

Hi I am Brian, **Grateful for God's** Amazing Grace, **recovering** from a sexual addiction, **healing** from life's hurts and **working** on some character defects. Tonight I have the privilege of talking about Step **One** and the word **Powerless**.

> **Powerless**

Well, if you **google** the word powerless, **apparently** it is some **NBC** superhero comedy, **phenomenon** ... has anyone heard of it? Seen it?

The motto at my original treatment center was, "*heroes walk these halls,*" not sure about that, but certainly **courageous** people walked those halls. And some **crazy** people, it took me about 3 days to admit that **I was one of** those crazy people. Then, if you look up the word **phenomenon**, it says,

> "something that is **impressive** or **extraordinary**, a fact or occurrence, a remarkable or exceptional person or **wonder.**" **I think that describes those of us in Recovery!** We are the superheroes, Does anyone agree?

> **Powerless**

**So, is an addict powerless? Is addiction a disease?  
Are we each responsible for our choices?**

I say **yes**, to each of these questions. I believe professionals in addiction recovery, say **yes** to these questions. **I say we are powerless, when** we are using, powerless when we are "**in** our addiction". Powerless when we are **in** the wrong place, **with** the wrong people, powerless when we **isolate** from the right people. **Powerless until** we understand **God's grace**. Powerless **until** we **humble** ourselves and admit we **need help**.

**I also believe we do not need to remain powerless.**

Although we always need to remember, **if** we return, **if** we use, **if** we relapse, we can quickly be **back in** the grip of our addiction and find ourselves **powerless all over again**.

Now, **I can not talk about Powerless** without sharing some of my own experiences, story and personal observations, since the day I walked into my own **30** day treatment program in November **1991**, almost **26** years ago.

**I will never forget** my feelings of being **powerless** over my choices and my behaviors. I knew I had **a sin problem** and I knew how **powerless** I was to stop the **insanity**. I was living contrary to my own **values** and could **not** control or manage my **behaviors**. While this is **not** a testimony night, I share this teaching out of deep **awareness** and personal experience, of having walked in **powerless** addiction, perpetual **fear**, deep **shame**, **hopelessness** and **desperation**. Thoughts of ending up in **prison**. I remember **thoughts** of wanting to **die**, **thoughts** of just **giving in and giving up** on ever being **free**.

Then **in the summer of 1991**, I was so concerned about my own **thoughts** and behaviors that I recall looking for a psychologist in the **yellow** pages, (some of **you** don't know what that was) looking and there finding, a psychologist to tell my story to. He introduced me to this sin as **an addiction** and lead me to a **book**, "Out of the Shadows" by Patrick Carnes. This ultimately lead me into **his** treatment center, **years** of 12 step meetings, several national conventions and various recovery paths. **I believe** we **become progressively** more **powerless**, the longer we are **in** and the **deeper we go into** our addiction.

I also believe it may be a **slow and progressive** journey to get out of our addictions. Addiction recovery is a journey, recovery is a progressive **reversal** of our addictive **patterns** and **behaviors**, that are no longer serving us. The time spent in your addiction and the depth of usage, **in** your addiction, will **often** factor into the amount of time it **may** take to **get out** of your addiction. And as we know, recovery is about far more than just **stopping a behavior**, it is about learning **a new way to live**, without medicating **our pain**. **Recovery is healing** our pain, hurts and wounds. Removing character defects and **dying to our drug of choice**. Recovery is a process of **renewing our minds** and getting a new understanding of God.

**There may be a few** of you here that don't fully understand **the powerless** aspect of addiction. Maybe you are even in the Bob Newhart camp of just simply saying, **"Stop It!"** Maybe you are **married** to an addict, or your child is in the grips of an addiction and you just **don't get it**. Have you ever thought, or said, **"why don't you just stop?"** Let me try to help you understand powerless. I have asked someone to join me for an illustration. Ok, I learned this illustration

from a young lady here at Central several years ago that had some form of **food** and **body** image addiction. Please welcome my courageous wife, Kim, she has a secret addiction, not many know much about.

**So**, I understand you have a **breathing addiction** and you can't seem to **stop breathing**. I am here to **help you** and tell you that **you can stop breathing**. You **must** stop breathing, in order to **fully** live and be free of this addiction that has been **destroying** your life. When did you first start breathing? That's a long time. How many **people** have told you that you need to stop breathing? How many **times** have you tried to stop breathing? Well, **I stopped** breathing 4 years, 3 months and 2 days ago and my life just keeps getting better. Ok, are you ready tonight to **surrender** and stop breathing? Ok, Ready? Remember, **God will help you**, Let's start now. **Go!** ...okay, Thank you. Oh, and here's your surrender **chip!** Crazy?

This may sound **ridiculous** and not realistic, but trust me, that is what **it seems like** to an **addict** being asked to give up and **stop** their drug of **choice**. They do not believe it is **possible to live** without their drug.. They often have to suffer to the point of **willingness** to try to **live without breathing**. **Hopeless**, until admitting that they are **powerless** to find the **strength** to do this **impossible** thing you are asking them to do. My one thought, my one **"take away" for tonight**: I had several ideas and ran them by friends and could not choose just one! Then I realized, there is not one phrase. So, here is what I want you to remember, **you are only ...**

> **Powerless Until ...** I tried to find **one word** to follow **until**, then I realized there is not one word. The word may be different for each person, although many words are good. Here are a few of my favorites, Powerless until **Desperate!** Powerless until **broken**, powerless until you **hit bottom**, powerless until we **admit** and **ask for help**, powerless until we **understand and experience God's love and grace**. **Powerless until** we find the **support we need** to stop **breathing**.

**Is this easy? No.** Can you do it **alone, no**. **Now imagine the powerless until ... ideas?** (Powerless Until, you are **sick** and tired, Powerless Until,

we **admit** we have an addiction and we are powerless over it, Powerless Until, we become **humble**, Powerless Until, you suffer enough **pain**).

**Ok, endless** possibilities!

**The AA Promises say**, “sometimes **quickly** and sometimes **slowly**.” There are generally no quick, easy ways out. No **one step** programs. Granted, **God** could choose to heal. **Miracles** do happen and people **do** stop addictions, sometimes quickly, **but** the **full** recovery of our emotions, hurts, habits, our character defects and life patterns, **takes time and a team**.

**Author and psychologist**, Dr. Townsend says **everyone, every day**, requires and has a physiological **need** for what he calls the **Five Supplements**:  
Supplements of,

> **Grace, Empathy, Validation, Acceptance, and Encouragement.**

This is what we hope CR will become for each of us, a safe loving place where we can find **grace**, empathy, validation, acceptance and encouragement. **We all need a team** of people to help **bring** these supplements into our **darkness**, into our hurts, habits and addictions. Some of us are more **fortunate** than others, to have a good **team**, perhaps even a good **family** around us for support and encouragement. Others of us are building **a team here, together** and I know **for me** building **trust**, building **new** relationships of honest vulnerability, takes **time and courage**.

**So how do we move from Powerless to Power, from powerless to hope, from powerless to new life in Recovery?** How do we become **healthy and power filled**? Well let's start with Step One:

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

Why do you think this is called step one? **There it is, Powerless Until we admit we are Powerless**. Many of us think we are powerful enough to control our drug of choice, control our own life and overcome on our own.

Paul, in the book of Romans, says it pretty well, a familiar verse.  
***I know that nothing good lives 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

And **Principle One**:

> **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 that they are spiritually poor.”***  
– Matthew 5:3a

You are **ready** to take your **first step** in recovery when you **embrace** that you are **powerless over** your addiction, when your **pain** is greater **than your fear**, when your **pain is greater** than **the pleasure of your drug of choice**.  
Now here is a look at the Celebrate Recovery, infamous **Acrostic, POWERLESS**:  
Yes, that's **9** letters.

> **P - Pride**, CR gives this formula:

Lack of knowledge + power + **pride** = a deadly mixture!

Proverbs says, **“Pride ends in a fall, while humility brings honor.”**

– Proverbs 29:23

I remember my **first** couple of days in my treatment center, full of **pride** and not wanting to enter into their **silly** activities. One guy got in my face and said, “you know **pride is a poison until swallowed**, sometimes you just have to comply.” Not the best way to **start** a new relationship. I don't know what **his** problem was! It took me a few days to admit that I was in the right place, that he was right and that I was as **sick** as anybody else there. Our **pride** can keep us from **admitting** we have a problem that we can not handle, that we are **powerless** to stop our addiction and often **pride** keeps us from **asking** for help.

> **O - Only Ifs**

Our “only ifs” in life keep us trapped in the fantasy land of rationalizing, minimizing and blaming! Only if, I had **not married** that person. Only if I had **not used** that first time. Only if, I had **different parents**. Only if I had a **better job**. Only if I had **not been abused**. The list goes on, many of them good and **understandable** as wounds and issues. We all have regrets and we all have broken people that have hurt us and let us down. The question is, **now what?** Our **choices** are **now** on us. Here’s a good verse:

***“Whatever is covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. So then, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in broad daylight.”*** – Luke 12:2–3

### > **W - Worry**

Worrying is a form of not trusting God! Worry is another word for **anxious**, or lack of faith.

***“So don’t be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time.”***  
– Matthew 6:34. *A good recovery slogan.*

We all know worry **does not change** a thing, except perhaps, making things worse. Actually worry and stress can make everything worse, especially our health. I read an interesting book, not long ago, entitled, ***The Body Keeps Score***. About how our **wounds**, our **abuse**, will generally show up in our body over time, if we do not **seek healing** and often professional help. Here’s another favorite verse:

***“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”***  
– Philippians 4:6

Imagine if we lived that way, without **worry** for today and without being **anxious** for our future.

### > **E - Escape**

By living in **denial** we may have **escaped** into a world of fantasy and unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others. We try to **escape** from, numb or medicate our pain, but we can not **escape** from our pain. Only by facing, forgiving and working through our wounds, can we truly **escape** the pain and progressively **escape** the **powerlessness** of our addictions. I heard it said one time, “**we will consider** and listen to advice, but we will **obey** our pain.” We can not escape the pain of our past, without facing it, dealing with it and getting the help we need to heal and forgive.

### > **R - Resentments**

Resentments act like an emotional cancer if they are allowed to fester and grow. Resentment, bitterness, unforgiveness will destroy relationships, destroy us and hinder us from healing and progressing through the steps of recovery. We can not afford to remain angry and hold on to the pain in our past.

***“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” – Ephesians 4:26-27***

### > **L - Loneliness**

Loneliness is a choice. In recovery and in our Christianity, we never have to walk alone. But, we may be surrounded by people and still feel alone. Alone in our **pain**, **alone** in our **story**, **alone** until we find the **courage** to share our wounds and find professional guidance. **Alone until** we find **grace filled**, compassionate people that add to our life the **5** supplements of **grace, empathy, validation, acceptance and encouragement**. Don’t remain **alone** in your addiction or in your recovery. Be **courageous** and join an open share group!

***“Continue to love each other with true brotherly love.***  
*– Hebrews 13:1*

### > **E - Emptiness**

You know that **empty** feeling deep inside. The empty feelings of **hopelessness**, **shame** and **despair**. Well intended people, give advice and words that often feel **empty**. Even scripture can feel empty and without power.

*Jesus said, “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness” – John 10:10*

*Paul said, “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” – Ephesians 3:20*

Power, that works in us? Sometimes we **don't see it**. Emptiness and hopelessness can haunt us. In our addiction it is often difficult to believe **God's love and promises**. Shame and a battle with repetitive, **powerless attempts to overcome** addiction, or **heal** from our **hurts**, can certainly leave us feeling **empty** and **without hope**.

### > **S - Selfishness**

In our addiction, our focus is all about self. Our prayers all become selfish. Life is all about us. Well, in certain ways, I say recovery needs to be somewhat **selfish**. We are learning to **love** ourselves, without being selfish and we are learning to **balance** our lives, while in time growing in love and concern for others. I believe **part of recovery is dying**. Dying to **selfishness**, dying to our **addiction**, dying to our **will**, dying to our **old thinking**. Dying to **blaming** others and **demanding** of God.

*“Whoever clings to his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall save it.” – Luke 17:33*

### > **S - Separation** (our last letter)

Some people talk about **finding** God. God is never **lost**. We certainly lose **our** way, lose our **faith** and find ourselves **separated** from God. Separated from the **right friends**. Sometimes in our shame, anger and hopelessness, we even want to **remain** in this separation. God may seem and feel **distant, unwilling** to help us and even **unloving**. At times **separation** feels normal, desired, we feel **unworthy** and **unwilling** to seek after a God we think has **abandoned** us. **Addiction loves isolation**. Does any of this sound familiar to anyone?

This is not the **end** of the story, these feelings are not the truth, just a **picture of us**, at times when we are not willing to admit that we are powerless. **Powerless**

is not **hopeless**. Powerless is not **helpless**. Powerless does not **excuse us** of choices and taking steps of personal responsibility. Remember God does not take away our **free will**. And God does not **separate** from us!

**So there's our acrostic!**

Here are some excerpts from **Alcoholic's Anonymous** material.

“When we lose our truth in the first step, we fall prey to the idea that we can drink or use successfully. It is not uncommon that over time the rebuilding of the ego, self knowledge and pride has the power to convince us that **one of something** will not hurt. So once you get sober and involved in a program of recovery, you are the only one responsible for success. And the crucial ingredient is **willingness**. In an age where others are always to **blame** for problems, it can be difficult to recognize personal responsibility in a program of recovery. Yet that's precisely what the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests, *(that we say)* **It is my responsibility to** stay involved in recovery, in sobriety, work the steps and follow my sponsor's suggestions. It is my responsibility **to cultivate and grow willingness**. Once sober, if **I decide** to pick up a drink or drug, that's on me too. I can't cop out behind a smokescreen of **powerlessness**. So I guess I do have power. I have the power to engage in a program of recovery. I have the power to choose not to abuse substances. But I am **powerless** over drugs and alcohol when I pick them up and put them in my body.

How can we do this if we are **powerless**? The program does not say we are **powerless** over our **lives and choices**, we are only **powerless** over **our addiction**, our drug of **choice**”.

Now, I actually want to **conclude** with a letter from the Relapse acrostic, the letter “P” in **Relapse**. An important reminder as we think about the word **powerless** and how to move toward and gain **power**.

> **P. Plug into God's power** (How do we do that?)

**Are we connected to the power? The Vine.** If we want fruit and freedom, we have to be **connected**. **We know we can't do this recovery thing alone.**

**How can we experience more power? Connecting is a choice.** I believe it is simply more **connection**, more **connection** to God, to the Bible, to meetings and **connections** with good people. Powerless is the opposite of Power. So when are we powerless? When we are caught in our addiction and alone. **When do we have power, when we are connected and in honest relationships!** **So, we might add, Powerless Until Connected.**

> **Powerless UNTIL CONNECTED**

So, take a minute now, think about **your word** or phrase.

> **Powerless UNTIL ...**

What was it for you? Was it a specific memory or date? What was the switch, that **shifted you from feeling powerless, to having a choice?** If you have not made that connection, what do you think it might be that is **missing?** What **helped you** understand there was hope. What did it take to begin to feel you were no longer **POWERLESS?** Take a minute now and write it down. As **you** are thinking, mine was, **Powerless Until ... understanding my sin struggle was an addiction, or Powerless Until 1991.** I remember a light going on, a faint ray of hope. Powerless until the book, *Out of the Shadows*. Powerless until **entering** a treatment center.

Now **take your word** home, **frame it, put it** on your mirror, **remember** it and **share it** with your open share group.

Also, you will notice on the **back of your handouts**, they offer two assignments for you to consider. These might be good **discussion topics** in your open share groups, or something you work through this coming week.

**I hope and pray we understand and discover that we are only Powerless UNTIL! Thank you for the opportunity to share with you. Now go find power through connection. You are only Powerless Until.**

Thanks for letting me share.

Powerless verses from the book of Romans:

***You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:6-8 (NIV)***

***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. – Romans 8:1-3***