

## Hooked On Recovery

August 19, 2005

### *Isolation*

*"We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once in a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real?"*

–Ray Bradbury

*"HALT – Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired? If you're feeling this way, halt what you're doing and get yourself to a meeting."* –Wisdom passed along in the rooms of recovery

*"Phillip, when you're alone you're in bad company."* – My loving sponsor

The process of recovery is not always fun. Most growth processes aren't fun. Recovery is a series of hills and valleys. As you mature, the landscape tends to flatten out. The hills aren't as high and the valleys ain't so low. With the smoother ride comes a little serenity. Yet, I've been in a little bit of a funk lately, nothing major, just another valley. Lot of life thrown at me lately and some of it's sticking. Maybe a good bath is the answer, maybe a fishing trip, maybe just a purge of some of my thoughts, probably a meeting. I have no idea if I'll end up sending this out, but sometimes I like to start typing and see what comes out. I apologize if this may seem "random". (Along with "sketchy", "random" is one of my oldest daughter's favorite terms). These Hooked on Recovery articles are about my life in recovery... the good, the bad and the ugly.

Truth be told, sometimes I like to be left alone. Especially when I'm hurting. "Don't bother me." "Go away." I don't think I'm unique, or different, or special. People in recovery or those still addicted isolate themselves. We also know that isolation is one of the first warning signs of a pending relapse. The pattern leading up to the relapse is usually the same, stop going to meetings, stop talking on the phone, stop doing things with other people in recovery. This is rarely forced, it's a choice. We might choose to sit down in a big old chair with a couple remotes and make the world go away. Drug yourself with the TV programs. Zone out and call it "relaxing". We all have ways of rationalizing our behavior. Men particularly like to sit, point the remote and kill channels until we become bored with all the killing. TV is just one way; we have a variety of ways of isolating ourselves that all have the potential to lead to relapse.

We begin to rebuild the wall, let no one in. Pink Floyd in "The Wall" sings about a number of incidents that help the main character build his wall. For example, *"Daddy's flown across the ocean. Leaving just a memory. Snapshot in the family album. Daddy what else did you leave for me? Daddy, what'd'ja leave behind for me!?! All in all it's just another brick in the wall; all in all you're just another brick in the wall."* Even in recovery, I've seen people build their walls and build them so high that no light can get in. Once the wall is built, they install a bathroom complete with a pity pot where some of us can sit for days. I'm speaking from experience here.

Thank God pure recovery is full of light. It's full of music. *"If you listen you can hear it. It's the laughter in the street. It's the motion in the music and the fire beneath your feet (Steely Dan)"*. On earth, the recovery energy is always counterbalanced by the drain that dwells in the dark. Indeed, without darkness we would not know light. But why is the darkness still appealing? Why do we allow ourselves to stray away from all the goodness of recovery and dabble in behavior that may ultimately destroy us? Why do we become complacent? Why do

we listen to the Siren call at all? Why don't we plug our ears and sail away? I wish I had some answers.

I only know what has worked for me and I know what has worked for others in my recovery circle. If we're serious about our recovery, we have regular checkups to see how we're doing. Recently, I've been asking myself these questions. "Why did Joey pick up after 14 years of recovery? Did some past pain surface that became too much to bear? Was his ego running rampant? Was he thinking he could handle a little recreational use? Or did he know exactly what he was doing and is now bent on a suicide mission? Could it be both? What can I learn from him? Is my ego in check? Am I close to picking up again?"

I'm scared... a little. Maybe my program of recovery is not as strong as it needs to be. Maybe I'm too isolated. I know it's been different since we changed churches over a year ago. Maybe I should attend more meetings. Do I have enough support around me? Who am I accountable to, I mean really accountable to? Am I too busy to take care of my recovery? If that's the case, then I am too busy.

This in recovery communities is known as healthy fear. I'm fearful of throwing it all away. I don't know if I can start over. I don't want to lose my job. I'm fearful of permanently messing up my wife and children. I'd be ashamed to turn my back on my God who saved me. And I'm not ready to die.

If you see someone isolating go rattle their cage. If you sense me building walls, please bother me. It's about something important, something real. It's about my life.

And just for today, if you want to find me, I'll be at a meeting.

*Hooked on Recovery* is a biweekly message from CCAR Executive Director Phillip Valentine, person in recovery since 12/28/87, devoted husband, a father of five and just another surf fisherman. These thoughts, views and opinions reflect on his personal recovery and are not meant in any way to speak for the entire recovery community. He welcomes all your comments and suggestions on this column, email him at [phillip@ccar.us](mailto:phillip@ccar.us). Visit the website at [www.ccar.us](http://www.ccar.us) to read the entire series.