

## Recognizing Our Need<sup>i</sup>

### Praise:

Begin to prepare your heart and mind for the study by listening to and/or singing the worship songs from the services. Choose at least three songs from the following list:

*The Only Name* – Big Daddy Weave  
*Today Is the Day* – Lincoln Brewster  
*All Because of Jesus* – Steve Fee  
*Rescue Me* – Selah  
*Before the Throne* – Shane and Shane

*Empty and Beautiful* – Matt Maher  
*Glorious* – Brian & Katie Torwalt  
*Lead Me to the Cross* – Hillsong United  
*Cornerstone* – Hillsong United  
*It Is Well with My Soul* – Chris Rice

### Prayer:

Following the praise music, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

### Preparation:

(5-10 min)

1. Ask each person to write on a piece of paper three sentences that describe or summarize the message, "Recognizing Our Need."
2. Have each person read aloud his/her summary. After all have presented, discuss the descriptions/summaries for the remaining few minutes (of the 10 total).

### Reviewing the Scriptural Basis:

(5 min)

Read aloud the following scripture. Take a moment to reflect on the verses and what they mean for you.

#### **Romans 7:18-19 (NIV)**

<sup>18</sup> For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

### Breaking it Down

(30 min)

Break into smaller groups of three or four people. Read the key segments of today's message, and answer together the questions related thereto.

### The Healing Power of Christ

This sermon series was intentionally planned to be taught and studied during the season of Lent, a time that Christians traditionally use for meditation and self-reflection while preparing to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. We recognize that through His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus saved us from our sins; i.e., we are pardoned, rescued from hell, and given the promise of Heaven. Yet, while all of these promises are true, it is vitally important to recognize that Jesus' saving work also frees us from the *power* of sin.

The Bible teaches us—and our experience confirms—that sin has infected the entire human race. Romans 3:23 (NIV) states, “...all have sinned....” As a result, we have created ungodly and unhealthy methods for managing our lives (e.g., self-indulgences, emotional eating, hoarding, retail-therapy, idolatry, etc.). Moreover, because of sin, we’ve hurt ourselves; we’ve hurt others, and others have hurt us. The good news is that Jesus came to deal with the entirety of sin’s consequences in our lives. That is, Christ has the power to heal and deliver us and to make us whole and well. It’s what the prophet Isaiah predicted would happen as a result of the suffering endured by the Messiah sent by God to rescue His people: “He took our suffering on him and felt our pain for us...He was wounded for the wrong we did; he was crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him, and we are healed because of his wounds” (Isaiah 53:4-5 NCV).

Between now and Easter we’re going to learn about the healing power of Christ. All that needs to be done for us to be healthy and whole has already been accomplished through the saving work of Jesus on the cross. But in order to receive Christ’s healing power, there are some steps we need to take. For this lesson, let’s look at the first of those: “recognizing our need.”

### **Recognizing Our Need**

Part of our human nature is to be stubborn. We don’t like to admit when we’re wrong; we don’t like to be held accountable for our choices, and we don’t like to be told how to live our lives. For many of us, we like to be in control, and we want predictability. We think we can fix anything—whether it’s something in our own lives or something in the life of someone else. Yet, when something is outside our realm of experience, we turn to a professional for help...someone whose experience or training exceeds ours. So, when the intangibles in life cause us strife (i.e., when sin overtakes us), we should be quick to seek the counsel of the One who has generously offered to bear the entire burden and cost for setting things right in our lives: JESUS.

In order for Jesus to make the necessary repairs that each of us needs, we have to *recognize our need* for Him. That realization occurs when we examine our problems in terms of their cause, their consequences, and their cure.

### **The CAUSE of Our Problems**

“Left on its own, our sin nature will tend to do wrong, desire to be God, and try to play God” (p. 14).

An Internet search for “Human Recall Notice” turns up a spoof on notices that manufacturers send to consumers when a product is being recalled for a defective part or mechanism. In this particular “Human Recall” notice, God is recalling all humans for a defect He calls, “Sub-Sequential Internal Non-Morality,” otherwise known as “SIN,” and the notice goes on to give symptoms and solutions for repairing the defect. While there’s humor in the author’s intent, there’s an overarching truth to this. All of us have a *sin defect*—either ours or someone else’s. We are consequently affected by hurts that haunt our hearts, hang-ups that cause us pain, and habits that mess up our lives. The one quality that unites the entire human race is S-I-N, and this “defect” manifests itself in two primary ways.

#### **1) Our tendency to do wrong.**

Given the choice between right and wrong, we tend to make the *wrong* choice. “We will always have this...tendency to do the wrong thing. In fact, we will wrestle with it as long as we

are on this earth” (p. 14). Even after we ask Christ into our lives, we still struggle with desires that pull us in the wrong direction. The apostle, Paul, wrote, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature, I want to do what is right, but I can’t I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway” (Romans 7:18-19 NLT). Sound familiar? Left to our own devices, we end up doing what we don’t want to do and not doing what we *do* want to do. Why?—because our sinful nature causes us consistently to make wrong choices; in other words, on our own, we are powerless to control our tendency to sin.

1. In what ways can you identify with Paul in the above passage from the book of Romans?
2. Describe a time when you knew the right thing to do but didn’t do it.

## 2) Our attempts to play God.

“We play God by denying our humanity and by trying to control everything for our own selfish reasons” (p. 16). Trying to play God is the oldest game on earth, and it all started in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve wouldn’t let anyone tell them what to do. Like them, we want to make our own rules, call our own shots, and run the show. There are several ways we try and play God...

One, we try to **control our image**. Whether we choose to admit it, we care very deeply about what other people think of us. So, we play games, wear masks, and hide the truth about ourselves from others. We’re afraid if other people really know us, they’ll reject us; so, we downplay our weaknesses and deny our feelings. We say, “I’m okay. I’m not mad. I’m not scared.”

Two, we play God when we try to **control other people**. We think to ourselves, “If I could just get others to do what I want, my problems would be solved.” No relationship dynamic is immune—parents try to control their children (and vice versa); one spouse tries to control the other, and peers, associates and roommates vie for control over each other. Throughout all of the tug-of-warring, we become adept at manipulation. In fact, some of us have mastered our manipulative skills with tools like guilt, shame, anger, fear, or the old stand by—the silent treatment. But are we *successful* at controlling others’ behavior? (rhetorical question). Sadly, that doesn’t stop us from trying.

Three, we act like God by trying to **control our problems**. More times than not, our attempts to “fix” ourselves mess things up even more. Think about the warning stickers on various products that read, “Caution! Do not tamper with product. Voids warranty.” We should heed the same warning when we try to control or “fix” our problems.

Last, we play God when we try to **control our pain**. We human beings are very resourceful and adaptable, so we are adept at avoiding, denying, escaping, or postponing our pain. It’s why some people eat too much, and others eat too little. It’s why some abuse substances. It’s why some jump from one relationship to another or from one job to another. But, despite our best efforts to escape, the pain is there, and the greatest pain of all comes when we realize that no matter hard we try, we’re not in control. While that realization is very scary (“He’s God, and I’m not”), it’s a step in the right direction. The longer we deny that we’re attempting to play God, the longer we will suffer the consequences of our wrong choices.

1. What are some ways in which you try to control your image? Other people? Your problems? Your pain? How successful were you?
2. What causes you to feel the need for control or to be in charge?

3. What benefits does having control provide?
4. What are the pitfalls of trying to be in control?
5. Share an experience—an “ah-HA” moment—where you realized that God is in control, and you’re not.

### **The CONSEQUENCES of Our Problems**

We’ve learned that the *cause* of most of our problems is two-fold: (1) our nature to do wrong (e.g., sin) and (2) our effort to control “x.” Consider the concept of causation: where there exists a relationship between one event (the cause) and a second event (the effect), the second event is understood as a *consequence* of the first. Thus, there are *consequences* (effect) to the wrong choices (causes) that we make. Therein exist the consequences to our problems.

#### **1) Fear**

When we fail at our attempts to control, we become fearful. Let’s look in the beginning of Creation, Genesis 3:10 (NIV): “...I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” Are we not like Adam?—afraid that people will figure out who we really are?—that we have hurts, hang-ups, and habits? Our fears cause us to pretend to be strong...as though we “have it all together.” We even compare ourselves to others, and, if our successes don’t look like theirs, we “fake it to make it.” Some of us hide our pain or depression for fear of looking “weak” or for fear of being rejected. And the result?—our fear often controls us.

1. Share your greatest fear?
2. Describe a time that you felt paralyzed by fear.

#### **2) Frustration**

Another consequence of our problems is frustration. Playing God will inevitably lead to frustration. Our lives may often feel analogous to the “Whac-A-Mole” game. For those unfamiliar with this game, the object was to whack a mole with a mallet when he popped out of his hole; yet, as soon as he got whacked, two or three more would pop up. Or, consider the grey hair analogy—when you pull out one, three more grow back. Such are our problems...when we fix one problem, another one pops up. Paul alludes to his own frustration in Romans 7 when he describes being unable to do the right thing and always doing the wrong thing; he concludes, “Oh, what a miserable person I am!” (Romans 7:24a NLT). We must realize, though, “Frustration is a symptom of a much deeper issue: a failure to acknowledge that we are not God” (p. 19).

1. What causes you to feel frustrated with yourself?
2. How do you channel your frustration when you see your problems multiplying?

#### **3) Fatigue**

Pretending that we have it together and playing God are hard work, and those efforts make us tired. David put it this way: “My strength evaporated like water on a sunny day until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them” (Psalm 32:4-5 TLB). The denial of our problems (fear) and our inability to handle them (frustration) cause many of us to run from the pain by keeping busy. Yet, busy-ness can wear us out, too! Nevertheless, we keep plugging along despite how emotionally drained we feel.

1. Have you ever felt “sick and tired of being sick and tired?” What caused you to feel that way?
2. When do you find yourself the most fatigued? what are the circumstances behind it?

#### 4) Failure

Attempting to take God's place in running the universe is a foregone conclusion: epic fail. Thinking we can take on His role in order to hide our sins is futile. Proverbs 28:13a (TEV) reads, "You'll never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins." Failure is just another consequence of our problems.

1. Describe what failure looks like to you. Give some concrete examples.
2. What—if anything—scares you about failing?

#### The CURE for Our Problems

"The cure for our problems comes in a strange form: it comes through admitting weakness and through a humble heart" (p. 20). We tap into the healing power of Christ and receive the cure for our problems in these two ways.

##### 1) Admitting our need and our powerlessness.

Even Jesus, in His humanity, admitted His need when he called out from the cross, "I am thirsty" (John 19:28 NLT). So, why is it so difficult for us to admit our needs?—the fear of appearing weak? When our neediness is directed toward God, we find real strength. Faced with a problem he couldn't remedy, the Apostle Paul concluded, "I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become" (2 Corinthians 12:10 MSG).

We must come to the point where we say, "I'm not God, but God is. I need you, Lord." We have to recognize our need and confess the following three important facts of life:

***I admit I am powerless to...***

- ***Change my past***
- ***Control other people***
- ***Cure my hurts, hang-ups, and habits***

Good intentions are not enough, and will-power alone is not sufficient to overcome my problems. Say this aloud, "I need 'a source of power beyond myself'" (p. 21, emphasis added). That source is God. And while we may be powerless to change our past, to control other people, and to cure our hurts, hang-ups, and habits, we are not helpless...because we choose to call on God for His help, His hope, and His healing. We read throughout the book of Psalms about David's spiritual restoration because he called to God...with faith and with *humility*...when he was in **need** (ref. Psalm 3:4, 17:6, 86:7). We can receive that healing, too.

1. What is the greatest need in your life?
2. What is something in your past that you'd like to change?
3. What have you learned from that experience?
4. Describe a situation you tried to remedy, but were unable to do so.

##### 2) Being humble.

We receive God's help when we come to Him with humble and submissive hearts. James affirms this by explaining that humbling ourselves before God can bring healing: "Let yourself be brought low [humbled] before the Lord. Then He will lift you up and help you" (James 4:10 NLV). Not only does our Lord help us when we call on Him, but He gives us grace to sustain us in our weakness. More than anything else, we need God's grace because it has the power to heal our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. It behooves us to heed James' words: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6 NIV). Where human pride reigns, there is no room for God's grace.

Humility doesn't necessarily come easily to a lot of us. We think, "I can do this on my own," or, "I did it, and I can fix it." "I can quit anytime I want." But can we really? If we could, we would; but, we can't, so we won't. Let go of pride. Choose NOT to allow pride to keep its grip on our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Our hope and our cure are in the healing power of Christ.

1. Why do you think God "opposes the proud?"
2. What does it mean to humble yourself before God?
3. Describe a time where you demonstrated humility before another person.
4. For what particular hurt, hang-up, or habit do you need the healing power of Christ?

### **In Closing:**

The first step we must take to receive the healing power of Christ for our hurts, hang-ups, and habits requires us to recognize our need. We must accept that we're not God, admit our need for His help, and ask Him humbly to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. "Choosing to admit that you can't do it alone and that you need God is the first and hardest choice. It's hard to admit, 'I have a problem, and I need help...'" (p. 22). The good news comes in the form of a beatitude<sup>ii</sup> that Jesus shared with His disciples: "God blesses those who...realize their need for him" (Matthew 5:3 NLT); when we do so with a humble heart, God showers us with His grace. As we take this first step, we'll begin to experience the healing power of Christ. And doesn't everyone need healing for some kind of hurt, hang-up, or habit?

### **Close in Prayer:**

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your presence in our lives. We confess that we've denied our need for You and that we've often tried to control our lives along the way. Forgive us, we ask. Give us the courage to let go of our hurts, hang-ups, and habits and invite YOU into our hearts and minds to begin the healing in us by Your power through Jesus Christ. For it is in His name we pray. Amen.

### **The Blessing (say this as a group):**

*"...the light of my blessing will shine on you like the rising sun. I will heal you quickly. I will march out ahead of you. And my glory will follow behind you and guard you...." (Isaiah 58:8 NIRV)*

### **Action Items for the Week Ahead:**

Review the key points of today's message and the scriptures related thereto. In the week ahead, reflect upon those scriptures, and consider the following:

1. Pray about it. Ask God to give you the courage to admit your inability to control yourself, others, or your world. Pray that you will begin to depend on His healing power to help you make positive changes in your life.
2. Write about it. In a journal, write down your thoughts and insights about what you are learning and about what God is showing you.
3. Share about it. Participate in a small group or find a person you trust, and ask him/her to meet with you for the next eight weeks so that you can share your joys and struggles as you proceed through this study.

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<sup>i</sup>This sermon series, "The Healing Power of Christ," is based on the book, *Life's Healing Choices*, by John Baker. ©2007 by Richard D. Warren and John E. Baker. All quotes used in this discussion guide are taken from this book and annotated where appropriate.

<sup>ii</sup> Pronounced, "BEE-attitude." The beatitudes are the set of teachings by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount.