

I think it was a couple of weeks ago that I had the privilege of introducing you to a new friend of mine, his name was Tom. He stood here and shared his story of recovery. You know Tom, yeah. This is Karen, a new friend, and the first time I ever went to a celebrate recovery gathering, I had the privilege of hearing Karen share her story, and it moved me, and it encouraged me, it gave me hope all over again, and we've asked her to come back again this morning and to share her story with you. I hope that you will receive her warmly, I hope you'll open your heart to what God may want to say to you this morning as she shares with you her journey toward freedom. I'm glad you're here, thank you for being with us. Welcome, Karen. (applause) Thank you, good morning. My name is Karen. I'm a believer in Jesus Christ who struggles with an addiction to food. I'm involved in Celebrate Recovery to heal past hurts and to become the woman that God wants me to be. It seems to me that I have always been hungry, very hungry. I wanted to escape. I wanted to numb myself out from my fear of a perfectionist, controlling father and an emotionally distant mother. My siblings were older than I was by ten years and "shut up, Karen, go away" is my strongest memory of my childhood. My relationship with my father was unhealthy and confusing. I know that my father loved me very much and he wanted the very best for me, but to accomplish that perfection, he would lash out in anger, sometimes using profanity and control followed by lavish gifts and attention. No matter how hard I tried, my father was highly critical of everything and I could not figure out where he ended and I began. I was daddy's little girl and completely isolated into my father's role for my life. My father was a perfectionist which worked very well for his career as he went into the janitorial business and he became obsessed about cleanliness and image. His image and mine. I was taught how to speak, act, and dress, how to image properly for the business. A counselor told me once that my father could be dead for years and his voice in my mind would still control me if I didn't learn my own truth. My mother, I don't ever remember feeling that my mother was happy. It became a lifelong feeling of responsibility that I didn't even know I had picked up to try and make my mother happy. I now know thanks to the program of Celebrate Recovery that my mother's happiness is not my responsibility. My responsibility is to love her and I do. But prior to my recovery, our behaviors together were unhealthy for me. I wanted to give her love and joy so we ate food I didn't need. We spent money I didn't have and we gossiped about those from whom I wanted love. I tried so hard to fill those gaps in my mother's heart which I now know probably came from her own past hurt. But not anything I would ever do or not do would ever bring my mother happiness. It's a God-sized hole and only His love can fill it. I know that until my recovery program, I never did leave my parents and cleave to my husband. I never honored my husband as the gift from God that he is because my dad's approval was all I ever sought. My father and I worked side by side for over 20 years in that family business. We fought a lot. I felt trapped. I hated myself. I hated my career and I was alone because I was angry at God for my infertility. I couldn't find any other way to escape my feelings, my own behaviors, and the devastation that coming from my actions so I kept returning to the only thing that allowed me to feel satisfied and content. Food. Somewhere along the way the suffering from abusing food far outweighed the good feelings that were brought from consuming it. But I kept returning to the food because it comforted me and then it started killing me. I would lose 100 pounds and I would gain back 150. I would do it again and again. I was heading to 400 pounds. I kept trying to find a way to stop, to get out of my body, but I couldn't stop eating. I had learned only one way to cope with my

emotions and that was to shove something in my mouth to make the pain stop. It was an ugly cycle and my body was reeling from my abuse. I was angry all the time. I was blaming other people and circumstances for why I couldn't control myself. There was not a single time in my adult life that I looked in the mirror and said anything positive. For over 20 years this went on, growing worse with each passing year. In recovery, I also discovered I had another addiction. I was out of control with spending. I was making very good money but I was spending more. My life was a lie because I was trying to buy people, love and an image that wasn't real. My father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2002 and died just a few months later. Things in my life went from bad to worse. You see I didn't have the skills to cope with my grief, to help my mother, to save the business, and to face what was rapidly becoming the truth of my life. I'm very fortunate that someone I worked with decided to talk to me about a recovery program. He did so at great personal risk, but he believed it was necessary to save my life and that man was right. He encouraged me to attend and they said keep coming back and I didn't want to. But I knew there was something at Celebrate Recovery that could help me. The gift that we discovered together on this journey of recovery is very precious to me. You see, it's my own identity. It is for me the woman that God wants me to be. He had always had a plan for my life and instead of following that plan, I created my own. My way of coping with my life led to self-destructive, large debt, pain for the people in my life, and damage to my step-children and my marriage. That was almost four years ago. In the first two years of Celebrate Recovery, by the grace of God, He helped me lose 178 pounds. Then for the next year, not one pound moved from my body, but that's OK. God was working in other ways. He was lightening me in other ways. This year I hope to seek God's will for losing the remaining weight. But God has changed me, through my life, my husband is experiencing the love of God. I have a peace and a contentment I've never known before. My past debts are all paid and we live financially free because God has completely removed my desire to eat food I do not need and to purchase things I do not need. Today, thanks to the program of Celebrate Recovery, I can love the woman within and I can thank God for changing me inside and out. And I rejoice that He allows me to stand here before you and tell you how much I love Him and how much He loves me. You see, I am His daughter. I am His princess. I am anointed, called, and chosen. I am free to be all that God created me to be. I believe I have a responsibility to work the best recovery program that I can. It's not perfect but I am committed. I believe God has a plan for me and that it includes that I be free of addictive substances, compulsive behaviors, and the pain of my past. Recovery is the greatest gift you can give yourself. It is more valuable to me than anything I've ever experienced because through this program God uses the pain that He has redeemed in me to reach others still in bondage and I am humbled by that privilege. Thank you for letting me share.

I hope that's encouraging for you. It is encouraging for me. I'll tell you that. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter what the struggle, there is hope for you. There is freedom found in relationship with Christ. There is support and encouragement found in the body of Christ and we want to invite you again, Friday nights, 7:00, right here upstairs on our campus. 7:00, Friday nights, our own Celebrate Recovery gathering where you will hear more from the word of God, you will meet the people of God, you'll be encouraged, brought along by the Spirit of God, I believe. Again, it doesn't matter who you are.

You are welcome to come. We'd love to have you. It's a great team of people and a growing community of folks that are giving themselves to that level of accountability and involvement. We come today to what is the wrap-up to this series that we've entitled Celebrate Recovery—The Road to Freedom. Before we move into the final steps, steps 7 and 8 this morning, I want to go back just briefly to step 6. We didn't get a chance to actually talk about it. Publically, it was posted for you on our Digging Deeper material on the website, but I just want to make sure in this setting we at least touch on step 6, a very important step in this process of God moving you and I away from our patterns of sin. God moving you and I away from the destructive addiction of sin. Step 6, you can see it on the screen. Step 6, evaluate it, it says all my relationships offer forgiveness to those who hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others except when to do so would harm them or others. That last phase there I think just generally speaking you and I need to be sensitive when we're going to others to talk about things that maybe haven't been talked about for a long time when there was a past offense and 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 years has gone by. You and I need to be careful how we go about bringing that up, how we go about articulating that, in now a new context or situation. But the bulk of that step, evaluate all your relationships, you and I need to be willing to do that. We'll talk actually about that this morning. As you evaluate your past, and as I look at mine, there has to be willingness and a readiness in you and I to offer forgiveness. Some of you, many of you in this room I am learning, with what has transpired and with what you have experienced with that which has been done to you, the things that you've endured in a relationship or relationships in the past, it may have been at home, it may have been with another, but there are many of us in the room who need to be willing to once and for all, with the grace of God and the strength that He provides, draw a line in the sand, put a stake in the ground and say "I forgive you." I hold nothing against you. I completely and absolutely forgive you and there needs to be a willingness to go and seek that forgiveness. A great verse in Ephesians, go ahead Katie and put that verse up on the screen. Ephesians 4:31, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to each other, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has forgiven you. So very important in this road to freedom, this road of repentance that you and I be willing to offer forgiveness. Dale Seiglin, who was up here just a few minutes ago, several years ago passed a quote, I don't even know who said it, but he passed it along to me. I've never forgotten it. I've used it many a time in years gone by. Bitterness, the lack of forgiveness. Some of you know what it's like to be controlled by bitterness. The quote goes like this. Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. It just kills you. It just eats you up. It just tears you apart. While you're waiting somehow for the other person to pay, you pay, I pay, when we withhold that. My friends, God calls us to be a people who are willing to forgive because you have been forgiven, because you have been forgiven so much. Who are you? Who am I to withhold that? Step 6, very, very important, a willingness to forgive and a willingness on your part and mine to go and seek forgiveness from those whom we have violated. Let's move on to steps 7 and 8. We've been talking about for the last 7 weeks. We've been teaching and looking to God's word as it relates to this idea of moving away with God's help from our patterns of sin. I'm talking about exposing our addictions to the light of God's truth and God's love and then watching Him heal and restore us from those habits and those hurts and those hang-ups that have been so destructive. We've been in the series that we've entitled The Road to Recovery for

almost two months now and many of you, it is so encouraging to hear it, it's so encouraging to read about it, many of you are beginning to experience God making significant changes in your life, significant changes in the way you think, significant changes in the way you choose and decide. I'm grateful for the progress. I love seeing people freed. I love seeing people transformed. Today I want to talk to you about how to maintain that movement, your movement towards repentance. How can we stay focused on obedience and stay away from falling back in to old patterns of sin and destructive? Today I want us to look at what can cause in your life and mine what can cause relapse. What can cause regression, if you will, on this road to freedom and sanctification? Why is it after you've been there, I would suspect, I know I've been there, why after a couple of weeks or why after a couple of months of new victories and seemingly new ground gained, what is it that happens, what is it that goes on in your life and mine where all of a sudden after two weeks or two months just boom like that, a foolish and really unhealthy decision gets made? And all of a sudden it feels like we're back at the what? Back at the beginning. Kind of starting all over again. How does this happen? How do we fall back into the failure and frustration of our sin? What can cause regression? You can write that down. What can cause regression in our journey towards freedom? Number 1, here we go. Reverting back, it can happen my friends when you and I revert back to relying on human effort. Reverting back to human effort. I love what Paul said to the church at Galatia. In Galatians he's writing them, he's concerned about the church at Galatia. They had made so much progress. They had moved away from their ritual. They had moved away from their dependence on the flesh. They had moved away from this humanist religion and they had become completely dependent on the Spirit of God. Sound familiar? It's where many of us end up on this road to recovery. They had done so well and now all of a sudden, some false teaching had made its way back in. Things were not going well and folks were starting to regress. Paul says in Galatians 3:3, you can see it there on the screen, Are you so foolish? Don't be foolish he says. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Does anybody in the room want to answer that? Are you going to be, am I going to be, are we going to be perfected, are we going to be furthered in this road toward freedom by our fleshly willpower, our human efforts? Yes or no? No, it's not going to happen. I'm reminded of Jesus' words, the Spirit may be willing but the flesh is what? Weak. So you start off, we've all been there, you start off trusting God in step one. Remember step one was, I am powerless to change me by virtue of my human sinful nature, it's not going to happen. I am powerless to change me. Step two, but God you're not. God you are absolutely powerful and able to transform and change me. So step three, I yield, I submit all of my life to the care and control of Christ. And we begin to cooperate with God. We begin to depend on Him. We begin to be absolutely reliant on Him and Him alone and He begins to grow us and He begins to change us and He begins to free us. Yet as time goes by, in that process of being grown and changed and freed, the enemy, Satan himself, is there whispering, sometimes yelling but either way, communicating to you and I this lie that so many times in the midst of our successes, we begin to buy into. The lie is this. The lie is, I'm pulling this off. I'm doing this. I'm making progress. I'm being strong enough. I'm being wise enough. Look what I'm doing. Wow! I'm doing really well here. Then as I like to say, we get down that road far enough and we end up on the balcony with David. You win a few battles. You make a pretty good name for yourself. You're feeling pretty strong and the next thing you know you think you can watch a woman bathe, Bathsheba, and not

get in trouble. You can't do that. I can't do that. You foolish people, he says, why would you start with the Spirit and then somehow think you've got this figured out, you don't. You desperately need my help. I love Zechariah 4:6. Zechariah 4:6, it says, Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might, not by might, you see that? Not by your strength or willpower, not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts. You can say Amen. There's nothing you bring to this. There's nothing I bring to this that's going to get us through this. You and I are going to walk this road of repentance by the Spirit, by the power and strength that He provides, and the He provides alone. Only God has the power to move you further and further away from sin's grip. If you go back to willpower, if you go back to "you" power, you will fail. Number two, getting sloppy with the steps. How does relapse occur? You start trying to do it alone. Number two, we get sloppy with the steps. What do I mean by this? We get in a hurry. We get excited, to our credit, we want to keep moving forward. We try to move through the steps to quickly or we try to skip a difficult step like step six. I've already heard from some people. Go back to the people you've harmed and seek forgiveness. Sometimes folks just sometimes say, you know what? I can't do that. I don't want to do that one. I really like the other six, I don't think I'll do that one. I'll just drop one. It can't be that bad. No, listen. It's that bad. You can't do that. These steps aren't just steps. These steps are based on biblical principles and you and I have to be faithful, not so much to the steps but we have to be faithful to the truth. The truth calls you and I all through these steps to a certain posture, to a certain mindset, to certain decisions and choices that you and I must make. You don't skip it. You don't go three for eight, no, no. You can I need to faithfully give ourselves and thoroughly walk this road to repentance; consistently addressing each and every step we've been given. And I'll give you all eight here in just a moment. We'll go back and review. Number three, regression can occur when we try to recover alone. I hope you'll write that down. When we try to recover alone. Solomon had some great words of wisdom for you and I on this front. Ecclesiastes 4, verses 9, 10 and 12. Listen closely as I read this to you. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. Two are better than one. Do you see that? Verse 10 goes on, For if either of them falls, the one, if I fall you're there, if you fall I'm there, one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Woe to the one who falls alone. Look at that last verse. And if one can overpower him who is alone, and one can. If one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. Here's an even better idea. A cord of three strands, community, relationship, people loving and caring for and walking with each other. A cord of three stands is not quickly torn apart. I know what some of you, because I know you, I know what some of you have been saying to yourself quietly. Some of you have even been saying it loudly, but many of you have been thinking to yourselves over these last seven weeks, you know what, I'm just going to get healthy here by myself. I don't need anyone else's involvement. You think to yourself, there's no way I'm going to ask for this level of help. I'm going to listen to these sermons. I'm going to pray about it, but I'm not going to go to counseling. I'm not going to go to celebrate Recovery on Fridays at 7:00. I'm not going to go to a small group and talk about this with people. I will not meet with that one person who I know down deep in my heart I should probably meet with. I'm not going to do it. I'll listen to these messages and I'll just get well on my own. Survey says...bad answer. Wrong answer. It will not work. God never designed you and I to live alone. You cannot beat sin. I hope you'll write this

down. You cannot beat sin in isolation. When you're tried and tempted and things are going poorly, relationships, not resolve, are what God uses to bring support and encouragement. Let us not give up, Hebrews 10, let us not give up the habit of meeting together. From the beginning God wanted His people in meaningful, intimate, accountability filled relationships with each other. Now you can see short-term gain in your life without involving others if you go through these steps. It's true. But you will never experience long-term recovery without people, without relationships. It's kind of like driving a car 70 miles an hour. Can you picture yourself just tearing down #69? It's like driving a car 70 miles an hour and taking your hands off the wheel. Are you going to crash immediately? Probably not. You'll probably go for a while wouldn't you? But inevitably you'll crash. Inevitably it'll all come crashing down when you try to do it alone. Regression comes. Becoming prideful, number four. Fill that blank in. Becoming prideful. We get overconfident and prideful in the process and say, now I'm strong. I mean, look what I've done. I've got this hurt beat. I've got this habit licked. I forgave them. I lost the weight. I didn't get drunk two weekends in a row. I haven't been on an illicit website in a month. I've been home on time for a week now. I'm good. I did it. It's over. Relationship's better. We're happy. Great! Done. Finished. Look, I've arrived. Then you can I hear echoing in our minds those amazing words from Proverbs 16:8. Pride goes before destruction. Pride goes before destruction. Write this down, 1 Corinthians 10:12. Another great chunk of truth to just be reminded of this morning. 1 Corinthians 10:12, what's it say? Therefore let him who thinks he's done it, let him who thinks he's cured, let him who thinks he has arrived, therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed, be careful, watch out, because when that's your posture, you will fall. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. And fall you will if you lack the one thing, listen, the one ingredient, the way God designed this, the one ingredient that you and I must possess. The one ingredient that you and I must grasp, the one ingredient that you and I have got to maintain in this process of recovery and movement away from sin, that one ingredient being humility. The secret of lasting recovery, the secret of lasting repentance, the secret of ongoing sanctification, my friends, is humility. A humble heart, a humble mind, is the best protection against a relapse and regression. OK. Really practical stuff here. Step seven. I want you to write this down. How does one prevent, how does one move away from regression? How do I prevent relapse? Step seven. Reserve a daily time with God for confession, scripture reading, and prayer. In order to know God, not in order to check a box. But in order to know God reserve daily time with Him for times of confession, scripture reading, and prayer. In order to know God, His will for your life, and in the process gain the power, gain the strength, gain the encouragement to live out His will based upon the very truths that you are interacting with as you spend time with Him. You know what I was thinking about this this week and you know often times I'll admit I stand here and I assume things about you. I think I've just stood here for so long and we've been in this discussion for so long that there are times I just assume things. It's really kind of a dangerous assumption because there are times where I would just say if somebody asked me about most of you in the room, I'd just say, yea. You know what they do. I bet almost everybody in that room; you know I'm sure they have reserved time and then I start thinking about it. And I start thinking about me. I start thinking about my own struggle with this. So I'm thinking this week, and I'm not going to have you raise your hand, not going to have you stand, but I wonder how many of you in this room this morning, watching the broadcast, listening on line, I wonder how many of

you really have a regular, daily time reserved for Him. A time in which you evaluate and allow the Spirit of God to evaluate and spend time confessing your sins. A time where you meet with Him as you listen to Him and read what He has to say to you in the scriptures, a time of prayer and honest, open communication with Him. I wonder how many of you in the room today really have this? A regular daily time with Him. I love Jesus' words. I love Mark 14:38. Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Be alert, He says. Come on, this is going to take some effort on your part. You have got to engage in this. This isn't some nebulous, ethereal thing that I just zap you with and you somehow get through all this. No, this is diligence. This is working out our salvation with fear and trembling. This is you and I being willing to take some steps, establish some patterns with Him. It's human nature, my friends, to relapse. It's human, sinful nature to go back to things that hurt us even though we know they're deadly. So He says, you need to have some safeguards and that's what this seventh step is about. There are three safeguards. I'll have you write them down that help you and I move forward toward repentance, that help us stay alert spiritually. Number one, evaluation. Will you write that down? Evaluation. There is a process of evaluation that you and I can engage in and it's not brain surgery. Anyone can do this. An evaluation that would lead to confession. A number of areas that I think need to be evaluated. We don't have time this morning for all four. I want you to just note the first two. Physically, I think there's something to do. Scratch that, I know there's something to do. There is a physical evaluation you and I need to pay attention to how we're treating ourselves physically. It has to do with, believe me, choices that get made. Habits that get carried out. Impact on relationships. There's some physical evaluation we can do. We'll talk more about that later. There's emotional evaluation that needs to take place. But I want to focus on these last two. Relational and spiritual. Before I do let me just say this about evaluation. I think many times in your life and I know in mine, I move away from, there's something in me that doesn't want to be evaluated. I think in many of us there is this insecurity. In many of us, there is this fear. In many of us, if we're getting to this point where other people are going to talk about our weaknesses, where people are going to address our failures, something about that is very, very unsettling to probably most all of us. But I can't begin to tell you this morning how at 46 I'm here to say to you I have never been more convinced of how healthy it is when you and I are willing to allow people, who we trust and who actually have perspective, to speak critically and lovingly and forthrightly into our lives. It is one of the most healthy things I can encourage you to give thought and effort towards. About a year ago, literally I've had people say to me in a very kind and supportive way, they've said it to me in this last year, not in a way to make light of the last nine, but I've been at this for about ten years now in this position, standing here week after week with so many of you, and it was about a year ago that a good friend of mine when asked was willing to tell me what he thought about my teaching. I've had people tell me in the last year, you know I don't know what kind of happened but in the last year or so, man, it's better. It's really sweet and thank you, and we don't know what happened and it wasn't like they were saying I stunk for nine years, but it was just better. I had a friend who a year ago when asked said to me, I don't think it's going so well. I think you could do better. I think you could spend more time. I think you could be more thorough. I think you could be more disciplined in your preparation. You know there is a part of you that just wants to just kind of jump over the desk at them and slap them across the face and say, who asked you? But then you realize that you did. I just want

you to know it's a good thing. It helped me. It's good for you. How do you feel about your mothering? Are you good with how your mothering or fathering? How about you go ask somebody who you really respect to speak into your life on your parenting? How are you doing mixing your relationships with Christ and your work world? Well, go talk to somebody who you really respect and ask them to have the guts to tell you the truth about what they see. You and I have to be a people who are willing and open to evaluation from God, yes, from the word of God, yes, and the Spirit of God, yes, but also from others who are willing to speak into our lives. I just wanted to say that to you about evaluation in general. Two things, relational evaluation. I think this should be a part of your everyday life. I think it should be a part of your everyday time with Him. How am I doing? Am I at peace? Here's the question, God am I at peace with those in my life? Romans 12:18, As far as it depends on you, if at all possible, be at peace with all men. As far as it depends on you. If you can have the coffee, go have the coffee. If you can write the note, write the note. If you need to go and drop by, go and drop by. But God's word says for you to be healthy and whole, you, as far as it depends on you, have got to be at peace with your brother. Something bugging you? Talk about it. Something got done but just never sat well? Go deal with it, but don't let it fester. If you're not at peace, that internal, sinful conflict is going to hold you back not only from your recovery but from basic, meaningful Christian living. As somebody told me this 25 years ago, I believe it to be more true today than I've ever believed it. You're only as spiritual, you're only as godly, as your worst relationship. There's your mark. If you're not walking well with God, you're not walking well with others. And the sad reality is that while some of our relational strife, some of your relational tension, is recent and in proximity here. Aunt Alice hurt you 20 years ago. She lives a thousand miles away and you still wake up everyday mad at her. It controls you. It dominates your heart and mind, and you have got to let it go. You have got to be willing by the grace of God and the strength that He alone provides move forward. A thousand miles away or a good friend sitting three rows away from you right now. Forgive them. Love them. Be gracious. Who are you or who am I to withhold kindness and grace? Now there are unique situations, I will admit, where we encourage people to stay away from dangerous people. There are unique settings where we don't go back and cozy up. We can talk about that with you, if you need to, but in general it is a powerful principle. Spiritual evaluation. Let me just say this to you for the sake of time, while I'm extremely supportive of spiritual evaluation that exposes our sin, Psalm 139, search me and know my ways, you know, test me and know my anxious thoughts if there is any sinful way in me, expose it. While I'm really good with that, spiritual evaluation that exposes weaknesses, sin and failure, I want to also encourage everyone of you this morning in the spiritual evaluation time with Him in that meeting you reserve each day that you would be open to experiencing, that you would be open to identifying successes. I know you may think this is just a glass half full, Kelly speaking here, but no I think there is more to it than that. I think there is something very valuable in you and I on a regular basis identifying areas of growth, identifying areas of victory. I talked to a guy a few weeks ago who said I didn't lie today. He'd been lying 20 or 30 times a day for the last 30 years. He's lied his way through everything. He lies constantly. He said I lied once and he celebrated that. We're thankful for God's progress in his heart. You may be a mom and you might say, OK, here I am with you this morning God, I just want to say thank you and celebrate that. I know I blew it with my mouth with the kids twice yesterday but I did well three times. I

wouldn't have done well a month ago. God, thank you for the growth and victory. We need to be willing to identify, even small victories. Celebrate those victories and be thankful to God for the work He is doing in our hearts. Meditation. Evaluation is part of this regular time. Meditation is part of this time. Meditation is a great biblical word. It simply means this, slowing down long enough to hear to God. Did you get that? Slowing down long enough to hear God. This is a time to be with Him. My friends, this is a time to be before Him. This is Psalms 46. Be still and in those moments know that I am God. And that you're what? That you're not. Business, job, career can stifle meditation. Ipods, radios, crowded settings can stifle meditation. I find that Satan fights nothing with great tenacity in my own life than this issue. He wants to make sure I don't get quiet time alone with God. He has three tools that he uses in my life to keep me from this: noise, crowds, and hurry. Maybe those are the same three he uses in yours. Those are the three things he uses in mine. Those things keep me too many times from hearing God in a personal and intimate way. What I come back to again and again and again is the great truth of Psalm 1. Would you turn there? Go back in your Old Testament, go to the very first chapter of the book of Psalms, first three verses. I love what it says. It says: How blessed is the man (that's you and me) who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners (doesn't do that, doesn't go there), not sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight (that which thrills him, that which fills him up) is in the law of the Lord, the scriptures, the word of God. And in His law this man meditates day and night. He is immersed in the truth. He is surrounded by the principles of scripture. He makes sure that he is because that's where his delight is. What will this man, what will this woman, what will this young person be like who does this? I love this. He will be like a tree, firmly planted by streams of water. A tree which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. Say it. Wither. A tree that yields fruit in its season and has leaves which do not wither. Here you go, ready? And in whatever he does, this man, this woman, this young man, this young woman, and in whatever he does, he what? He prospers. Your translation may read, he succeeds. Hey, young people, I hope you heard that. Young people, middle school students, high school students, college age, I hope you heard that. When you're willing to establish a pattern in your life that is absolutely and thoroughly connected to this, when you delight in this, when you allow this to grow roots that are deep and strong, then young people when the winds blow really hard, when the heat comes...and guess what, the winds are going to blow and it's going to get hot, God's word says that you will succeed, you will prosper. It will go well for you when you give yourself to this, deeply and consistently. The key to growth is to have roots deep down into God's word and the way you get roots deep down into God's word is to read it, to meditate on it, to seriously think about you just read and then think about how that applies to your life, what does it mean in the everyday experience that you're in the midst of. You figure out ways to apply it. You ask others to hold you accountable to those actions. You memorize the scriptures. This is meditation and you'll be like a tree planted by the river and you'll do well. You won't regress. I love it. It always comes back to the word of God. Number three, evaluation, meditation. Write this down my friends. Prayer. Prayer is the way you and I plug into, it's the way you and I stay intimately and spiritually connected to our source of direction and hope. I want to just say this to you. Many of you in the room in the midst and heat of this battle of trying to, with God's help, move away from sinful patterns, I want to make sure you understand and hear me say this. You know, right? You know that you can talk to God about anything. I literally had somebody say to

me, I could never say that to God. I mean we had just had a very, very honest personal interaction and I said you know what, you've got to pray about that. You've got to take that...he said, whoa, whoa. It was almost that he wanted to whisper because he didn't want God to hear us. I'm like, dude, He's listening. All right, He can hear. He wants to hear. Anything. You know this, right? You can talk to Him, you can pray to God about any temptation, even the darkest, most twisted thing that you could experience or think of. You can talk to Him about any temptation, any struggle, any sin, any repeated failure, any need, any time. You can have this posture and you can say these words, you're God, you're a great God. I'm not. Please help me. Please forgive me. Please help me to forgive. Oh, God, please guide me away from sin toward life. Our prayers should be laced with appropriate begging and appropriate humility and appropriate communication of His bigness and our smallness and our desire for His help and engagement. Evaluation. Meditation. Prayer. These should be components in this regular time. Here you go. Here's all eight. I'm going to have the guys come on up, if they would. Here is all eight, all seven on the screen for you. Then I want to just say something to you about number eight before we close this morning. Number 1: Realize I'm not God. Number 2: Earnestly, believe that God exists. 3: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control. Step 4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself and to someone I trust. Powerful stuff. 5: Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove character defects. Step 6: Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others. Step 7: Reserve a daily time. Will you do that? Reserve a daily time with God for confession, scripture reading and prayer in order to know God, in order to know His will for my life, and gain the power to do it. Then I want you to see eight. Yield (the "y" in recovery) myself to God to be used to bring the good news of repentance, the good news of the gospel, the good news of life in Christ. Yield myself to God to be used by Him to bring the good news to others by both my example and my words. Here's the deal on this. Listen. People have asked me for years. You've had conversations about this. Over the last several weeks I've heard people talk about it many times. They've asked the question, why? Why would God allow pain at this level in my life? Why does God allow certain things to happen that have certain repercussions and certain effects? Why does God allow us to face and experience some of the hurts and difficulties and confusion that we do? I want to give you two things to hang onto this morning. Number one, God uses pain to teach me and you to depend on Him. Will you write that down? God uses pain to teach me and to teach you to depend on Him. I love the phrase, you'll never know that God is all you need until you really realize that is all you've got. God allows pain to teach you to depend on Him. I love Psalm 119:71. It was the best thing that could have happened to me, this pain, this calamity, this tragedy. David said, it was the best thing that could have happened to me for it taught me to pay attention to your laws. Raise your hand if your pain and your struggle has brought you closer and led you to a greater realization of Him and His truth. It happens all the time. Lastly, the second thing here, God allows pain. This is powerful. God allows pain to give me a ministry to others. I want to leave you with this this morning. Could it be that He has allowed what has transpired, could it be that you've experienced what you've experienced, could it be that the confusion and the heartache that we've traveled through, was allowed by a sovereign and providential God who knew that in this process of repentance and recovery, you then would have a chance. You would have this

amazing opportunity to help others, to point others toward the gospel, toward the life-giving, life-saving truth of freedom in Christ. Could it be that all you've endured and all you've struggled with and all those dark days of wondering if it was ever going to end, now in the light of a new day, could it be God allowed your pain so that you could be a comfort to others? I love what it says in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:15, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you. You and I on this road to freedom, you and I on this road to recovery, have a chance to share with others the great hope that we have found in the person of Christ. Listen this morning as the guys close us. They started this series seven or eight weeks ago with this song and I've asked them to sing it again for us. Would you worship God in the midst of this great truth. Would you be reminded of what a comfort we have in Him and of this great hope that He and He alone provides.

[Singing: Heal the Wound]

I used to wish that I could rewrite history  
I used to dream that each mistake could be erased  
Then I could just pretend  
I never knew me back then

I used to pray that You would take this shame away  
Hide all the evidence of who I've been  
But it's the memory of  
The place You brought me from  
That keeps me on my knees  
And even though I'm free

Heal the wound but leave the scar  
A reminder of how merciful You are  
I am broken torn apart  
Take the pieces of this heart  
And heal the wound but leave the scar

I have not lived a life that boasts of anything  
I don't take pride in what I bring  
But I'll build an altar with  
The rubble that You've found me in  
And every stone will sing  
Of what You can redeem

Heal the wound but leave the scar  
A reminder of how merciful You are  
How merciful You are  
I am broken torn apart  
Take the pieces of this heart

Heal the wound but leave the scar

Don't let me forget  
Everything You've done for me  
Don't let me forget  
The beauty in the suffering

Heal the wound but leave the scar  
A reminder of how merciful You are  
(Ooo) I am broken torn apart  
Take the pieces of this heart  
Heal the wound but leave the scar

Heal the wound but leave the scar  
A reminder of how merciful You are  
I am broken torn apart  
Take the pieces of this heart  
And heal the wound but leave the scar  
Leave the scar

Kelly: I'll stand here with you guys. Thank you for singing. Father God, thank You for the morning, thank You for the chance that You've given us God to worship You. God, let us leave this morning with great strength and courage to face a life of freedom, not a life of bondage, and God if we need help, when we need help, oh God, when we need assistance and reminders I pray You'd give us the strength and the courage to ask, for it's in Your Son's name we pray, amen.