

New Life and New Friends

As part of your recovery, it is important to discover your values, goals, and objectives. A Christian values a relationship with God and living a life that is pleasing to the One who gave His Son as a ransom for sin. He or she also desires attending church, hanging out with other Christians, and spending time at church functions. There are many things in life that are more valuable than alcohol, drugs, pornography, food, and so on. Identify what you treasure and you will also find your heart:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:34)

I was asked by a concerned mother to talk to her son about his heavy drinking. I typically do not intervene unless I am approached by the person who has acknowledged that he or she has a problem; which is also why I do not participate in "interventions" of any kind. In this particular case, I decided to talk with her son to see what I could do to help. I met with him weekly and we had many wonderful and productive conversations; but not about drinking. Several months into the process, the mother asked if I had confronted him about drinking and I said, "No." She was not very happy and replied, "Then what the heck have you been talking about!" I told her that we were discussing "life." She was dumbfounded and I could tell she was displeased.

To help alleviate her concern, I explained that he needed to discover those things that he valued more than drinking so that is what I focused on during our time together. We talked about work, church, and relationships. Quite on his own he began to recognize that alcohol was interfering with his ability to find work and therefore pay rent, which was important to him because he treasured his newly found independence away from home. He also discovered that drinking was impacting his relationship with his new girlfriend whom he loved very much. What is more, he noted that reading the Bible and praying were becoming bigger priorities in his life. He is now drinking less and is learning to do so in moderation. In all of the time we have spent together, the focus has never been on alcohol. Rather, we identified his goals and aspirations that he valued more than getting hammered every night.

In addition to changing your goals and values, it is important to develop new friendships that support the new life you have been given in Christ. You cannot hang out with the old gang, do the same things that you did before, and expect success in your recovery. Keeping old friendships at a healthy distance is required since old habits tend to follow old friendships.

Our friends have a tremendous influence on our lives. Those friends who embrace and support Christian living will encourage you to live for God. Conversely, friendships that delight in sin will drive you further from holy living and a healthy relationship with God through Christ.

It is important to evaluate every friendship to determine if it is a Godly relationship. As you reflect on your friendships, keep in mind that not everyone who attends church is a good influence in your life. There are

many people who simply go to church on Sunday and live a life contrary to Biblical tenets the remainder of the week. This is why Christ gave this stern warning:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" (Matthew 7:21, 22)

Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:23, 24)

Examine your life and your friendships carefully. Those who put Christ's words into practice are true Disciples of Christ. These are the people that should be part of your new life that is now free of drugs and alcohol.

Making new friends and developing new habits may seem like radical ideas. But remember, you have been radically transformed! Living a new life in Christ requires leaving the former things behind. When you decided to follow Jesus, you gave your life to Him completely. This is what it means to be a disciple of Christ. We see this kind of devotion recorded in the calling of Peter and Andrew early in the ministry of Jesus:

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-20)

His call to both of them was simple yet emphatic. In response to Christ's calling, they willingly left everything and devoted their lives to serving God. Their new commitment involved a radical change in attitude and behavior. Similar to a religious commitment, like choosing to become a Christian disciple, your commitment to recovery will be accompanied by significant lifestyle changes. You will not seek the same rewards and pleasures afforded by drugs and alcohol, or other things such as pornography. Find healthy alternatives that bring lasting joy instead of practicing old habits that bring pain and frustration. You are born again and have been given a completely new life through Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection.

If you are in the early stages of your new life, you most likely still have close friendships with other 'users' or addicts. That is because we tend to hang out with other people that have similar values and interests. When it comes to addiction, addicts attract other addicts because they support one another in their sin. This has disastrous consequences for those who are trying to overcome drugs and alcohol. Like a lobster that is pulled back into the tank by those on the bottom when it tries to climb free, an addict is pulled back into sin by those who drink or use drugs.

New friends and Christian relationships must be an integral part of your recovery in Christ. This is common sense and a biblical command:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Paul is emphatic in his exhortation: The committed Christian should no longer associate on a deep and personal level with those who do not live their life for Christ. This seems rather harsh, but it is something most Christians know is wise advice. I want to make it clear that this attitude is not born out of arrogance but necessity. Old relationships with those who promote habits and attitudes counter to recovery will lead to frustration and possibly even relapse. It is a matter of common sense that those who do not believe in Jesus Christ and reject the Bible as God's revealed truth have a different view on life.

The idea that Christians need to surround themselves with other Christians who share similar values is difficult for some to embrace. I explained this concept to a young man who had recently started attending church. He was very offended by my suggestion that he should be "equally yoked" and needed to evaluate his current friendships in view of God's Word. After reflecting for a moment or two, he declared that his friendships were more important than his relationship with Christ so he stopped attending church because Christians were "narrow-minded." And he was undoubtedly correct: A true Christian is narrowly focused on God's revealed truth and teaching of Christ and the Apostles.

We know that a person who is still doing drugs or drinking heavily will discourage you and your efforts. This is what I refer to as "toxic" friendships. This is especially true in the early stages of your recovery. That is when you are perhaps most vulnerable. You will need to decide what friends will be most helpful as you begin your new life. This is entirely up to you and is a decision that should not be made on emotional grounds alone. Use your head and practice wisdom. You are in control of your life and need to make wise choices.

One of those key choices is to seek out friends who support your recovery. Unfortunately most addicts have similar friendships that are harmful. Unhealthy relationships are not helpful to recovery and slow or completely stall the process. Here is where the addict needs to make a decision about what is more important: recovery or friends. Yes, choosing recovery may result in the loss of some or all of your current friendships. If you are serious about recovery then separating from friends who drink excessively or use drugs is necessary. This is not an easy decision to make if those friendships have been important in your life. You decided to quit and now need to make other difficult choices that support your new life in Christ. Consider your friends carefully and cleave to those people who support your sobriety.

Walking away from friendships will create a void in your life so it is important that you fill that void with new friends. Choose friends that share your new values and interests. Proverbs 12:26 tells us "to choose our friends carefully" and we should heed Solomon's exhortation. Friends that embrace sobriety and a healthy lifestyle will encourage you in your recovery. They will motivate you to press forward rather than pulling you back into a life of sin. Making new friends may take time, but it is well worth it in the long run.

This rule also applies to loved ones in your life. If you are dating an addict, evaluate that relationship using God's standard of being "equally yoked" to those who hold similar beliefs. This is difficult and may cause great pain and heartache as you consider God's will for your life. I believe that God will reveal to you that remaining in a serious relationship with an addict is destined to be a constant source of temptation and frustration. This is one situation in which following your head is better than listening to your heart. Trust that God will fill the void caused by the loss. Exercise wisdom and discernment and you will inevitably know what is right.

Marriage is the only relationship that you cannot walk away from because it is ordained by God. His injunction for husbands and wives to remain together should not be taken lightly. It is extremely difficult when one member of the marriage chooses to quit and make changes while the other remains stationary. It is difficult but not impossible.

There are things that you can do that may help in this situation. To begin with, talk to your spouse about your decision and determination to live free of addiction. Ask for his or her support in helping you remain sober and drug free by removing alcohol or drugs from the house. Explain that addiction is robbing your marriage of the joy God promises. Appeal to your spouse to participate in healthy habits you can do together that do not involve drinking or using drugs. Hopefully, your marriage vow of "for better or worse" will motivate your spouse to help you through this process.

Your spouse may not understand or even refuse to make changes that support your new lifestyle. This is unfortunate, but not a good reason for you to throw-in the towel. Take proactive measures to avoid unhealthy situations whenever possible. It may require that you leave the home when your husband or wife is getting high or drunk so you are not tempted to fall. You want to avoid a conflict so be sensitive, yet firm in your resolve. The goal is not to be rude or harsh. Explain that you have to take the necessary precautions to avoid temptation if you are going to be personally successful in recovering from addiction. And pray that God would open the eyes of your spouse so you can walk this journey together and support each other. Anything is possible for God!

You can fill the gap that is caused by your spouse's lack of support. Perhaps you can go out for the evening and do something constructive during those times of trial. Take a long walk, go to the bookstore, or attend a Bible study if one is meeting at that time. You do have options. It is your life and your choice so exercise your strength in Christ and do what it is necessary to avoid temptation and live a new life free of addiction.

Keep in mind always that you are a new creation clothed in the robes of God's righteousness. It is time to walk away from the bad habits you once practiced. Your old self is dead and gone forever. Your new life in Christ should be filled with healthy habits and activities that don't involve drinking or using drugs. Discover things in life that make you happy and satisfied but are not unhealthy. Learn to play a musical instrument, attend exercise classes, or take a cooking class to replace drugs and alcohol. I guarantee that it is fun to do something new!



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It is also important that you attend a church if you are not actively involved at this time since you are a Christian. By joining a healthy church, you will develop Christian friendships with those who support your new values. I am not recommending that you necessarily join a church recovery program. In fact, I strongly encourage that you join groups and clubs that focus on healthy things other than addiction. Get involved in prayer meetings and worship services that focus on God rather than drugs and alcohol because they are no longer your master. Live your new life and experience the freedom and joy that is available to you in Christ! Do not spend your time commiserating with other 'recovering' alcoholics about what you have missed; enjoy healthy relationships with those who enjoy a new life in Christ. If are looking for an occasion to celebrate, rejoice in the resurrection of Christ and your new life.