

FROM THE EDITORS OF THE #1-BESTSELLING LIFE RECOVERY BIBLE

THE
T W E L V E
GIFTS
OF LIFE
RECOVERY®

*God's hope and
strength for your journey*

Stephen Arterburn | David Stoop



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The Twelve Gifts of Life Recovery: God's Hope and Strength for Your Journey

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Designed by Stephen Vosloo

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Literary Agency, 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.aliveliterary.com.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arterburn, Stephen, date.

The twelve gifts of life recovery : hope for your journey /

Stephen Arterburn, David Stoop.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4964-0269-1 (sc)

1. Twelve-step programs—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Gifts—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4596.T88A826 2015

248.8'629—dc23

2015011978

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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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.

THE TWELVE GIFTS OF LIFE RECOVERY

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.

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The Twelve Steps of Life Recovery

1. We admitted we were powerless over our problems 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 all these defects of character.

THE TWELVE GIFTS OF LIFE RECOVERY

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 used in *The Twelve Gifts of Life Recovery* have been adapted with permission from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Introduction

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR RECOVERY!

Okay, maybe you're in the very early stages, having only recently admitted that you are powerless over your problems and that your life has become unmanageable; or maybe you've been working the Twelve Steps of Life Recovery for months, years, or even decades. Either way, the fact that you are on the journey toward recovering your life as it was meant to be lived is cause for celebration. You're moving in the right direction, and we encourage you to keep going.

We have chosen the language of celebration intentionally because, in a sense, that's what this book is all about. And as with any good celebration, there are some gifts to be unwrapped along the way. We're calling them the twelve gifts of life recovery.

The life recovery process will take you far beyond

the day-to-day struggle of a problem-focused life and will teach you new ways of living. As you continue along the path to recovery, you will begin to experience a life that is rich and full; a life that goes far beyond simply getting free from your problem behaviors. Yes, you will gain victory in the areas where you have struggled, but you will also find that life recovery touches your *entire* life.

As you persist in the journey of life recovery, God will give you gifts—or blessings—from time to time to strengthen and encourage you. Because they are gifts, you can't earn them; and because they can come to you at any time, you might not always realize when a gift has fallen in your lap. That's why we've written this book. We want you to recognize the gifts so you can celebrate them when they arrive.

Think of these gifts as some of the natural fruits of the recovery process. As you repair the damage you have caused in your own life and in the lives of others because of your problems, you will begin to discover *hope, power, character, clarity, security, abundance, wisdom, self-control, courage, happiness, serenity, and peace*. These are not automatic results of “working the program”—they are *gifts* that may come to us

along the way—but by working the program we prepare ourselves to receive the gifts and to know what to do with them.

So as you keep working your life recovery program, keep your eyes open for God's good gifts to come to you along the way.

The Gift of Hope

IT'S A COMMON STORY. An addict or an alcoholic gets clean and sober and joins a life recovery group, and things start to look better. But then something triggers the old habits and behaviors—encountering a familiar point of pressure or spending time with an old friend from addiction days—and there's a relapse. Then the process of getting clean and sober starts all over again—beginning with a renewed sense of powerlessness.

It is essential that we stay the course in life recovery,

but doing so can also be discouraging or frustrating, especially at the beginning. As we admit—*again*—that our lives have become unmanageable, it’s tempting to lose hope that things can ever be made right. But the apostle Paul tells us that we should actually “*glory* in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame” (Romans 5:3-5, NIV, italics added). As we deal with the problems and trials in our lives, God gives us the gift of hope.

The road to recovery is like running a marathon. We don’t wake up on the morning of a race and suddenly decide to enter and run. We would never finish

Just as training for a race prepares us to run, life recovery prepares us to receive the gift of hope.

the race that way. But there’s a process that leads to success in running a long race. It’s called *training*. There is also a type of training for dealing with our addictions, problems, and trials. It’s called *life recovery*. And just

as training for a race prepares us to run, life recovery sets us on a course to overcome our challenges and prepares us to receive the gift of hope.

Roy has been in recovery for thirty-seven years. Recently, a friend asked him the age-old question: “Aren’t you recovered by now? Why do you still go to Twelve Step meetings?”

Roy’s first instinct was to say, *Well, it’s called “recovery,” not “the recovered.”* Instead, he said, “I guess for me it has become a part of my life. It’s not an ordeal, or something I wish I didn’t have to do. The truth is, my friends are there, and they are my support system. God uses them in my recovery journey to give me hope, and I get to help others on their paths to recovery as well. When people who are just starting out see a guy who has been walking in recovery for thirty-seven years—well, that gives them hope that victory in their own lives is possible.”

As he thought more about his answer, Roy added, “I don’t struggle with the fear that I’m going to drink again. I guess you could say I’ve recovered from *that* issue. But there are so many other challenges in everyday life that I find I need the support and encouragement of my fellow strugglers, my recovery partners, to stay the course.” Roy is both receiving and giving the gift of hope.

Millie’s story is a little different. Though she has

been in recovery for twenty-one years, she hasn't been to a Twelve Step meeting in seven or eight years. For some people, that seems dangerous, as if she's asking for trouble. But Millie is quick to point out that she is still in recovery—she has only switched groups. Though she no longer goes to a Twelve Step meeting, she says that the group she now attends isn't much different from the Twelve Step groups she used to go to.

For more than a decade, she has been an active participant in a women's Bible study, where they not only study God's Word but also share what's going on in each other's lives.

Millie says, "It's just like my old recovery meetings, in that we are honest with each other, we don't hide our issues, and we are invested in each other's lives and families. That's where I get the encouragement and hope that keeps me on course."

She went on to explain that the women in her Bible study are divided into small groups of eight to ten, and that the same women have been in her small group for more than ten years now. They've all gotten to know each other very well, and they stay current in terms of life events and pressures.

“I get the same thing from my Bible study that I got from my recovery meetings,” Millie says. “We are honest, accountable, and involved with each other throughout the week. They are my support system—and there’s nothing we can’t share within our small group.” Millie is experiencing the gift of hope.

Both Roy and Millie discovered the gift of hope through the mystery of paradox—finding power in their powerlessness. They both started their recovery journeys years ago by recognizing that they were powerless on their own to overcome their addictions. Prior to starting their recovery journey, they had tried a number of other ways to overcome their problems, always depending on their own power. Each time they failed, they eventually relapsed. They had hope, but they didn’t know that the purpose of hope was to lead them to *training for endurance*. When they finally gave up striving on their own, they began to discover what it means to be powerless, which in turn allowed them to access real power—the power of God in their lives.

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Though they didn't realize it at the time, they also discovered several biblical principles that pertain to training for endurance. For example, in Colossians 1:11, Paul prays that the Colossians would "be strengthened with all [God's] glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy." The strength for enduring the journey of recovery comes not from anything within ourselves but from the hope that comes from trusting in God's "glorious power," which he freely gives us when we ask.

The writer of the book of Hebrews encourages us to "strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up," and to "run with endurance the race God has set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Building endurance is possible because of *faith*: "the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen" (Hebrews 11:1).

To experience the results of the gift of hope, we must get rid of the things that weigh us down—the difficult areas in our lives that we continually "try harder" to overcome. As the J. B. Phillips translation puts it, we're to rid ourselves of the sin that "dogs our feet." That's a great picture of the sin connected

to our addictions—a dog that keeps nipping at our heels and tripping us up.

When we get involved in life recovery, we begin to identify things that truly weigh us down—the things we get anxious over and worry about—and we think about ways to get rid of them. We also become aware of how sin trips us up. What are the triggers that knock us off course? If we try to “just stop” our addictive issues without getting into recovery, we will miss both of these insights. The life recovery process sets us free from the weight of worry and the sins that cause us to stumble, so we can experience God’s gift of hope to run the race successfully.

The Source of My Hope

Some people may say, “I can experience hope with just God at my side. Just God and me—we can do it! We don’t need anyone else!” This attitude sounds noble, but it’s a guaranteed way to miss the gift of hope. It is counterproductive to think that we can travel the life recovery journey on our own. That kind of thinking leads inevitably to failure and relapse. Both Roy and Millie tried that path, and both of them found that it didn’t work. Now that

they have seen the value of having support people in their lives, they would tell you that no one can persevere in recovery in isolation. They have succeeded in their recovery because they surrounded themselves with people who are available and supportive. God uses these people to give them hope.

Look at one of the traps we set for ourselves when we try to go it alone. When things start to get difficult—as they always do at some point—we typically pull back and withdraw from others as we

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struggle with our problems. Soon, the problems begin to grow, and we start feeling overwhelmed by our situation. Before we know it, we've relapsed. Now our hope is gone, and endurance is no longer the issue—getting back

on track is. If we're isolated, we feel so much shame and guilt that even getting back on track seems to be a gigantic, insurmountable problem.

Now look at the alternative. Things start to get difficult for us—again, as they always do at some point—but this time we are connected with our

support system. We go to a meeting and listen as people share problems that are even bigger than ours—and yet they are staying on track. By sharing their struggles, they bring *hope* to the group. They aren't trying to do it alone, and we shouldn't either.

As we listen to these people describe their process, we begin to see our own problems from a different perspective. We still have our problems, but we draw courage and hope from listening to our friends describe what they are going through. Hearing how they are surviving inspires us to push forward and not give up. We also realize that, when we are the ones sharing our struggles, we are helping others to draw courage and hope from what we are going through.

Gradually—one day at a time, or even one moment at a time—we become aware that we are experiencing the gift of hope and it is leading us to a desirable outcome. It's a gift because it is beyond our ability to stay the course on our own. We become aware that not only are we able to overcome our addictions but also that others in our support system are encouraged to stay sober as well.

Hope always has an objective structure—the

means by which we have “confidence that what we hope for will actually happen.” Structure “gives us assurance about things we cannot see” (Hebrews 11:1). But if we don’t have structure, such as a Twelve Step program, our hope can become merely *wishful thinking*.

The apostle Paul reminds us that structure is needed for hope to become more than wishful thinking. He writes, “I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). Following God’s plan of recovery,

The gift of hope is the motivation for our continuing on the same track when something is painful or difficult.

which the Bible calls *sanctification*, will cause our hope to overflow, bringing with it joy and peace.

The dictionary defines *hope* as “desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment.”¹ Another definition

is “believing that something good may happen.” But this kind of hope—believing or expecting, but without the means of fulfillment—may lead us to

disappointment. The gift of hope is the motivation for our continuing on the same track when something is painful or difficult. It's not simply the empty or casual sentiment of "I hope so." Its true meaning also involves our doing things that—through God's power—go beyond what we can do on our own. Its foundation is found in our relationship with God. That's why it is a gift. If we try to conjure up hope on our own, we will not be able to stay the course. We need our support people, and we need God's gift of hope to make it.

The Overflow of the Gift of Hope

As we discover the effects of the gift of hope, we not only experience transformation in the area of our addiction but also begin to see that the gift affects other areas of our lives as well. Roy talks about his struggle with alcohol, but he also talks about his issues with procrastination.

"Just like with my addiction," he said, "whenever something would go wrong, I found I would just give up. It didn't matter whether it was my sobriety, finishing a task at work, or some project that I had set for myself."

But when he got into recovery and gradually experienced the gift of hope, the triggers that would set him off and send him into relapse became less and less frequent.

“What surprised me, though,” he said, “was that the more consistent I was in my recovery, the more I started to notice that I didn’t give up like I used to when a problem reared its head in my work, or in some other project. I persisted until it was finished. That was new for me!”

Roy started to see that the gift of hope didn’t apply only to his addiction; it gradually became a part of “the new Roy.” But his hope was now founded on the reality of God and on God’s gift to him. Others have said the same thing. As they stayed more consistently on track in their recovery (regardless of what they were recovering from), they also experienced the gift of hope in other areas of their lives. They experienced progress in all areas of life, not just where they had experienced problems.

The Misstep That Robs Us of Hope

The misstep that robs us of hope is characterized by this sort of thinking: “I can handle my problems

just by trying harder, or by having more willpower.” The truth about willpower is that its power is very limited. Anyone who has tried to diet knows only too well how limited our willpower really is. Anything based on willpower will work for a time; but eventually it will lose its power and we’ll be right back where we started—struggling with feelings of hopelessness. That’s why we need a power source that is greater than we are: We need God’s intervention in our lives. Believing we can handle life on our own, just by trying harder or having more willpower, is the antithesis of hope.

The truth about willpower is that its power is very limited.

As our lives move forward, it’s easy to forget what we used to experience. Under our own strength, we may have won some short-term victories, but no matter how hard we tried, we never experienced genuine hope based on our faith in God’s power. According to a time-worn principle, “trying harder always gets you more of the same.” That certainly was our experience before we started in recovery. No matter how hard we tried, nothing changed. The power source was missing.

Isaiah puts it this way: “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). Under God’s strength, we experience the transforming power that will give us the *hope* to carry us to the end. It is a gift that God wants to give us, and one that we desperately need to receive and experience.



Unwrapping the Gift of Hope

1. What tempts you to hold on to false hopes?
2. Describe a time when you had genuine hope and were disappointed. What contributed to your loss of hope?
3. How does *trying harder* undermine the gift of hope?
4. How does Step 1 of the Twelve Steps give you hope?