

STEPHEN ARTERBURN | DAVID STOOP

THE  
*Life Recovery*<sup>®</sup>  
DEVOTIONAL

Thirty Meditations from Scripture  
for Each Step in Recovery



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com)

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*Life Recovery* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

*New Living Translation*, *NLT*, and the New Living Translation logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that AA has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, nor that AA agrees with the views expressed herein. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism—use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after AA, but which address other problems, does not imply otherwise.

*The Life Recovery Devotional: Thirty Meditations from Scripture for Each Step in Recovery*

Copyright © 1991 by Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop. All rights reserved.

Previously published as *The Twelve-Step Life Recovery Devotional* in 1991 by Tyndale House Publishers under ISBN-13: 978-0-8423-4753-2 / ISBN-10: 0-8423-4753-4.

*The Life Recovery Devotional* first published in 2009.

Cover photo copyright © by Creatas Images/jupiterimages. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jacqueline L. Nuñez

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NKJV is a trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arterburn, Stephen, date.

The life recovery devotional : thirty meditations from Scripture for each step in recovery / Stephen Arterburn and David Stoop. —New repackage.  
p. cm.

Originally published: The twelve step life recovery devotional / David Stoop, Stephen Arterburn. c1991.

ISBN 978-1-4143-3004-4 (sc)

1. Twelve-step programs—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. 2. Bible—Meditations. I. Stoop, David A. II. Stoop, David A. Twelve step life recovery devotional. III. Title.

BV4596.T88A78 2009  
242'.4—dc22

2008054374

---

Printed in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## **DEDICATION**

This devotional is dedicated to all fellow strugglers who have had the courage to face the truth about themselves, the humility to abandon their flawed attempts at living, and the willingness to find God's truth and live accordingly.

# CONTENTS

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous . . . . .	viii
The Twelve Steps. . . . .	ix
Acknowledgments . . . . .	x
Introduction. . . . .	xi
Step One . . . . .	1
Step Two . . . . .	32
Step Three . . . . .	63
Step Four . . . . .	94
Step Five . . . . .	125
Step Six . . . . .	156
Step Seven . . . . .	187
Step Eight. . . . .	218
Step Nine. . . . .	249
Step Ten. . . . .	280
Step Eleven . . . . .	311
Step Twelve . . . . .	342
Starting Over . . . . .	373

## THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

- (1) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- (2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- (3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- (4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- (5) Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- (6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- (7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- (8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- (9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- (10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- (11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- (12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that AA has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, nor that AA agrees with the views expressed herein. AA is a program of recovery from alcoholism—use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities which are patterned after AA, but which address other problems, does not imply otherwise.*

## THE TWELVE STEPS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*The Twelve Steps in this devotional book have been adapted from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

A lot of people have played a part in the creation of this devotional, but we want to especially thank Connie Neal, for letting us draw from her own recovery, and Mark Norton at Tyndale House Publishers, for bringing it all together.

## INTRODUCTION

It's impossible to go through life without experiencing hurt, especially in the invisible world of our thoughts and emotions. We all respond differently to these hurts. Some of us try to avoid feeling the pain by turning to harmful behaviors or addictive substances—hoping to numb the hurts within. Others of us try to distance ourselves from the pain by throwing ourselves into more noble pursuits—hoping to stay busy enough to silence the painful memories from our past.

Over the years, millions have found help and hope by working through the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. More recently, many who have not been addicted to alcohol or another addictive chemical also have found healing through these steps. *The Life Recovery Devotional* has been designed for all of us whose lives have in some way been touched by addictions or other compulsive behaviors.

All of the Twelve Steps are rooted in spiritual principles that are displayed prominently in God's Word. And each meditation in this book is based upon biblical truths that will lead us to freedom from the prisons of our addictions and compulsions. This fits with our desire to bring recovery back to the Bible.

These biblical meditations have been written and edited by people who are in recovery. Some of them are focused more toward those of us struggling with addictions; others deal with issues common among those living alongside those with addictions and compulsions. Although we may go about dealing with our problems in very different ways, we're all trying to deal with the pain of growing up in a broken world. Reading these meditations will help us understand the struggles that are common to all of us in recovery. Sharing the truths we encounter will encourage our growth and lead us out of our isolation and loneliness.

This book contains thirty meditations for each of the Twelve Steps, plus five additional meditations to use when starting over



after a relapse. There are no wrong ways to use this book (unless it is used to point a finger at someone else). Some of us may choose to read one meditation each day for a year, progressing a step each month. Others may find it more helpful to read through the meditations for a single step several times before progressing to the next. Our recovery is the goal; use the book with this in mind! And this devotional will be helpful whether or not we're active in Twelve Step groups.

Working through the Twelve Steps will unite us with millions of others who are working through their programs. Looking for help in God's Word will unite us with God and the power he offers for our healing. He longs to bring us good news, to heal our broken hearts, to comfort those of us who mourn, and to free us from the bondage of our past. "For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

## **STEP ONE**

We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies  
and that our lives had become unmanageable.

*Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive  
the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it"  
(Mark 10:15).*

## STEP ONE

Day 1

# Like Little Children

*Bible Reading: Mark 10:13-16*

We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our lives had become unmanageable.

**F**or many of us in recovery, memories of childhood are memories of the terrors associated with being powerless. If we were raised in families that were out of control, where we were neglected, abused, or exposed to domestic violence and family dysfunction, the thought of being powerless might be unreasonably frightening. We may have silently vowed never again to feel as vulnerable as we did when we were children.

Jesus tells us that the first step into the Kingdom of God is to become like a little child, and this involves being powerless. He said, “I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it” (Mark 10:15).

In any society, children are the most dependent members. They have no inherent power for self-protection; no means to insure that their lives will be safe, comfortable, or fulfilling. Little children are singularly reliant on the love, care, and nurture of others for their most basic needs. They *must* cry out even though they may not know exactly what they need. They *must* trust their lives to someone who is more powerful than they, and hopefully, they will be heard and lovingly cared for.

We, too, must dare to admit that we are truly powerless if our lives are to become healthy. This doesn’t mean we have to become victims again. Admitting our powerlessness is an honest appraisal of our situation in life and a positive step toward recovery.



Discovering our powerlessness is the first step toward wholeness.

## STEP ONE

Day 2

# A Humble Beginning

*Bible Reading: 2 Kings 5:1-15*

We admitted that we were powerless over our dependencies and that our lives had become unmanageable.

**I**t can be very humiliating to admit that we are powerless, especially if we are used to being in control. We may be powerful in some areas of our lives, but out of control in terms of our addictive/compulsive behaviors. If we refuse to admit our powerlessness, we may lose everything. That one unmanageable part of our lives may infect and soon destroy everything else.

The experiences of a man named Naaman illustrate how this is true (2 Kings 5:1-15). He was a powerful military and political figure, a man of wealth, position, and power. He also had leprosy, which promised to bring about the loss of everything he held dear. Lepers were made outcasts from their families and society. Ultimately, they faced a slow, painful, and disgraceful death.

Naaman heard that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him. He found the prophet and was told that in order to be healed he needed to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. He went away outraged, having expected his power to buy him an instant and easy cure. In the end, however, he acknowledged his powerlessness, followed the instructions, and recovered completely.

Our “disease” is as life threatening as the leprosy in Naaman’s day. It slowly separates us from our families and leads toward the destruction of everything important to us. There is no instant or easy cure. The only answer is to admit our powerlessness, humble ourselves, and submit to the process that will eventually bring us recovery.



We must let go in order to hold on to the things dear to us.

## **STEP TWO**

We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves  
could restore us to sanity.

*“Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen”  
(Hebrews 11:1).*

## STEP TWO

Day 1

# Grandiose Thinking

*Bible Reading: Daniel 4:19-33*

We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

**W**hen we're caught up in our addiction, it's common for us to deceive ourselves with grandiose thinking. We may believe that we're above it all, a god unto ourselves, accountable to no one.

In his day, Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon, was the most powerful ruler on earth. He believed himself to be a god and demanded worship as such. God said to him, "The Most High has declared . . . [that] you will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals . . . until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses" (Daniel 4:24-25).

All this happened just as predicted. At the end of the king's time in exile, he said, "I . . . looked up to heaven. My sanity returned, and I praised and worshiped the Most High and honored the one who lives forever. . . . When my sanity returned to me, so did my honor and glory and kingdom . . . with even greater honor than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble the proud" (Daniel 4:34, 36-37).

We must remember that we are not God. We're accountable to a higher Power who can remedy our "madness" and restore our lives to be even better than before our season of insanity.



God is not going to shape our lives until we acknowledge him as God.

## STEP TWO

Day 2

# Healing Faith

*Bible Reading: Luke 8:43-48*

We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

**F**aith is a key to successfully working the second step. For some of us faith comes easily. For others, especially if we have experienced betrayal, it may be more difficult. Sometimes we must exhaust all of our own resources in trying to overcome our addictive “disease” before we will risk believing in a higher Power.

When Jesus was on earth he was renowned for his healing power. Crowds of sick people constantly pressed in on him. One day there was “a woman in the crowd [who] had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding, and she could find no cure. Coming up behind Jesus, she touched the fringe of his robe. Immediately, the bleeding stopped.” Jesus realized that someone had deliberately touched him because he felt the healing power go out from him. When the woman confessed that she was the one who had been healed, Jesus said, “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace” (Luke 8:43-48).

In order to recover we need to follow the example of this woman. We cannot afford to stand back, hoping for a “cure,” and avoid deliberate action because of our lack of faith. We may have lived with our condition for many years, spending our resources on promising “cures” without success. When we can come to believe in a Power greater than ourselves and have the faith to take hold of our own recovery, we will find the healing power we’ve been looking for.



What a difference between knowing about Jesus and reaching out to touch him!

## **STEP THREE**

We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives  
over to the care of God.

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry  
heavy burdens, and I will give you rest"  
(Matthew 11:28).*



## STEP THREE

Day 1

# Submission and Rest

*Bible Reading: Matthew 11:27-30*

We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.

**W**hen our burdens become heavy and we see that our way of life is leading us toward death, we may finally become willing to let someone else do the driving. We've probably worked hard at trying to get our lives on the right track, but still feel like we always end up on a dead-end street.

Proverbs tells us, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death" (Proverbs 14:12). When we began our addictive behaviors we were probably seeking a way to find pleasure or to overcome the pain of living. The way seemed right at first, but it became clear that we were on the wrong track. But then we were unable to turn around on our own. Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

To take on a yoke implies being united to another in order to work together. Those who are yoked together must go in the same direction, but by doing so, their work is made considerably easier. Jesus is saying that when we finally decide to submit our lives and our will to his direction, our burdens will become manageable. When we let him do the driving, we will be able to "find rest" for our souls. He knows the way and has the strength to turn us around and get us on the road toward life.



We all wear a yoke on our shoulders; the trick is in finding the right master.

## STEP THREE

Day 2

# Releasing Worry

*Bible Reading: Matthew 6:25-34*

We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.

**I**t is often our worries about the small details of life that lead to our undoing. Life's daily demands can be overwhelming. Perhaps, our "acting out" is a way of escaping. When we are sober, we are once again faced with the pressures of life. Learning to manage these in a new way is a key to maintaining our sobriety.

Jesus said, "I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?"

"And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing. . . . And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. . . .

"So don't worry at about these things. . . . Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:25-34).

Since God cares deeply for us, we can choose to live one day at a time and turn the details of our lives over to him.



God calls us to live one day at a time.

## STEP FOUR

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*Jesus said, “Why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? . . . First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye”*

*(Matthew 7:3-5).*

## STEP FOUR

Day 1

# Facing the Sadness

*Bible Reading: Nehemiah 8:7-10*

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**M**ost of us falter at the prospect of making an honest personal inventory. The rationalizations and excuses abound for avoiding this step. The bottom line is, we know that there is an enormous amount of sadness awaiting us. And we fear the pain that facing the sadness will bring.

The Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem after captivity in Babylon had lost touch with God. During the exile, they hadn't been taught his laws; so naturally, they hadn't practiced them either. After rebuilding the city walls and the temple, the priests gathered the people together to read the Book of the Law. The people were overwhelmed with grief and began sobbing, because their lives in no way measured up. The priests said to them, "Don't mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the LORD your God. . . . Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared . . . for the joy of the LORD is your strength!" (Nehemiah 8:9-10).

That day marked the beginning of the Festival of Tabernacles, a required Jewish feast which celebrated their escape from bondage in Egypt and God's care for them while they wandered in the wilderness.

When we set out to face the pain and sadness of making a moral inventory, we will need the "joy of the Lord" to give us strength. This joy comes from recognizing, even celebrating, God's ability to bring us out of bondage and to care for us as we pass through the sadness toward a new way of life.



Our joy in the Lord helps us to face the sadness within ourselves.

## STEP FOUR

Day 2

# God's Standard

*Bible Reading: James 1:21-25*

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

**W**hen making an inventory, some kind of list is usually used to help take stock of what's on hand. If we've lived our lives with dysfunctional influences, our idea of what's "normal" probably won't be a very good measuring stick for evaluating our lives. We'll need another standard to help us take account of where we are.

The Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem had grown up in captivity. They started their inventory by finding a new standard. "They remained standing in place for three hours while the Book of the Law of the LORD their God was read aloud to them. Then for three more hours they confessed their sins" (Nehemiah 9:3).

The apostle Paul ridiculed the idea that we could measure our lives by the people around us. He said this of the Corinthian believers: "They are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! . . . We will boast only about what has happened within the boundaries of the work God has given us" (2 Corinthians 10:12-13).

James wrote, "Humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. . . . But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it" (James 1:21, 25).

In doing our moral inventory, we will get better results if we use God's Word as a measuring stick. This should give us the perspective we need as we seek to sort out our lives.



Our recovery involves coming to terms with ourselves as we really are.

## **STEP FIVE**

We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

*“If we confess our sins to him [God], he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness”  
(1 John 1:9).*

## STEP FIVE

Day 1

# Freedom through Confession

*Bible Reading: Romans 2:14-15*

We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

All of us struggle with our conscience, trying to make peace within ourselves. We may try to deny what we've done, find excuses, try to squirm out from beneath the full weight of our conduct. We may work hard to be "good," trying to counteract our wrongs. We do everything we can to even out the internal score. In order to put the past to rest, we must stop rationalizing and admit the truth.

We are all born with a built-in buzzer that alerts us to what is wrong. God holds everyone accountable. "They know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right" (Romans 2:14-15).

Part of Step Five is to stop this internal struggle and admit that wrong is wrong. It's a time to agree with God and our own conscience about our cover-up and the exact nature of our wrongs. We're like people who have been accused of crimes which they actually committed. We may have spent years constructing alibis, coming up with excuses, and trying to plea-bargain. It's time to come clean. It's time to admit what we know deep down inside to be true: "Yes, I'm guilty as charged."

There is no real freedom without confession. What a relief it is to finally give up the weight of our lies and excuses. When we do confess, we will find the internal peace that we lost so long ago. We will also be one step closer to full recovery.



Admitting our failures is an essential step to forgiveness and healing.

## STEP FIVE

Day 2

# God, Our Friend

*Bible Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16*

We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

**G**oing to God can be scary. We may associate God with a condemning judge, a brutal father, or some other frightful image. Before we will be able to admit our wrongs to God, we'll need to feel confident that he is on our side.

In ancient times, people could not approach God on their own. The high priest would offer a sacrifice to cover their sin and then bring them before God. The high priest was on their side, even though he had to acknowledge and deal with their sins. We have someone on our side, too. "Since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:14-16). "Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested" (Hebrews 2:18).

We don't have to fear admitting our wrongs to God. In him we have a friend who understands our struggles and our suffering. When we go to him we won't have to flee from his condemnation. We will be welcome to stay at the throne of God to receive mercy. He will give us the grace we need in our struggle to recover.



When we face our wrongs, God understands and is able to help us.



## STEP SIX

We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.

*“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable”  
(Romans 12:1).*

## STEP SIX

Day 1

# Discovering Hope

*Bible Reading: John 5:1-9*

We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.

**H**ow can we honestly say that we're *entirely* ready for God to remove our defects of character? If we think in terms of all or nothing, we may get stuck here because we will never feel entirely ready. It's important to keep in mind that the Twelve Steps are guiding ideals. No one can work them perfectly. Our part is to keep moving, to get as close as we can to being ready.

In Jesus' day there was a pool where people came in hope of finding miraculous healing. "One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, 'Would you like to get well?' 'I can't, sir,' the sick man said, 'for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.' Jesus told him, 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!' Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!" (John 5:5-9).

This man was so crippled that he couldn't go any farther on his own. He camped as near as he could to a place where there was the hope of recovery. God met him there and brought him the rest of the way. For us, "entirely ready" may mean getting as close to the hope of healing as we can in our crippled condition, using the support available to us. When we do, God will meet us there and take us the rest of the way.



Our confession readies us for God's work of  
cleansing and releasing.

## STEP SIX

Day 2

# God's Abundant Pardon

*Bible Reading: Isaiah 55:1-9*

We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.

People tell us to repent and stop thinking the way we do. Most of us would give anything to do this. If it were only that simple to put a stop to our obsessive thoughts! When we're starving emotionally, it's almost impossible to stop thinking about what has fed that hunger, even when we realize it doesn't satisfy.

People don't seem to understand. They may quote a verse like, "Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong" (Isaiah 55:7). But we think, *How? My thoughts seem to be out of my control.*

God does understand. He put that verse into the larger context of dealing with the hunger within our soul. He said, "Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food. Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. . . . Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously" (Isaiah 55:2-3, 7). The word translated *generously* can be understood to mean "in progressively increasing measure each time we come."

We need to fight our addictions on two fronts: dealing with the hunger deep inside us, and changing our thoughts of doing wrong. Neither battle is easily won; each requires our daily readiness for God to satisfy our hunger and remove our defects of character.



God not only forgives us, but also promises to satisfy the hunger we feel deep inside.

## STEP SEVEN

We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

*God said, “Come now, let’s settle this. . . . Though your sins  
are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow”  
(Isaiah 1:18).*

## STEP SEVEN

Day 1

### Made Right

*Bible Reading: Romans 3:23-28*

We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

**W**hat are our shortcomings? We all realize that we have them. Is this just another way of saying that we've fallen short of our personal ideals? At some time, all of us have held high ideals; we've used them to define what we think life should be like. But most of us learned early on that we couldn't measure up to them. And worse yet, we have often fallen short of the expectations of others, and we certainly haven't fulfilled all that God desires of us. Oh, the weight of guilt we carry! Oh, the pain to think of how we've disappointed those we love! Oh, the longing for some way to make up the difference between what we are and what we should be!

The apostle Paul once wrote, "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins" (Romans 3:23-24). Paul goes on to ask, "Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law" (3:27-28).

When God removes our shortcomings, he does a great job! "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). We can trust God to remove our shortcomings, moment by moment, if we humble ourselves to accept his way. That means having faith in Jesus Christ to make up for our lack in both character and action.



No matter how great our sins, God's grace is greater.

## STEP SEVEN

Day 2

### Pride Born of Hurt

*Bible Reading: Luke 11:5-13*

We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

**O**ur pride can keep us from asking for what we need. We may have grown up in families or relationships where we were consistently refused, ignored, or disappointed. No one listened when we asked that our needs be met. Some of us may have reacted by determining to become self-sufficient. We were not going to ask for help. In fact, we were going to strive to never need anyone's help ever again!

It is this type of pride, born of hurt, that will hold us back from asking God to remove our shortcomings. Jesus said, "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10). "If your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:9-11).

We must come to the place of giving up our prideful self-sufficiency; we must be willing to ask for help. And we can't ask for help just once and be done with it. We must be persistent and ask repeatedly as the needs arise. When we practice Step Seven in this way, we can be assured that our loving heavenly Father will respond by giving us good gifts and by removing our shortcomings.



God promises to lovingly respond when we ask him for help.

## STEP EIGHT

We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

*Jesus taught, “If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, . . . go and be reconciled to that person”  
(Matthew 5:23-24).*

## STEP EIGHT

Day 1

# Forgiven to Forgive

*Bible Reading: Matthew 18:23-35*

We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

**L**isting all the people we've harmed will probably trigger a natural defensiveness. With each name we put on our list, another mental list may begin to form—a list of the wrongs that have been done against us. How can we deal with the resentment we hold toward others, so we can move toward making amends?

Jesus told a story: “A king . . . decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars” (Matthew 18:23-24). The man begged for forgiveness. “Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment” (18:27-28). This was reported to the king. “Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart” (18:32-35).

When we look at all that God has forgiven us, it makes sense to choose to forgive others. This also frees us from the torture of festering resentment. We can’t change what they did to us, but we can write off their debt and become willing to make amends.



The value we place on God's forgiveness is best measured by our willingness to forgive others.



## STEP EIGHT

Day 2

# Grace-Filled Living

*Bible Reading: Romans 12:17-21*

We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

**M**ost of us probably have relationships in which we are holding grudges. Sure, we've hurt them, but they've hurt us, too. We become like children quarreling back and forth: "You hit me first!" "I did not!" Somehow, it just doesn't seem fair to let them off the hook! Now, we're supposed to become willing to make amends to everyone? Even those who have wronged us? How?

The apostle Paul left us this advice: "Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. . . . Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.' . . . Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good" (Romans 12:17-21).

This is not impossible. We are not called to create peace, only to "do all that [we] can" to be at peace. We are not required to say that others don't deserve punishment, only to turn the job over to God. We don't give up a quarrel because someone else is necessarily right, but for the sake of our recovery. We can't change other people, but we can ask God for the courage to change ourselves.

This may seem all backwards, but God's ways are not our ways. As we turn our will and our lives over to God, we will learn that his ways do work.



If we've really experienced God's grace, we'll want to pass it on to others.

## STEP NINE

We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

*“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar. . . . He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters”  
(1 John 4:20-21).*

## STEP NINE

Day 1

# Keeping Promises

*Bible Reading: 2 Samuel 9:1-9*

We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**H**ow many people are still living in the shadow of our unkept promises? Is it too late to go back now and try to make it up to them?

King David had made some promises to his friend Jonathan. “One day David asked, ‘Is anyone in Saul’s family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’” (2 Samuel 9:1).

Jonathan’s only living son, Mephibosheth, had lived a long time with the pain of David’s unkept promise. It had shaped his lifestyle, his emotional condition, the way he thought about himself. His grandfather, King Saul, had mistreated David before David became king. Perhaps Mephibosheth was afraid that David would mistreat him on account of his grandfather. Perhaps he had begun to take the guilt of his grandfather’s sins upon himself. Generations of fear and guilt had been laid upon him—until David remembered and fulfilled his promise.

There are probably people in our lives who have been affected by promises we’ve failed to keep. It is important that we try to fulfill whatever promises we are able to. When we can’t, the least we can do is to ask what our neglect meant to those we disappointed.



As we make amends we restore to others what rightfully belongs to them.

## STEP NINE

Day 2

# From Takers to Givers

*Bible Reading: Luke 19:1-10*

We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

**W**hen we are feeding our addictions, it is easy to become consumed by our own needs. Nothing matters except getting what we crave so desperately. We may have to lie, cheat, kill, or steal; but that doesn't stop us. Within our families and community we become known as "takers," trampling over the unseen needs of others.

Zacchaeus had the same problem. His hunger for riches drove him to betray his own people by collecting taxes for the oppressive Roman government. He was hated by his own people as a thief, an extortionist, and a traitor. But when Jesus reached out to him, he changed dramatically. "Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, 'I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!' Jesus responded, 'Salvation has come to this home today'" (Luke 19:8-9).

Zacchaeus went beyond just paying back what he had taken. For the first time in a long time, he saw the needs of others and wanted to be a "giver."

Making amends includes paying back what we've taken, whenever possible. Some of us may even seize the opportunity to go even further, giving even more. As we begin to see the needs of others and respond by choice, our self-esteem will rise. We will begin to realize that we can give to others, instead of just being a burden.



Making amends is the first step to becoming a giver.

## STEP TEN

We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

*“Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).*

## STEP TEN

Day 1

# Looking in the Mirror

*Bible Reading: James 1:21-25*

We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

**H**ow many times do we look in the mirror each day? Suppose we saw someone looking in the mirror who found that he had mustard smeared around his mouth. We would find it very strange if he didn't immediately wash his face and clear up the problem. In the same way, we need to routinely look at ourselves in a spiritual mirror. Then if anything is wrong, we can make the proper adjustments.

James used a similar illustration to show how God's Word should be like a spiritual mirror in our lives. He said, "Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it" (James 1:22-25).

We can use this illustration to support the sensibility of doing routine personal inventories. As we examine ourselves, we need to respond with immediate action if something has changed since we last looked. If we put off taking care of a problem that we see, it may soon slip our minds. Just as we would think it foolish to go all day with mustard on our face, it's absurd to notice a problem that could lead to a fall and not correct it promptly.



The mirror of God's Word helps us to see what we should become.

## STEP TEN

Day 2

# Dealing with Anger

*Bible Reading: Ephesians 4:26-27*

We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

**M**any of us have a hard time dealing with anger. Some of us have a history of rage, so we try to stifle our feelings. Others of us stuff down the feelings of anger; we pretend they don't exist because we were never allowed to express them in the past. If some of our problems stem from not knowing how to express anger properly, we may try to avoid dealing with it altogether. We may try to just "put it off" and hope it goes away. Evaluating how to deal with anger appropriately is an important part of our daily inventory.

The apostle Paul once said, "Don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27). One key is to have a daily time limit for handling our feelings of anger—a time to find a way to express the feelings and then let them go.

Dealing with anger promptly is important because when it is left to fester, it becomes bitterness. Bitterness is anger that has been buried and given time to grow. The Bible warns us, "Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many" (Hebrews 12:15).

AA teaches that we should never allow ourselves to become too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. We can accomplish this by promptly dealing with our anger as it occurs.



We need to deal with short-term anger before it causes long-term destruction.

## STEP ELEVEN

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.

*“Those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint”  
(Isaiah 40:31).*



## STEP ELEVEN

Day 1

# Joy in God's Presence

*Bible Reading: Psalm 65:1-4*

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.

**M**ost of us need to desire something before we will wholeheartedly seek after it. Until we realize how much God loves us and cares about the details of our lives, we won't want to pray to him. Until we sincerely believe that he has completely forgiven us, we will be ashamed to face him. If we hold to our misconceptions about God, this step will be a formidable chore rather than a joy.

The life of King David gives us hope. Long after he had come face-to-face with his own sinfulness, he was able to sing, "What mighty praise, O God, belongs to you in Zion. We will fulfill our vows to you, for you answer our prayers. All of us must come to you. Though we are overwhelmed by our sins, you forgive them all. What joy for those you choose to bring near, those who live in your holy courts. What festivities await us inside your holy Temple" (Psalm 65:1-4). God wants us to be like those who live and serve in his temple, walking freely into his presence. He wants us to know that we are welcome and valued before him. (See also Matthew 10:29-31.)

The place where God lives can be a place of joy and happiness for us now. We can look forward to spending time with him and living in his presence every day.



It is essential for our recovery that we draw close to God.

## STEP ELEVEN

Day 2

### Pools of Blessing

*Bible Reading: Psalm 84:5-11*

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.

**W**here do we find the desire to seek after the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out? We probably realize that seeking after our own will only brought us misery. Instead of happiness we found sorrow; instead of power we found that we became powerless. In following our own will we ended up depressed and exhausted, on a road leading nowhere.

The desire to seek after the knowledge of God's will comes from realizing that God's plan for us is good. The psalmist wrote, "What joy for those whose strength comes from the LORD, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem" (Psalm 84:5-7).

Those who long and pray for God's will are on a road that leads to happiness. We may still walk through the "Valley of Weeping," but out of the sorrow will spring new life. Instead of depression, exhaustion, and a road to nowhere, we will find joy, strength, and a road that leads to heaven and the presence of a loving God.



We are not alone in the Valley of Weeping; God walks there with us.

## STEP TWELVE

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed”  
(Isaiah 61:1).*

## STEP TWELVE

Day 1

### Our Stories

*Bible Reading: Mark 16:14-18*

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

**E**ach one of us has a valuable story to tell. We may be shy and feel awkward about speaking. We may wonder if what we have to share is trivial. Is it actually going to help anyone else? We may struggle to get beyond the shame of our past. But our recovery story can help others who are trapped back where we were. Are we willing to allow God to use us to help free others?

Jesus left us with this vital task: “Go into all the world and preach the Good News [of salvation from the bondage and penalty of sin] to everyone” (Mark 16:15).

Paul traveled the world over telling everyone the story of his conversion. He ended up in chains, but his spirit was free. He presented his defense (and his own story of redemption) before kings. King Agrippa interrupted him to say, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so quickly?” Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains” (Acts 26:28-29).

Within each personal story of the journey from bondage to freedom is a microcosm of the gospel. When people hear our story, even if it seems trivial, we are offering them the chance to loosen their chains and begin a recovery story of their own.



All of our recovery stories are custom designed for another person's encouragement.

## STEP TWELVE

Day 2

# Never Forget

*Bible Reading: Titus 3:1-5*

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

**A**s we get further along in our recovery, the memory of how bad it really was may begin to fade. Do we vividly remember what we once were? Can we recall the dark emotions that filled our souls? Do we have true compassion and humble sympathy for those to whom we try to carry the message?

When we take the message of recovery to others it is vital that we never forget where we came from and how we got where we are. Paul told Titus, “Once we, too, were foolish and disobedient. We were misled and became slaves to many lusts and pleasures. . . . When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:3-5).

As we share our message, let us never forget the following truths. We, too, were slaves just like they now are. Our hearts were filled with the confusion and painful emotions that others still feel. We were saved only because of the love and kindness of God, not because we became good enough. We must also remember that we are only able to stay free because God is with us, upholding us every step of the way.



Sharing our recovery will remind us of how far we've come and how much God loves us.

## STARTING OVER

*“And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord”  
(Romans 8:38-39).*

## STARTING OVER

Day 1

### The Morning After

*Bible Reading: Matthew 26:33-35, 74-75*

**Y**esterday we may have sworn there was no way we were going to fall again. Things were going well. But what happened? Now we're sitting here, aching inside, and cursing ourselves. Maybe we allowed ourselves to be lured into a risky situation. We convinced ourselves there was good reason—that it would be all right. Maybe we just felt like we could handle it—but we couldn't—or at least we didn't. And now we're miserable!

Peter had his own “morning after” experience. He had sworn to Jesus, “Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you.” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” “No!” Peter insisted. “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” (Matthew 26:33-35). Jesus had been right, as always! Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, and beaten. It was more than Peter could bear; but he couldn't walk away. So he followed. He was suspected of being a collaborator. Each time he lied to protect himself. The third time, “Peter swore, ‘A curse on me if I'm lying—I don't know the man!’ And immediately the rooster crowed. Suddenly, Jesus' words flashed through Peter's mind: ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.’ And he went away, weeping bitterly” (Matthew 26:74-75).

Jesus knew Peter was going to fall in advance; and his love didn't skip a beat! God doesn't hate us on the morning after. He loves us every bit as much today as he did before we fell.



God's love for us never changes, even when we've failed.

## STARTING OVER

Day 2

# Not Disqualified

*Bible Reading: Matthew 4:18-20*

**W**e may accept God's forgiveness, but feel that our fall has disqualified us from serving God or aspiring to great things. We may conclude that we're only fit for the kind of position in life we had before we began to hope and work for something better.

The apostle Peter started out as a fisherman named Simon. That was all he was qualified for, at least before Jesus came along. "One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and followed him" (Matthew 4:18-20). For the next three years Jesus trained him to "fish for souls," and during that time Peter witnessed many miracles. But then he blew it! In the end he denied Jesus. He went through three days of utter hell, and then the greatest miracle of all happened. Jesus was alive again! But Peter still thought of himself as disqualified. He started up his fishing business again. That's where Jesus found him, back in his old life. It was on that same shore that Jesus reaffirmed his call. Again he said to Peter, "Follow me" (John 21:19).

We may consider ourselves disqualified after a fall, but God doesn't. The apostle Paul said, "For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn" (Romans 11:29). Just because we've blown it doesn't mean that we should give up and go back to our old lives. God still has a wonderful future for us.



We only really fail when we refuse to get up and start again.