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HOPE IN ADDICTION RECOVERY: ESCHATOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS IN
CELEBRATE RECOVERY AND THE GENESIS PROCESS

“Hope in Addiction Recovery”

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HOPE IN ADDICTION RECOVERY: ESCHATOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS IN
CELEBRATE RECOVERY AND THE GENESIS PROCESS

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Divinity
at Seattle Pacific Seminary

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Part One: Models of Addiction and Recovery

- Addiction as Disease
- Addiction as Moral Choice
- Addiction as Intrinsic to the Human Condition: Gerald May
- Addiction as Complex Habit: Kent Dunnington

Part Two: An Analysis of Two Christian Addiction Recovery Programs

- Celebrate Recovery
 - o Descriptive Task – Purpose
 - o Descriptive Task – Content
 - o Interpretive Task
 - o Normative Task
- The Genesis Process
 - o Descriptive Task – Purpose
 - o Descriptive Task – Content
 - o Interpretive Task
 - o Normative Task

Conclusions and Next Steps

Bibliography

Appendices

- A. Celebrate Recovery Eight Principles
- B. Celebrate Recovery Twelve Steps

Introduction

The world of addiction recovery is, by its nature, fraught with challenges. Addicted people face powerful physical, emotional, and spiritual forces, and many find the process of recovery too difficult to handle. The National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimated several years ago that the relapse rate of addicted people in recovery was somewhere between 40 and 60 percent.¹ The reasons for this are complex, and an account of them is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear, at least, that attempting to recover from addiction is frustrating.

Recovery is not only frustrating for the addicted person, but also for the people offering help and treatment options. Many recovery programs and addiction treatment institutions exist in America, and that is because addiction of all kinds, but especially chemical addiction, is a broad problem: a public health issue, a destroyer of families and communities, a drain on society, or all of the above, depending on whom you ask. Recovery helpers watch the successes, struggles, and failures of addicted people, very often investing heart, soul, blood, sweat, tears, and money into the process of recovery. This investment leads recovery practitioners to continually develop new ways of approaching the issue.

This project will focus on one segment of the addiction recovery sector: Christian addiction recovery ministries, represented by two programs currently operating in the Seattle area. These two ministries fall into the categories of long-term support and behavioral therapy respectively, providing community and counseling for the ongoing process of recovery. In practice, they look very much like non-faith-based addiction recovery programs, but they are particularly “Christian ministries” because of their foundational use of Christian scripture and tradition.

¹ “Media Guide,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, https://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/mediaguide_web_1.pdf

Personal Connection. This project grew out of the efforts of a church with which I was associated—Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Washington—to create space on Capitol Hill for the addiction recovery community. As a small, middle-class, commuter church, CHPC seems an unlikely place for this kind of ministry to take place. But it is located in the center of a neighborhood known for free-flowing drugs and alcohol, and it seems now that its mission to become a central place for recovery was inevitable.

There are two main reasons for the development of this mission. First, many years ago CHPC said “yes” to a request from Alcoholics Anonymous to hold weekly meetings in our building. Over the years, that yes has expanded into a church-wide policy to say yes to any Anonymous or other recovery group that requests space if we can accommodate them. Today, there are 22 separate recovery groups meeting in the CHPC building at least once a week. Some groups meet daily. Through the efforts of our pastor and other church leaders, participants have been invited to attend church services, and sometimes people accept.

The second reason CHPC has become a central place for the recovery community is our ongoing support of local ministries such as the Union Gospel Mission (UGM) and Mary’s Place. Both organizations focus on the issue of homelessness, but chemical addiction and mental illness are often related issues. In particular, Union Gospel Mission has a residential recovery program for men, which includes counseling, classes, and life-skills training for recovery. A member of CHPC named Kimberly began volunteering with the weekend worship services at the mission, developed relationships with the staff and the participants, and over time fostered a two-way relationship between the institutions. Men from the program began attending CHPC services, and more volunteers from the church began helping out with UGM projects. These men very often

became a vital part of our community. They played instruments on the worship team, attended Sunday school classes, and even assumed leadership roles within certain ministry groups.

The congregation welcomed these men, but the underlying issues of addiction were ever-present. Men from the program sometimes would ask to be baptized, and more often than not, they would relapse within a couple weeks of their baptism. We would never hear from them again. Sometimes men would act out inappropriately, showing their tempers or negative attitudes towards women. As a community, we slowly learned how to deal with these issues in a loving and beneficial way, but we never perfected our approach. And over time, members of our congregation began to wonder whether this kind of relational ministry was worth the effort. They felt the same frustration about addiction recovery that practitioners and addicted people have been feeling since the beginning.

I felt the frustration personally as well. In fostering friendships with some of the men from UGM, either through the worship team or in Sunday school classes that I taught, I began to notice the unique ways that these men would talk about God, the Bible, and their addictions. Most often, I noticed a duty-bound resolve or a “one chance” mentality around recovery. I found myself wishing I could see joy and hope in Christ more often. But instead, I saw fear. For much of this time, I was also a seminary student at Seattle Pacific Seminary, learning historical and systematic theology and how to apply it to life and ministry. I was experiencing real and living theology as a way to bring Life and Hope to the world, in the sense of abundant life in Christ and hope for the future of God. I began to wonder if these Christian ministries of addiction recovery were really bringing Life and Hope to these men. What was embedded in their theology that brought fear instead of joy? And thus, the idea for this project was born.

With this project, I am attempting to understand the theological foundations of the two Christian addiction recovery programs with which Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church has been directly involved: Celebrate Recovery and The Genesis Process. Particularly, I will focus on the presence or absence of Christianity's unique sense of hope for the future, using eschatological themes.

CHPC ran a Celebrate Recovery (CR) group for a few years with the participation of 10–100 people weekly at various times. The group was started by a core team of church members who volunteered regularly at UGM, men going through the UGM residential program, and people who had gone through CR leadership training in the past. Once it started, the program attracted other men from the UGM residential program, especially those who were still not allowed to leave the mission's premises except for such events. In addition, we welcomed individuals who had been in recovery for several years already, who wanted a Twelve Step program that was Christ-centered, or who needed a recovery community. Several members of CHPC also participated regularly because the program was not specifically for people who are chemically addicted, but also for people with self-destructive “hurts, habits, and hang-ups” that keep them from relationships with God and others. Participants worked out of a set of Participant's Guides with a new lesson for each week. Because CR has a prescriptive process for creating new CR groups, the core team struggled to find qualified leaders and establish legitimate processes. Eventually, due to a lack of leadership and poor attendance, the group shut down in December 2016.

The Genesis Process is not a Twelve Step program but a behavioral therapy program that includes one-on-one counseling and support groups (called Change Groups) in which to explore the underlying issues that can lead to addiction. Many of the men who attended our church while participating in the residential recovery program at UGM were going through the process with

UGM counselors, and the CHPC volunteers that spent time at the mission observed significant changes in the men who earnestly engaged with it. Two of these volunteers invited members of CHPC to start a Change Group of their own in the spring of 2014. By adopting the same process that the men in recovery were experiencing, the church members were able to relate with program participants more genuinely. About ten church people participated, and they found it very beneficial.

The Question of Eschatology. In reading through the materials of both Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process, I became aware of the theological assumptions, emphases, and omissions embedded in the programs. My questions about why I saw more fear than hope in the participants of these programs began to crystallize. I asked myself, “If I were a person who struggled with chemical addiction, how would I understand the goal of this program? What exactly is CR/the Genesis Process telling me I will recover? Where does the hope lie for me?”

The question of hope led me back to my growing and abiding interest in the theological sub-discipline of eschatology, the study of “last things.” Eschatology encompasses many important theological concepts, including death and life after death, heaven and hell, judgment day, the Kingdom of God, and the Second Coming of Christ, not all of which are directly applicable to the process of addiction recovery as such. The overarching question explored by eschatology, however, is this: “What is the final goal? What is the *telos* of God’s salvation history?” Or in other words, “What is the world coming to?” Specifically, eschatology’s practical application to recovery ministries centers around three distinct yet related theological concepts: hope, resurrection, and shalom.

Hope is the concept related to the “here and not yet” condition of the Kingdom of God. Hope encompasses the idea of process, of moving forward, of yearning, believing, and trusting.

As Christians, we yearn for, believe, and trust that Christ will come again to establish God's Kingdom on earth, and the Christian life is about learning to recognize the glimpses of the Kingdom already apparent in the world and proclaiming their significance. A relevant question for recovery ministries is whether hope can be fulfilled in this life. In his book *Eschatology*, Hans Schwarz writes about the difference between hope in the Kingdom and the contemporary hope in Western ideas of progress. With the Enlightenment came the idea that humanity has the capacity to evolve into a better version of itself: "If we had evolved so high above the animal world, we could evolve much higher."² And therefore, "Humanity is in control of its future; it can determine its own progress and need no longer rely on an active God."³ We see the evidence of this attitude embedded in Western economics and politics, especially. A nation's success is evaluated by its economy's sustained rate of growth, not necessarily its stability, ethics, or the wellbeing of its citizens. But now, in what some might call the Postmodern Era, Schwarz suggests that people are beginning to see the flaws in the hope of progress:

Our rushing toward the future would be more bearable if we could discern true progress. Yet, as anybody realizes, the vision of self-perpetuating progress is an illusion. We cannot obtain larger and larger pieces of a pie that is not increasing in size. Since we are finite creatures living in a finite earth, we will sooner or later encounter boundaries⁴

In much of our society, we have idealized the ideas of change and innovation, making them an end in themselves. But without an ultimate goal, progress becomes meaningless. As a counterpoint to the modern idea of progress, Christian eschatology

. . . endows our life and even the idea of progress with new meaning. . . . On the basis of the Christ event, [secular endeavors] can be understood as the prophetic anticipation of the God-promised eschaton which at the same time is their incentive, their directive, and their judgment. Secular endeavors for pro-

² Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

gress and a social and ethical transformation of the world are legitimate and necessary, but they are preliminary and inadequate, and they yearn for their final completion through God's redemptive power.⁵

In the realm of recovery ministries, the focal point of an addicted person's hope is extremely important. Should the addicted person put hope in a "cure" for addiction? Is the saying, "once an addict, always an addict" really true? Should the addicted person put hope in the "progress" one makes in therapy? "Progress" toward what goal exactly? Will a person ever reach it? This project asks how the materials of the two chosen recovery ministries answer these questions.

Resurrection is most closely associated with Jesus Christ within Christianity. He died on the cross and rose three days later with a scarred yet glorious body that would never die again. Jesus is alive for eternity, sitting at the right hand of the Father. And those who believe in him, along with the rest of creation, are promised a similar resurrection in the final *parousia*. The importance of the concept of resurrection in addiction recovery ministries centers around two key issues. First, resurrection is more than returning to a former state. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his disciples did not recognize him at first. Mary thought he was the gardener (John 20:15). The disciples walking along the road to Emmaus talked with him for hours without knowing him (Luke 24:13ff). Schwarz writes that "it would be erroneous to interpret . . . [resurrection] as if [it] were to open the opportunity for us to return to an ideal state of the past. Such an interpretation would force us into the cyclical view of history represented by most religions and mythologies: after the cataclysmic end dawns a new beginning, the wheel of world history moves on to a new revolution."⁶ At the end of time, creation will essentially be a new and better version of itself, free of the trappings of sin and death. The second key issue is the idea that resurrection is only possible through death. Jesus Christ had to die to be glorified, and we will have

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid., 284.

to die as well. In addiction recovery ministries, it is easy to see how the concept of death and resurrection could become metaphorical. Emerging from the throes of addiction can seem like resurrection, and it is certainly a freeing event for many. However, the temptation in this metaphor is to believe that the “event” of recovery, or the moment a person stops using, is a finishing point. “I’ve made it! I’ve been resurrected!” A newly sober addict might celebrate. But true resurrection, characterized by a new whole body and a spirit free from the trappings of sin and death, will only happen fully after death. So the question for someone in recovery is how to balance the joy and freedom of recovery with the acknowledgment that there are still temptations, physical ailments, damaged relationships, and brokenness in this life. The new life promised when one accepts Jesus Christ is fully realized only in the next life. The addiction recovery programs featured in this project will be evaluated on how they relate the nuances of resurrection and new life to recovery.

Shalom is a Hebrew word that is traditionally translated “peace,” but it also encompasses concepts of abundance, flourishing, and security. Shalom features prominently within the eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God, which J. Richard Middleton explores in his book *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. His argument is that the New Testament concept of “a new earth and a new heaven” is directly related to the Old Testament (i.e. Jewish) vision of holistic shalom. He writes,

Indeed, the entire Old Testament reveals an interest in mundane matters such as the development of languages and cultures, the fertility of land and crops, the birth of children and stable family life, justice among neighbors, and peace in international relations. The Old Testament does not spiritualize salvation, but rather understands it as God’s deliverance of people and land from all that destroys life and the consequent restoration of people and land to flourishing.⁷

⁷ J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 25.

This earthly vision of shalom and “the good life” carries over into the New Testament. According to Luke:4:16–30, Jesus Christ begins his public ministry by reading and commenting upon the following heavily eschatological passage from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue of Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” He finishes by telling the people of his hometown, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Of this claim, Middleton concludes,

To put it differently, “the year of the Lord’s favor” has begun (Luke 4:19; Isa. 61:2). God’s Jubilee reign of grace, anticipated in Isaiah 61, is finally coming; indeed, it is “fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). This is nothing less than “the age to come” of Jewish expectation, a new epoch in history, no longer limited to every fiftieth year or seventh year, in which God is at work healing the world, making things right once again. It is the age of the kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus, in which God is restoring broken, fallen, needy human beings and reversing evil (every form of bondage, poverty, and blindness) so that the world (the *kosmos*, which God so loved, says John 3:16) might again manifest God’s true purposes from the beginning—purposes for shalom and blessing.⁸

For the purposes of this project, the eschatological vision of shalom is defined as “the restoration of people and land to flourishing,” also called “the good life.”

The concept of shalom relates to addiction recovery because it forces the question of what life looks like after recovery. Many recovery programs promise a “better life” when one gives up one’s addiction, but that “better life” is not always well defined. In addition, what happens when someone’s preconceived notions of a “better life” go unfulfilled? Life is hard, regardless of one’s addictions, and so a person in recovery should not expect that life will be suddenly easy after giving up one’s object of addiction. There is, however, hope and expectation of a good life to come after death. The Christian life, then, as well as the life of recovery, becomes antici-

⁸ Ibid., 260.

pation of the Kingdom of God. In the recovery ministries analyzed in this project, what kind of life is promised to people in recovery? What kind of vision for the Kingdom of God is offered?

Methodology. In order to assess the theological foundations of these two addiction recovery ministries, I performed a content analysis of the published materials used by participants, including workbooks, lessons, and reflections. The biggest challenge was that these materials were written intentionally as “theology lite” for a population without scholarly training. As such, I had to dig deep into my own theological training to interpret the cues presented. I relied heavily on Hans Schwarz’s book *Eschatology*, a survey of eschatological issues and literature, to place these recovery materials within their theological contexts.

To present my assessment of the theological, and particularly eschatological, foundations and assumptions of these recovery programs, I followed Richard Osmer’s structure of practical theology, a discipline dedicated to understanding how theology is enacted in the world and to applying theological principles to specific situations more effectively.⁹ Osmer outlines four tasks with corresponding questions of practical theologians:

1. The Descriptive/Empirical Task: What is going on?
2. The Interpretive Task: Why is this going on?
3. The Normative Task: What ought to be going on?
4. The Pragmatic Task: How might we respond?

These tasks were designed for use by pastors in congregational situations, but I adapted them for use in analyzing written materials:

1. The Descriptive/Empirical Task: What does it say?
2. The Interpretive Task: What does it mean?

⁹ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

3. The Normative Task: What other perspectives might be considered and applied?
4. The Pragmatic Task: How might the materials change?

This project will focus mainly on the first three tasks to analyze the written materials of Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process. For each program, I started with the question, “What does it say?” This question focuses on the face value of the materials, which gets to the heart of the Descriptive-Empirical Task. I catalogued scriptural references and theological phrases and looked for common themes. Then I asked, “What does it mean?” which is the question of the Interpretive Task. Interpretation of any situation, publication, or interaction is always fraught by perspective, but in this section of my assessments, I attempted to home in on what the program creators were trying to convey and teach about recovery. Very often, in both programs, the materials included ambiguous terms such as “a better life” or “you can change,” leaving, in my opinion, too much room for interpretation. My intention, however, is to come out on the other side of this section with as complete a picture of the programs’ theological foundations as possible. From there, I will move to the Normative Task, which asks the question, “What should it say?” or “What other perspectives might be considered and applied?” In this section, I will supplement the theology of each recovery program with eschatological perspectives that might add weight and meaning to them. In both cases, there are other beneficial sources that can inform how recovery programs articulate their purposes and goals theologically. Schwarz’s *Eschatology*, especially its excellent literature review, will be particularly helpful.

Based on my analysis, it is my opinion that a thorough rewrite of these materials, with attention to both theological content and pedagogical format, would benefit people in recovery on a spiritual level. Offering such a rewrite, however, is outside the scope of this project. It is my

intention to give a brief overall assessment of the content of these two projects and make key suggestions for improving them.

Part One: Models of Addiction and Recovery

In order to provide further background and context for the assessment of eschatological themes in *Celebrate Recovery* and the Genesis Process, this section will provide an overview of four models of addiction and recovery. The first two models described here—addiction as disease and addiction as moral choice—are the two most prevalent models in Western culture, particularly the model of addiction as a disease. However, the two come into conflict in the practical question of how to treat addiction. Do we treat addiction medically, focusing on brain science and physical symptoms, or do we treat it as a symptom of depravity, focusing on social implications and punishment? The next two models—addiction as intrinsic to the human condition and addiction as complex habit—are offered by a psychiatrist and a philosopher, respectively. These models attempt to move beyond the debate between the disease model and the moral choice model, delving into the theological and spiritual aspects of addiction. All four models will speak to the interpretive and especially the normative tasks in the assessment in Part Two.

Addiction as Disease

The prevailing view of addiction, touted especially by the scientific community, is that addiction is a physiological disease. The definition provided by the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) is: “Addiction is a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use that is compulsive, or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences.”¹⁰ Scientists and researchers

¹⁰ “Understanding Drug Use and Addiction,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>

give three reasons for this characterization: 1) evidence of chemical changes to the brain, 2) evidence of genetic predisposition, and 3) effectiveness of medical treatment.¹¹

First, the NIDA definition concedes that “the initial decision to take drugs is voluntary for most people,” but then asserts that “repeated drug use can lead to brain changes that challenge an addicted person’s self-control and interfere with their ability to resist intense urges to take drugs.” Chemical changes to the brain are an accepted fact across the spectrum of addiction models, but the argument for the disease model here is that these biological changes are involuntary, and therefore the subsequent behavioral changes of addicted people are involuntary as well, much like behavior-altering diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

Second, research has suggested that, like the existence of a genetic predisposition to cancer or other diseases, a person’s inborn genes account for about half of a person’s risk for addiction. “Gender, ethnicity, and the presence of other mental disorders may also influence risk for drug use and addiction.”¹² Certain studies show that adopted children with at least one alcoholic biological parent were more likely to become alcoholic. Also a group of geneticists in 2005 succeeded in isolating genes that affect sensitivity to drugs and/or tolerance for alcohol.¹³

The third piece of evidence supporting the disease model is the clear effectiveness of medical treatment for chemical addiction. NIDA reports,

According to research that tracks individuals in treatment over extended periods, most people who get into and remain in treatment stop using drugs, decrease their criminal activity, and improve their occupational, social, and psychological functioning. For example, methadone treatment has been shown to

¹¹ Kent Dunnington gives this summary of the disease model in *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology series, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

¹² “Understanding Drug Use and Addiction,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>

¹³ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 21.

increase participation in behavioral therapy and decrease both drug use and criminal behavior.¹⁴

While this statement is relatively optimistic, NIDA acknowledges the high rates of relapse with addiction, ranging from 40 to 60 percent of people in treatment. The medical community, however, does not see this as a failure, but part of the process of recovery, comparable to other chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and asthma. In addition, it should be noted that the goal of medical treatment, according to this statement, is to lessen physical symptoms that may motivate relapse in order for the addicted person to enter behavioral therapy and other non-medical treatments that encourage societal rehabilitation.

The disease model of addiction emphasizes the compulsive nature of addiction, which makes addicted persons feel that addiction is uncontrollable, or is happening *to* them. Few argue that compulsion is a clear aspect of addiction, but the question of the “initial voluntary action” remains. Most often, there is a choice at the beginning of addiction, as well as at the end, whereas there is no choice preceding other chronic diseases like asthma and Alzheimer’s.

Treating the Disease: The Medical Approach

NIDA describes common medical interventions at the withdrawal and the relapse prevention phases of recovery. For the withdrawal phase, medical intervention focuses on lessening the effects of withdrawal symptoms during the initial process of detoxification. Then during the subsequent phase of relapse prevention, “. . . medications to help re-establish normal brain function

¹⁴ “Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide (3rd Edition),” National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment-research-based-guide-third-edition/frequently-asked-questions/how-effective-drug-addiction-treatment>.

and decrease cravings” are available for opioid, tobacco, and alcohol use.¹⁵ Examples are methadone, which “act[s] on the same targets in the brain as heroin and morphine . . . suppress[ing] withdrawal symptoms and reliev[ing] cravings.”¹⁶

The perceived success of medical treatment programs for addicted people can be somewhat misleading. According to Kent Dunnington, “addiction researchers have drawn their conclusions based largely on studies involving addicted persons who are in medical treatment programs, ignoring the significantly larger population of addicted persons who never seek treatment.”¹⁷ The overall remission rates for the general population, according to the National Comorbidity Survey, was 82 percent in 2003.¹⁸ Dunnington concludes, “Most persons with addictions recover in non-medicalized contexts, and furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that medical treatment improves the changes of recovery from addiction.”¹⁹

Addiction as Moral Choice

The moral choice model of addiction emphasizes the initial choice one makes to engage in behaviors that are potentially addictive. The model’s main argument against the disease model is that one does not “catch” an addiction as one contracts a chronic disease like asthma. While environmental factors are relevant to the onset of addiction—i.e. social pressure, family of origin, pain, genetic predisposition—the choice model argues that all of these factors are secondary to a person’s decision to engage in addictive behavior. Rarely will a person start drinking heavily, for

¹⁵ “Treatment Approaches for Drug Addiction,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/treatment-approaches-drug-addiction>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25f. Dunnington summarizes Gene Heyman’s work *Addiction: A Disorder of Choice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

example, in order to become addicted, but as with any decision, one weighs the benefits and the risks of certain behavior based on one's own reasoning: "Because human beings have, in addition to their desires, the ability to form beliefs about what is suitable to them, they are able to act rather than merely be acted on."²⁰

People who espouse the moral choice model have tended to view addiction as "a rejection or abnegation of a life of serious moral endeavor," making addicted people "morally dubious individuals."²¹ In other words, addicted people choose to engage in behaviors that risk addiction out of some kind of depravity. This was the prevailing view in the early twentieth century when Alcoholics Anonymous was first developed by two "hopeless drunks." To be clear, Alcoholics Anonymous does not espouse the moral choice model, but instead began as a reaction against it: "In the 1930s, if you look at what was available for alcoholics who wanted help—there was almost nothing. The most common way of understanding addictions at that time was that if you were an addict or an alcoholic you were just a bad person. . . . There were good people and there were bad people and if you were an addict you were a bad person."²² The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, "Bill W." and "Dr. Bob," developed their recovery program with the alternative view of the importance of community support for recovery, and the Anonymous Network is still one of the most prevalent and successful recovery programs in the United States.

The moral choice model, however, has persisted outside academic or scientific circles, resulting in social stigma and even government policies like the "War on Drugs" initiated by President Richard Nixon in 1971, designed to crack down on narcotic and opioid sale and use

²⁰ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

²² Dale Ryan, "The Christian Recovery Movement: A Brief Introduction," National Association of Christian Recovery, <http://www.nacr.org/center-for-recovery-at-church/the-christian-recovery-movement-a-brief-introduction>.

through the criminal justice system.²³ Another example was Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” campaign in the 1980s, which capitalized on the choice model to encourage young people to *choose* to abstain. The long-term effectiveness of such policies is hotly debated.

The choice model has also prevailed in churches. Dale Ryan, a professor at Fuller Seminary and one of the founders of the National Association for Christian Recovery, unpacks the idea that churches are not necessarily safe places for people in recovery:

There are many congregations where the dominant response to any kind of real-life struggle is still ‘If you really trusted God enough, you’d be better by now.’ The most difficult struggles of life are all too often dismissed with simple platitudes such as ‘Have you prayed about it?’ or ‘If you are not feeling close to God, guess who moved?’ These exercises in shame and blame do not help anybody. And they communicate in direct ways that this place is not safe.²⁴

Ryan is saying that churches tend to make people in recovery feel like they are “doing something wrong,” as if they were silly or lazy for struggling, which is related to the idea of addicted people being “bad.” Many congregations perpetuate a culture of hiding struggles and, in turn, not engaging with the struggles of others. Sometimes congregations even worry about how inviting addicted people to their fellowship will damage their reputation: “Many people resist the development of recovery ministries because of concerns that the presence of ‘people like that’ will adversely affect the way people in the community perceive the congregation.”²⁵ Since church congregations have traditionally been sympathetic to people suffering from diseases, the unsympathetic

²³ There has been much commentary lately about the long-term negative effects of this social and political movement to crack down on drug use. A good, if biased, historical summary can be found on the website of the Drug Policy Alliance (drugpolicy.org), as well as in bestselling books like Johann Hari’s *Chasing the Scream* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

²⁴ Dale Ryan, “Recovery at Church?” National Association of Christian Recovery, <http://www.nacr.org/center-for-recovery-at-church/recovery-at-church>.

²⁵ Dale Ryan, “Criticisms of Recovery, Part 3,” National Association of Christian Recovery, <http://www.nacr.org/center-for-recovery-at-church/criticisms-of-recovery-part-3>

idea that “people like that” might damage a church’s reputation indicates the prevalence of the choice model of addiction rather than the disease model.

The main problem with this model is that addiction does, in fact, include the element of compulsion that very often feels impossible to control. The choice model has tended to dismiss the idea of physical compulsion as weakness of willpower. Conversely, the disease model has tended to absolve addicted people from any responsibility for their behavior.

Treating Addiction as Moral Choice: Boot Camp Approach

What we are calling the “boot camp approach” to treating addiction is the tactic touted by proponents of the moral choice model, like the “Just Say No” campaign and the War on Drugs. The two common categories of “treatment” are demonizing the initial choice and criminalizing subsequent behavior. The “Just Say No” campaign, for example, championed the strong willpower required to resist peer pressure to take drugs. The belief that the best way to avoid addiction was to abstain from drugs completely was correct on a basic level, just as the best way to avoid unwanted pregnancy is to abstain from intercourse. But the argument against the advocacy of such prescriptive solutions is that emotional and biological factors may, on some level, guarantee experimentation and participation in such behaviors regardless of the risks. In the case of sex, contraceptives abound to mitigate unwanted pregnancy while still allowing their users to remain sexually active, but there is nothing currently available that can completely eliminate the possibility of addiction to chemical substances. Is simply using one’s willpower to resist drug use enough?

The other side of the boot camp approach to treatment is the criminalization of drug use behavior, which we can see in the policies of the so-called “War on Drugs.” President Nixon

“dramatically increased the size and presence of federal drug control agencies, and pushed through measures such as mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants.”²⁶ The Reagan and Clinton administrations utilized zero-tolerance policies for drugs, and “the number of people behind bars for nonviolent drug law offenses increased from 50,000 in 1980 to over 400,000 by 1997.”²⁷ Many believe that this system of mass incarceration revealed new heights of systemic racism and classism: “The disease concept of addiction is routinely applied to wealthy addicts while the general public persists in thinking of poor addicts as morally depraved. Prison demographics suggest that the hypocrisy is reproduced in public policy.”²⁸

Inpatient recovery centers can also be considered part of the boot camp approach, even though they rely largely on medical treatment and behavioral therapies. Addicted people can check in to a comprehensive residential program that includes detoxification, counseling, and other kinds of support over a predetermined period of time. Sometimes these programs involve lock-in systems and strict schedules designed to overpower potential backsliding once the withdrawal symptoms kick in. Such systems could potentially be seen as a way to “force” a person into sobriety, and their effectiveness is varied.

Addiction as Intrinsic to the Human Condition

A third approach to addiction was developed by Gerald G. May, who understands addiction, or more specifically “attachment,” as a basic feature of the human condition. In his book *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*, he argues that all humans

²⁶ “A Brief History of the Drug War,” Drug Policy Alliance, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/facts/new-solutions-drug-policy/brief-history-drug-war-0>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 34. Written since *Addiction and Virtue*, Michelle Alexander’s bestseller, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012) makes a similar argument about class and, more specifically, race.

have an inborn desire for God—a desire, essentially, for love—and that we are, in fact, built for attachment to that love. Christianity affirms the grace of God, which is characterized by love freely given, but in our broken world, the thing that ultimately gets in the way of our desire for God is our God-given human freedom:

It seems to me that free will is given to us for a purpose: so that we may choose freely, without coercion or manipulation, to love God in return, and to love one another in a similarly perfect way. This is the deepest desire of our hearts. . . . But our freedom is not complete. Working against it is the powerful force of addiction. . . . Addiction . . . displaces and supplants God’s love as the source and object of our deepest true desire.²⁹

May describes addiction as a “self-defeating force”: “. . . addiction *attaches* desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things, or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions; they come to rule our lives.”³⁰ In other words, anything that “impede[s] human freedom and diminish[es] the human spirit” is an addiction.³¹ Central to May’s claim is that addiction is at work in every human being: “The same processes that are responsible for addiction to alcohol and narcotics are also responsible for addiction to ideas, work, relationships, power, moods, fantasies, and an endless variety of other things. We are all addicts in every sense of the word.”³²

Building on this underlying assumption, May presents the psychological, neurological, and theological aspects of attachment. In Chapter 3, May describes the psychological nature of addiction as a system of positive and negative reinforcement to stimuli:

Simply stated, if I do something that makes me feel good, I am likely to do it again. If I keep doing it, and if it keeps making me feel good, I will probably make a habit of it. Once I have made a habit of it, it becomes important to me

²⁹ Gerald May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

and I will miss it if it is taken away. In other words, I have become attached to it. The most important behavioral insight into addiction, then, is that attachment takes place through a process of learning.³³

The psychological process of learning goes hand in hand with the physical and chemical changes in the brain caused by stimuli, which is what May describes in his Chapter 4 on the neurological nature of addiction. Through the brain's own systems of maintaining equilibrium, addictions are imprinted in a person's body, changing chemical responses, creating a "new normal," making the process of detachment difficult. "Compulsive, habitual behavior" can be seen in almost every realm of life, from eating ("I always have a piece of chocolate before I go to bed.") to working ("I have to answer all my emails before I do anything else.") and so on, all because the brain becomes wired that way.

The theological nature of addiction, described in Chapter 5, is a bit more abstract: our addictions are basically idols that trap us in longing and unfulfilled promises. May writes,

For me, the energy of our basic desire for God *is* the human spirit, planted within us and nourished endlessly by the Holy Spirit of God. In this light, the spiritual significance of addiction is not just that we lose freedom through attachment to things, not even that things so easily become our ultimate concerns. Of much more importance is that we try to *fulfill our longing for God* through objects of attachment.³⁴

What we need, then, is a "transformation of desire," going through the awkwardness of withdrawal from our idols into freedom for love.³⁵ May addresses the question of whether or not a person can be addicted to God. If all addiction limits human freedom by attaching desire, then when we desire God, can that be an addiction, too? May says no for two reasons. First, "God remains somewhat hidden from us," too close to be clear and too massive to be comprehended.

³³ Ibid., 56.

³⁴ Ibid., 92.

³⁵ Ibid., 94ff. May borrows Constance FitzGerald's idea of "spiritual homecoming," when a person finally sees idols for what they are and chooses to return to a desire for God: "The journey homeward, the process of homemaking in God, involves withdrawal from addictive behaviors that have become normal for us" (95).

And second, if God did choose to appear in clear, objective perfection, what would happen to our freedom?

Almost without thought, we would fix all our desires upon this Divine Object, try to grasp and possess it, addict ourselves to it. I think God refuses to be an object for attachment because God desires full love, not addiction. Love born of true freedom, love free from attachment, requires that we search for a deepening awareness of God, just as God freely reaches out to us.³⁶

May would say that it is possible to be addicted to religion, those human institutions we need in order to guide and nurture our search for God. But we find true freedom in displacing and transforming our attachments with a true longing for God.

May's model of addiction as intrinsic to the human condition rejects both the disease model and the moral choice model of addiction. Addiction is not simply a disease because the psychological and spiritual aspects of it must be taken into account. He also emphasizes the agency to choose to forsake attachments in favor of a longing for God. On a related note, May's rejection of the disease model of addiction is seen in his claim that the "addictive personality," a disorder characterized by narcissism, manipulation, and low self-esteem that supposedly predisposes a person to addiction, is a myth. Observing that addicted people exhibited these traits regularly, May concluded that if it were a true personality disorder,

the symptoms should have been apparent before the addiction ever began. But detailed histories revealed no supporting evidence. . . . Most, however, seemed to have led relatively normal lives before the addiction started. They had been capable of authentic respect for themselves, and in their dealings with others they had demonstrated compassion, honesty, and straightforwardness. I had to conclude that the symptoms of addictive personality were caused by the addiction, not the cause of it.³⁷

Similar to May's rejection of the disease model of addiction, May also rejects the moral choice model. Addiction does not make a person morally corrupt; addiction makes a person

³⁶ Ibid., 94.

³⁷ Ibid., 54–5.

normal. His definition of addiction encompasses behaviors far beyond engagement in chemical addictions that has often been the target of the moral choice model. Humanity can be, and is, addicted to an infinite number of things, people, and processes, trying to fulfill our longing for God.

Treating Addiction as Intrinsic to the Human Condition: The Contemplative Approach

Perhaps it is impossible to treat addiction if it is such a prevalent feature of human beings. There is no medication that can cure or even lessen the effects of something intrinsic to human nature, and no therapy exists that can change the fact that humanity is what it is. Gerald May, however, believes that humanity can transform its desire and find freedom from addiction in a longing for God. This happens only when God empowers a person through grace to abstain. Grace is a free gift of God, but there is still an element of human agency in a “contemplative approach” to addiction recovery. First of all, accepting grace can feel like a risk: “We may have been taught that grace is present, available, and victorious, and we can try to believe it is true, but it is only through risking it in actual life situations that we give substance to our belief.”³⁸ This involves a choice, but the choice to say yes to grace opens the door to being empowered: “We cannot make this empowerment happen. But . . . we can pray for it, seek it actively, open our hands for it, and try our best to live it. We can confront our addictions as honestly as possible; we can claim responsibility for the choices we make, and we can turn to God.”³⁹ May calls it a mystery, but in his work with addicted people over the years, he observed the people who are most successful in recovery are those that experience a moment of empowerment, a moment in which they inexplicably know that they will no longer engage in their addictive behavior.

³⁸ Ibid., 129.

³⁹ Ibid., 140.

To illustrate the moment of empowerment, May tells two stories. The first involves a married man who is having an extramarital affair. The relationship becomes addictive for him, and try as he might, he can't leave it, until one day when he said to her, "This is the last time," and it was.⁴⁰ The second involves a woman who was addicted to stress and overwork. She couldn't relax, couldn't sleep, couldn't be attentive to her family, and constantly worried. But finally she realized that her success "was not going to save the world," and so she "quit." She didn't quit her job, and she didn't even quit working hard, but she quit attaching extraneous meaning to her work, and eventually she slowed down.⁴¹ In these stories, neither person could explain his or her moment of decision. May, however, claims that in those moments, they were empowered by the grace of God to abstain.

From the moment of empowerment, grace has a foot in the door. In the experience of "emptiness" after a person leaves an object of attachment or an addicted behavior, he or she can begin to engage in the "consecrated life" of coming home to God.⁴² May's idea of the consecrated life is marked by five characteristics:

They are characteristics of discernment, things we can do and attitudes we can nurture to help us embrace God's loving activity and join more fully the mystical courtship that is already happening. They are, if you will, guideposts through the desert. They are not the way home, but they do point in that direction. These qualities are *honesty*, *dignity*, *community*, *responsibility*, and *simplicity*.⁴³

If, as May writes, ". . . the journey homeward is one of increasing freedom from attachment," then the contemplative approach is about continuing to reflect on attachments and pray for grace while exercising these qualities in everyday life. *Honesty* allows a person to accept that a prob-

⁴⁰ Ibid., 157–8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 158–9.

⁴² Ibid., 161.

⁴³ Ibid., 165.

lem exists and that he needs God. *Dignity* allows a person to believe that God created her good. *Community* allows addicted and recovering people to guide and support each other through the tough times. *Responsibility* is when a person acknowledges that he is part of a larger social system and that actions have an effect on others. *Simplicity* is required for the addicted person to take the step of quitting: “It all comes down to quitting it, not engaging in the next addictive behavior, not indulging in the next temptation.”⁴⁴ It is simple, but not easy. It should be noted that May’s statement here supports an element of the moral choice model. A person chooses to stop the addiction, and the choice, with God’s help, is enough to begin a successful recovery process.

As in other models, the contemplative approach emphasizes the lifelong process of recovery, carried by the grace of God. May concludes:

[Recovery] is a willing, wanting, aching venture into the desert of our nature, loving the emptiness of that desert because of the sure knowledge that God’s rain will fall and the certainty that we are both heirs and cocreators of the wonder that is now and of the Eden that is yet to be.⁴⁵

Addiction as Complex Habit

In his book *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*, Kent Dunnington offers a philosophical framework for addiction as a “complex habit.” As seen in the title, Dunnington’s goal is to move the conversation about addiction away from the seemingly dichotomous models of disease and choice, which I discussed above, in favor of a more nuanced model.

In an interview published on the Ministry Matters website, he summarizes his argument:

The main argument of the book is that addiction is neither a disease nor a choice, but a complex habit. It’s neither fully determined nor voluntary, but is rather a “second nature” that a person takes on. The power of any habit is cor-

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 182.

relative to the kinds of things the habit helps an agent achieve, thus a big part of the book is spent showing what it is that addictions help us achieve. Contrary to popular belief, we don't get addicted for pleasure, though pleasure may be an initial hook. We get addicted because addictions help us attain, though only fleetingly, certain moral and intellectual goods that late-modern capitalist culture makes difficult to attain.⁴⁶

As a professor of philosophy at Biola University, Dunnington draws on the work of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to develop his idea of addiction as a complex habit. He begins with Aristotle's concept of "incontinent action": "An incontinent action is performed whenever a person rationally approves of what is good, desires what is bad, and following appetite, does what is bad."⁴⁷ Incontinent action is paradoxical; why would a person act against his or her own judgment to do something harmful or self-destructive? One explanation for the paradox is the psychological and physical category of craving.⁴⁸ Another explanation is the weight of habit, which does not require craving but only a perceived inability to abstain.⁴⁹ For Aristotle, a habit is like a "second nature," an action one no longer thinks about, which would explain how it is possible for one to know that an action is destructive, but still engage in it: knowledge has not translated into alternate action and new habits.⁵⁰

From Aristotle, Dunnington moves to a discussion of Thomas Aquinas' definition of habit. Aquinas generally talked about habits in the context of developing moral habits for moral character. When a person is presented with several response options to a situation, a habit can "qualify and coordinate desires," helping the person to order his or her priorities and act consistently with values or virtues.⁵¹ Habits are in fact necessary to mitigate the reasoning required to

⁴⁶ Clifton Stringer, "Love and Addiction: An Interview with Dr. Kent Dunnington," Ministry Matters, February 8, 2016, <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6663/love-and-addiction-an-interview-with-dr-kent-dunnington>.

⁴⁷ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46ff.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

“do the right thing,” whatever that may be, in repeated instances. With proper habituation, doing the right thing can become second nature. Of course, humanity’s capacity to develop habits is not always directed toward doing “the right thing” in the sense of common, or absolute, morality. Sometimes habituation is directed toward behaviors that hurt us or hold us back in the long run.

Habitual addictive behavior is generally self-destructive. Therefore, it is difficult to comprehend why a person would develop such a habit at all. Dunnington counters that there is some perceived good behind the development of addictive behavior. Taking both the theories of Aristotle and Aquinas, Dunnington offers a neutral definition of a “habit” as “a relatively permanent acquired modification of a person that enables the person, when provoked by the relevant stimulus, to act consistently, successfully and with ease with respect to some objective.”⁵² By this definition, habits are entirely dependent on a person’s personal objective and a set of external stimuli. Or, more simply, “. . . habits are formed whenever two conditions are met. First, the external act must be repeated. Second, there must be appropriate attention to the interior quality of the acts.”⁵³ Dunnington uses the example of someone who wants to become a skilled basketball player.⁵⁴ In order to become a skilled basketball player, she must practice the skills that skilled basketball players utilize. At first, she is not able to perform the skills with the same “success, consistency, and ease” as a skilled basketball player, but with time and repetition, she will be able to. The “external acts” of practicing will help develop the habits of a skilled basketball player, and her desire to become skilled is the “interior quality” that will develop the habits of skilled basketball players.

⁵² Ibid., 62.

⁵³ Ibid., 78.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.

The same requirements apply to the development of bad habits like, for example, an addiction to alcohol. Perhaps such a habit begins from a desire to fit in socially in a new environment, like a university setting. A new freshman may experience some social anxiety and seek to lessen the anxiety by drinking regularly in social settings. The repeated external act of drinking added to the interior quality of wanting to fit in and finding success with drinking could develop a habit of alcoholism. Social acceptance is the “perceived good” of this addiction, the certain “objective” the freshman seeks. Dunnington writes,

. . . the testimonies of persons with addictions make plain that addiction is powerfully rooted in the pursuit of certain goods, goods that appear to addicted persons to be uniquely accessible through the practice of their addictions. Addictions are like virtues and vices in this respect, since . . . virtues and vices are those habits through the practice of which human beings aim at the good life, the life of happiness⁵⁵

According to Dunnington, addicted people are seeking “the good life” through their addiction, however they have defined the good life for themselves.

On a larger scale, Dunnington argues that deficiencies in Western capitalist society account for an increased rate of addiction because contemporary culture has failed to provide an adequate concept of a good life. He supports this thesis by contrasting the pre-modern concept of the “common good” with the modern concept of “individual good”:

The Greek polis was organized around a *shared vision* of the good life for human beings and a *relatively rigid and hierarchical set of social roles* into which persons were born or trained. The culture of modernity, by contrast, is characterized by *the proliferation of visions* of the good life for human beings and resulting moral landscape in which human persons find themselves *arbitrarily free to “realize” themselves* in pursuit of one or several of an assortment of disparate “ways of life.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 106–7. Emphasis mine.

In pre-modern society, an individual person engaged in a certain social role for the benefit of the larger community because the “shared vision,” and therefore the shared values, clearly focused on the advancement of society and culture. By contrast, in modern society, each individual person is the master of the fate of his or her own choosing, seemingly without reference to anyone else, and the sole owner of a vision for the best life possible. The problem with this is not necessarily in the individual’s freedom to choose a vision or a way of life, but rather in the challenge to make a choice: “Modern persons no longer know what to do because they know all too well how many things they *could* do.”⁵⁷ And how does one really know which choice is better? During the age of Enlightenment, “the ultimate defensibility of any claim about the *telos* of human existence” came into question.⁵⁸ Addiction enters in the middle of that challenge:

Addictive objects stand in for a rationally determinable *telos* because they are able to demand by other means—by means of addiction—a kind of absolute allegiance to a way of life that modern persons cannot attain through the exercise of rational inquiry into the best life for human persons.⁵⁹

And thus, addiction is on the rise in our society because society has not provided a viable purpose for the individual. Addictive objects, by contrast, offer a viable purpose:

. . . the lure of addiction lies precisely in its ability to give the addicted person a sense of being in control of her life and of being able to assess and evaluate every possible course of action in terms of one definite end that eclipses every other contender for absolute allegiance.⁶⁰

That “one definite end” is, of course, the next fix.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 151.

Treating the Complex Habit: Community Approach

If Dunnington is right and the complex habit of addiction is at least partially caused by a communal failure to give purpose to the individual, then it would make sense that recovery efforts should be focused on redirecting one's life toward a new purpose. It would also make sense that that new purpose would be offered and practiced by a community. As such, Dunnington is an advocate of recovery communities such as Alcoholics Anonymous. The fact that Twelve Step programs are communities that “work the steps” together is an important part of the process:

Working the steps is not some magic formula that prevents the alcoholic from drinking while leaving him otherwise the same. . . . Rather, working the steps is about becoming the kind of person who does not perceive the world as an addict. This is at the heart of the A.A. adage that the fellowship is not mainly about teaching you how to quit drinking but about teaching you how to live sober.⁶¹

Individuals are not given some literature and sent on their way to achieve sobriety themselves.

The learning process is facilitated by the testimonies and experiences of others.

In the last chapter of *Addiction and Virtue*, Dunnington also argues that the church is a community that can fill in some of the gaps in Twelve Step programs. In agreement with the view of Dale Ryan cited above, he writes that the church has not always been willing or able to “deal honestly and adequately with the brokenness of persons.”⁶² And yet, churches have traditionally been willing, at the very least, to host Twelve Step programs. There are other ways the church can bridge the gaps. First, the church can offer a vision of God the Higher Power as described in the scriptures and through the liturgy of worship, as opposed to a Higher Power “as we understand him” (Step 2). Creating a Higher Power based on a person's own perceived needs is self-deceptive in ways similar to addiction and keeps the person and his or her addiction at the

⁶¹ Ibid., 165.

⁶² Ibid., 179.

center of the process.⁶³ Offering a concrete identity for God can allow a person in recovery to pursue a relationship with the real and living God.

Second, by teaching the identity of the true God, the church can also offer a truer sense of a person's own identity relative to God:

It is a question of priority: if we are certain of our own identity and character, then the identity and character of God must be conditioned by this certainty. Alternatively, if we are certain of the identity and character of God, then our own sense of self is always conditioned by our relationship to God. . . . In this sense Christian identity is always *relative*.⁶⁴

An addicted person's identity is wrapped up in his or her certainty of the object of attachment, and therefore his or her identity is shaped by the addiction. Twelve Step programs continue to emphasize this relative identity by requiring participants to use the introduction, "I'm Sue, and I'm an alcoholic." While "admitting you have a problem" is the first step to recovery, here is the unintended consequence of claiming this identity: "If my addiction is fundamental to who I am, if it is basic to my being, then the life of recovery can never be more than a daily denial of my true self." Dunnington calls this "tragic."⁶⁵ As an alternative, the church offers a vision of a person as a child of God, part of a family, community, and a participant in God's Kingdom.

Because of addiction's all-encompassing nature, Dunnington describes it as a "counterfeit form of worship," namely idolatry.⁶⁶ He cites testimonies from recovering addicts like this one from A.A. founder Bill W.: "Before A.A. we were trying to drink God out of a bottle."⁶⁷ The church, on the other hand, teaches how to be in a right relationship with God through authentic worship:

⁶³ Ibid., 181.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 155. From James Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 27.

Worship, let us say, is right relationship with God. Worship is not restricted to the sanctuary or the prayer chapel, nor is it restricted to the morning “quiet time” or to bedtime prayers. Rather worship names the possibility that human persons may experience and live their days as an expression of their relationship with God.⁶⁸

Through the daily act of worship, we rehearse God’s story, which gives meaning and order to our lives. Through worship, we remember that our habits do not constitute our identities, but instead are facets of them. Our hope is in redemption more than recovery, and the hope the church can offer is in the promise of sanctification.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 142.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 183.

Part Two: An Analysis of Two Christian Addiction Recovery Ministries

This part of the project will explore the actual writings of two Christian recovery ministries, Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process. For the descriptive task, I will first present an overview of the program's purpose, as well as the scriptural and theological references to the three chosen eschatological themes: hope, resurrection, and shalom. Then, the interpretive task will synthesize the references in order to draw out a theological standpoint, which will then be put in conversation with eschatological standpoints and outlooks that may further develop it or call it into question, which is the normative task. These assessments will include insights from the four models described in Part One, as well as additional eschatological principles.

Celebrate Recovery

Descriptive Task–Purpose: Celebrate Recovery is “a biblical and balanced program that can help you overcome your hurts, habits, and hang-ups.” The program was developed in 1990 by John Baker, who intended it to be “based on the actual words of Jesus rather than psychological theory.”⁷⁰ Baker was an alcoholic who had worked the Steps with Alcoholics Anonymous, but found that the vague concept of “the Higher Power” was dissatisfying. In his testimony about his journey to and from alcoholism, Baker says that he was mocked at AA meetings for talking about Jesus Christ as his Higher Power. At the same time, while Baker was attending Saddleback Church and growing in his faith, he also found that other church members were unwilling to en-

⁷⁰ Rick Warren, foreword to *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace: Participant's Guide 1*, rev. ed., by John Baker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 7.

gage with him about his alcoholism.⁷¹ All this led him to create a new program that brought Christ to the center of recovery. The program draws on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, but reorganizes them into Eight Principles of Recovery that find biblical parallels with the Beatitudes. (See Appendix A).

The stated purpose of the Celebrate Recovery program, according to John Baker, is:

By working through the eight recovery principles found in the Beatitudes with Jesus Christ as your Higher Power, you can and will change! You will begin to experience the true peace and serenity you have been seeking, and you will no longer have to rely on your dysfunctional, compulsive, and addictive behaviors as a temporary ‘fix’ for your pain.” By applying the biblical principles . . . which are found within the eight principles and the Christ-centered 12 Steps, you will restore and develop stronger relationship with others and with God.”⁷²

It is worth noting that the Celebrate Recovery program is not designed exclusively for chemically addicted people like those who struggle with alcohol, as indicated with the phrase “dysfunctional, compulsive, and addictive behaviors” being the “temporary fix.” Many of CR’s participants are going through the program to address emotional, relational, or social problems and habits rather than physical addictions.

Embedded in CR’s purpose statement are several concepts that require deeper definition. First, what is meant by “hurts, hang-ups, and habits”? This phrase functions as a motto for CR and is used in all of its marketing materials. While “hurts, hang-ups, and habits” are not explicitly defined in the curriculum, inferences can be drawn as to their specific nature. “Hurts” can refer to instances of past painful experiences that have lasting effect on the present-day reality. An example is used in Lesson 9 of having an emotionally unavailable, controlling, and/or alcoholic

⁷¹ “John Baker’s Testimony,” given at Olive Branch Church, December 1996, <http://rollinghillscr.org/about/john-bakers-testimony/>

⁷² John Baker, “Introduction,” *Stepping Out of Denial into God’s Grace: Participant’s Guide 1*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 9.

parent.⁷³ That kind of early experience can have a lasting effect on a person's everyday existence. "Hang-ups" sound like the kinds of operating assumptions that people carry through life, such as body image distortion issues or fear of being vulnerable. "Habits" could, in fact, refer to addictions or compulsions of all kinds.

The next concept that needs definition is the assumption that people in the program are seeking "peace and true serenity." What is the operating definition of peace and serenity? The front matter of each CR participant guide includes a long version of the famous "Serenity Prayer" written by Reinhold Niebuhr and commonly used by the Anonymous Network:

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.⁷⁴

According to this prayer, *serenity* is characterized by acceptance, courage, wisdom, surrender, and trust, which lead to "reasonable happiness" in life. Lesson 2 of Celebrate Recovery, entitled "Powerless," addresses Principle 1: "admitting that we are powerless . . . and that our lives are unmanageable." According to the lesson, admitting that we are powerless means "we can stop

⁷³ John Baker, "Lesson 9: Inventory," *Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory: Participant's Guide 2*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 26ff.

⁷⁴ Although the authorship of this prayer is still under debate, the earliest versions of the prayer were published in the early 1930s and were attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr. See Fred R. Shapiro, "Who Wrote the Serenity Prayer?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 28, 2014, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Who-Wrote-the-Serenity-Prayer-/146159/>.

living with the following ‘serenity robbers’’: pride, resentments, selfishness, and worry.⁷⁵ Because there is no further discussion of what peace means, we assume here that serenity and peace are used interchangeably.

The final line of the purpose statement of Celebrate Recovery states how going through the program will “restore and develop stronger relationship with others and with God.” This statement implies an assumption and a value of the program. The assumption is that hurts, hang-ups, and habits negatively affect relationships, and the value is that relationships with people and God are an important part of human existence. Few would deny that addictions affect a person’s relationships. The Anonymous Network developed a counterpart for its Twelve Step programs called Al-Anon, which is specifically intended as a support group for families of addicts who may develop co-dependency and/or addictions of their own.⁷⁶ Similarly, few Christians would deny that relationships with God and others are vital to humanity. In the creation story of the Judeo-Christian tradition is the decree, “it is not good for the man to be alone,” which presumably extends to the woman as well (Genesis 2:18, NIV). Thus, from the very beginning, humans were created for relationships. Humanity’s relationship with God is also a given; both the Old and New Testaments speak of God’s invitation to community and communion. In Exodus, God says to Moses, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). And in the gospel of John, Jesus says to the disciples, “Abide in me as I abide in you. . . . As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (John 15: 4, 9). CR teaches that just as in human relationships, a relationship with God is hindered by addiction, and part of recovery is the intentional restoration of that relationship.

⁷⁵ John Baker, “Lesson 2: Powerless,” *Stepping Out of Denial into God’s Grace: Participant’s Guide 1*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 23.

⁷⁶ Al Anon Family Groups, at <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/>.

The form of Celebrate Recovery reinforces the emphasis on relationships. The core of the program is the weekly gathering that can include dinner, worship, testimonies, and small groups. Sponsorship is also essential to the program, just like Alcoholics Anonymous. Participants have a sponsor, someone with shared experience, to help them through the first steps, and later they become sponsors for someone else.

Descriptive Task–Content: CR uses a set of short Participant’s Guides, written by John Baker and Rick Warren, the lead pastor of Saddleback. The guides have a lesson for each week that develops and expands one of the principles using scripture and reflection prompts. In order to assess the content of these guides according to the eschatological concepts of hope, resurrection, and shalom, a few representative examples of each are explored below.

Since **hope** has to do with the anticipation of the future, any time the CR curriculum uses the form “if you do [this], [that] will happen,” it is a statement of hope. What can a person in recovery anticipate and for what can he or she hope? The stated theme of Lesson 3, in particular, is hope. The opening statement says, “Now in the second principle, we come to believe God exists, that we are important to Him, and that we are able to receive God’s power to help us recover. It’s in the second step we find HOPE!”⁷⁷ According to this lesson, participants can put hope in Jesus Christ the Higher Power to “change” them into “better” people, “free” from their hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Scriptural support for this idea comes from the following passages:

- “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13, NIV)
- “My grace is enough for you: for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more completely” (2 Corinthians 12:9, PH)

⁷⁷ Baker, “Lesson 3: Hope,” *Guide 1*, 32.

- “Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better. Yes, you must be a new and different person” (Ephesians 4:23, TLB).
- “For I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and the power” (Philippians 4:13, TLB).
- I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns” (Philippians 1:6, TLB).

There are two tensions present here: first, the tension around the question of who is doing the work of “changing,” and second, the tension of change’s timing, now and/or later. Sometimes the scripture passages and the CR texts do not seem to match. For example, the Ephesians passage is written in the imperative mood, implying that the reader has some agency in performing the action: “Your attitudes and thoughts must” change, and “you must be a new and different person.” And yet, the phrase “with God’s help” is sprinkled throughout the lesson text. Lesson 14: Ready cites Lamentations: “For I can never forget these awful years; always my soul will live in utter shame. Yet there is one ray of hope: his compassion never ends. It is only the Lord’s mercies that have kept us from complete destruction” (Lamentations 3:20–22, TLB).⁷⁸ This passage emphasizes the work of God over the work of the person in recovery. The main idea of the lesson is to be open to God’s work of change without holding onto self-will.

The second tension is illustrated by these back-to-back statements: “The changes that you have longed for are just *steps* away,” and “God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you . . . until his task within you is finished” on Judgment Day.⁷⁹ What then

⁷⁸ John Baker, “Lesson 14: Ready,” *Getting Right with God, Yourself, and Others: Participant’s Guide 3*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2012), 32.

⁷⁹ Baker, “Lesson 3: Hope,” *Guide 1*, 33–34.

should participants hope for? Change now or change later? This lesson also says, “Throughout our lives, we will continue to encounter hurts and trials that we are powerless to change.”⁸⁰ This statement places the emphasis back on the *process* of change and recovery. The Philippians 1:6 passage is repeated in Lesson 6: Action under the heading “It’s only the beginning.” The text says, “Our walk with our Higher Power, Jesus Christ, begins with this decision and is followed by a *lifelong process* of growing as a Christian.” Here the process is emphasized, reiterating the idea that change will only be complete on Judgment Day. It is worth noting that the stated “lifelong process” here is “growing as a Christian,” and not necessarily “recovery.” Later in Lesson 14: Ready, the writers reiterate that change is not instantaneous: “These principles and steps are not quick fixes! You need to allow time for God to work in your life.”⁸¹ Lesson 15 says something similar: “Once you ask God to remove your character defects, you begin a journey that will lead you to new freedom from your past. Don’t look for perfection; instead rejoice in steady progress.”⁸² As a whole, the message of Celebrate Recovery is that hope can be found in God’s faithfulness to continue to work within a person. The future holds out hope two ways: the promise of steady progress in this life, and acceptance and understanding that the work will be completed when Jesus Christ returns.

CR does not have much to say about **resurrection**, although there are a few references to “new life.” CR promises that when participants believe in Jesus Christ as the Higher Power, they “do not have to live by [their] old ways any longer.”⁸³ The primary scriptural passage repeated with this idea is 2 Corinthians 5:17: “When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!” (TLB). The old life is

⁸⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁸¹ Baker, “Lesson 14: Ready,” *Guide 3*, 28.

⁸² Baker, “Lesson 15: Victory,” *Guide 3*, 35.

⁸³ Baker, “Lesson 4: Sanity,” *Guide 1*, 38.

referred to as “your old sin nature,” and, accordingly, new life is equated with freedom from such sin: “After you ask Jesus into your heart, you will have a new life! You will no longer be bound to your old sin nature. God has declared you NOT GUILTY, and you no longer have to live under the power of sin!”⁸⁴ At first glance, this concept seems a little abrupt and maybe simplistic, as in: “Pray the prayer and get new life! Done and done!” Its instantaneous nature seems to contradict the framework of hope discussed above, in which hope is found in the continuing process of God-assisted recovery. In order to reconcile the process with instant new life, the CR writers say this in Lesson 15: Victory:

When you become a Christian you are a new creation—a brand new person inside; the old nature is gone. But you have to let God (change) transform you by renewing your mind. The changes that are going to take place are a result of a team effort—your responsibility is to take the action to follow God’s directions for change.⁸⁵

In order to give credence to both ideas of process and ideas of instant transformation, the writers seem to separate two parts—the mind and the inside nature—of a person that experience change at different rates.

Since the concept of **shalom** is related to how “the good life” is defined, we must look at CR’s references to “a better life” in its curriculum. At the end of Lesson 4: Sanity, the text says, “if you take action to complete the next principle, your future will be blessed and secure!”⁸⁶ The next principle is Principle 3: “Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control.” The text is talking about the moment of conversion, but beyond the discussion of “new life,” the promise is for a “blessed and secure” future, a similar sentiment to J. Richard Middleton’s definition of the future Kingdom of God: “the restoration of people and land to

⁸⁴ Baker, “Lesson 5: Turn,” *Guide 1*, 44.

⁸⁵ Baker, “Lesson 15: Victory,” *Guide 3*, 38.

⁸⁶ Baker, “Lesson 4: Sanity,” *Guide 1*, 39.

flourishing.” When one flourishes, one experiences abundance without hindrance, a blessed and secure existence.

The nature of this blessed and secure future is, however, ill-defined in the CR curriculum, especially regarding the post-*parousia* Kingdom future. A section in Lesson 18: Grace describes how Christians are saved by faith and not works, as follows: “We cannot work our way into heaven,” implying that reaching heaven is the goal. Later in the same lesson, it says, “He paid the price and sacrificed Himself for us so that we may be with Him forever,” which suggests that communion with God is the goal. These two goals together speak of a vision of life after death that emphasizes spiritual presence rather than abundance and flourishing in the new earth and new heaven.

In terms of an earthly “good life,” the time between now and death, the CR curriculum talks about putting God first and living the way God wants you to. In Lesson 10: Spiritual Inventory Part 1, Matthew 6:33 is quoted: “He will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to” (TLB), referring to the basic necessities of life.⁸⁷ Another translation of that verse is “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (NIV). The good life on earth, then, is equated with seeking the Kingdom of God and living as God wants, in righteousness. This is a spiritual vision of earthly life and does not encompass the abundance and flourishing of the eternal shalom vision of the Kingdom, although in context, the scripture passage promises that physical needs will be taken care of.

In the last few lessons of Celebrate Recovery, the overall emphasis is on continuing to take a daily inventory of wrongs, in order to “humbly live in reality, not denial; . . . [do] our best to make amends for our past; . . . [and] desire to grow daily in our new relationships with Jesus

⁸⁷ Baker, “Lesson 10: Spiritual Inventory Part 1,” *Guide 2*, 33.

Christ and others.”⁸⁸ These habits frame a new way of living, the way of recovery, characterized by spiritual growth, discipline, and integrity. The vision is further emphasized by these verses:

- “You are living a brand new kind of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right, and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you” (Colossians 3:10, TLB).
- “If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask him, and he will gladly tell you, for he is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask him; he will not resent it” (James 1:5, TLB).

The second-person pronouns here are ambiguous in English, but the original text uses the plural form, confirming that the writers are speaking to communities. This is important because the last element of the vision of the earthly good life in CR is the element of whole, healthy relationships. From the purpose statement at the beginning, relationships are emphasized as an important aspect of life after addiction. Essential to the program is finding a sponsor with whom to walk through the recovery process (Lesson 7), and another part is becoming a sponsor for someone else (Lesson 24). Scripture passages referring to the importance of relationships include:

- “Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing” (Colossians 3:15, MSG).
- “As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses around us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us” (Hebrews 12:1, GNT).

⁸⁸ John Baker, “Lesson 20: Daily Inventory,” *Growing in Christ While Helping Others: Participant’s Guide 4*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 27.

- “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39).
- “Two are better than one, because together they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone . . . there is no one to help him. . . . Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, GNT).
- “Share each other’s troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord’s command” (Galatians 6:2, TLB).

The good life, as presented by CR, seems to be focused on healthy relationships with God and others, on spiritual growth, and on service. The idea of a “blessed and secure future” must be a reference to the far-future shalom life in the Kingdom of God, which, according to CR, is described as eternal life with God.

Interpretive Task: All told, Celebrate Recovery carries participants on this trajectory: addicted persons admit powerlessness and turn their lives over to God, becoming Christians—or “new creations”—who find hope in their new converted (resurrected) status and in the ongoing process of recovery. They are working toward a life of serenity grounded in humility, surrender, and healthy relationships and can expect to go to heaven to be with God after death. Generally, the future outlook of participating in CR is optimistic, but more than anything, it is focused on a “better life” here on earth, characterized by healing and freedom from the bondage of sin.

While it is clearly possible to find freedom and healing in this life, especially and most completely through faith in Jesus Christ, what does “better life” really mean? First of all, we must consider that there is general consensus that an addiction never really leaves you; any re-

covering alcoholic will tell you that the temptation to drink is a part of life. And second, life is hard, even without addiction. Not everyone gets the job they applied for. Many people have chronic health problems. Relationships take work to maintain. Accidents happen. The process of learning how to deal with the pitfalls of life without addictive coping mechanisms is long and difficult. And so, putting hope into a promise of a better life here on earth could potentially lead to despair and relapse if, for example, it does not happen fast enough. Perhaps a vision of a better life after death could add another dimension of hope: no matter how bad things get here on earth, life after death will be better than we can imagine and worth aligning with today. CR's emphasis on the *process* of recovery could set the stage for the invitation to intentionally hope in the future of God's Kingdom. In this earthly life, Christians are practicing for life in the Kingdom, and working on our issues and addictions is an essential part of that preparation.

The same potential for despair and relapse can be inferred from the presented image of "new creation" or "new life" in Celebrate Recovery, which is achieved in a moment of conversion, or resurrection, the moment that changes everything. According to CR and also scripture, an addicted person becomes a "new creation," a new and better version of oneself, nearly instantaneously upon acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord. But how does that jive with issues like continued temptation, which all human beings can expect to encounter? A man who had been part of the Union Gospel Mission residential recovery program and attending Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church regularly once described what it felt like to go back to work after graduating from the program. He described waiting at a familiar bus stop and realizing it was the first time he would make this journey sober. The memory caused an anxiety attack, and made him wonder if he would be able to handle life without his drug of choice. He was a new creation, redeemed by God through grace, but he was nearly overwhelmed with a desire to return to what was comfort-

able and familiar to him: traveling and working while he was high. He had become sober, but his old habits still intervened in his new life.

The CR text talks about how “the mind” still needs to be transformed after conversion, but also that a person’s “insides” are “new” right away. What makes up a person’s “insides”? Since the curriculum does not say enough to answer this question, perhaps we can use a framework from the New Testament, taken from Jesus’ teaching, that outlines multiple facets of a human being: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, NIV). According to CR, the mind is transformed over time, not instantaneously. Neither is the body suddenly perfected at the moment of conversion. Even if someone experiences a miraculous healing as part of conversion, the body will continue to decay with age, and the person will die at some point. It is possible that the heart can experience instantaneous conversion, especially if one views the heart as the seat of emotion and passion. Emotion and passion are intrinsically changeable, but would this change of heart and newfound devotion of passion precipitate the status of “new creation”? Probably not.

It is more likely that the human soul experiences instantaneous conversion. The soul is a hot topic of theological debate, especially regarding the question of its immortality. The view touted by Hans Schwarz describes the soul as immortal not on its own power, but something on which Jesus Christ bestows immortality. He quotes Joseph Ratzinger, saying, “In Jesus Christ, God’s action in accepting humanity into his own eternal life has, so to speak, taken flesh: Christ is the tree of life whence we receive the food of immortality.”⁸⁹ Therefore, the continued status of the soul after death depends on a person’s relationship to Jesus during life: “God’s relationship with us in this life is sustained and finalized in and through death. Thus death can result in

⁸⁹ Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 277, quoting Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Aidan Nichols (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 141–42.

eternal death as eternal damnation or it can result in eternal life as eternal joy. This does not mean that death is already eternal damnation or eternal life, but it entails it.”⁹⁰ By this theological theory, a person in recovery who accepts Jesus Christ as his or her Higher Power embarks on the journey of eternal life right then.

Normative Task. It could be confusing for individuals in recovery to have their being separated thus into heart, mind, soul, and strength, with some facets of their being made new while others needing time to change and heal. But it is, in fact, confusing in CR’s current form to say that one’s insides are made new while one’s mind needs transformation over time. What if the Celebrate Recovery materials included a simple rundown of the facets of humanity: heart, mind, body, and soul? CR, as well as the Genesis Process and other faith-based recovery materials, attempts to keep the theological complexity to a minimum.⁹¹ However, the concept of the body, mind, and heart is common in American culture, so we can assume that addicted people can understand that these facets of humanity operate differently from each other. A fuller description of the soul would be necessary, but the benefits of explaining could easily outweigh the risks of presenting a complicated theological concept. Conversations about the soul make it clear that because humanity was made in the image of God, God will remain faithful to a relationship of grace and mercy with those who rely on God—into death and beyond. “Even as a sinner a human being is still God’s creature and related to God. The Psalmist captures this insight very

⁹⁰ Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 280.

⁹¹ Dale Ryan writes, “It is no accident that the recovery process is sometimes called a spiritual kindergarten. Even if we have a graduate school–level formal theology, we may need to spend time in kindergarten focusing on the most basic and practical of truths if our experiential theology has been distorted by shame, abuse, addiction or trauma.” In “Theology and Recovery,” National Association of Christian Recovery, <http://www.nacr.org/center-for-recovery-at-church/theology-and-recovery>.

precisely when he exclaimed: ‘Whither shall I go from they Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from they presence?’ (Ps. 139:7)”⁹²

The concept of “homecoming” in Gerald May’s contemplative approach to recovery would be a helpful reference for any discussion of the soul here. He frames his discussion of attachment and desire around the psychological, neurological, and theological aspects of addiction. He is careful about his use of the term “soul”;⁹³ he does not address at all the concept of “heart”; and he does not approve of the segmentation of a person into parts (body, heart, spirit, etc.). Yet May’s recovery model clearly takes into account the unique connection humanity has with the eternal. The “journey homeward to God” is how May describes the “transformation of desire” required for dispensing with addiction. It takes a combination of honesty, dignity, community, responsibility, and simplicity, all the while letting God do the work of empowering the addicted person to correctly attach desire. As May writes, “God’s Spirit is the vibrant essence of creation and transformation, and grace flowers in constantly surprising ways, but in the root of love that bears this Spirit and grace, God is changeless.”⁹⁴ May’s emphasis on grace as God’s instrument for transformation complements CR’s assertions that God has begun the work of change, which will be completed on Judgment Day.

The idea of a “better life” also needs more description in CR. Judging by the general spiritual tone of the curriculum, the writers of CR probably subscribe to a better life characterized by emotional and spiritual wellbeing and an overall positive outlook on life. The Serenity Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr offers a vision of “reasonable happiness” in this life and “supreme happiness”

⁹² Hans Schwarz, *The Human Being: A Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 214. Schwarz surveys the theological conversation on the extent of evil in human beings, from Augustine to Karl Barth and beyond, in Chapter 6, “The Understanding of Sin in the Tradition of the Church.”

⁹³ May writes that the terms “soul” and “spirit” can be misleading because they are not clearly defined in common parlance to the point of conflating the two. He notes, however, that he provides his own definitions in his book *Will and Spirit: A Contemplative Psychology* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 32–46.

⁹⁴ May, *Addiction and Grace*, 123.

in the next life. While the intentional distinction between levels of happiness in this life and the next is admirable and biblical, a person participating could easily attach his or her own definition of happiness to either level. So much of American culture suggests that acquiring money and belongings is the best way to be happy in this life, going back to Schwarz' description of the cult of "progress." Nearly everyone wants the job that pays a bigger salary or the biggest house available within a price range. If a person drives a BMW, for example, she must be doing very well for herself. We are growing our assets, but to what end?

What if CR spent time unpacking the theology and values of the Kingdom of God? This is one of the themes of J. Richard Middleton's book *A New Heaven and a New Earth*. The vision of "the new age to come" is marked by restoration and justice and is represented in the Old Testament by the year of Jubilee. In the New Testament, the new age to come is also marked by restoration and justice, but is represented by Jesus Christ: his incarnation, death, resurrection, and his inauguration of the Kingdom of God, the place where this restoration and justice happens. The Kingdom of God is described as being both "now" (inaugurated by Christ's Incarnation) and also "not yet" (incomplete until the Second Coming of Christ). While we can see evidence of that restoration and justice in the world, we can also see the residual evidence of sin, death, and brokenness in the world. And so, the tension between inauguration and fulfillment is the reality of Christian life. This concept is reminiscent of recovery. A person is both healed and free after addiction, but will not experience true, whole healing and freedom from death until the Second Coming of Christ.

The benefits of introducing the Kingdom of God in recovery curricula are twofold. First, a person can envision his or her place in an imperfect world and know that the world will be made perfect by God's interaction in the world. And second, the values of the Kingdom of God

are well defined in the Bible, which can give a person in recovery guidelines for how to live and also for how to define success. The good life in the Kingdom of God can look very different from the good American life, and this also gives hope to a person in recovery. Very often, people recovering from addictions experience frustration when integrating back into society without the object of their attachment. They are free, but not necessarily whole, in the sense that humanity and all of creation is not yet whole. The shalom vision of the Kingdom of God is not yet realized, but because the resurrection of Jesus Christ generates hope, we know that it will be.

The Genesis Process

Descriptive Task–Purpose: Michael Dye developed the Genesis Process after a long frustrating career working with substance-abuse addicts, during which he found Twelve Step programs, whether faith-based or not, unsatisfactory. In the 1990s he turned to research on the brain in general and the limbic system in particular to find solutions to the problem of addiction. He found parallels between psychology and biblical literature regarding themes of bondage, freedom, hope, and change, and set about developing the Genesis Process to marry the two into a comprehensive tool for recovery.⁹⁵ The Genesis Process is presented to participants in a workbook entitled *The Genesis Process for Change Groups* and defined like this:

The Genesis Process is an attempt to provide the necessary understanding, as well as the practical tools, for real and permanent change. It is a blend of biblical principles, understanding of the brain, and proven recovery strategies for not only freedom from self-destructive behaviors, but also addressing the underlying issues that drive them.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Michael Dye, *The Genesis Process for Change Groups. Book 1 and 2: Individual Workbook*, 4th ed., (Auburn, Calif.: Genesis Addiction Process & Programs, 2004), 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

A big part of the program is the regular gathering of participants that Dye calls Change Groups: “This process is designed to be accompanied by group interaction and support. . . . The main goal of the Change Group is to give you the knowledge, tools and relationships so that you can successfully resolve life issues as they come up.”⁹⁷ Change Groups are specifically not therapy groups, but rather safe places to do the work with others who will keep one accountable.⁹⁸ Participants are also supposed to meet with a Genesis Buddy, a person who helps the participant complete the homework every week and prays.⁹⁹

Embedded in the title and the small group model of support is the overarching theme of the whole process: “real and permanent change.”¹⁰⁰ Each of these terms deserves a deeper definition from the curriculum. **Real** change, according to Dye, is more than just changing behaviors: “The biblical view of change says, in order to change what you do, you must first change who you are. In many recovery programs the accepted perspective about change is, ‘If you can change your behavior, you can change who you are,’ i.e. ‘your behavior is the problem.’”¹⁰¹ Dye talks about addiction as coping behaviors that are merely symptoms of an underlying problem, a way to anesthetize pain, pain that has become part of a person’s identity. So when he talks about “changing who you are,” he is talking about finding a solution or a resolution for an underlying problem, which ideally will result in a change in behavior.

Permanent change is related. Sometimes when a person addresses only the addictive or coping behaviors without addressing the underlying problem, the person merely trades behaviors: “If you give up a coping behavior without resolving the underlying issue that was causing

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 12–13.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

the pain that you were anesthetizing, you will have to find another way to cope—you will end up trading one coping behavior for another.”¹⁰² The idea behind permanent change is that a person will no longer need coping behaviors of any kind.

The idea of **change** deserves its own discussion. The introduction to *The Genesis Process* begs the question: What is the result of “real and permanent change” after individuals have changed who they are, resolved the underlying problem(s), and given up all their coping behaviors? Or, into what or whom does a person change? Or, to ask in terms of the recovery process, what exactly is a person “recovering”? Dye answers these questions by defining recovery as a “return to a formerly healthy state; to return to the person you were before you were wounded, betrayed, experienced pain, and built walls of defense and distrust,”¹⁰³ suggesting that “change” means a change *back*. He writes, “Jesus tells us we are to be like children, who in their most innocent role trust, believe all things, love, and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁴ For Dye, recovery is a change back to a childlike state of trust through an exploration of past events that initiated coping behaviors that would eventually lead to addiction.

The “understanding of the brain” mentioned in the purpose statement of the Genesis Process is based on Dye’s research into the limbic system of the brain, which he defines as “the unconscious brain . . . or survival brain. The limbic system is responsible for most of the automatic responses in your life. It is responsible for learning ways to help you cope and survive. It controls your emotions as well as your physical and behavioral responses to them.”¹⁰⁵ The limbic system is supposed to increase a person’s chances of survival by promoting adaptation, releasing chemicals that produce good or fearful feelings. Good feelings encourage a person to repeat cer-

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 9.

tain behaviors whereas fear feelings encourage a person to avoid certain behaviors. Since it is all happening unconsciously, the survival brain can at times shut down the conscious brain, overriding a person's emotions and responses.¹⁰⁶ Survival responses—the reactions of fighting, fleeing, or freezing—replace rational responses to stimuli. **Fight** is the response of anger in the face of a potential threat. It allows a person to react with strength, or at least a show of strength, which can cover the vulnerability of the moment. **Flight** is the response of avoidance, either by running away or figuring out how to prevent the situation in the first place. And finally, the response to **freeze** is a way of playing dead. People who respond by freezing describe going numb and letting things happen to appease the threat. These responses tend to isolate people from one other and cause pain to the people closest to us. But according to Dye, in order to change these responses, we need those relationships:

Your ability to change depends in many ways on your survival brain. Your survival brain's job is to keep you from taking risks that it associates with fear, because fear is associated with things that have hurt you and which you need to avoid. Research has shown that your ability to take risks is increased in group situations. In other words, it is not safe to take risks alone.¹⁰⁷

But at the same time, “change involves risk.” Therefore, in order to change responses, people have to be willing to open themselves up to people who could potentially hurt them. And that is what Change Groups are for.

The Genesis Process is an attempt to help participants sort through their coping behaviors and the underlying problems that cause them by applying brain science and biblical principles, and find new ways of reacting in a relational setting, leading to “real and permanent change.” Much like Celebrate Recovery, the Genesis Process is not exclusively designed for those who are

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

chemically addicted. Rather anyone who sees repeated “self-destructive behaviors” could benefit from the program.

The Descriptive Task–Content: The Genesis Process uses a workbook written by Michael Dye with twenty weekly “processes” that include explanations and reflection questions. The processes are broken up into Book 1 (1–10) and Book 2 (11–20). The following mainly focuses on the processes in Book 1. Each process includes scripture passages and key thoughts to guide a person in getting to the bottom of the underlying problems for their self-destructive behavior. The content is more robust in its psychological material than its theological material, but it still gives clues to its eschatological outlook in terms of hope, resurrection, and shalom.

The Genesis Process offers a clear framework for **hope**, called simply The Hope Formula, presented in Process One called “Change: You Are Made for Change”: “HOPE comes from CHANGE, CHANGE comes from taking RISK, RISK comes from FAITH, [and] FAITH gives you the HOPE to CHANGE and RISK again.”¹⁰⁸ The related scripture passage is Romans 5:3–5:

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

These two quotes do not say exactly the same thing, but the point the author seems to be making is related to hope being a driving force in recovery. The first step, of course, is faith. According to the formula, faith empowers a person to take a risk, which leads to change, which leads to hope. But hope gives a person the perspective to risk again and again and continue changing: “Hope is a very important element in your ability to recover and change. When you have hope, it gives you the ability to get through a bad day because it puts things into perspective.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 26.

In terms of what participants are taught to put their hope in, the Genesis Process espouses a metaphor of growth: if you're not changing [growing], you are stagnating. The hope is that change is possible, and that things can be different than they are right now. The Genesis Process is not only about recovery from addiction, but maturing into “healthy people” who don't rely on self-destructive, addictive coping behaviors.¹¹⁰ Participants in this program are encouraged to view recovery as a process of growth toward the goal of being able to help others: “You must give to grow. Reaching out to others is something healthy people do. It is the main evidence of real recovery.”¹¹¹ This assertion seems to suggest that recovery is something that can be achieved in this life. If you are helping someone else in his or her recovery, you have recovered something in yourself—you have “returned to a formerly healthy state.”¹¹²

The Genesis Process does not seem to have much to say on the theme of **resurrection**.

The biggest clue into its theology is the definition of recovery:

[Recovery] literally means to *return to a formerly healthy state*; to return to the person you were before you were wounded, betrayed, experienced pain, and built walls of defense and distrust. The result of pain is fear. Jesus tells us we are to be like children, who in their most innocent role trust, believe all things, love, and exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. Recovery is a process of identifying your fears and moving toward resolving them. That process restores your ability to trust and love. Recovery is more than abstaining—recovery is healing.¹¹³

As opposed to “new life” and “new creation,” the language we saw in Celebrate Recovery, the emphasis is on the “old life” before the pain. In the introduction to Book 2 of the Genesis Process, this scripture passage from Jeremiah is used to illustrate the journey from woundedness to trusting, intimate relationships:

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 29.

¹¹² Ibid., 2.

¹¹³ Ibid. Emphasis mine.

‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord ‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will *bring you back* from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will *bring you back* to the place from which I carried you into exile.’ (Jeremiah 29:11–14, NIV)¹¹⁴

The idea of “bringing back” is another way of thinking about resurrection: that which was alive died and has been *brought back* to life.

In Process 3, which outlines the survival responses of fight, flight, or freeze in response to perceived threatening stimuli, uses some interesting language for recovery that could relate to the theological idea of resurrection:

This reactive memory system [the limbic system] (part of what the Bible calls the heart) is programmed through experiences and needs to be *reprogrammed through new and opposite experiences*. It doesn’t respond very well to words, because language is in a different part of the brain. Effective recovery must be experiential. It takes an opposite healing experience from the hurt to change the heart.¹¹⁵

The concept of “reprogramming” is intriguing. There are no scripture passages attached to this concept in Process 3, but the language of “changing the heart” (or by inference changing the limbic system) is embedded in Process 1. A key thought there is “If you want to change your behavior (sin), you must change your heart. That is why we ask Jesus into our hearts.”¹¹⁶ The attached scripture passage there is Romans 10:8–11:

“THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 152. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 52. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

In a sense, one could think of reprogramming the limbic system as the transformative act of inviting Jesus into one's life, the moment of being "born again," which is a phrase Dye uses throughout the Process, referring to spiritual birth and the beginning of eternal life. Since it is clear that what Dye calls "reprogramming" is a long, involved process, however, this concept is perhaps better related to the idea of ongoing sanctification, the journey in this life toward resurrection in the next.

Finally, the outlook on **shalom** or the good life is focused first on relationships with God and people. According to the Genesis Process, the problem with coping behaviors is that they isolate people from each other. The good life—the life that God intended—is about regaining trust and intimacy with people, more than material success or talent:

Think about your potential as a human being here on Earth. What could it be? You could be rich, intelligent, powerful, accomplishing your goals and dreams, be the best in your field, or simply raise a healthy family. *All those goals have limitations.* Think about your spiritual potential. What are the limitations? What IS your potential in God? As you can see, it is infinite. God is your Father, making you in the likeness of His own image.¹¹⁷

In other words, worldly markers of success, while not bad, are not as important to God. What is important is a transformative relationship with God. Later Dye writes, "The Bible tells us that God's priorities for us are basically: God, family, ministry (investing in others), and then everything else."¹¹⁸ After the transformative relationships with God, healthy relationships with people are also important. Accordingly the Genesis Process focuses its work on healing the wounds of past relationships so that current and future relationships will be strong and healthy: "God creat-

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 20. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

ed you for intimacy, to be bonded with Him and others. Intimacy, in this sense, is that ability to give and receive love without walls and barriers.”¹¹⁹

The other part of the Genesis Process’ vision of shalom is the idea of ministry, or serving others. Early on, when the Process is explaining the idea of reaching out to others as a sign of health,¹²⁰ Dye also says that service to others is a way we “invest our lives into the Kingdom of Heaven.”¹²¹ Shalom—the good life of God—is about pointing out God in the world through relationship. Dye quotes from *The Message*:

Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

The Interpretive Task: The Genesis Process’ definition of recovery—the “return to a formerly healthy state”—is problematic. Can one ever really get back to a formerly healthy state? When were we actually “healthy”? Dye says that the first two years of a person’s life are the primary time when “the part of your brain that is developing has to do with your ability to bond, trust, and relate to others. It grows from your experiences with your caregivers and your environment.”¹²² There is so much that can go wrong in the first two years of a person’s life, from babies being addicted to drugs at birth to mothers having trouble lactating or letting a baby cry herself to sleep at bedtime. Even the event of birth is stressful for a baby. These things teach

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 28.

¹²¹ Ibid., 29.

¹²² Ibid., 38.

children very important emotional lessons subconsciously, even at such a young age. So what point of life is this supposedly healthy, unwounded phase?

On a theological level, the doctrine of original sin, which has undergone interpretation in many movements and denominations throughout history, teaches that humanity resides in a state of sin passed down from Adam and Eve. The Genesis Process generally stays away from equating sin with self-destructive and/or addictive behavior, preferring instead to focus on such behaviors as an effect of being hurt or helped by others. However, we can still assume that exposure to the sinfulness of the world comes very early. When did we ever live without the brokenness of sin, another's or ours?

With regard to hope, the idea of putting hope in going back to a time you may not even remember, or may have never existed, seems unhelpful. And it even seems to counter the idea of growth so prevalent in the Genesis Process. Growth conveys the idea of moving forward, of moving on and moving past adversity, but that doesn't mean that the adversity disappears. Trees, for example, continue to grow past adversity, but they become indelibly marked by that adverse event. Trees can survive fires and grow new bark and new shoots, but later when you look at the tree's rings, you can see the scars of past fire damage embedded in the wood. You may not have been able to see it from the outside, but it remains part of the tree's identity. It is the same with people. People might be able to "reprogram" their limbic brains to react differently, but the hurt, abuse, and tendency to addiction will still be there.

Dye's definition of recovery—the "return to a formerly healthy state"—is also related to the question of resurrection, and particularly what "new creation" means. Hans Schwarz says that resurrection is distinctly *not* a return to a former state, namely, a return to Eden. New creation is definitely "new," something that has never been seen before, made possible by the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ: “Jesus Christ’s resurrection does not indicate the fulfillment of a restorative process that had started with the Old Testament covenant community. His resurrection is rather the first point of a *new* creation, a creation in perfection.” And in fact, we see evidence of this newness in the accounts of Jesus’ appearances after his resurrection. His disciples didn’t always recognize him (cf. Luke 24:16; John 20:13–16). Jesus appeared and disappeared suddenly (cf. Luke 24:36; John 20:19). Tradition calls Jesus’ post-resurrection body the “glorified body,”¹²³ and yet, Jesus still carried his scars (cf. Luke 24:39–40; John 20:20; 20:25–28) and ate meals with his friends (cf. Luke 24:41–43; John 21:9–13). Jesus was somehow new, but also somehow familiar.

Contrast Jesus’ resurrection with the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11. Lazarus came back from the dead the same as he was before. Not only did everybody recognize him after his resurrection, but presumably he also continued to grow old from that point and eventually died again. Jesus with his new glorious body did not die again. He ascended into heaven to be with the Father in his whole, bodily state. Bible scholars sometimes call the Lazarus event “resuscitation,” reserving the term “resurrection” for Jesus Christ only.

In contrast with Hans Schwarz, J. Richard Middleton says that resurrection is “God’s restoration of human life to what it was meant to be,”¹²⁴ and that Jesus’ resurrection in particular was the beginning of that process of restoration. Middleton’s idea of resurrection seems to support the definition of recovery as a “return to a formerly healthy state” because Middleton claims that the Bible points back to the Garden of Eden to find the purpose of the world, i.e. “what it was meant to be.” The purpose he defines, however, is not necessarily what is described in the

¹²³ For example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part 3, Question 54, Article 2, accessed at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/4054.htm#article2>.

¹²⁴ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 154.

first few chapters of Genesis, i.e. being naked and unashamed and eating a vegetarian diet. Instead, Middleton claims that God’s original purpose of the world is “earthly blessing and shalom,” seen in the “wise stewardship of the earth” and the development of a cultural existence that glorifies God.¹²⁵ In other words, the original intent of creation was always for humanity to *move past Eden*. In the same way, perhaps the “return to a formerly healthy state” is less about returning to childhood innocence and more about getting *back on track* toward living into God’s purpose for our lives: making God’s priorities our priorities.

Michael Dye writes, “Changing your priorities to God’s is hard. The most challenging part of our walk as a Christian is to invest our lives into the Kingdom of Heaven The Kingdom of Heaven is primarily made up of one thing: people.”¹²⁶ The primary vision of shalom espoused in the Genesis Process is that of healthy, intimate relationships with God, family, and ministry community. This is a particularly narrow view of the Kingdom of Heaven, especially considering the cosmic imagery used in the New Testament: “this restorative work [of God] is applied as holistically and comprehensively as possible, to all things in heaven and on earth”¹²⁷

The Normative Task: To invest one’s life in the Kingdom of God is to participate on a grander scale in God’s grand vision of holistic redemption. It is not just about healthy relationships; it is about global justice, restored creation, and cultural abundance. Admittedly, this vision could seem quite overwhelming for a person in recovery. After being consumed by compulsive behavior that seems to shrink one’s worldview to the space of one’s next fix, it could be difficult to comprehend the cosmic reality of the Kingdom. It is difficult for most people even without

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Dye, *Genesis*, 29.

¹²⁷ Middleton, *New Heaven*, 163.

addictions, but the benefit of presenting the grand vision and extensive purpose of the Kingdom would be giving people in recovery something good and constant in which to put their hope. The current focus of the Kingdom of God, according to the Genesis Process, is on healthy relationships; a person in recovery can practice trust and intimacy with God and others as a sign of health after leaving addictions and coping behaviors behind. The question is whether this is enough. People's lives are messy, so just because a person in recovery has new skills to engage in healthy relationships does not mean the person with whom he or she is engaging has those skills as well. And so building relationships, while important, is fraught. I am not suggesting that participants avoid relationships, nor even that the Genesis Process deemphasize them. I am suggesting that a bigger picture and a cosmic perspective might add weight and purpose to post-addiction life. While relationships can seem changeable and difficult, something bigger than the relationship can be a constant guiding force.

Kent Dunnington's assessment of how Western culture has contributed to the rise of addiction could lend itself to establishing such a bigger picture and vision for the future that the Genesis Process is currently lacking. Dunnington argues that Western culture encourages the individual to pursue his or her own unique path to happiness, but that individuals are challenged by the choice. How does one begin to decide which path is better? He writes, "The post-Christian pursuit of flourishing and fulfillment . . . has been reduced to a project of immanence, and . . . addiction is a product of this modern privileging of immanence at the expense of transcendence."¹²⁸ He means that "flourishing and fulfillment," something everyone desires to some degree, is understood as something that exists within each person. Or, in other words, each person is able, and perhaps responsible, to find a way to order his own life in such a way that brings

¹²⁸ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 144–5.

maximum happiness. The transcendent view would emphasize that the definition of “flourishing and fulfillment” is found outside the individual. That is, an external context orders and gives purpose to the lives of individuals. Western culture no longer provides such an external context for flourishing, and people are left to drift in the wind, so to speak. Thus, Dunnington argues, “the emergence of the discourse of addiction was correlative to a loss of an agreed-on transcendent *telos* for human beings”¹²⁹ Combatting addiction, then, must include some introduction of a transcendent *telos*, or higher purpose, for humanity—something that can order the lives of people toward health and happiness. The Kingdom of God as described in scripture offers such a purpose.

For Dunnington, worship is the instrument for living into that purpose. He writes that in worship we rehearse the story of God as told through scripture and liturgy, the effect of which is twofold: first, we learn who we are in relation to the God of the universe—the ultimate Higher Power—and second, we can place our lives within the unfolding story of the “now-and-not-yet” Kingdom of God.¹³⁰ Worship is not limited to gatherings on a Sunday morning, but also includes the daily acts of justice and mercy, stewardship, and creativity consistent with the values of the Kingdom. What if the Genesis Process included elements of worship into the curriculum—things like prayers, stories from the Bible that illustrate God’s priorities, or weekly outwardly focused action items? In the current material, there are almost no prayers, except in Processes 8 and 9. The majority of the stories and examples are from Michael Dye’s counseling days or his own life. And the action items are very much inwardly focused exercises for getting in touch with feelings and deciding what risks one will take in a particular week. Perhaps some attention to the values of the cosmic Kingdom could restore a sense of purpose to people in recovery.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 140.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 183.

Since the focus of the Genesis Process is on change, particularly the hope for “real and permanent change,” we must revisit the question of into what participants are changed. As stated above, Dye’s definition of recovery as “a return to a formerly healthy state” is problematic, and it focuses most on the past. An emphasis on the values of the Kingdom, the Kingdom that is still coming, places the focus on the future, on “becoming.” Generally the Genesis Process lists in great detail all the hang-ups and personality flaws we may have developed along the way, but allows participants to choose into what or whom they would like to change. So much of the process is focused on shedding the unwanted pain and anger that leads to coping behaviors without much help in claiming a new identity in Christ. Here the language of “new life” and “new creation” so prevalent in Celebrate Recovery would be helpful.

Perhaps participants could be urged to shape their new healthy state according to descriptions in scripture of a transformed life. Colossians 3 gives concrete guidance to this end. After the introductory exhortation to “put to death whatever is earthly,” the believer is offered an alternative lifestyle to embrace:

As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:12–17).

This passage from Colossians highlights the themes of worship, relationship, service, and the overarching vision of belonging to something bigger than yourself.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This project marks the beginning of a larger project to see the materials of these addiction recovery ministries revised to include more overarching eschatological insight. I have offered suggestions for themes to include, but recovery practitioners and Christian educators who have direct experience with addiction recovery should be the ones to undertake the actual writing of new versions of these curriculums. The process of revision would take several drafts and tests with evaluative processes built in. Because addiction is a colossal problem in our society, I believe it is worth it to try. I also believe that the church should be at the forefront of a new theological recovery movement because addiction recovery looks so similar to one of the core tenets of the faith, the redemption of sin:

. . . the Christian view of recovery is a function of the Christian view of redemption, which is almost profligate and reckless in its hopefulness. For at the heart of the Christian view of redemption is the insistence that sin is not fundamental or ontological but rather historical and contingent. Therefore Christians live into the hope that their destiny is a harmony between who they are and what they want and do. Between their being and their act. . . . The scope of recovery is therefore radically extended within a Christian view of addiction. Indeed “recovery” does not sufficiently name the Christian hope in the face of addiction. Instead the Christian hopes for “discovery” and “new creation”¹³¹

Recovery should be primarily about moving toward an ultimate goal, not so much about recovering something lost. Hope, resurrection, and shalom are all things we look forward to and give meaning to our lives here and now.

However Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process may be revised and developed in the future, whether my more specific suggestions are claimed or not, there are two great spiritual needs that should be met by any Christian addiction recovery ministry: 1) deep theological un-

¹³¹ Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 183.

derstanding of God’s unfolding story and 2) from that understanding, a sense of a high purpose and eschatological hope for humanity.

Regarding the first need, it seems as of now that Christian addiction recovery ministries actively avoid “abstract” concepts in their materials. In an article for the National Association for Christian Recovery entitled “Theology and Recovery,” Dale Ryan writes,

The kind of theology that is most important in recovery is basic where-the-rubber-meets-the-road theology. Abstract, speculative or formal theology may have its place, but it provides little traction for people struggling with the most difficult of life’s problems. We need to focus on the God we actually live with every day—the God we wake up to in the morning, the God who shapes how we think and feel about ourselves. That God can be very different from the God of our formal theology.¹³²

Ryan argues for a back-to-basics theology in recovery ministries, theology that can be understood by even the newest Christian. He says people in recovery are preoccupied with the practical parts of life so that theories and abstractions hold little appeal. “It’s not that our formal theology is unimportant,” writes Ryan. “But most Christians in recovery find that formal theology is either too advanced or too theoretical to help us do what needs to be done.”¹³³ I agree that there is danger in engaging in too much theological complexity, but there is also danger in too much simplicity. Without defining terms or identifying deep reasons, simplistic theology leaves too much room for inadequate interpretation.

I think that in the case of Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process, the theology is too basic. Their focus is on conversion, freedom from bondage, new life, and change, none of which are irrelevant to the process of recovery or incorrect theologically. They do not, however, seem to offer the kind of robust worldview defined by an overarching story of God’s involvement in the world.

¹³² Ryan, “Theology and Recovery,” <http://www.nacr.org/center-for-recovery-at-church/theology-and-recovery>

¹³³ Ibid.

In addition, let us not assume that addicted people in recovery do not want theological depth in their process. I knew a man in the residential recovery program at Union Gospel Mission whom I met at Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church. I will call him John. John had been in and out of recovery programs in several different parts of the country. He told me that he hoped “this time” would really stick. “I know what I have to do.” He would say. “I just have to really do it.” There was no reference to God in his language, and no sense of hope. He seemed tired more than anything, as if he were tired of trying. When I told him that I was in seminary, however, his face lit up.

“What classes are you taking right now?” He asked.

“Church history,” I answered.

“You mean like Martin Luther and John Calvin?”

“Exactly! In fact I’m reading Martin Luther right now.”

“I’ve always wanted to take a class on church history,” he said. “I want to know more about how the church got where it is now.”

That was the beginning of an engaging conversation with a recovering alcoholic about denominational distinctions. John was hungry for knowledge about the church and its theological interpretations. He told me that he found his daily Bible studies thin and boring. What he really wanted was “meat to chew on.” Clearly, there are people who wish for theological depth and want to see past the mundane.

John and I talked about the possibility of me offering a class in church history for people living at the mission, but when I suggested it to one of the UGM staff who attended CHPC with me, he said, “I don’t think many residents would really be interested in that,” even though my informal poll of residents, at least the ones I knew from church, revealed a high level of interest.

Why do we assume that people in recovery cannot or do not want to handle abstract theological concepts, whether it be the subtle differences among Christian denominations or the Kingdom of God?

The second need that any Christian addiction recovery program should address is the need for a sense of higher purpose. I would argue that eschatology, particularly the theology of the Kingdom of God and its ethics provides that higher purpose and eschatological hope for resurrection and shalom—that “transcendent *telos*” as Kent Dunnington would say. Hans Schwarz agrees with Dunnington in that modern Western society lacks a common, meaningful goal:

We have abandoned God-confidence to gain self-confidence. Yet this hard-won autonomy stands on shaky ground. How can we as finite beings be true granters of time and history as God had been when he was understood as creator, sustainer, and redeemer? . . . The loss of a meaningful goal makes more and more people push the panic button. They ask to what end we are progressing and if there is anything worthwhile to hope for except uncertainty. . . . It should at least arouse our suspicion when we notice the increasing number of people of all ages who resort to alcohol and to drugs, whether illegal narcotics or prescribed tranquilizers, to escape from an uncertain and progress-demanding future. Perhaps we have created a world of standards without meaning and goals without ultimate direction.¹³⁴

Conversely, eschatology can provide that direction. Christian eschatology says that humanity’s purpose is eternal life with God, exercising our creativity and will to love and to flourish. The Good News of Jesus Christ is that eternal life is available to us right now because he died and rose again. Perhaps addiction recovery programs like Celebrate Recovery and the Genesis Process attempt to champion the idea that eternal life begins now, focusing on the present moment, the changes that can occur in this life, and the short-term rewards of recovery. Even though eternal life begins now, we must go through death and resurrection like Jesus to realize the fullness of that life. In this earthly life, we still have great challenges with which to contend.

¹³⁴ Schwarz, *Eschatology*, 19–20.

A former coworker of mine is a recovering alcoholic. I'll call her Susan. When we worked together, she had been sober for several years, but she would talk about a point in her recovery process when hopelessness hit her like a brick. She said that for most people in recovery, the first few months of recovery are euphoric. Everything is new and exciting without alcohol (or drugs), but then reality sets in. "The honeymoon was over," she said of her own experience. She remembered all the reasons she took up drinking in the first place: the stress of life, the drive for perfection, relationships she could not handle. And the thought of dealing with those issues without alcohol scared her. Susan says that without her church and a new appreciation for liturgy, prayer, and community, she certainly would have relapsed. Christian faith gave her a reason to maintain her sobriety by giving her a bigger purpose—something else to live for. This is the promise of eschatology. We look to the future for our hope, trusting in God's promise of resurrection and shalom in the fulfilled Kingdom of God.

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Appendix A: Celebrate Recovery Eight Principles

The Road to Recovery

Eight Principles Based on the Beatitudes

By Pastor Rick Warren

1. **Realize** I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.
"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor."
(Matthew 5:3)
2. **Earnestly** believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that he has the power to help me recover.
"Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
(Matthew 5:4)
3. **Consciously** choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.
"Happy are the meek." (Matthew 5:5)
4. **Openly** examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.
"Happy are the pure in heart." (Matthew 5:8)
5. **Voluntarily** submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.
"Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires."
(Matthew 5:6)
6. **Evaluate** all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.
"Happy are the merciful." (Matthew 5:7)
"Happy are the peacemakers." (Matthew 5:9)
7. **Reserve** a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.
8. **Yield** myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and by my words.
"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires."
(Matthew 5:10)

Appendix B: Celebrate Recovery Twelve Steps

Twelve Steps and Their Biblical Comparisons

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

“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.” (Romans 7:18)

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

“For it is God who works in your to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

3. We made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1)

4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.” (Lamentations 3:40)

5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

7. We humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

9. We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift as the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23–24)

10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12)

11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)

12. Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)