

I had grown up in an environment where the most prominent emotion was a constant display of anger by my little Italian mother. My parents were so wrapped up in business priorities that I learned to be alone and take care of myself at a young age. I ultimately harbored intense feelings of hurt and resentment.

I suppressed my anger most of the time but not always. In hindsight, my failed first marriage should have taught me that my childhood wounds and issues were going to be a continuous problem for any future long term relationship. This would have been an excellent time to recognize my denial!

When I was married for the second time in December of 1992, I was extremely happy despite the unconventional nature of our union. Our 6-year-old daughter and my 11-year-old daughter both participated in the marriage ceremony. I had no misgivings and was delighted to bring us together as a family!

However, what I was totally ignoring was the baggage that I was bringing to our journey. If we had been taking commercial transportation, the cost for my extra baggage would have been phenomenal.... perhaps prohibitive!

Over the next few years, I recall mostly good times but certainly an unacceptable number of bad times. It was not unusual to find myself becoming resentful, withdrawn, controlling and angry. Perhaps the biggest challenge I have ever faced came when I found out that my wife was pregnant with an unplanned second child.

I confess that through purely selfish thinking, I could not imagine starting again! Looking back, I was in a zombie-like fog for I don't know how long. My old friend's resentment, control and anger were not going to work in this situation. I'm embarrassed to admit that I resorted to withdrawal.

My spiritual shortcomings left me to only pray to God to "get me through this". If only I had been in a relationship with the Lord that I could have leaned on. We made it through this but not without some damage to our relationship.

Guess what? My Denial continued! Several years ago, my wife asked me if I would like to go to *Celebrate Recovery*. I asked her "what are we trying to recover from". I was closed minded and without the understanding to stop pointing the finger at anybody other than myself and to put my problems in the hands of the Lord.

In 2014, our marriage was challenged again. This time it was our 19-year-old daughter. Her behavior took a sudden turn in a bad direction. My wife and I were caught totally by surprise and our peace was challenged. We struggled with attempts to collaborate on a course of action to deal with the situation.

My default tools, you might suspect, were control and anger. My wife was not happy with my approach and unfortunately we could not settle on an acceptable alternative. My wife and daughter moved out in September of 2014. The camel's back was finally broken although divorce was not yet on the table.

It was clear to me that I needed to seek some guidance. I had limited sessions with three different Christian counselors and attended a ten-week Anger Management class led by a Christian counselor. I began attending *Celebrate Recovery* and found peace and healing through openly sharing my issues with other men.

But the most meaningful thing happened when I was alone one Saturday. I had finished my home chores early, which never usually happens, so I got cleaned up. Then an idea hit me out of the clear blue, to go to the five o'clock service at Covenant. I did and had what I would call a "heart softening" experience. I felt the Lord telling me that it was time to come back to Him...nothing miraculous but I knew very clearly what I was feeling.

Each Saturday thereafter, the worship and Pastor Byron's message brought me into something I had never had experienced: A Relationship with God. You see, I had been a "practicing" Catholic for about 20 years. When I drifted away, my faith only yielded occasional prayer.

However I am forever thankful for the Catholic Church helping me develop an unwavering belief in God and Jesus. Unfortunately, what I didn't learn was how to have was a real relationship with the Lord.

In December of 2014, Pastor Nate recommended that we attend the four-day Relationship Boot Camp. His guidance was just what the doctor ordered. As some say, it was like a step-study on steroids.

We were all-in relative to sharing our issues while working through the program. We came away with the beginning of our healing which we have could continue with CR. I started a CR step-study in January, 2015, which our group completed later that year in October.

The healing, in parallel with my relationship with the Lord, has continued. I have also co-led a step-study and I regularly lead Open Share on Friday evenings. Psalm 143:10 says *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground"*.

I consider myself to be a work in progress but through *Celebrate Recovery* and Step Study I have come to trust in God, to seek Christ's will for my life, to turn away from sin and to have a new life with Jesus in my heart. I am committed to a lifelong process of growth as a Christian.

Juan R.