

GROWTH & HEALING

# SEVEN STEPS

A Weekly Guide For  
Small Groups

by David Stiles

WEEK

6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



## Week 6 – Responding Again

### God Wants Us to Follow

We discussed last week the importance of turning our brokenness and our lives over to God. We called it, “turning it over to God”.

After this step, then, it is important to hear what God wants us to do and then respond to Him. In Scripture we can see that God wants to give us direction on what to do to help us grow spiritually and receive healing.

The myth, or lie, that many of us believe is that “I can’t do that.”

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Big Lie #6</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">“I can’t do that.”</p>
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You may have heard others say,

- “Not that Lord.”
- “I just got discouraged and stopped trying.”

Have you ever had those thoughts? How would you complete the sentence, “I can’t do that because \_\_\_\_\_.”

### The Truth

So the truth, then, is that God wants us to understand His ways and then respond accordingly. James, says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22)

The Bible has a number of passages describing the Lord’s desire for *followers*. The writer Jerry Bridges encourages us to “take whatever specific steps are necessary in order to obey God’s direction.” The truth also, according to Scripture, is that God will not give us tasks to do that He is unwilling to help us with.

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### Step Six

The sixth step in our journey to spiritual growth and personal healing, is simply called, “Respond to God’s direction.”

**Step #6:**  
Respond to God’s direction.

### No Formulas

The difficulty with this step is that there are no easy formulas. The specific steps that you must take to respond to God’s direction will vary based on the issues that you are facing.

Therefore, it will be important to pray for wisdom and direction and rely on God for help.

Some common responses that God may be calling you to do in response to His direction might be:

- Confession/Repentance
- Waiting
- Letting Go
- Taking Authority
- Forgiveness
- Trusting
- Renewing Your Mind
- Taking Specific Steps toward Health

### Confession and Repentance

We all sin and “miss the mark.” Some of our mistakes are willful, self-centered decisions while others are unintentional. The response that God expects when we sin is to simply confess and repent. Confession simply means to tell the truth, admit, or take ownership for something that you did. Confession, therefore, means to simply say, “I did it.” Linked with confession, in Scripture, is repentance. As James Dunn, points out, there are really three definitions of the word “repent”. To repent means:

- to change one’s mind
- to regret, to feel remorse
- to turn around and head in a new direction

So, if the simple definition of confession is, “I did it.” The simple definition of repentance is, “I’m sorry, Lord. Help me do something different.” As we sin, and “miss the mark”, we should confess and repent as the Holy Spirit convicts us.

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In the Bible, James encourages Christians to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

After prayer and reflection, you might consider praying this prayer of confession and repentance from the Book of Common Prayer:

“Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you In thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

### **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is the act of forgiving (or canceling the debt of) someone who you believe has hurt or wronged you.

Without forgiveness life can be filled with resentment, bitterness and retaliation. Forgiveness is an important element in the process of spiritual growth and healing. As we learned earlier, as Christians, Christ has forgiven us of all our sins.

Paul described it this way,

- “...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (I Cor. 15:3)
  
- “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (II Cor. 5:21)
  
- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (Gal. 3:13)

Jesus taught that just as He has forgiven us, so we should forgive others. In Matthew 18, we can read a parable that Jesus told about this need to forgive others. Jesus started the parable saying, “the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”

A servant was brought to the king who owed him millions of dollars (10,000 talents in the language of the New Testament). Jesus explained, “Since the servant was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”

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But the servant began pleading with the king, saying "Be patient with me and I will pay back everything." Jesus then explained that "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."

So, like our status before God as Christians, the servant had no debts, his debts were completely forgiven by the king. Interestingly, however, the parable does not end there. Jesus explained that after the servant left the king, he found a second servant who owed him a few dollars (a hundred denarii in the language of the New Testament).

The first servant from the parable, then grabbed the second servant who owed him money and began to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe me!" So, instead of forgiving the debts that were owed to him, the first servant, even though he had no debts to pay to the king, wanted to extract everything he could out of this second servant who owed him money.

Jesus then said that the second servant who owed the few dollars "fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'"

But the first servant refused and instead had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the King heard about this he called the first servant to him.

"You wicked servant," the King said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"  
(Matthew 18:23-32)

So, through the use of the parable, Jesus taught his disciples the need to forgive others, because they had been forgiven.

On another occasion, Jesus said:

- "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." (Mark 11:25)

Even the famous "Lord's Prayer" contains the phrase, "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12) A number of churches use the more modern language version of this prayer: "forgive us our *sins* as we have forgiven those who have *sinned* against us."

What is not being said here is that if we have some unknown or unconfessed unforgiveness in our hearts that God's hands would be tied and He would be unable to forgive us. We learned earlier that once we become Christians, we are new creations, free from condemnation.

Rather, we will be unable to experientially understand the complete forgiveness and depth of God in our lives if we are unwilling to forgive others.

Another way to look at it is that others will still have some level of control over us, until we forgive them. And, as we learned previously, we can be free from the bonds of sin that control us.

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Paul encouraged Christians to:

- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32)

Paul later wrote,

- “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Col. 3:12-14)

The results of forgiveness can be powerful.

- In the Old Testament we can read the story of Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers. After enduring much difficulty, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers which ultimately led to saving his entire family from starvation.
- In the New Testament we can read about an early Christian named Stephen who asked God to forgive those who were killing him because he was a Christian. “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” He prayed. (Acts 7:60)
- In modern times, we have the example of Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned by South Africa’s apartheid government for 27 years. The moment he was released from jail, however, he spoke about the importance of forgiveness. Later, when he was elected as South Africa’s first black President, he chose Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission”, focusing on restoration and forgiveness instead of retribution.

Jesus, we need to remember, is our ultimate model. As he was being crucified by his persecutors, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

So, here’s an exercise for you (it may be difficult, but God can help)...

Make a list of those past hurts and the people that you’ve been unable to forgive. Ask God to help you in extending forgiveness.

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### Waiting

Christians are also frequently called to wait.

Jesus had his disciples wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4) and Paul waited in Tarsus before starting his public ministry.

Numerous passages in the Bible encourage waiting:

- “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14)
- I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)
- “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
- “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope” (Psalm 130:5)
- “...we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:25)

We can have confidence in the Lord that He will be with us as we wait. You may need to wait to receive an:

- answer to prayer
- insight
- wisdom

What is it that you need to wait on God for?

### Trusting

Throughout the Bible, God encourages His people to *trust* Him.

- “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” (Prov. 3:5)
- “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:2)
- Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me.” (John 14:1)

Trusting God means having *faith* that God will provide help for your needs.

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Jesus said,

- “Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” (Mark 11:22-24)

In a similar passage, the disciples asked Jesus why they could not heal a boy, and Jesus replied,

- “Because you have so little faith. I tell the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20-21)

Question for Discussion:

- What seems like a “mountain” in your life that is in need of moving with God’s help?

### **Letting Go**

As we trust God, we will find the need to “let go” of anything in a situation that we are trying to control, fix or manipulate.

Controlling situations in our own lives or the lives of others falls short of what God intends for us. God desires that we let go in order to trust Him.

Perhaps you have seen the limits to controlling ourselves and others. As Henri Nowen has written, “Even when we are trying to be in control and to determine our own course in life, we have to admit that life remains a great unknown to us.”

For counselors and psychologists, this process of “letting go” is known as “detachment.”

When should we detach? According to Melodie Beattie, we should detach, “When we can’t stop thinking, talking about, or worrying about someone or something; when our emotions are churning and boiling; when we feel like we have to do something about someone.”

So, as we trust God, we will need to “let go” and ask God to control the situation.



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### Renewing the Mind

Another response to God's direction is called "renewing your mind."

As Paul wrote, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)

Our minds can be filled with many misconceptions, but by reading and meditating on Scripture we can bring truth to the lies that we believe.

If we are prone to trust in our possessions, or anxious about not having enough, we may need reminding that, according to Jesus,

- "Watch out! Be on your guard for all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

And the writer of Hebrews explains,

- "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" (Hebrews 12:5)

If we are anxious about our circumstances, we might be reminded in Scripture to,

- "Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

If we are mourning or sad and in need of comfort, we might read from the Apostle John,

- "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:3-4)

God's Word will give us the truth that we need for living and for combating our negative and misconceived thoughts.

Question for Discussion:

- What areas of your thinking would you like to be changed by more of God's truth?

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### Taking Authority

Another response to God's direction may be to take spiritual authority over a situation, or a broken area of your life. You may not be aware of it, but if you are a Christian, you are involved at some level in spiritual warfare.

According to the Bible, as Christians, we have an enemy that seeks to accuse and destroy.

Paul wrote that, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

Peter said that, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The enemy, also referred to as Satan in the Bible, then, is one who will try to accuse and torment us. Because of God, however, we should not fear Satan.

- Jesus said, "...on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (that is, Hell) will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18)
- According to Paul, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your foot." (Romans 16:20)

What do we need to do to use our "spiritual authority"? According to Scripture, we need to simply rely on God and be dependent on Him.

- "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

In the book of Acts, we can learn how the early Christians encountered spirits sent by Satan. When Paul encountered an evil spirit in a fortuneteller, he simply used his spiritual authority and said to the spirit,

- "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her." (Acts 16:18)

Question for Discussion:

- What areas of your life do you feel that the enemy is harassing, bringing temptation, doubt or pain?

Perhaps you could pray simply as the Apostle Paul did, saying, "Stop that, in the name of Jesus."

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### **Taking Specific Steps toward Health**

In addition to the responses that we have identified, there may be additional specific steps towards spiritual growth and health that God may be asking you to take.

So, after you have surrendered, turned your brokenness over to God and admitted your own ownership in a situation, God may provide you with specific steps to start, stop or continue.

### **Actions to Start**

Perhaps as a response to God's leading, you may identify healthy actions to *start*:

- attending church
- attending a small group for growth
- helping/serving others
- making amends with others - if you have hurt them
- praying for others
- reading God's Word
- saying "No" – if you feel pressured by others
- setting limits - if others are hurting you
- spending time with God in worship
- telling others about your feelings
- thanking God for what He has provided

### **Actions to Stop**

Perhaps you may identify actions to *stop*:

- being a victim
- blaming others
- controlling others
- destructive habits
- doubting
- nagging
- saying hurtful things

### **Actions to continue**

Perhaps you may identify actions to *continue* doing that lead to greater spiritual growth and health.

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### The Result

The result of responding to God's direction can be powerful.

As Smith Wigglesworth has written, "Christ takes us where we are and transforms us by His power."

As God's new creations, we should expect that God will pour out his Spirit upon us and transform our lives, giving us even more than what we have even requested.

### If you're stuck on this step:

If you find that you're having difficulty in this area, think and reflect for a moment upon the pain of not changing or not responding to God.

The following prayer might also reflect your thoughts and hopes in the Step:

### Prayer

Lord, as Your new creation I know that You are calling me to some difficult things. Please give me the strength to respond to your loving direction and care. Amen.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. Think for a moment about some of the responses mentioned in this week's discussion as a response to God's direction:
  - Confession/Repentance
  - Forgiveness
  - Waiting
  - Trusting
  - Letting Go
  - Renewing Your Mind
  - Taking Authority
  - Taking Specific Steps toward Health

Reflect for a moment on the phrase, "I can't do that." How much does it represent your feelings right now? Why?

- Not what I'm thinking
- Somewhat what I'm thinking
- Very much what I'm thinking

2. What is difficult about responding to God's direction in these ways? Why?
3. What action steps might you take in light of this week's topic?

