

THE GOSPEL IN STEP 10

Introduction

Step 10 says this: “We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.” “We continued to take personal inventory” – we have now made it a habit, a lifestyle, to examine ourselves. We are now, in step 10, much better at naming those people and circumstances that cause resentment, we are much better at understanding the effect they have had on us, including the damage caused, and most importantly, we are much better at seeing our part in the resentment. We have now made repentance and confession a part of our daily routine – this is progress in the Christian life, and progress in our recoveries!

And, we are now in the habit of making amends quickly: “when we were wrong, we promptly admitted it.” In addition to a lifestyle of repentance, we have now included humility. It is not all about us – we are no longer the center of the universe. We recognize when we are thinking and acting wrongly, and we promptly admit it.

This is step 10 – much different than step 4, where the inventory was long overdue and therefore much harder, and where we were really getting out a lot that had kept us sick for a long time. As Dean said, if you don’t really feel bad, or wiped out after doing steps 4 and 5, you probably need to go back and do it again! But in step 10 we see progress, and this is worth being thankful for.

So what is the Gospel in step 10? I think it centers on one word: **continue**. “We continued.” Yes, we’re grateful to be able to say we’ve made progress in the steps to this point. But why do we continue? It’s because **God**

continues to recover us from sin. We continue the work of recovery because God continues to save us, and part of that continuing work of salvation is to recover us from sin – our sin and the effects of others’ sin on us. This is good news. This is the Gospel – **God continues to save us.**

Just one verse to drive this gospel point home tonight: Phil 1:6: “And I am sure of this, that He Who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” God has begun a good work in you; He continues to do this good work in you; and He will finish this good work in you. We do our good work in step 10, taking personal inventory regularly and admitting when we are wrong when it happens, because God continues to recover us from sin; He continues to save us.

God Has Done Good Work **For Us**

By way of review, God has done the good work of justification, by allowing His Son to pay the price for our sins on the Cross. The price was paid **for** us, because we could never have paid the price ourselves. Jesus paid the price – he redeemed us. Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory and God **and** are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

This is a good work, and it has been done for us. We are justified – we have been set free from **the penalty of sin.** All we have to do is receive this justification by faith, understanding it is a gift of God. You are not guilty, if you are in Christ. Believe that!

The work of recovery starts at the Cross of Jesus Christ. He died, to set you free. Because he did this, God has declared you to be not guilty. One reason we stay stuck in our recovery is because we continue to declare ourselves guilty. If God says you're innocent, who are you to say you're guilty?

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

For God so loved you that He gave his only Son. Jesus did not come to condemn you, but to save you. “No guilt in life, no fear in death; this is the power of Christ in me.” It is the power for recovery. It is the good work that God has done (past tense) for you.

God Continues His Good Work *In Us*

The work done for us, on the Cross is called justification. When we receive this gift by faith, we are freed from the penalty of sin. But God's saving work continues in us. He began a good work in us, and is in the process of bringing it to completion. He continues to save us, to recover us from sin, and this is called **sanctification**. The process of sanctification frees us from **the power of sin**.

Isn't this your experience, those of you who are at step 10? The power of the sin that brought you here is diminishing, and the power of Christ in you is growing. It's why step 4 is different than step 10. We've won some victories, through the power of Christ in us. As Paul said last week, this is why it's called *Celebrate Recovery*. We celebrate:

- Any length of sobriety.
- “I statements” – think about how you keep your sharing focused on yourself so much more easily than when you first entered this process.
- Different reactions to the same person or circumstance – triggers stop working, to your amazement. This is character change!

We continue to take personal inventory, and when we’re wrong we promptly admit it, but we also see that now there are times when we’re doing it right! Let’s admit it when we’re doing it right, as well.

But let’s never forget and celebrate that this continuing work of God in us is a work of grace.

Eph 2:⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

Examples of God’s continuing work of grace *in* us:

- Fellowship with him – Bible study and prayer are richer. Sermons speak to us at a deeper level. We feel him continuing to work in us.
- Fellowship with others – this is a safe place to be a sinner; to be honest; to be broken.
- Service – it is amazing grace for many of us that God can actually use us in His continuing work of saving His people. So we serve here; we volunteer in other areas of the church; we become an

accountability partner or sponsor for someone else (huge for our recovery!). God works in us, and now also works through us to work in someone else!

None of this is possible, except by a work of God's grace in us.

Now this may be a night when you are feeling anything but victorious. You're beat up – you've reacted the way you always have, creating wreckage in the process. You've relapsed, giving up a period of sobriety. This message is still for you. If you are in Christ, I am sure that the work He began in you is, in fact continuing. God is faithful, even when you think you're not.

All I can say is, look to Jesus, the “author and perfecter of our faith.” He is the author – your faith originates in him. And he is the perfecter – he is making you perfect. But for now, understand that you are not perfect; you are being made perfect, and what we celebrate is not perfection, but progress.

Listen to this quote from John Newton – a slave-trader, converted to a pastor and the one who wrote *Amazing Grace*: “I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.”

He is grateful that he is not the man he used to be. He is grateful for progress, even as he waits for the perfection of heaven.

You know what? – So am I. I am not the man I used to be, even though I am not what I ought to be. I remember saying to the congregation that the best thing that ever happened to me was my son's drug addiction. It awakened my faith. It moved me to trust God more than ever before, and so I changed.

Now before the challenges with our son hit the fan, I was president of a company. I still am president, but I'm different. I'm a president who went to seminary. Making that announcement was like coming out of the closet as a Christian. It was a little nerve-wracking, but also an exciting time to witness.

My brother Duane asked me the other night if I would be nervous if three-quarters of my company showed up one Sunday to hear me preach. I said, "No, I'm pretty much the same guy at work that I am at church. People know who I am." But as I thought about it, ten or fifteen years ago, I might not have been able to say the same thing – my anger outbursts may have been more frequent and intense; my language might have been worse; I might have drank too much at company functions. So yes, I've made progress, and I know it is because Christ continues to save me; to recover me from sin.

And working the steps works – when I get angry, or resentful I am so much quicker at figuring out the reason. It is because I continue to take personal inventory, and when I'm wrong, when I see my part in the problem, I am much better at saying I am sorry. I'm far from perfection, but I'm better than I used to be, only by the grace of God.

No matter your circumstances tonight, can you say, "I am not the man or woman I used to be?" If so, be grateful for the progress, however small it seems. If not, even then, can you believe that Jesus is not only the one who created faith, but also the perfecter of your faith?

God Finishes What He Starts

God has done good work for us; God continues His good work in us; and God finishes what He starts.

The good work for us is our justification – it freed us from the penalty of sin. The good work continuing in is our sanctification – we are gaining freedom from the power of sin. And when God finishes what He has started, we will be free from the **presence of sin**.

The work is finally finished at the “day of Jesus Christ.” This means the work is done forever when Christ returns in final victory. All traces of evil will vanish.

There will be no sin in heaven – no addiction, no hurt, no habit, no hang-up, no anxiety, fear, no pain; no sin or effect of sin anywhere. This life is momentary, and then we have an eternity to be free from the presence of sin. God is faithful. Christ has risen, and Christ is coming. We are thankful for his continuing saving work in us now, and we can be thankful for the glory that awaits us in heaven.

In the meantime, we fight the fight. Mike Roche’s testimony at Victory in Christ was powerful (they all were) – and there he was, on the following Tuesday in our small group, sharing about another struggle in his life. Praise God for the continuing work of salvation in our lives, and praise God that he gives us the strength to continue the process. And praise God that he will **finish what he has started in us**.

Be Sure of God’s Work in You

Paul is **sure** that the one who began the good work will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Oh, to be sure like Paul. Paul writes this letter to the Philippians from jail. He is sure of God's work, in jail! Even though his circumstances absolutely stink, he is sure of his salvation. Few people endured more pain and suffering than Paul did, in the service of the Lord, and yet he is sure of God's work, and sure that God is faithful to complete it.

Are you sure of the work that God has begun and is doing in you? It's an important part of the recovery process to have confidence that God is working.

There is an old song that is called *Trust and Obey*. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey."

Have you ever experienced God's faithfulness? Remember those moments when prayers were answered in really obvious ways. Remember chance encounters, that you know were set up by him. Remember his surprising provision, often right at a time when you thought there was no hope. God has "brought you safe thus far," as John Newton writes in *Amazing Grace*, and he will "lead you home." I submit you can trust God because of experience. Even if you can't, I hope that your faith is stirred by another's experience. That's why testimonies are such an important part of our program. They are shared so that you may trust God more when you see what's he's done in another's life.

Has God said He is faithful to you? If in doubt, spend more time in His word, or ask a friend to show you in his word where he has promised to be faithful. God says he is faithful – I believe him and therefore I can trust him.

Most importantly, has God demonstrated his faithfulness to you? Just look at the Cross of Jesus Christ.

- ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
¹¹ Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and righteousness looks down from the sky.

To be sure that God has begun a good work in you and that he will bring it to completion, you have to trust him – and he is utterly trustworthy.

And, I think, to be sure that God has begun a good work in you and that he is even right now bringing to completion, you have to obey him. It's hard to be sure, if you are not obeying his call. He is your Lord, which means, as we've talked about before, you have to surrender your arms to him.

As you take inventory, now on a regular basis, you become aware of areas where you're not obeying. See those; confess them; experience his grace and mercy all over again. Then, you can be sure of the work He is doing in you.

The confidence of the Christian is the great comfort of the Christian. Philippians 1:6 should be a comfort to you. It will be if you are as sure of God's working as Paul is. And that sureness, that confidence comes when you trust and obey. Trust and obey – actually that's shorthand for “work the program” – and see your confidence grow that God is doing a good work in you. And let that be your comfort.