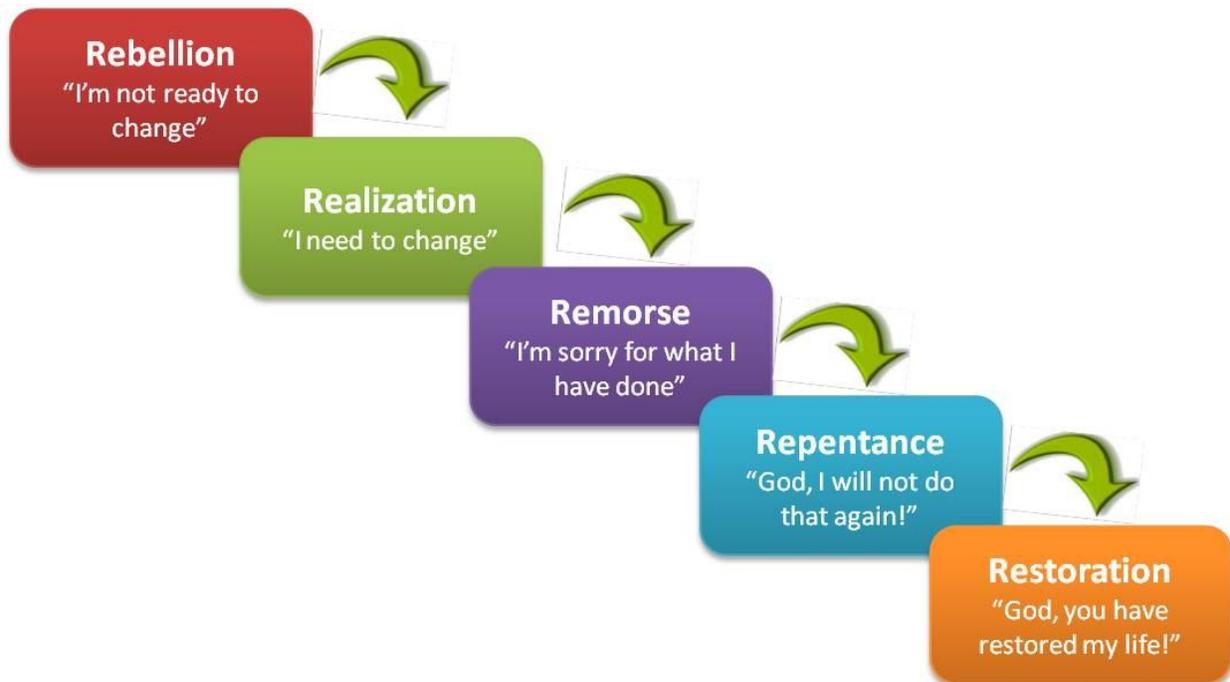


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## Change Cycle

Change often involves a process. The Bible describes five significant stages of change that are important to understand. They include *Rebellion*, *Realization*, *Remorse*, *Repentance*, and *Restoration*. If you are struggling with addiction, it is important to examine your life and recognize where you are in the change process. The length required for each stage depends completely on the individual and God's redemptive plan. There isn't a specific time frame for this process because every Christian is unique.

For some, rebellion is a brief period that leads quickly into realization, remorse and repentance. For others the state of rebellion can last for many years and result in great pain and loss. Realization is generally short-lived as a person who realizes what he or she has missed out on in life moves rapidly into remorse. Depending on the severity of the rebellion and resulting damage, repentance and restoration may be lengthy processes requiring many years to complete.



## ***Stage 1*** ***Rebellion***

The first and most critical admission every addict must make is that he or she has an addiction and is living in sin. Unfortunately, a great number of addicts deny that they have a problem that requires fixing. Those in this stage are living in a state of rebellion. Not only do those in rebellion fail to admit that they have a problem but they become offended and possibly even angry when it is brought to their attention.

This is an extremely difficult stage to work through. It is not easy to convince anyone in this stage to change because they are unrepentant. Until they have a true change of heart, they will continue to live in willful, disobedient sin. If you know someone who is living in rebellion, you cannot give that person the desire to change because it is a personal choice that only the addict can make.

## ***Stage 2*** ***Realization***

We leave the rebellion stage when we realize that we have a problem that requires changing. This is important. An alcoholic may realize that he drinks too much but fail to admit that he or she needs to change. I spoke with a man who was in this situation. He realized that his drinking was a problem, but he did not think that he needed to change his behavior. He claimed that drinking alcohol was the only way he could cope with the stress of his job. He reasoned that he needed to drink. Furthermore, he suggested that his drinking was hereditary. In other words, it was not his fault.

A change of heart comes when we realize that what we are doing is destructive and contrary to those things that we truly value – like health, friendships, family, and pleasing a holy God. Realization, therefore, is necessary. We are responsible for our actions – those that lead to addiction and those that lead to recovery.

Realization may involve pain. God gave us the ability to experience pain to protect us from even greater harm. This may seem contradictory, but it is perfectly reasonable. Pain is very motivating and often creates an awareness of our situation that we might not otherwise have. To illustrate this point, let's take a look at the story of the prodigal son who found himself in dreadful circumstances because of his sinful folly:

*Jesus said, "After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!'" (Luke 15:14-17)*

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The prodigal son hit absolute rock bottom, which resulted in a spiritual awakening that led to meaningful change. He realized that his life became futile:

*"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." (Luke 15:18)*

As was the case with the prodigal son, many addicts reach a real low point in their lives. This creates a deep sense of remorse, which is a sign of brokenness. Those who are broken call out to God for help and hunger for meaningful change.

In this stage, it is also important to realize the wonderful things that are ahead of you. Addiction keeps you from living a full, happy, productive life. God's intended plan is that you have an abundant life (John 10:10). He wants you to prosper:

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)*

Your future free of drugs and alcohol will be incredibly rewarding. All of those things that you have wanted to do are waiting for you to accomplish. God has given you hope and a bright future – now take hold of it!

### ***Stage 3*** ***Remorse***

The stage of Remorse follows the stage of realization in the change process. This is a critical step because it leads to repentance.

*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)*

Not all remorse is the same. Paul differentiates "worldly sorrow" from "Godly sorrow" above because the difference is theologically significant. It is not simply good enough to feel bad because of your circumstances. This is worldly sorrow that pushes a person away from the Lord. When you blame God or others for your personal actions that result in pain and suffering, you are manifesting worldly sorrow. A person in this situation may grow cold and callous and seek relief for his or her pain by indulging in even greater sin.

Godly sorrow, on the other hand, draws us nearer to God when we acknowledge responsibility for our actions and ask for forgiveness from both God and those we have offended and hurt. This is the start of repentance and signifies to God that we are ready to change our lives and it begins with deep, sincere sorrow and remorse.

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*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10)*

## **Stage 4**

### **Repentance**

The Bible has a great deal to say about repentance because it is something that God requires of everyone. But why is it so important to God? The answer is simple: Repentance demonstrates a sincere heart. For those repenting of addiction, it is the start of recovery because a new heart is required for meaningful change.

There are many Christians who continue to struggle with addiction because they have not fully repented before the Lord. Unfortunately, many Christians attending misguided recovery programs are told that they have a disease or psychological disorder, which is only an excuse for their sin. Believing this lie will not lead to repentance or a sincere desire for change. Those who have an addiction must take personal responsibility for the choice that they have made and the consequences related to their addiction. This is the definition of "Godly sorrow" Paul is describing in 2 Corinthians.

Repentance involves a complete turning from sin. One cannot be truly repentant and continue living in the same sin, which is what the beloved disciple of Christ describes below:

*No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.(1 John 3:9, 10)*

A repentant heart cannot continue living in willful, disobedient sin. God's love and grace will eventually lead to change. This is how we can distinguish between those who are truly "born of God" and those who are living in darkness. This may seem like an impossible task, especially when considering addictive drugs, but God's Word tells us that all things are possible for God's children:

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27)*

God has given us the tools we need to repent of sin. We must cooperate with God and "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). For those struggling with addiction, it will not be necessarily easy, but it is possible.

Repent of your sin before God and resolve not to do it again. Make the necessary lifestyle changes that accompany a new heart and experience the freedom that is available to you in Christ. Your repentance

will require work. Take the time to develop healthy coping mechanisms so you can deal with stress. There are many options available to you, so exercise your free-will and choose to do the right thing!

## ***Stage 5*** ***Restoration***

A step that follows repentance is often restoration. This is where God not only heals a person of his or her sin, but also begins to restore the things that were lost as a result of the addiction. Depending on the length of abuse, there may be significant consequences – lost employment, failed marriage and relationship woes, obesity, legal issues, and a host of other problems. God can restore these things completely despite the damage that may have been done:

*Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. (Psalm 71:20)*

The Jewish people collectively experienced the five stages of change. When the Jews repented of their sin before God, He inevitably set them free from captivity and restored their prosperity. One such example involved the Babylonian exile recorded in Scripture. God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to invade Jerusalem and plunder her gold and treasure. Men, women, and children were carried away to slavery. However, God made this proclamation through the prophet Jeremiah:

*“They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,” declares the LORD. “Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.” (Jeremiah 27:22)*

A Christian addict may experience something similar on a personal level. I have witnessed many people's lives restored by God through Godly remorse and true repentance.

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## Questions for Review

- 1) After reading through the stages of change, identify where you are in the process:

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- 2) What is keeping you from advancing to the next stage in the process? Be specific and honest with yourself.

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