

God Calls Us Out Of Our Comfort Zones

Lesson 1

"Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions." - Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Acts 22:2-3, 21—Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today... Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

Luke 14:25-29—During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.



Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. When we're in our insane mode we do things because they're familiar and comfortable, not because they work. Think of the ways that God calls you out of your comfort zone and into new ways of thinking and living:

- From thinking "I have to do something to get God to accept me" to thinking "I'm acceptable to God just as I am, because of what Jesus has done for me"
- Facing difficult situations and emotions without drugs or alcohol
- Asking for help and listening to the wisdom of others, instead of being the Lone Ranger
- Saying, "I don't know," instead of thinking you always have to have the answer
- Accepting responsibility instead of finding someone else to blame
- What else?

God's Grace Frees Me

To Discover – Love – Be

Lesson 2

The Real Me

3rd Step: “...made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.”

4th Step: “...made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

In our addictions and dependencies we tried to escape from what we remembered, what we had done, what we felt, who we are. Now God invites us to see the person he sees when he looks at us, and accept that person the way he does.

Mark 8:35 – “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” (Quoted six times in the Gospels!) – Turn yourself over to God, and you get to be your real self!

Read Mark 5:1-20.

- How had this man been robbed of his identity? Have there been things that have robbed you of your identity?

- Look at verse 15. Can you think of ways that God's love and forgiveness have returned you to “your right mind”? (Has that freaked people out the way people freaked out in verse 15?)

- Look at verses 18-20. The man who had been freed from the demons wanted to be like Jesus' other disciples. Jesus told him he had different plans for him. Has God surprised you with his unique plan for your life?

Bottom Line: My Efforts Or God's Mercy?

Lesson 8

What happens when you're living your life thinking, "Bottom line: it's all up to me"?

"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy... What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction?"

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

As he says in Hosea:

*'I will call them "my people" who are not my people;
and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one,' and,
'It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them,
"You are not my people,"
they will be called "sons of the living God." ...*

"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works." (Romans 9:16-32)

"So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kill us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

"This is the how and the why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children." -- *Alcoholics Anonymous*

- How does the "Bottom line: it's all up to me" way of thinking play into a life of drinking and getting high?
- What happens when you start to believe that the bottom line is not your efforts or attitude or sincerity, but God's mercy?

- Sometimes people who are very serious about their religion go through life without any peace or hope because they're thinking, "Maybe God won't answer my prayers because I'm not praying quite the right way," or, "Maybe God won't bless me because I'm not completely obedient to him yet," or, "Maybe God won't accept me until I quit smoking and swearing and start going to church every Sunday." What does the Bible's message of God's grace say about that?

If You're Being Crushed, Jesus Is Here To Give You Rest

Lesson 4

When have you felt like the demands of life were crushing you? Jesus lets you know that if you're being crushed by your burdens, then those burdens didn't come from him and you need to get rid of them.

Matthew 11:28-30—"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

[Yoke: A device fastened around the neck and shoulders of an ox or other animal so that the animal can pull a cart, plow or other burden. The word was also applied to a student being under a rabbi's authority: "I am under the yoke of Rabbi Benjamin." (Many rabbis had very high expectations for their students, and their demands were burdensome.)]

LIFE UNDER JESUS' YOKE

- Restful
- He's always there for me
- There's room for learning and growth
- Jesus is gentle with me
- Jesus isn't arrogant with me
- My soul has peace
- The work is very doable
- What else?

LIFE UNDER THE YOKE OF MY ADDICTIONS AND DEPENDENCIES

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Why do you think it can be so hard to get away from the "yokes" that are crushing you?

What does it feel like to live under Jesus' "yoke"? Why?

How can you tell when you've gone back to living under a "yoke" that isn't from Jesus?

Jesus Is The Answer For Shame

Lesson 5

- Think of something that has brought you shame. What does it feel like to think of that thing?
- What would it be like to find out that the thing that has caused you shame was wiped off the record, as if it had never happened?

Jesus isn't in the business of beating people down; he's in the business of picking them up with his love and forgiveness. As God the Holy Spirit brings you into a closer relationship with Jesus, you're going to see yourself more and more as the infinitely valuable object of God's love.

John 8:2-11 – At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

1. In verse 3 these religious leaders publicly announced this woman's secret sin. What is it like to have people find out about some secret sin?
2. In verses 4-5 the religious leaders made it clear that they believed people fell into one of two categories: "good" people, like themselves, who deserved to live, and "bad" people, like this woman, who deserved to die. What sorts of things have you seen people use to judge who's "good" and who's "bad?"
3. Have people who thought they were better than you ever judged you this way?

4. Have you ever judged **yourself** the way these religious leaders judged this woman?
5. The religious leaders expected Jesus to either join them in their condemning this woman or to try to bend the rules for her. Instead, verse 6 says he bent down and drew doodles in the sand, the way people doodle on paper when they're bored. What does this tell you about how Jesus feels about shaming and judging?
6. Look at Jesus' reply in verse 7. What is he saying about the idea that the world is divided into "good" people, who deserve to live, and "bad" people, who deserve to die?
7. Look at Jesus' conversation with this woman in verses 10-11. Jesus is telling her that no one had the right to shame and condemn her, that even he himself refuses to shame and condemn her. Compare this with what the Bible says in Hebrews 9:14 – "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" What does this tell you about what God has done about any shame you're living with?
8. Notice, in verse 11, that Jesus tells this woman to start living a changed life only **after** he tells her that he's not going to shame or condemn her. How would **freedom from shame** be a better start for living a new life than **fear of shame**?

Jesus Speaks From The Cross – What Is He Saying To Me About My Recovery And My New Life?

Lesson 6

1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." – Luke 23:34
2. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. – John 19:26-27
3. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." – Luke 23:42-43
4. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – Matthew 27:46
5. Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." – John 19:28
6. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." – John 19:30
7. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. – Luke 23:46

Issues in my recovery:

- I'm completely accepted by God as I turn my will and my life over to him
- I need fellowship to recover; an addict alone is in bad company
- No matter what I have in my inventory, it's been forgiven by Jesus' death for me
- I am no longer ignoring what my body is telling me about its needs (H.A.L.T.)
- I don't have to fear being rejected by God, because Jesus was rejected for me
- I can let go and let God
- I'm going to stick with the winners
- What else?

Pick one of the seven things Jesus said from the cross, and meditate on what it is saying to you.

Recovery Calls For Fellowship

Lesson 7

Jesus died to get rid of our separation: The separation between you and God AND the separation between you and me:

1 Thessalonians 3:9-12 – How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

1 Corinthians 12, selected verses – There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... The body is not made up of one part but of many... in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body... Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

The Second Tradition of AA: “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.”

- Was part of your insanity thinking that you had to know it all and do it all yourself? Did you push other people away? Why do you think you were like that?
- Can you look back at the beginnings of your recovery and of your life with God, and see the people God sent to help make it happen?
- Are there people in your life today who are strong for you in areas where you are weak, and wise for you in areas where you are ignorant?
- Are there times when you get to be strong for somebody else?

Unhealthy Justification/ Healthy Justification

Lesson 8

“The second most important human need is the need for justification. The first is oxygen.” – Mark Belling

“When you stop justifying yourself, you start getting better.” – Dr. Thomas Lehmann

One aspect of AA's First Step – “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol, that our lives had become unmanageable” – is admitting that we are powerless to justify ourselves

- Look at the addendum entitled “Justifying the Addiction/Offender Lifestyle”. How have you tried to convince yourself and other people that you're okay?
- What have you thought you needed to do to be justified?

Romans 3:20-28 – Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

1 John 1:8-10 – If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

- How is God's way of justifying you different from ways you've tried?
- What happens when you start to give up justifying yourself and start to let God do his job?

Addendum: **JUSTIFYING THE ADDICTION/OFFENDER LIFESTYLE**

[from the Texas Department of Criminal Justice]

People involved in Addiction/Offender behaviors often deny responsibility for their actions and the harm they inflict on themselves, their family and on others.

A wide range of psychological maneuvers emerges when addicted and criminally inclined people unwittingly protect themselves from the reality of what they are doing. All of these maneuvers distort reality. This distorted reality can be similar to the armor worn by knights of old. Worn to ward off the blows of life, it makes it very difficult to see, hear, or feel what is really happening.

Addiction and Offender Thinking Errors can be arrested when openly confronted. **It is the denial of addiction and crime that kills people.**

Denial has many faces:

- Impaired Judgment
- Self Delusion
- Selective Recall

Simple denial: Saying something is not true, when in fact, it is, e.g., insisting that chemical dependency isn't a problem, when it is seen as such by those around you. The person in denial frequently does not tell the truth, but is unaware of the fact. "I was framed, I'm innocent!"

Minimizing: Admitting to some degree of a problem with chemical usage or criminal behavior but in such a way that it appears to be much less serious or significant than is actually the case. "I only stole from a company, not from an individual" or "I only drank some beer".

Blaming: Denying responsibility for certain behavior and maintaining that the responsibility lies with some- one else. The behavior is not denied, but its cause is placed "out there", not within the person. "She/He/They made me do it!"

Projection: Attributing one's own feelings, shortcomings, or unacceptable impulses to others. "They're the thieves, not me!"

Rationalizing: Offering alibis, excuses, justifications, and other explanations for behavior by giving reasonable but false reasons. "I only sold because I couldn't get a real job."

Diversions: Chemically dependent people and offenders change the subject to avoid a topic that is threatening to their usage and related behavior. "It is just baloney, the real problem is the way I was treated by my parents!"

Hostility: Becoming angry and irritable when reference is made to chemical usage and drug related behavior or criminality. This is a good way to avoid the issue. It serves to get people to back off. "What do you mean I'm an addict? I wouldn't have to use if you weren't on my back all the time!"

Assimilation: Taking everyone else along for the ride. Pretending the problem is normal behavior. "Hey, everyone drinks."

Dehumanizing: Treating someone as less than human to avoid guilt over using or hurting him or her. "They are just a bunch of _____, nobody cares what happens to them."

After years of living in an addictive or offender lifestyle, these defense mechanisms become automatic. The addict/offender is now living a lie.

Wearing The “Jesus Uniform”

Lesson 9

The Bible talks about how Christians are “in Jesus” – surrounded by Jesus’ righteousness, dressed up in his goodness. If you’ve ever stressed yourself out trying hard to keep up an image of goodness, listen to God’s invitation.

Zechariah 3:1-7 – Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.”

Then I said, “Put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

The angel of the LORD gave this charge to Joshua: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you will govern my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here.’”

Galatians 3:25-28 – Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 22:10-14 – The servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. “Friend,” he asked, “how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are invited, but few are chosen.

- Have you ever worn something that made you feel different and act differently? Can you think how the “Jesus uniform” can help you in the way you think and live? (See Step 2: “We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”)
- Trying to make it on your own efforts doesn’t work (see Step 1: “We admitted we were powerless...”). How is “wearing the Jesus uniform” different from trying hard to be good?
- Some clothes look good, but they’re “high maintenance” – they stain or wrinkle or rip or fade, etc., and need constant protection and upkeep. Trying hard to live right can be like wearing high maintenance clothes. How is the “Jesus uniform” different?

What Do I Really Need In Life?

Lesson 10

Step 1: We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step 2: We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

People often come to Al-Anon hoping that they'll learn how to get someone else to quit drinking. People often come to AA expecting to learn a formula for quitting drinking.

Instead of learning methods to make drinking stop, they learn *powerlessness*. Instead receiving formulas for conquering alcohol, they receive *hope for a sane life*.

People often come to Jesus with the same kind of confused ideas. Look at what they receive from Jesus instead: **Matthew 9:1-8**

If this man was coming to Jesus thinking that he needed the ability to walk so that his life could have meaning, he found out that what he needed so that his life could have meaning was *forgiveness, acceptance and love*.

"I asked God for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all men, most richly blessed." – Anonymous

What have you thought you really needed in life? What are you discovering your real needs are, needs that God will always take care of?

WHAT I THOUGHT I NEEDED

WHAT I REALLY NEEDED

Where's The Escape Hatch?

Lesson 11

On public transportation they have signs and recorded announcements to alert you to where the emergency exits are. We used to have our own "emergency exits" in case the stress got to be too much:

- Getting high or drunk
- Getting some guy to take care of you
- Trancing out on porn
- Fixing somebody else's life
- What else?

Then our stress remedies started taking over our lives and making them unmanageable. And we started recovering. Now we need "emergency exits" for when we start moving back toward our addictions and dependencies. And God provides them:

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

What are some of the "emergency exits" that God has provided you with so that you don't have to go down that same old path again?

- People you can talk to who understand and want to help
*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:
 If one falls down, his friend can help him up.
 But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!
 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?
 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
 A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).*
- Prayer
*"Call upon me in the day of trouble;
 I will deliver you, and you will honor me" (Psalm 50:15)*
- The Holy Spirit's guidance
"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:21)
- What else?
- What can help you go to the "emergency exits" that God has given you, instead of the old ones that only led to more misery?