

**Part I**

---

**BAPTISM**

## **STEP 1**

*We admitted we were powerless  
over addictions, compulsions,  
and unhealthy attachments —  
that our lives had become  
unmanageable.*

## SECTION 1

---

# SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

Many people, nonalcoholics, report that as a result of the practice of A.A.'s Twelve Steps, they have been able to meet other difficulties of life. They think that the Twelve Steps can mean more than sobriety for problem drinkers. They see in them a way to happy and effective living for many, alcoholic or not.

—*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, pp. 15–16

### Exploration and Understanding

We now begin our journey through the Twelve Steps of recovery—a journey that has brought healing, transformation, and new life to countless people over many years. With God and others in recovery, we have so many reasons to be hopeful as we begin!

“Baptism” comes from the Greek word *baptizein*, which means “to plunge.” When we are baptized in Christ, we are plunged into the living waters of renewal and healing. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that our soul is marked indelibly through Baptism (1272) and that the Lord has claimed us as his own. We are given the grace to leave our old ways behind and live according to the Spirit as God’s children.

Similarly, we are invited to “plunge” into the first Step of recovery, turning away from our addictive habits and unhealthy thinking patterns as well as our denial, shame, and fear. We take this plunge when we’re ready to admit our powerlessness and our need for God.

Our transformation through recovery is a process that will require a willingness to be honest, the encouragement and hope of others, and, most importantly, a reliance on God’s mercy. As we work the Steps, we’ll also be adopting a new set of life principles. By “principles,” we mean guidelines for conduct that do not change regardless of our circumstances or feelings.

Whether we know it or not, we all live by certain principles. The problem is that in the midst of our addiction our principles have been unhealthy, selfish, and contrary to our flourishing. For example, we may have been living by the principle that we deserve and need a drink after a long day of work. Or that we have to watch football on Sundays no matter what. Or that we can never trust another person because it’s too risky.

The unhealthy principles we live by are often not consciously chosen but stem from subconscious habits and unreflective behaviors. Part of working the Steps entails uncovering these unhealthy principles and replacing them with healthy ones. It's important to remember that if we don't make an effort to identify and live intentionally by a set of principles, we end up adopting the principles of those around us—and those can be unhealthy and destructive.

So, what are some examples of healthy principles that we'll be adopting? There are many. Below are some principles that are necessary for working the Steps and finding healing in recovery.

- Honesty
- Faith
- Hope
- Courage
- Acceptance
- Willingness
- Humility
- Self-Discipline
- Confidentiality
- Perseverance
- Service
- Unity
- Trust
- Progress
- Fellowship
- Respect

There are some common misunderstandings about addiction recovery. Before we get too far, let's clarify a few things:

- Addiction does not discriminate.
- Addiction is not a moral referendum on one's life.
- No human power can relieve us of addiction.
- It is easier to put on slippers than to carpet the world.

There are a host of other concise phrases and slogans that capture key insights, which we'll explore in a future section. Similar to principles, these simple truth statements will be essential for us to adopt and internalize. They can help us move from delusional and false thinking to the healing light of truth and hope.

## Barriers to Change

Despite our desire to begin recovery, there are many barriers to change that can make this journey a challenge. Denial, shame, fear, resentment, self-pity, selfishness, and pride are some of the potential obstacles that can keep us isolated within ourselves and unwilling to undergo the Steps to receive God's healing. Yet, the good news is that we can indeed overcome these obstacles by cooperating with God's grace—the grace that he deeply desires to pour over us!

In his book *Change or Die*, Alan Deutschman details the three phases required to undergo lasting change in our lives:

- *Relate*: Form a new, emotional relationship with a person or community that inspires and sustains hope.
- *Repeat*: Utilize this new relationship to learn, practice, and master the new habits and skills that we'll need.
- *Reframe*: Learn new ways of thinking about our situations and lives by means of this new relationship.

The steps above are exactly what recovery and the Twelve Steps are all about. We *relate* by joining a recovery community that offers us hope and encouragement on our journey. We *repeat* by walking alongside our sponsor and others in our recovery community to develop new habits as we work the Twelve Steps. And we *reframe* by gaining a new perspective on our thinking, enabling us to take responsibility and make meaningful and lasting changes in our lives. Deutschman highlights that this approach is proven to be much more effective than relying on the mistaken assumption that facts, fear, and force propel behavioral change, especially among those who are addicted.

When we are ready to admit that we are powerless over our addiction and that our lives have become unmanageable, we will grasp the importance of adopting new, healthy principles to guide our conduct.

### *Recovery Tool*

**Intentionally adopt for yourself a set of healthy principles to live by so that you can avoid living according to someone else's.**

## Reflection Questions

Take time to think about and write down responses to the following questions. Once you've done so, discuss your responses with your sponsor and/or small workbook group.

- How has denial, shame, or fear kept you isolated from God and away from seeking a spiritual solution?
- What has been your experience with the spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps and the Catholic Church?

## Prayer

### The Serenity Prayer

God,  
Grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,  
enjoying one moment at a time,  
accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.  
Taking, as he did, this sinful world as it is,  
not as I would have it.  
Trusting that he will make all things right  
if I surrender to his will.  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
and supremely happy with him forever in the next.  
Amen.

## Putting the Steps into Action

This is where the real work of recovery takes place. Complete the following exercises before moving on to section 2:

- Spiritual Principles Worksheet
- Barriers to Change Worksheet
- Vision of Hope Inventory

# Spiritual Principles Worksheet

1. What does the word "principle" mean to you?

---

---

2. What principles have you lived by throughout your life (spiritual or otherwise)?

---

---

a. How have your actions reflected these principles?

---

---

b. How have these principles served you and others?

---

---

c. Which unhealthy principles are you willing to let go of?

---

---

3. What new spiritual principles are you seeking to adopt as you grow in your recovery journey? Explain.

---

---

4. What healthy new spiritual principles do you think will be the most challenging to adopt? Why?

---

---

# Barriers to Change Worksheet

---

## Denial

1. Describe a moment or moments in your life when you were unwilling to face the truth about your addiction/compulsion/unhealthy attachment.

---

---

- a. What impact did this have on you and others?

---

---

2. Are there people, places, or things you've avoided so as to not be reminded about your condition?

---

---

## Shame

3. *Shame* is defined as "a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior." When have you felt ashamed about your addictive/compulsive behavior?

---

---

- a. How have these feelings shaped your personal identity and your relationships with others, God, and yourself?

---

---



# Fear

4. How do you think fear impacts your health, wellness, and capacity to grow?

---

---

5. How might fear get in the way of your making progress through this spiritual work?

---

---

# Vision of Hope Inventory

What are ten things you want out of a life that is free from your addiction, compulsion, or unhealthy attachment? Do not hesitate to dream big here!

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 2

---

# POWERLESSNESS

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

—Blaise Pascal

### Exploration and Understanding

One of the hardest things about starting recovery is admitting we can't do it on our own—that we are powerless over preventing addiction from controlling our lives. After telling ourselves for so long that we are in control, despite everyone and everything around us indicating otherwise, we eventually accept that we are not. By the grace of God, we realize that the only way to freedom is by *embracing* our powerlessness.

This is what happened to Emily. She struggled with alcoholism for fifteen years, working hard to keep her addiction hidden from others. And after she became critically ill and was given medication to help manage her pain, it wasn't long before she was abusing the medication, too. Things only got worse from there. As she shares, "It just spiraled out of control, drinking around the clock, snorting pills, and manipulating doctors for more pills."

In other words, Emily had lost control of her life. She was utterly and completely powerless. Many of us know what it feels like to be at the mercy of our addictions, and to feel that, no matter what we say or do, we just can't break away from the awful cycle. Part of the reason this is so difficult is that addiction often takes root and manifests in four fundamental ways.

### The Four Manifestations of Addiction

- *Biological*: Biological manifestations of addiction include the intense physical cravings not experienced by temperate users of a given substance (alcohol, drugs, food, etc.). These cravings can also affect participants in certain unhealthy behaviors (codependency,