



My Sweet Precious

By Steve Benson M.A., M.Div., LPC

This letter is a composite of real-life conversations and counseling sessions with many family members of recovering addicts. Although this letter is fictional, the content is based upon true stories. The intention is to guide loved ones through the relational process of healing. Highlighted are the principles of empathy, confession, boundaries, reconciliation and rebuilding trust that are helpful for healing relationships damaged by substance abuse.

Sweetheart,

As someone who has never been high, never taken drugs or even smoked a cigarette, for that matter, I must confess that I have no clue what you are going through. I don't understand the extreme amount of pain, shame and discomfort that your heart has experienced in your last few months of residential treatment. However, I want you to know that your last letter touched my soul. I cried for hours when I read this:

empathy

Last week in group, the counselor said, "Do you know what your spouse feels when you get high on drugs? It's like making them watch you spend your most intimate moments with a new lover. They see you dance with your new love, but you don't dance with them.

confession

They see you hold your new love, but you don't hold them. They see you hug your new love, but you don't hug them. They watch you give all your attention, affection, adoration and allegiance to your new love; however, it is not them!"

I am so broken and ashamed. I never understood, until then, the amount of betrayal, pain and grief that I caused you. My selfishness destroyed you. I remember calling you "My Sweet Precious" when we first walked on the beach during sunset at the Cove. And now, you watched me give myself away to something else. That drug, that stupid drug, became my mate more than you. I was so wrong. I hurt you! I betrayed you and gave you up for something that never satisfied me. I want you to be "My Sweet Precious" again. Please, will you forgive me?

I can't tell you how I have longed to hear these words from you. It has never been about your addiction, strangely enough. We all have addictions – food, exercise, computers and even our favorite video game can become addictive. (Right now as I write this, I want to be eating Godiva chocolate with you!) It has always been about the betrayal, the secret nights and the daily lies. Darling, for the first time I believe you understand what I've been going through, and I am proud of you. It takes a strong person to admit your weakness. Thank you.

I must confess also that it is hard for me to answer your question on forgiveness. Do I want to forgive you? Yes! Do I struggle to forgive you and let go of all the bitterness, past and pain? Yes! As I have worked with my counselor, I have realized that forgiveness is not only a choice but also a process. And to declare that I have forgiven you without going through the process would cheapen your request. So I would

boundaries

like to say, "Yes, I desire to forgive you, but I need to work on my own heart first." This is my responsibility. I plan to work hard to clear my heart of these barriers of bitterness.

I have also realized that forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. The counselor said, "Forgiveness deals with the past and reconciliation deals with the future." As for reconciliation, we have a lot of work to do. I have realized that your addiction is not just a "you" issue but a "we" issue. There are areas I need to work upon as well. As you know, I grew up in a home of perfectionism. I am a recovering perfectionist. Many times, I have criticized you to be better, but

reconciliation

now I realized that I deflated you. So I ask forgiveness as well. (And I am not asking you to answer right away, either.)

To answer your question, "Where do we go from here?" in order to rebuild trust, both of us need to be consistent – if we say it, then we do it. We both need to be honest – please, no more secrets and lies. I know I am hard to talk to many times; please help me to open up to you. We both need to be honest when we mess up (me with my perfectionism and criticism, you with your harshness). I realize that this won't happen instantaneously

but over the **rebuilding trust** course of time.

I don't always get what my counselor says, but yesterday he said, "Time doesn't heal all wounds, but healing is what you do with the time in between the wounds." I like that. I am willing to give our marriage another try. I also think we need a lot of help – counseling or something – when you get back.

So please know that, I love you – though I may not show it at times. Please know that I pray for you and I will be waiting when you get back. It has been a long three months of hard learning for me but nothing compared to your journey.

Love, Your Sweet Precious

Professional Training Session
(pending NCSAPPB approval)

The addicted brain and the keys to recovery

Presenter: Horacio Sanchez
CEO Resiliency Inc.

September 12, 2012

8:15 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.

The Westin Charlotte

\$40 registration fee.

Call 704-927-8822 to register.
More information at anuvia.org.