

# CONVERSION COMPANION

## WEEK 3, RESISTANCE | DAY 1

### STEPS

The essence of conversion is change. Change is something that many of us resist; however, being changed is something almost every one of us resists. In all of my years of priesthood, I have found no single ministry more helpful than Alcoholics Anonymous in walking people through the reality of change. AA is one of the most renowned organizations helping individuals recover from behavior that controls them. Hundreds of millions of people just like you have benefited from the steps articulated by AA. Working the steps of AA can help us learn how to say “no” to the things that lure us “out of the chair”.

I have often said: “If you don’t know where you’re going, it’s easy to get lost along the way.” What the 12 steps of AA provide is a direction for where we’re going, as well as process as to how to get there.

- The steps help us understand what must be done, but also alleviate the subtle temptation of having to do everything all at once.
- Steps also infer a process: first do this, then do that. The steps imply that our spiritual exercise builds upon previous exercise.
- Steps also reveal movement which helps us admit that I cannot stay still in my interior life, nor can I continue to do the same thing and expect a different outcome.

Over the next several weeks, you and I will be led on a journey. God is going to lead us on an interior journey of self-discovery. As we “work” the 12 steps of AA we will replace the word “alcohol” in use of the word “sin”. The steps will provide the process; however, no one else can do the work. You have to commit. The first step is always the most important step and that is one of commitment. Therefore, before we go any further, one question looms: Are you committed? Are you really committed?

### FOR YOUR PRAYER

Today’s homework is important. Perhaps the most important of any homework during this semester. Today, write your first letter to yourself. In today’s letter, write to yourself describing what your life will look like if you actually commit to being committed. Be honest – be brutally honest – regarding the positive consequences in your life if you were really committed to the process.

# CONVERSION COMPANION

## WEEK 3, RESISTANCE | DAY 2

### EVIDENCE

One of the definitions of insanity as defined by Alcoholics Anonymous is repeating the same behavior over and over while expecting a different result. In other words, I have often heard it said: “If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you always got.” As you behold those words, I would imagine that most of us would agree that our lives will not change unless our concrete behaviors do. Perhaps the most deceptive temptation is believing that our behavior will change without the necessary effort and intentionality. We have to choose to choose. Expecting our lives to change without struggle or discipline is at the very heart of the previous definition of insanity.

Today, I would like us to confront the voice of temptation that has either already whispered to you, or that will soon whisper to you in the coming days. I would like to confront the lie that lifestyle change can be expected without process. In other words, simply asking God to change our life while sitting back and doing nothing to help God doesn't work. If we are going to actually make strides in our spiritual life, we need to engage in the process. However, most of us will be tempted to dismiss the process; falsely believing we can do this “on our own.” To that, let me ask you a simple question: what is the evidence that this has actually worked in your life? What is the concrete evidence that attempting to change yourself all by yourself actually works? Or, if you were to be brutally honest with yourself, is there evidence in your life that attempting to change without help has actually led to the same pattern of “leaving the chair” again and again.

I have recently been reminded that hope is not a strategy. Hoping that your life would change and attempting to do so all by yourself will only lead to the same results. And, if I were a betting man, I would bet that you have evidence in your life that this is true. You don't have to trust the process of working the steps; however, if you don't, may I merely ask you to provide evidence that your way is working.

#### FOR YOUR PRAYER

Today's homework is important. Perhaps another one of the most important of any homework during this semester. Today, write your second letter to yourself. In today's letter, write to yourself describing what your life will look like if you don't commit to being committed. Be honest – be brutally honest – regarding the negative consequences in your life if you attempt to change on your own.

# CONVERSION COMPANION

## WEEK 3, RESISTANCE | DAY 3

### ADMIT

Fear lies to us, but evidence reveals the truth. When we look at the concrete evidence of our lives, we come face-to-face with the reality that most of us cannot experience life change, or sustain life change, relying on our own strength. How many times have we made New Year's resolutions and failed to actualize them by the end of the same year? How many times have we challenged ourselves with a deeply personal Lenten penance and failed to experience spiritual breakthrough by Easter? When we look at the evidence in our history, it is actually our own lives that reveal the reality that we need God's help in order to change. Therefore, it would not surprise us to see that the first step of the 12 steps is to admit that we are powerless over sin. In fact, if pride is the root of all evil, failing to admit that we are powerless over sin actually guarantees that that we will be enslaved to sin.

You cannot conquer sin on your own. How many times have you tried? How many times have you wanted to stop a particular sin, only to repeat the same pattern at the first sign of difficulty? Admitting that we are powerless over sin is not an admission of weakness, but instead an admission of wisdom. Admitting that we are powerless over sin actually disposes us to admitting that we need God. We all acknowledge that Christ is our Savior; however until we admit that we need a Savior, especially in our patterns of habitual sin, that Savior cannot transform our life.

Admitting that you cannot is the first step in accepting that He can. Until we admit that we have a problem, and that we, left to our own strength, cannot solve that problem, we will continue to "leave the chair" and produce the evidence of failure. If admitting that we need God is the first part of the process, then admitting that we cannot do it on our own strength is what lies before us today. The first step of AA is: "We admitted we were powerless over (sin)—that our lives had become unmanageable." Are you ready to admit that you need help with sin? Are you ready to admit that you cannot change relying solely on your own strength?

### FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with Isaiah 65:1-3. Today, write your third letter. In today's letter, write to God admitting the reality of what has happened in your past when you've tried to live relying on your own strength. In your letter, admit to God, and to yourself, what happens when you try to do it on your own.

# CONVERSION COMPANION

## WEEK 3, RESISTANCE | DAY 4

### GREATER

The second step of AA is: “We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” All of the words of the 12 steps are very specific and intentional. The second step doesn’t say “We came to believe in a power greater than ourselves,” it says: “We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” The emphasis is not simply admitting that we need God, but also in what God can do for us. God – who is greater than us – can restore our sanity. Remember that one of the definitions of insanity as defined by Alcoholics Anonymous is repeating the same behavior over and over while expecting a different result. As I mentioned just a few days ago: “If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you always got.” The “sanity” that is restored when we surrender to God is the reality of what our lives look like when we are “in the chair”. To choose to live a life stuck in the repetitive patterns of sin, rather than to live in the freedom of God, is “insane”. This affects us. It affects our families. There are consequences when we live with God versus when we live stuck in sin.

The good news is that God longs to free us. God longs to help us. God longs to bring transformation into our lives. Not only does God desired this, but God is capable of making this a reality. Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that God can do immeasurably more in us than we could ever ask for or imagine. When we surrender to Jesus Christ, we surrender to a person – a person who has already conquered death and conquered sin. Christ has already won the victory. His power is greater than our struggle. His desire is greater than our resistance. His fidelity is greater than our infidelity. His mercy is greater than our self-condemnation. His strength is greater than our weakness. When we surrender to the very specific person of Jesus Christ, we are not merely asking for help from someone, we are acknowledging the reality that this very specific someone is greater than anything else – including my struggles with sin.

### FOR YOUR PRAYER

Pray with Exodus, chapter 14. What is the “Red Sea” that you are facing? Who or what is the enemy that pursues you. Ask the Lord to speak to you about His power. Ask the Lord to speak to you about His greater.

# CONVERSION COMPANION

## WEEK 3, RESISTANCE | DAY 5

### DECISION

The third step of AA is: “We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God”. Before we unpack the importance of the word “decision”, let us begin by acknowledging the specificity of the word “will”.

You want God. You would not be reading this meditation, or be participating in a small group, unless you had a desire for God. However, just as each of us has a desire for holiness, each of us has built up an appetite for sin. We actually have an affection for the sins we repetitively grasp at. Spiritual maturation is not merely when we want or do not want something, for we will often experience an actual craving for the things that pull us “out of the chair”. Spiritual maturation is when we exercise our will, especially when we do not want to. Far too many of us wait for our sinful desires to dissipate before we consider ourselves on the journey of spiritual growth. My experience reveals to me that it is not the annihilation of sinful craving that leads to spiritual growth as much as it is choosing to choose even when I do not want to. This is our will. It is our will - our decision-making - that must be surrendered to God.

Notice that in this very important third step we are not merely surrendering our desires to God. We are admitting that our very capacity to choose God has become weakened by our history of sin. Therefore, in this third step, we admit that we cannot choose God on our own strength. Not only can we not sin relying solely on our own strength, but we cannot choose God on our own strength. We need His help to surrender to Him and must do so on a daily basis. Our decision to surrender to God is not a once in a lifetime event. We surrender to God every day. We acknowledge every single day that without His help, and left to our own strength, we may revert back to selfish behavior. The freedom in the third step is choosing to make that decision every day. Doing so removes the burden from me that I have to manage temptation on my own. When I every day decide to rely on God, I begin to rebuild the muscle of a healthy conscience and stronger will.

The future daily decisions are preceded by the very first decision. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Today, at this very present moment, God is asking you to make a decision to surrender your will to Him. Are you ready to do so? Would your life be better or worse if you did so? Can you today make a decision to turn your will and your life over to the care of God?

#### FOR YOUR PRAYER

Today, write your fourth letter. In today’s letter write to God expressing your heart, your desires, and your decision to your will and your life over to His care.