

Step 1: Confess

Have you ever seen examples of denial in action? Here just a few that come to mind:

The husband who confidently tackles a plumbing disaster in the kitchen, armed with duct tape, a couple tools, and YouTube tutorials. As water sprays in all directions (pic), he insists, “This is just a minor hiccup!” Meanwhile, his spouse stands in the background and picks up the phone to call a REAL plumber, “I told you to call a professional.” By the end of the day, the water’s off—but only because he shut off the entire house’s main valve.

The couple drowning in credit card debt (pic) who insist they’re “budgeting pros” while regularly “rewarding” their financial discipline with expensive spa days and weekend trips (pic). They justify the spa days and trips as “an investment in our happiness!”

Then there’s the group of high school friends in their sixties who gather in a suburban garage twice a week, practicing their “classic rock” songs (pic). Their neighbors roll their eyes at the out-of-tune guitar riffs and shaky

vocals, but the bandmates are undeterred. They're convinced their demo tape will land them a spot at **Coachella**, even though their only public gig so far was at Cousin Jake's backyard barbecue. Let singer and guitar aficionado extraordinaire, Charles "Chazman" Johnson explain, "We're just one viral TikTok away from making it big!" Problem is, nobody in the band knows how to set up a TikTok account.

It seems some people are simply **powerless** to see the reality of their circumstances. It's as if they live in some kind of alternate reality.

On December 28 and 29, I had the privilege of preaching a message entitled **2025 – The Year of Freedom** at the weekend services at First NLR. If you didn't have a chance to attend those services or watch online, I encourage you to do so by going to www.FirstNLR.tv. In my message, I shared an abbreviated testimony of how powerless I was. For over 24 years, I had absolutely no control of my consumption of substances and porn. As a result, I lost almost everything.... houses, cars, money, family, self-respect.

And then **I hit a bottom....** and in a jail cell, I reached a point of desperation. In my desperation, I called out to a God that I didn't even believe in, and **He heard my prayer.** Looking back, I realize **this was an act of confession.** I admitted to myself and God that I was powerless and needed help.

Step 1 says **We admit we are powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives have become unmanageable.**

The Apostle Paul knew all too well what powerlessness looked like in his life. He wrote, **Romans 7:18** *And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't (NLT).*

If you are new to recovery and Forever Free, the whole idea of powerlessness is very foreign. You might be thinking to yourself, "I'm not powerless! Why would anyone admit that they have no power to control an addiction or compulsion?"

Acknowledging powerlessness is one of the first steps of leaving denial behind and accepting the truth. If you want to come out of denial, **you must confess**.

Step 1 requires you to admit you are powerless over your addictions and compulsive behaviors, and that your life has become unmanageable. The key to this step is **breaking free from denial by embracing confession**. Confessing your powerlessness over the addiction or compulsion and acknowledging the futility of living according to worldly standards rather than God's is vital. Romans 7:18 captures the internal conflict we all face: **the desire to do what is right but the inability to carry it out without God's help**.

Tonight, we will explore the process of confession. Confessing to ourselves, to God, and eventually to others. It's the first step in making this year **YOUR Year of Freedom!**

The first step in the process of confession is acknowledging the reality of your struggles. **Confess there is a problem**. Denial keeps you stuck in an unhealthy cycle, convincing you that you can handle your

problems on your own. But confession begins with honesty. The key to this step is to get honest with yourself by admitting to that your life is either beginning to spiral or has already spiraled out of control. ^{1 John 1:8} *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.*

So how to you acknowledge and accept there is a problem? Let me give you three ways:

- **Recognize destructive patterns.** Reflect on areas in your life where addictions, compulsions, or struggles have caused harm. **Journal** specific instances where these patterns have negatively impacted your relationships, health, job or goals.
- **Acknowledge unmanageability.** Stop lying to yourself. Honestly evaluate how these behaviors have taken control. Consider the ways they have disrupted peace, joy, or progress in your life.
- **Stop rationalizing.** It's easy to fall into the trap of making excuses or justifying behaviors that keep us stuck. Rationalizations might sound like, "This isn't really hurting anyone," or "I've tried to change, but it's

too hard." These excuses create barriers to growth and healing. Instead, challenge these thoughts by bringing them into the light of God's truth. Replace them with Scripture that aligns with His will for your life. For example, when tempted to justify actions, remember *Proverbs 3:5* ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.*** ⁶***Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.*** Let God's Word guide you to break free from the cycle of rationalization and move forward in obedience.

Another vital step in the process is **confess you can't fix it on your own**. Think about it... If you could've fixed it on your own, you would've done it long ago. Confess that you need help. Invite others and God into your situation. *Psalms 46:1* ***God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*** True transformation begins when you confess your need for a power greater than yourself.

I know I've shared this dozens of times, but when I was sitting in that jail cell, I admitted that there was a

problem and that I couldn't fix it on my own. I was in jail! It was a direct result of the unmanageability of my life and how powerless I was. So, I said a prayer to God I didn't even believe in. You need to do the same.

Here's what that might look like:

- **Pray and ask for help.** Start each day by intentionally seeking God's strength to face your challenges. This act of humility invites His presence into your day and demonstrates your dependence on Him. Use heartfelt prayers like, "Lord, I surrender this struggle to You. Grant me Your wisdom and strength to navigate today's trials." This daily practice creates a habit of turning to God first, even before difficulties arise, setting the tone for a God-centered perspective throughout your day.
- **Admit your need.** Openly acknowledging your need for God's power is a vital step in living out your faith. Saying it out loud—whether in prayer, journaling, or speaking to a trusted mentor—reinforces your reliance on Him. For example, share with a friend, "I'm struggling with _____, and I need God's help to

overcome it.” When you honestly admit your need, it creates accountability, strengthens your commitment to rely on God, and builds trust and connection with others.

- **Trust in God’s promises**. Strengthen your faith by meditating on Scriptures that affirm God’s power and provision in your life. Reflect on verses like *2 Corinthians 12:9* ***My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.*** Write the verse on a card or save it as a reminder on your phone, revisiting it throughout the day. This consistent focus on His promises allows His truth to sink into your heart, giving you peace and confidence even when you feel weak. As you trust these promises, you’ll find renewed courage to face life’s challenges with God’s strength.

The next step in the process is **confess the struggle between worldly and Godly values**. A significant aspect of coming out of denial is recognizing and admitting the conflict between how you’ve been living and how God

calls you to live. *Romans 12:2* ***Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.***

This step in the process of confession requires humility and honesty. It involves confronting the ways your actions, thoughts, and priorities have strayed from God's purpose for your life. Worldly standards often encourage self-reliance, indulgence, and instant gratification. God wants you to give up control, stay disciplined, and live a holy life. This change isn't just on the outside. It starts by renewing your mind and thinking in line with God's truth.

So, how do you practice this step?

- **Evaluate your influences.** List the ways worldly thinking has shaped your behaviors and attitudes. Identify habits or beliefs that contradict Scripture. Reflect on the shows, movies, music, and books you consume. Ask yourself if these align with or contradict biblical principles. For example, are they promoting materialism, immorality, or anger? You may realize a habit of watching shows that normalize deceit or unkind behavior, subtly shaping your own perspective.

- **Assess your relationships.** Do you spend time with people who still use drugs or alcohol? Do your friends engage in immoral sexual behaviors? *Proverbs 13:20* warns *Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.* Identify friendships or influences that might encourage gossip, dishonesty, or compromise of your values. These relationships may subtly or not-so-subtly pull you away from Christlike attitudes. Ask yourself, “Do these people sharpen my recovery and faith or do they have the opposite effect?”
- **Confess misalignment.** Let me explain what this means. Humbly pray and acknowledge specific areas where you’ve allowed worldly desires, such as control, pride, or material gain, to overshadow God’s will for your life. **Step 1** in **Forever Free** is about breaking through denial and confronting the reality of how these misplaced priorities have distorted your relationship with God, yourself, and others. This requires courage and honesty, recognizing that holding onto worldly standards has led to **spiritual**

misalignment and contributed to struggles or brokenness in your life.

- **Replace worldly practices with godly practices.**

Replace old, destructive habits with godly practices. Commit to daily prayer and Bible study, not as obligations, but as life-giving practices that deepen your relationship with Christ. Engage in serving others, whether by sharing your story, offering support to someone struggling, or simply showing kindness. Surround yourself with influences that promote spiritual growth, such as godly mentors, recovery groups, and uplifting resources. As you adopt healthy practices, you replace the chaos of the world with the peace and purpose that only God provides, nurturing a recovery grounded in His strength.

The last step in the process of confession is, **confess daily and practice being honest**. Confession is not a one-time event but a daily discipline. As you practice ongoing honesty with yourself, God, and others, you remain grounded in the truth and open to the Holy Spirit's

work in your life. *Lamentations 3:40* ***Instead, let us test and examine our ways. Let us turn back to the Lord.***

How do you put this into practice:

- **Daily Self-Reflection.** Step 1 reminds you to confront your powerlessness honestly. Set aside intentional time each day to examine your thoughts, actions, and motivations. Ask yourself questions like,
 - *“Did I honor God today?”*
 - *“Where did I try to control things beyond my ability?”*
 - *“How did I lean on God rather than my own understanding?”*

This self-awareness helps ground you in humility and dependence on Jesus.

- **Regular confession to God.** You may need to confess to God numerous times a day. The key is to practice confession to God every day. Admitting powerlessness requires a heart open to God's grace. Bring your shortcomings to Him in prayer, recognizing where you fell short and seeking His forgiveness and strength.

- *“Lord, I acknowledge I cannot overcome my struggles without You. I confess where I tried to do things on my own today. Help me surrender completely and trust You more tomorrow.”*

Ongoing confession to God fosters spiritual growth and a deeper reliance on His power.

- **Become accountable.** In recovery, we are not meant to walk alone. Share your progress and struggles with a trusted accountability partner who understands your journey. Their encouragement, wisdom, and prayers can help keep you on track.
 - Ask questions like,
 - *“What areas of my life do you see me resisting surrender?”*
 - *“Can you pray with me for God’s strength to overcome today’s challenges?”*

Accountability helps you stay honest and reinforces the truth that recovery is a community effort, rooted in God’s strength.

On a sidenote, it is never too early to get a recovery mentor, also known as a sponsor. Look for someone

who has had victory in the same area of Recovery that you are in. Remember... **Change happens in community, not in isolation.**

Good habits are as easy to develop as bad ones. You can make this year your Year of Freedom by **showing up to Forever Free every single week.** Remember, change never happens in isolation. Change happens in community.

Acknowledging your powerlessness and practicing confession is a transformative journey that begins with humility and honesty. As you step into this recovery journey, I encourage you to take that first courageous step of admitting the reality of your struggles and turning them over to God. **True freedom** comes when you release control, align your heart with God's truth, and allow Him to lead you on the path of recovery. Through daily reflection, prayer, and accountability, you will experience the life-changing power of God's grace. You can break free from denial and step into the abundant life Christ has planned for you. Let today mark the beginning of that journey, as

you surrender your struggles and trust in God's unfailing strength. This year can be **YOUR Year of Freedom!**

Thanks for spending some time with us tonight! Those of you watching online, make sure you join us for our **Share Groups at 7:45pm**. And if you're here in person, go to group tonight!

Here is your **Leader's Question:**

- **What does it mean to you to admit that you are powerless over certain areas of your life?**
- **Why is honesty with yourself, God, and others so important in breaking free from denial?**

If you're watching in person or online, I make sure you to go to group tonight!