jesus Christ. If you would like to borrow that video, so you know, it's available. We own a copy of that. The testimonies around it, and Dave's messages, are terrific, and that's just a small snip of the video Break the Chains.

I'd like you to stand with me this morning as we read our scripture. If you turn in your bibles to the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 12:1-3, we're going to read together. I'd like us to read it aloud together in unison, rather than just myself reading it. Let's begin reading with Verse 1 of Hebrews, Chapter 12. It starts with the word “therefore.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

This promise talks about not only our sins, but it says also everything that hinders and so easily entangles us. There are some things that keep us from recovery in our life that aren't necessarily sins, yet they're hindrances. Maybe it's procrastination; maybe it's laziness; maybe it's anxiety, always worried about something; maybe it's

timidity or always fearful and fear keeps us from breaking free; maybe it's our own negativity, our own negative words that keep us bound. Those aren't necessary sins, but they're hindrances-they're weights. Together, this morning with God's help, we are going to break free from some of those bondages. We're going to learn the principles and truths that will help you and how to live more free in Christ because Christ has said, "Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed." We all want to know the joy of chains off and freedom in Christ that is available to us today. Would you join me in prayer? "Heavenly Father, as we are here this morning, we are all in need. This young man that we saw today had bondages to chemical substances, drugs and alcohol. That might be what we are in fact struggling with, but many of us struggle with other things. Many of us struggle with pornography. Some of us struggle with our temper. Some of us struggle with greed, some with dishonesty. Some of us struggle with things that aren't so much sins as hindrances, personal character defects that we have taken with us, and they've become a part of our lifestyle and our habits. No matter how hard we try, we seem to not be able to break free. We've come this morning, a needy people, and we ask you Lord as we fix our eyes upon you, as the scripture says, to help us to do just what we were admonished in our reading, to take off that sin and remove that hindrance that so easily entangles us, that we might run this race. We commit ourselves to that this morning. We've committed to move the chains and move the obstacles and hindrances. We commit ourselves to that this morning. We've committed to move the chains and move the obstacles and hindrances out of our lives. Teach us practically this morning how we can do that. I pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."

Well, this morning we're going to be talking about making changes, dealing with these character defects in our lives. We've been on a series called Road to Recovery, and this is Part 5 of that series. Yesterday, I had an opportunity to do something I had not done before, to go to Camp Randall and see the Badgers play football. It was a very fun experience, 78,000 fans cheering the undefeated Badgers on. Some of you have thought that my being a Chicago Bears fan is a character defect, but I want you to know it's not all bad. I am a Badger fan. I didn't just "go." I really do cheer for the Badgers. So you can pray for that inconsistency in my life if you want to.

We went there and after the game, the guys I was with hung around a bit and were trying to watch their behavior because the "reverend" was there. I imagine they tone things down quite a bit. When they were through, they said, "Let's get going." I said, "All right. Let's get going." We got to the place, and we couldn't get out. There was a Jeep parked right near us, right behind us, we couldn't get out of the way. My friend, he was trying to finagle back and forward, pull forward and back up, pull forward and back up, and we were saying, "Okay, that's enough. Go forward. Okay." We just weren't making it, so there we were. We were stuck. We didn't know how long we were going to be stuck, and finally a guy walked by that might have had one too many and said, "You can't get out of there? I can't believe you can't get out of there. All you have to do is move the Jeep." He says, "It's easy. Four strong guys like you, there are five of us. We can move that Jeep. Here, let me show you. Get down." We all got down, and he says, "You just bounce it. You bounce it. Bounce one, two, three, lift!" Nowhere. "Let me get a better grip.

Ready, bounce, bounce!” And we were bouncing this Jeep, feeling really stupid. “One, two, three, lift!” Nothing. “Oh, it’s heavier than I thought,” he said. “Good luck guys,” and he walked off. We talked about it; we bad-mouthed him. One guy says, “That guy must’ve been three sheets to the wind, thinking he’s going to move that Jeep.”

I said, “Yeah, but we’re dumb enough to get down there and start lifting with him too. We’re not much better.”

We just sat there trying to figure it out, us knuckleheads. Finally, a guy comes up from behind the garage with a key and says, “Hey, you guys looking for this?”

We said, “Is that your Jeep?”

He said, “Yeah, let me move it for you.” He opened up the door, started it up, and backed it out. We then pulled out.

My friend is not a church-goer. He says, “Hey man, by the time you spend an afternoon with us, you’re going to have enough serminal illustrations for a month.”

I was really disappointed at the game, and I said, “So far, you’ve given me nothing. Not one.”

After that, he says, “Well, you got one now.”

I said, “Well all right. I got one now.”

When I thought about that and the fact that these character defects we’re talking about, we can’t move them ourselves. No matter what our own strength and might, we can’t break it or move it. We can’t get the obstacle out of the way. Others can’t necessarily help us in the journey, but they can’t move the character defect out of our lives either. It takes the one who has the key.

In Revelation 1:18, Jesus says, “I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

He’s got the keys, friends. He’s the one we look to in our Road to Recovery to move what we cannot move for ourselves. So, we’re going to talk about Step 5 this morning. Now you’ve noticed that we have changed these 12 steps a little bit and condensed them and taken some liberties with them. The principles and understanding are the same. Step 5: *Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask him to remove my character defects.*

We’re going to look at three questions this morning. One is “where do my character defects come from?” The second is “why is it so hard to change them?” Third is “how can I cooperate with God in this change process. So, we’re going to go through the first questions rather quickly and linger a little on the third question.

Where do my character defects come from? I think it doesn’t take a rocket scientist. There are three areas that can be contributors to our character defects. One is our chromosomes, our DNA. It’s the way we’re put together. There are certain tendencies within us. I believe these are not only physical tendencies; for instance, in my family, if I even think about food, I can gain weight because of the propensity in our family. We don’t have a lot of high metabolizers running around. I was looking at my family, some of the family tree albums from way back, and I see even Grandma and Grandpa and Dad, we smell water and gain weight. So, we have to be really careful.

But just like there are genetic propensities, there's also, I believe, behavioral propensities we can carry. Now scientists don't know exactly to what degree genetics plays, but we certainly know it plays a part.

Secondly, circumstances play a part, my upbringing, how my needs were met or unmet. Many times, the character defects I have are me trying to meet a need that was not fulfilled in my childhood or my infancy. We know certainly from John, Chapter 4, last week I believe, we were talking about the woman who had five husbands and the man she was living with now was not her husband. Remember her? We certainly know she had some unmet love or unmet intimacy needs in her life that she was trying to fill through those relationships. So that is certainly a contributing factor, our circumstances.

Thirdly, we could say that a contributing factor would have to do with our choice ourselves. We're not robots. We do have chromosomes that we've inherited. We do have circumstances from which we were raised, but we're not mindless robots. We make choices. If we make enough choices long enough, we form habits, and those habits determine a lifestyle for us. So our choices are another area where our character defects come from. Repeated actions become habits. If we choose to do something over and over again, pretty soon we become bound to it.

Secondly, why are they so hard to change? I have a list of several reasons why they're so hard to change. First of all, many of our habits we have had for years. Many of our attitudes, world views and opinions and values, we've had for years. By the way, this stuff this morning, a lot of this stuff is life-changing, but it's extremely practical. God's word is life-changing, but it's extremely practical. I have heard some criticisms about our ministry saying words such as, "You know, too basic" or whatever. "Too user friendly. We need deep stuff!" Let me tell you something, I don't think the object of church is you walking out of here all confused. We don't think that's our purpose, to get up here and expound and use a lot of superlatives and talk about deep abstract concepts so you leave thinking, "Wow, that was deep. What did he say?" "I have no idea."

We want you to leave with things you can begin to use today, now, to change your life. So I wear that criticism like a badge of honor.

We've had them so long, we become slaves to them. After the Emancipation of Proclamation, many of the slaves here in America continued to live as slaves. Why? Because it was all they had known. They had that slave mentality, so they lived as slaves even though they were technically by law now free, free people. They continued to live as slaves because it was a habit.

Secondly, the reason it's so hard to change is because I identify with them. I begin to come to see that's just the way I am, and I put a tag onto that. Finish the following phrase: It's just like me to be _____. It's just like me to be "late." It's just like me to be "short-tempered." It's just like me to "put something off." Right? We just come to accept that. We say, "That's just the way I am." Everybody has a vice; everybody has a short-coming. This is mine. So we come to identify with that character defect. "That's just the way I am." It becomes an excuse.

Thirdly, they are hard to change because they have a pay-off. There is a physical need that is met. When I engage in that activity, that behavior, there is a physical need that is met. I'm afraid if I surrender that or give that up, that physical need

won't be met. There is a tension maybe. That can be a pay-off. Even if the tension is negative, it's a tension. Many children's behavioral problems, a teacher will tell you, "Children in school who have behavioral problems are acting out because they want attention." Now the attention they get is to be reprimanded, but it's still attention, so they repeat the behavior. Right? Mom tells the children to do something, and the children don't do it, Mom yells at them, and the children do it. What has Mom learned? The children have taught Mom a valuable lesson. We respond when you yell. We don't respond when you ask. In our home, we very seldom raise our voices. When we're giving a command or when we're issuing discipline. Very seldom. So Mom gets the message that "there is a pay-off when I yell," so she begins to go around yelling all the time. Or Dad yells all the time to get the kids to respond. It could be the pay-off is control. It's a character defect, but I'm in control, and there's a need we have to control things and people, so that becomes our pay-off.

Fourthly, I believe, as in the video we saw, there really is an evil influence in this world. The scripture talks very much about the reality of Satan and the reality of the demonic forces of darkness. There really is a demonic force that seeks to discourage us. Try to live for God, try to remove these character defects with the help of God and see if you don't encounter spiritual opposition. You will. I was talking with a brother the other day, and he said, "I'm just giving my life to Christ, and I'm trying to turn things around." He says, "Man am I encountering opposition."

I said, "You can expect that. You're on the right track. Don't be discouraged by that; be encouraged by it."

You know Satan had a garage sale last summer. He was selling some of his tools. One man was perusing Satan's tools, and there was one that was very well worn but very expensive. He said to the devil, "How come this tool that's so beat up and worn out is so expensive?"

Satan says, "Because that's my best tool. That's the tool of discouragement. I use that more than any other tool that I have." It's true. Discouragement: discouragement of others, discouragement of the enemy in our souls, but discouragement will keep us from making those changes. "I don't deserve it. I'll never be able to" or "I failed there."

Thirdly, how do I cooperate with God's changing process? How do I cooperate with God's changing process in my life? It's a process. It's not an event. Change is a process. These steps are a process. It's not a one-time deal. It's something you have to live with for the rest of your life, the rest of your life, not a one-time deal. If you want to change your life, you must do what? You must change the way you think. That's essential. If you want to change your results, if you want to change your direction, you must change the way you think. That's where it all begins. The scripture says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

Romans, Chapter 12:2 says to be transformed by the renewing of what? The renewing of your mind. Here's where it begins friend. Here's where the healing process begins. It's in our mind.

The body won't respond and do what it has first not been trained to do through the mind. By training we are training ourselves to do something that we cannot do right now. Training is a process. How many of you in this room right now, today, can run a marathon? If we were to start a marathon after church, how many of you could run a 26-mile marathon. Put your hand up. Okay, a couple guys. Now, a year from now: if you began to train for a marathon this week, you began to start running about a mile, and then you run two miles, and then three miles and let it build up; if you set your mind to that, a year from now, many of you would be able to run that marathon. The key is training. We are training our mind to think in a proper way. We train our mind through God's word to have right thinking and right understanding which will lead to right action.

I'm going to share some real practical things, seven things, that will help us to cooperate with God's process in our lives. The first one is "*Focus on changing one defect at a time.*" Focus in on changing one character defect at a time. Don't take the things we've learned and say, "You know what? I've got 10 things that I want to work on, and I'm going to change all 10 things." You probably won't. Be specific. Don't just say, "My goal is to be a better person." What does that mean? What does you being a better person look like? Let's get specific. Ask God. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Ask God. "God, what is the one character defect that is the most inhibiting for me? What is the one character defect that I need to change above all others?" Ask God that. One defect at a time.

The scripture says, and this is the Living Bible, "An intelligent person aims at wise action, but a fool starts off in many directions," Proverbs 17:24 in the Living Bible. Secondly, "*Focus on victory one day at a time.*" Work on one character defect at a time. You work on that character defect until you feel like that character defect is beginning to break its hold and, in fact, be removed from you life. But even then, for the rest of your life, victory over that character defect is going to be one day at a time.

Tell me, I'm going to read you a very familiar verse in the Bible, and you tell me what's wrong with the way I read it. Matthews 6:11, "Give us this day our monthly bread." Give us this day our *monthly* bread. What's wrong with that sentence? Give us this day our what? Our *daily* bread. God gives us enough strength and enough provision for today. Victory, in these areas of your life, is one day at a time. Sometimes, it's several hours at a time. You might have-let's say you have trouble with your short fuse-a boss or a co-worker who pushes your buttons. Now, probably this does not relate to any of you, but there may be a chance one day that you will meet somebody who just pushes your buttons the wrong way. As you go to work, you don't say, "God help me to never get mad at my boss again" or "God help me to never lose my cool at my co-worker again. I'm never going to lose my temper again for the rest of my life toward that person." You just set yourself up for failure. Maybe you have the most interaction with that person the first few hours of the day, and you say, "God, help me for the next three hours to have self-control in my anger. I can't control it all myself. I need your help. God, I turn that over to you. Help me for the next three hours to have that strength to be able to control my mouth or my behavior." It's one day at a time, and it's sometimes one moment at a

time. When the day is done, you thank God for the victories, no matter how small they are, no matter how insignificant they might seem.

What did Jesus say in that passage, he said in Matthew 6 in the sermon on the mountain, "Don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough troubles of its own." Could Jesus' teaching be more practical folks? He says, "Don't worry about tomorrow. *Each* day has enough troubles of its own." Each day has troubles. Jesus just came right out and said it.

Being a believer isn't going to change that. Each day is going to have troubles. But he says, "I don't want you to worry about tomorrow's troubles. I want you to just deal with today and know that God's provision and his grace will sustain you *today*."

Thirdly, *focus on God's power, not on willpower*. Focus on God's power, not on willpower. Willpower doesn't work. We said that in week one. If your willpower would work, it would have already worked by now, and you'd already have victory over that thing, but your willpower doesn't work. It doesn't cut it. Focus on God's power, not your willpower. Jeremiah, Chapter 13:23 says, "Can a leopard take away his spots?" The answer, a rhetorical question, is no. "Nor can you who are used to doing evil now start being good. You need the help of God." You need to say, "God, I'm going to focus today not on my power, but on your power. God, you're aware of the garbage in my life. You're aware of the stuff in my life that is unclean, that is untidy, that is ugly, and God, I'm going to take that up, and I'm going to wrap that up in a garbage bag today and put it on the curb. I ask you to take it away. I'm going to focus not on my strength, but on your strength." You picture that in your mind. Picture God's dump truck pulling up, and it says God and Son, in business with people like you for 2,000 years. One of God's helpers gets out and grabs that bag of garbage and throws it in the truck, and the truck takes off to heaven.

Some of you say, "Well, I need more than just once a week. I need kind of a daily stop." He makes as many stops as you need, as many stops as you need. The scripture says, "I can do all things with the help of Christ who gives me strength," not "I can do all things." It didn't stop there. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Fourth, *focus on what I want, not on what I don't want*. You ask what do you mean by that? The scripture says in Philippians 4:8, "Fix your thoughts on what is true and right." What sort of things are true? What sort of things are honest? What sort of things are a good report? Fix your mind on those things. The bible never says to resist temptation. Did you know that? If you're resisting temptation, what are you doing? You're focusing on temptation. You're focusing on what you don't want. The bible says, "Flee temptation." The bible does say, "Flee Satan." It does say, "Resist the devil." But it doesn't say, "Resist temptation." It says, "Flee temptation." There's a big difference. There's an old saying that says "what you resist, persists" because you're focusing on the wrong thing. Instead of resisting, refocus.

Now, I don't know about you, but I am a channel surfer. I'm sure I speak to many of my male peers out here this morning. We are channel surfers. It is our responsibility as men in our household to surf the channels since our wives don't do

it. Jerry Seinfeld said the difference is that men hunt and women nest. Women want to watch what's on TV, and men only care what *else* is on TV. I call it power-lounging in my home. I'm in my glory. This invention of the picture in picture, that's good stuff because what you can do now is you can channel surf twice as much with power. You can surf while you're watching something else, and that is a very fulfilling experience. Now, as you're watching this television, and you run across a channel that you don't like, you come across something unpleasant that you don't want to see, is this what you do? Do you sit in your chair with your power lounging button and say, "I will not watch this channel? I will not watch this channel. I can still hear it, so I'll plug my ears. I will not listen to this channel. I will not watch that channel."

Your wife walks in, "What are you doing?"

"I'm resisting this program. I'm resisting. I will not watch this program." She comes up with a brilliant idea. She grabs the remote and changes the channel. "Watch that."

That's what you do, right? If you don't like what's on your TV, you change the channel. You don't resist. You refocus. The same thing is true. "I'm going to resist this temptation. I'm going to resist this temptation," and it doesn't go away, it just persists. What you resist, persists.

God didn't say, "Resist temptation." He said, "Flee temptation." Refocus your mind, the Lord says.

Let me give you a couple examples. If I struggle with guilt, and that is a real problem for many of us, guilt over the past. We talked about that last week quite extensively. When that guilt feeling starts to overwhelm me, and it starts to focus in on me, instead of focusing on that and saying, "I'm going to resist guilt. I'm going to resist guilt. I'm going to resist guilt." The believer says what God's word says in Romans Chapter 8:1. "There's therefore now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus." You refocus. You put your mind on what God's word says about you in the situation. Yes, but God does not condemn me for that anymore. That has been forgiven. That has been taken away through the blood of Christ. You refuse to walk any longer in guilt. You focus instead on what God says.

Do you struggle with doubt? You struggle with doubt, and you say, "I don't know if I can do this" or "I'm afraid. I'm going to resist fear. I'm going to resist fear. I'm going to resist doubt." No. I begin to focus on Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

Worry and concern, "I'm going to resist worry. I'm going to resist it." No. Joshua 1:9 says, "Be strong and courageous for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." And you focus on what God's word says. You don't resist; you refocus. That's the real key, friends.

Scripture memory is almost essential at that step. Scripture memory is an essential. You take that one character defect that you're going to work on, you make it known, I think that's a healthy thing to do; you write it down or you tell your spouse or a friend, "I'm going to work on this character defect." Then you begin to list the scriptures that deal with that particular defect. You list God's promises that pertain to that particular character defect. You memorize them and you put them in prominent places. You read them when you wake up, and you read them when you

go to bed. And you thank God for those promises. If you do that over a period of time, you are going to begin to see that chain begin to weaken and fall. Victory, one day at a time. One day at a time.

Fifthly, *focus on doing good, not feeling good*. Focus on doing good, not feeling good. Too often we focus on our feelings. We wait until we *feel* like doing something to do it. In many cases, it won't get done. Focus on doing right, not necessarily feeling right. Galatians 5:16 says, "If you walk by the spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." The flesh tells us to do one thing, the spirit tells us to do something totally contradictory. If you wait until you feel like changing, you may never change.

I wrote down something I want to read here. "Actions against our habits feel unnatural, even if it's the right thing to do. We are habitual people. Cross your arms." Everybody cross your arms, I'm not going to keep going until I see every arm crossed. Now cross it the other way. Put the other arm on top. I don't even know if I can do that. It doesn't feel right. I'm used to crossing my arms in a certain way. We go through our morning routine in the same way, don't we? We probably shower the same way, dry the same way, brush our teeth at a certain interval, and put on the deodorant at a certain interval, and do our hair at a certain interval. It's our habits. We do something out of the normal, it feels awkward, and so when the same thing is true in the practical sense, when we begin to do a behavior-even if it's the right behavior to do-if it's not normal for us, it's going to feel strange.

If you are an over-eater, to stop eating when you're full is going to seem very strange to you. In fact, you're going to think, "I should keep eating. I want to keep eating." But you work on doing the action instead of depending on the feeling. You know what you find many times when you worry about doing what is right instead of what you feel like doing, you find that feelings catch up eventually. It may take time, but as soon as you start to enjoy the rewards of doing the right thing, it will become easier to do it.

Years ago, my wife and I joined the YMCA when we moved to Janesville. I would say to my wife, "Let's go to the Y." It was like the equivalent of taking the child to the doctor or the dentist. She just did not want to go. She would get very cantankerous with me. She would say, "I don't feel like going." We would go, and the whole time there she would complain. She would go on the Stairmaster or the treadmill, and she'd say, "I hate this. This doesn't do any good. It's pointless. You've been dragging me here for a month now, and things are still just as out of shape as they ever were. I don't want to come here anymore."

I would say, "Come on honey. You don't feel like going, but let's go anyway. We paid good money for this membership. Let's use it."

Finally one day, I said, "I throw in the towel. If you don't want to go, you don't have to go, but I'm not going to pay for you. We're going to pull your membership. If you want to go, you go. We'll keep your membership, but I'm not going to fight with you anymore. It's up to you."

So she would go on her own, still kicking and screaming, still mad about it, still complaining. but, she would go. After about a year, she began to firm up and tone up and see herself get more endurance on different machines and gain more strength, her feelings began to conform to her actions. She acted when she didn't

feel like it, and she continued that, and pretty soon, her feelings began to conform to her actions. Now, if you try to take away her Y, you're in for a big fight. That's been like six, seven years ago, and I would say in that seven-year period, she has not missed a week. She's there at least three days a week exercising. She's going to go after we get home from church. She'll change her gear and she'll go. See, now she's motivated because she's received the positive results from that.

I was talking with a gentleman just the other day who had stopped smoking. He was talking about the difficulties in stopping smoking. He said, "This is the time when I would normally smoke a cigarette, and now it feels strange not to smoke." He began to work these 12 steps, because regardless of what you have a problem with, the 12 steps are the same, regardless of what it is that we struggle with. He began to enjoy the benefits of not smoking. Pretty soon, he became excited about it. Pretty soon, his feelings changed to match his behavior. It works friends, it really does. Focus on doing good, not on feeling good.

Sixthly, *focus on people who help me, not on people who will hinder me.* Put people around me and spend time with people, people who are going to influence me—who are going to help me, not hinder me; people who are going to help me do what is right; people who are going to hold me accountable to change these behaviors; people who love me and care about me, instead of spending my time and letting those around me who might be negative influences on me have the most influence in my life. It's just common sense.

I spoke with a young man in the Rock County Jail last night. He stayed in a particular youth facility for a period of time. There he went to the Chaplin service, and there he received help and dedicated his life to Christ. He said he got out of that youth facility and started to hang around with the same old friends. Guess what? Same old results. You take a white glove, and you put it in mud, does your glove get muddy, or does the mud get glovey? He started hanging around those kids again. As Corinthians 15:33 says, "Bad company corrupts good morals." They begin to rub off, and the next thing you know, he's in the adult section of the Rock County Jail looking at some serious time and still wanting to live for Christ. I said, "One of the old 12-step sayings is you have to change playpens and playmates." By the way, the scripture of number 6 was Proverbs 27:1, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another," or so people can improve each other. This whole recovery process takes place in community. We've talked a lot about that. Let's move on.

Number 7, *focus on progress, not on perfection.* Focus on progress, not on perfection. Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it." Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God who was at work in you both to will and to do His good purpose." God is at work in you to will and to do His good purpose. It's a cooperative adventure, and it is a process. There are stages along the way, but you know what? God loves you at each stage. God looks at your heart, and maybe you say, "I'm not there yet. I'm not free yet. I'm still struggling." But God sees your heart is in the right direction. You're making progress, and He's pleased with you right now with the stage where you're at. If you are making an effort to point your life in the right direction—some of you this morning are spiritual seekers, you've not made a commitment to Christ, but you're coming to this church and making an effort to pray or read your bible, spend some time with other believers

and ask questions-you're not there, but you're in the process. You're in the journey. I respect you for that. Success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal. If you're heading toward that worthy goal right now, you're progressing toward it; you're successful right now, not just when you get to the peak.

I don't expect my nine-year old son to act like a nineteen-year old son. I'm very happy with the stage he is at, and I'm very happy with him acting as a nine-year old. I expect different behavior from my fifteen-year old than I do my two-year old. But I love all three of them at all the stages of life that they're in. God's love for you is unconditional. If you get out of here, and you fall flat on your face, God's love is unconditional. Some of you get so discouraged. If you walked out of here, you say, "I want to quit! That's it. I throw in the towel! I give up!" Like that man in the video, you're ready to take the gun. You just want out. Don't do that! It doesn't make sense to do that any more than walking out of here this morning, you trip and fall in the parking lot, and you just lie there. "That's it! If I can't walk from the church to the car, I'm going to quit!" You just lie there, and snow comes, and people use you as a speed bump, kind of drive over you; winter comes, and you're just a bump there in the driveway.

"You want to get up now Charlie?"

"No! I quit!"

Spring comes and you thaw, and we make you part of the landscaping team and decorate you. Spiritually, the same thing is true. That song said, "When I get back on my feet again..."

If you're down this morning, don't stay there. You don't have to stay there. With the grace of God, and with the help of other people who care about you, you can get back on your feet. You can have victory over those sins and those hindrances.

While we receive communion, we're going to pray together. I'm going to ask the ushers to come forward, and we're going to pray. Would you bow your heads with me and pray? "Heavenly Father, as we come to this portion in our service where we receive of the cup and of the bread, we are mindful of one who died for us while we were yet sinners, Romans 5:8 says. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Reminded of First Peter 3:18, that He died, once and for all, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. We thank you this morning that we are reconciled to you through the sacrifice of the Son, that Christ not only died for our sin, but your word says surely He bore our griefs and our sorrows in Isaiah 53:6. You want to heal not just our souls, but you want to heal our minds, and you want to heal our bodies, and you want to heal our spirits. You want us to be whole people. Father, as we take these elements now, we consecrate them. We pray that you will bless them to us as we remember and give thanks for all you have done for us in Christ. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.