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2011 January Newsletter

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Yes, You Can!

To be sure, it's easy to slip back into old habits, into techniques for survival; into behaviors that don't serve you well! And when you do, taking the steps out of the rut into which you've slipped is NOT as difficult as you might think! Remember the tow truck that'll pull you out of the muddy hole or the icy snow bank has all the power of the universe, Divine Power, for the task.

Perhaps you were with family and friends during the Thanksgiving, Christmas or New Year's holidays; influences that pulled you back into anger or fear, into sadness or feelings of worthlessness, and you know that staying there isn't good for your psychological or your physical health. Perhaps old memories, painful ones, have resurfaced, causing you difficulty, and you CAN let them go if you will follow the path you first took to put them behind you.

Recently something strange has happened in our household. Of course you know that Ron had a total knee replacement in November, and has been recovering since, but with some bizarre accompaniments! Old fears, dating way back to eighteen months of age began to surface. Fears of water and of even taking a shower! They came from an experience when he was just eighteen months old and in a swimming pool with his siblings. Someone pushed him down a slide into the water, and he vividly recalls flapping around in that water until his older brother George, then age 10, pulled him up out of the water. Somehow it's connected to not being able to see well, and that happened on our trip to the Czech Republic two years ago, when his glasses fell off his chest where he had placed them while taking a nap. That loss set him into a panic then, and so during this recovery period, it became necessary for him to sleep in his glasses.

Why in the world would this old junk come up now? Well, the medications required for pain relief after surgery really messed with his mind in an intolerable way! We had to try seven different pain relievers until we found an extremely mild one that didn't send his mind reeling! One night the effect of one of the meds was so dramatic that he felt like he was on fire. His only relief was found at 35 degrees on our back patio in his underwear!

Please understand that it doesn't take crazy pain pills to mess with your mind. Any stimulus can do that! A sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or even an emotion that arises can take you backwards into some old mud puddle or racing headlong into an emotional snow bank.

It happened on the day after Christmas when we were celebrating with a wonderful family dinner at our daughter's home. We sat at the table, all 15 of us, and Sara asked us to hold hands as she prayed. WOOPS! Instant tears for us! Then I began to look at the dishes on the table – especially the rutabagas in a serving dish across the table. My Grandma Scott ALWAYS made them with a holiday meal – it's the English way. I noticed the gravy boat that was always on our holiday table when I was a child, and several of the serving dishes that my mother had bought, believe it or not at the 5 and 10 cent store, during the Great Depression. We were using the Christmas dishes that had been mine and I'd given to Sara. Through my tears I commented to Sara's mother-in-law how beautifully odd it was to sit at our daughter's table, eating food she had prepared, served in dishes that I had known since childhood. SO my response was heightened emotions and tears, and my thought process took me to, "I am my Grandmother – the eldest generation left in our family." For a split second there was sadness there, assuming that because of age, we are the next to die, but I chose to not stay there. There were a few moments of heightened emotion missing parents and grandparents who had been so impactful in my life, but again, I didn't let that control me and spoil the day.

When the day was over and Ron and I were on our way home, I noticed his tears. "What is it?" I asked. "I feel like I went to sleep and woke up twenty years older," he wept. Here's where a law of the mind comes in – "With every period of exhaustion, there is a corresponding period of depression." The physical pain and inabilities post-operatively and with his new diagnosis of early stage Parkinson's Disease, and the recognition that we were the eldest generation at the gathering, heightened his emotion, and his emotion heightened mine.

OK now, what do you do when you find yourself back in that mud puddle or stuck in a pile of dirty snow?

1. You ask yourself if you are exhausted. Christmas shopping, wrapping gifts, attending plays, concerts and even religious services of the season, parties, baking and cooking, cleaning the house for company, and tolerating a crowd, regardless of where it is. Add to that the season of colds and flu (and maybe you succumbed) all these contribute to exhaustion.
2. Then look at the specific instance that caused you to feel overwhelmed, to break down, to get angry or sad or whatever. Was this something you contributed to? Was this in the past that you have already faced and worked through? Have you written about this? (remember, "The hand will write what the mouth cannot speak.") Advice: Get out paper and pencil and write. Write about the incident, write about your feelings then, write about how that instance has affected you, write about your current feelings. Then take it to your spouse, trusted friend, counselor or Pastor, and read that letter out loud, emptying the painful emotions attached to the

memory. Then let go of the written letter however you choose – burn, shred, tare in tiny pieces or place in a spot for safe keeping.

3. Ask yourself, is there someone connected to this memory who needs your forgiveness? If there is, ask God to give you forgiveness for that person, and as He does your attitude, your emotions and your behaviors toward that person(s) will transform. God is able to do that in you! Just be willing to accept His forgiveness for that person(s) as He gives it to you!
4. If you find yourself in an old self-destructive pattern or behavior, talk to your facilitator or someone from your small group. Confession is good for the soul, and having someone to be accountable to is beyond valuable! When the temptation comes, do what Jesus did in the wilderness – claim the name of Jesus which causes the “tempter” to run! Get on the phone with a colleague from your group, and/or think up something you can do to benefit someone else. Then go and do it!
5. You could always go through a Recovery Group – Binding the Wounds or The Journey again! Life’s journey is ongoing with always something more to learn, to absorb and to apply to your life. Going through recovery groups once does not signify a diploma allowing you to “veg” for the rest of your life. Help some others who need healing and recovery, and in the process you will be benefited. You don’t have to be perfect in order to facilitate a group!
6. Always be alert to your reactions to life experiences. Ask yourself why your reaction may have been “over the top” or minimized. Keep looking for what set you up to respond as you did. Self-understanding is a valuable tool, and helps you to understand others.

So a new year has begun. This is a time for renewal. This is the time to be reborn, to begin again. Actually every day, every hour and sometimes every minute is your opportunity to “begin again.” Instead of “pulling yourself up by the bootstraps” so to speak, do the things that will help you. Don’t just “stuff” the pain, but choose to use it as an exercise from which to learn. Your physical and emotional well-being will be positively benefited if you do.

And remember, as long as we live and breathe, there is ALWAYS something to learn, some way in which we can improve and grow, some ways in which we can be a blessing to others, and some way to enhance your relationship with the one who makes this old life worthwhile. Keep on, keeping on!