

2. FASTER Scale

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The FASTER Scale is a tool that helps you become aware of your current emotional state, which is a reflection of your core beliefs, and see relapse coming before it hits. It gives you the opportunity to make a change in your life that will move you toward dependency on God rather than continuing toward relapse. We'll look at Joe's journey as we talk about each category of the FASTER scale.

Restoration

Restoration is defined by accepting life on God's terms, with trust, grace, mercy vulnerability, and gratitude. This depicts "surrender." This is accepting both the good and bad with an attitude of gratefulness for God's love, moving toward others openly and honestly, and facing and resolving problems. It is becoming part of the solution to your problems rather than the problem.

Joe's "recovery" lifestyle is marked by a humble and dependent attitude where he knows his limits, lives within them, and often asks for help in making progress in life. He still experiences stress and the ups and downs of life, but since he is asking for help and living with no secrets, he faces challenges head-on with the help of God and others.

Forgetting Priorities

Neglecting the priorities of a restorative way of life are the first steps toward relapse and can happen weeks before the actual relapse. This comes in the form of denial, flight, or a change in what's important. These actions often come in the form of avoiding what you know is the right thing to do. This can be so subtle it's hard to see; a master tactic of the enemy. You can see this most easily by looking at how you spend your time, energy, and thoughts.

Here, you might begin to avoid simple life tasks or recovery commitments. It is so important to become sensitive to when you are beginning to live in this category. This is when we start trusting what circumstances are saying to us rather than trusting God. In some small way you are saying to God, "I don't need you or your help. I can handle it. I will take care of myself" This attitude, if not repented of, will ultimately lead to relapse. Recovery priorities can sometimes feel difficult or painful, and your reaction will be to avoid the pain. When you choose comfort over difficult priorities, anxiety begins to well up.

Joe has committed to his friends that he won't mindlessly surf the internet and will completely avoid social media. He can get online for specific reasons and has also committed to only being on his phone in public places. He has been doing great for quite a while, but has grown a little complacent staying true to this recovery priority. His heart slowly hardens and he ignores the boundaries he set up. There's no harm in just checking what movies are playing, he thinks. He is now headed down the road to relapse by moving onto the FASTER Scale and Forgetting Priorities.

Anxiety

Forgetting Priorities will bring on some anxiety. It feels like a growing background noise of undefined fear where you are getting energy from emotions. In this category, old messages are played over and over again in your mind. In recovery circles, this is called blaming people, places, and things for the way you feel." When you choose to worry about things, especially things you can't control, you feel an emotional charge, and anxious adrenaline rush. Faith and worry cannot exist in the same mind at the same time. Unfortunately, your ability to see and resolve today's problems is greatly diminished.

While alone in his room after being on the movie site for a while, Joe is fighting off a little temptation to watch certain movie trailers. He feels a twinge of guilt for doing what he's committed to not doing. Now I'm going to have to confess this to the guys, he thinks. He feels a tiny bit of conviction for this and realizes he should probably call a friend to admit what's going on. He's embarrassed and doesn't want to be a bother, so he pushes through the conviction, buying into the lie that he can handle it. Now he feels some underlying anxiety mixed with the boredom and loneliness because he knows he's headed in the wrong direction, but reaching out feels to inconvenient right now.

Speeding Up

Living with anxiety will cause you to speed up. In this category of numbing the pain, feelings of fear, anxiety, or depression are subconsciously avoided by Speeding Up. This can look like an inability to relax, working too much without eating regular meals during the day, or binging at night. Consuming a lot of caffeine and sugar is another way to speed up. Working long hours, going out every night, staying up late, over or under-eating, and compulsive spending are some other ways that you outrun depression and anxiety and deny that you have physical or emotional needs. Unfortunately, Speeding Up is often praised and mislabeled as “hustle” in our culture (even in the Church) at the expense of our mental, emotional, spiritual, and relational health.

Joe bought into the lie that he can handle the temptation when he's alone. After all, look how well I've been doing, he says to himself. So, instead of reaching out, he decides to get off the movie site because of the temptation there and heads out the door to class. The next few days go well, but he finds himself alone and bored again and decides to browse a social media site. He blow through the conviction he feels, believing he can handle it and starts checking out his friends' profiles. He starts feeling pangs of comparison and rejection again and for the next week he puts in an extra hour at the gym each day to “get out the extra energy” he's feeling. The core belief that “I have to earn love” gets triggered by the comparison and fuels Joe's isolation and over-exercising.

Ticked Off

Living sped up eventually makes you angry because outrunning the anxiety doesn't work. You start to feel threatened because the Spirit is convicting you of your isolation and you increase the energy of pushing Him and others away. When you feel threatened, anger is one of the best ways to isolate from others. You may shame and blame others, pushing them away with an attitude of “I don't need anyone” or “no one understands me.” The result is that you are pushing people away when you need them the most. Christians often see anger itself as a sin and conceal it, so be on the lookout for anger's cousins, resentment and passive aggressiveness.

Joe's friends have noticed that something is a little off with him and they've brought it up at their group meetings. He brushed them off a few times, but he's started getting defensive and irritated at their observations. So this week he decides not to pick up the phone when guys call and complains to himself how irritating it is when guys constantly interrupt his day. If he were paying attention, Joe would realize that he's spending more and more time on social media and he's getting sucked back into old patterns of behavior that lead to relapse.

Exhausted

Stay angry long enough and you will eventually become Exhausted. Remaining in this category for any length of time will cause you to feel tired, hopeless, and depressed. Moreover, if a crisis occurs at this category, you are unable to cope. The survival part of your brain creates a craving for your addiction.

Joe gets home late one night from hanging out with friends and is tired, but not feeling ready for bed quite yet. He picks up his phone when he's alone in his room and flips through social media to see what he's missed. A picture catches his attention and even though he knows he shouldn't, he decides to click on it anyway out of

curiosity. Before long, he's spent an hour clicking links and is cruising some pretty sexually stimulating images. He rationalizes it away by telling himself he's not looking at porn, even though he's feeling aroused.

Relapse

Returning to the place you swore you would never go again. Giving up, giving in, out of control, lost in your addiction. Lying to yourself and others. Feeling you just can't cope without it; at least for now. Relapse first feels exhilarating, but it soon turns to feeling like death.

Let's pause and look at Joe's life right now. He has gone from living in the light with his friends to exhausted and isolated. He's continuing to mindless browse the internet late at night alone in his room when he's feeling lonely. He's started comparing himself to others more and is working out excessively to feel better about himself and outrun the anxiety he's started feeling. The core belief that he has to earn love fuels his resistance to return to the light. On top of that, he's feeling irritated at his accountability partners and is actively avoiding their support.

It took a month, but Joe finally relapses and decides to search out porn. He goes on a three-day binge. Next week he has to decide if he will confess to his friends that he has looked at porn and masturbated, or if he will continue to hide. Hiding the forgotten priorities ultimately lead to a relapse. Wouldn't it have been so much easier to confess the movie site and experience the love and grace of his friends?

All of these categories have one thing in common: procrastination. As you fail to deal with problems, you move down the FASTER Scale. Crisis comes at a time when you are least able to deal with it emotionally. The short version of the FASTER Scale is Speeding Up > Ticked Off > Exhausted > Relapse. Many people don't know what life is like not being sped up. Procrastination only makes problems worse, and isolation eliminates the wise counsel of God, your friends, and family who will help you see the big picture and resolve problems. You must accomplish isolation in order to relapse. Regular, true accountability is the antidote for isolation.

There are two ways to progress down the scale. The first is a slow progression due to procrastination caused by fear. The second is a speedy descent when your emotional wounds get touched by something in life. As you pay attention to where you are on the FASTER scale, you will learn how you procrastinate out of fear and what your wounds are. As long as you apply what you are learning, you will never wonder why you are relapsing or moving towards relapse. Additionally, as you spend more time living in Restoration, it will become much easier for you to detect where you are on the FASTER scale. Don't get too frustrated if the scale doesn't make sense at first. It will become more clear as you use it.

Assignment

Start by working through the FASTER Scale together now, and discuss what you come up with.

Use the FASTER Scale every day this week. Before next week's meeting, summarize what you have observed about yourself over the week by listing any "ah-ha's" or "uh-oh's" you've noticed.

FASTER

FORGETTING PRIORITIES

Secrets
 Avoiding support
 Avoiding accountability
 Sarcasm
 Isolating
 Obsessing over relationships
 Breaking promises and commitments
 Neglecting family
 Preoccupation with material things
 Procrastinating
 Lying
 Boredom

ANXIETY

Worry
 Using Profanity
 Resentfulness
 Perfectionism
 Fantasy
 Codependency
 Sleep problems
 Flirting
 Gossip
 Making assumptions about the thoughts of others

SPEEDING UP

Super busy
 Workaholic
 Can't turn off thoughts
 Skipping meals
 Binge eating (often at night)
 Overspending
 Irritable
 Nervousness,
 Over-exercising
 Difficulty being alone
 Difficulty being with people
 Making excuses for "having to do it all"

TICKED OFF

Procrastination causing crisis in money, work, relationships
 Increasing sarcasm
 Black and white thinking
 Feeling alone
 Overreacting
 Increasing isolation
 Blaming
 Arguing
 Irrational thinking
 Defensiveness
 Digestive problems
 Headaches
 Pridefulness
 Using intimidation
 Can't forgive

EXHAUSTED

Depressed
 Panicked
 Confused
 Hopeless
 Sleeping too much or too little
 Overwhelmed
 Forgetful
 Pessimistic
 Wanting to run
 Craving old coping behaviors
 Thinking of using sex, drugs, or alcohol
 Self abuse
 Suicidal thoughts
 Survival mode
 No appetite
 Missing work

RELAPSE

Giving up
 Out of control
 Lost in addiction
 Lying to self and others
 "I can't live without my coping behaviors"

The FASTER scale is an exercise to aid accountability and mindfulness. This tool helps you recognize what you are experiencing and why you are taking particular actions. It is recommend that you use this tool in your weekly accountability.

Exercise:

1. Underline all the behaviors on the FASTER Scale with which you identify.
2. Circle the most powerful ones in each section.
3. For each of the circled behaviors, answer these questions:

- How does it affect me? How do I act and feel?
- How does it impact the important people in my life?
- How do I think I'm benefiting from this behavior? Is that healthy?