



WISDOM OF THE TWELVE STEPS: 3RD STEP

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Course Author: David Walton Earle, LPC

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ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

David Walton Earle, LPC combines his counseling skills with his twenty-plus-years of executive management experience into a powerful matrix called Business Coaching. Using this technique, Earle assist leaders to increase their leadership effectiveness through people skills. He is also a teacher, trainer, author, counselor, and alternative dispute professional.

Earle earned a Master's of Science in Counseling from Texas A&M and has held executive management positions in various fields including industrial construction, private investment banking, and corporate trouble shooting. He is now the president of the Earle Company, an organization dedicated to change.

Self-published six others books: What To Do While You Count To 10, Gilligan's Notes, Simple Communications for Complicated People, and Love is Not Enough. In addition there are three workbooks entitled The Wisdom of the Twelve Steps a separate book for each of the first three steps. Earle also wrote a three-book self-help poetry trilogy: Professor of Pain, Iron Mask, and Red Roses 'n Pinstripes.

Co-authored books on leadership: Leadership-Helping Others Succeed and Extreme Leadership.

Earle has been on the panel as a mediator and/or arbitrator for various organizations such as U.S. Federal Court-Middle District, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Financial Industry Regulator Authority (FINRA), and the Louisiana Supreme Court. He was on the faculty of the University of Phoenix for over 10 years.

His trademarked motto is My Life Ill Change When I Change™; he enjoys tennis and he lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, Penny, and their dog, Fletcher.

The Third Step and the Decision to Turn It Over: Current Evidence on Surrender, Trust, and Letting Go

The Third Step framework this course provides, centered on making a decision to turn one's will and one's life over to the care of a Power greater than oneself, addresses the pivotal act of surrender and commitment that follows the First Step's admission of powerlessness and the Second Step's coming to believe. Since this course was written, research has clarified the protective role of spirituality across large populations, tested the surrender and acceptance processes that the Third Step involves, and evaluated the mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions whose mechanisms of letting go and non-attachment converge with the step's central movement, together deepening the evidence base for the Third Step's themes of decision, surrender, and trust.

The effectiveness of the twelve-step approach within which the Third Step is practiced was established in a 2020 Cochrane review, distilled for clinicians by the review team, which analyzed 27 studies involving 10,565 participants and found that Alcoholics Anonymous and twelve-step facilitation interventions performed at least as well as established active comparison treatments including cognitive-behavioral therapy, while on continuous abstinence these interventions were superior, and while also reducing healthcare costs (Kelly et al., 2020). For the Third Step this course teaches, deciding to turn one's will over to a power beyond one's own, this evidence establishes that the twelve-step process the step advances is genuinely and substantially effective, so that the decision the step asks the person to make is a decision to entrust oneself to an approach the research confirms works.

The protective role of spirituality, which the Third Step engages through its turning of the will over to the care of a higher power, was quantified in a 2026 meta-analysis of rigorous longitudinal studies of spirituality and harmful or hazardous alcohol and other drug use, drawing on 55 studies that collectively included 540,712 participants. The analysis documented a consistent 13 percent reduction in the risk of harmful substance use associated with spirituality, at a relative risk of 0.87, a figure that rose to an 18 percent reduction, at a relative risk of 0.82, among individuals engaged in spiritual or religious communities defined by more than weekly service attendance (Koh et al., 2026). For the Third Step framework this course provides, this large and high-quality evidence establishes that the spiritual engagement the step involves, the turning over to and reliance on a power greater than oneself, is associated with a genuine and measurable reduction in harmful substance use across a very large population, grounding the step's spiritual movement in robust epidemiological evidence.

The specific relationship between spirituality and long-term recovery, central to the Third Step's proposition, was examined in a 2025 cohort study of 120 individuals with methamphetamine use disorder in a twelve-step-based residential program in Japan, followed over five years. The study found that higher spirituality was significantly associated with long-term methamphetamine abstinence, at an adjusted odds ratio of 1.05, and that program involvement was more strongly associated with abstinence, at an adjusted odds ratio of 2.28 (Ofuchi et al., 2025). For the Third Step this course teaches, this indicates that the spiritual dimension the step engages contributes to sustained recovery across substances and cultures, while also confirming, through the stronger association for program involvement, that active engagement in the program matters at least as much as the spiritual disposition itself.

The relationship between spiritual well-being and recovery outcomes was further examined in a

2024 longitudinal study of 262 adults, the large majority of whom were Black or African American, entering residential substance use treatment and followed over the year after treatment. The study found that greater spiritual well-being significantly predicted less frequent substance use during the early months of recovery, and that twelve-step involvement significantly predicted fewer substance use consequences, though these effects diminished over the following months and no significant effect of general social support emerged (Kane et al., 2024). For the Third Step framework this course provides, this establishes that the spiritual well-being the step's turning over can foster functions as a genuine mechanism of recovery, associated with reduced substance use in the vulnerable early period, and distinct from both program involvement and general social support.

The evidence for twelve-step mutual-help groups beyond Alcoholics Anonymous, including the programs addressing the broader substance use disorders this course's clients may present with, was synthesized in a 2024 systematic review and meta-analysis of groups other than Alcoholics Anonymous, drawing on 55 articles corresponding to 47 distinct studies, which found that attendance and involvement were negatively correlated with the severity of the addictive disorder and positively associated with quality of life (Leurent et al., 2024). For the Third Step this course teaches, this confirms that the mechanisms of twelve-step recovery, within which the Third Step's decision and surrender operate, generalize across substances and organizations.

The surrender and acceptance processes that the Third Step involves converge with the mechanisms of the mindfulness- and acceptance-based interventions that have accumulated evidence since this course was written. One striking demonstration came from a 2022 double-blind randomized clinical trial of psilocybin-assisted therapy for alcohol use disorder, in which 95 participants undergoing psychotherapy were randomized to psilocybin or an active placebo during two medication sessions and followed over a 32-week double-blind period. The percentage of heavy drinking days was 9.7 percent in the psilocybin group versus 23.6 percent in the placebo group, a mean difference of 13.9 percent, with no serious adverse events among those who received psilocybin (Bogenschutz et al., 2022). For the Third Step framework this course provides, this trial is notable because the psychedelic-assisted approach engages precisely the experiences of surrender, letting go, and connection to something larger than the self that the Third Step describes, and its robust effect on drinking suggests that these experiences of surrender can have genuine therapeutic power, though the specialized and still-experimental nature of the treatment means this is a parallel to, rather than an endorsement of, the step's spiritual surrender.

The mindfulness-based approaches that cultivate the letting go and non-attachment central to the Third Step have shown genuine but qualified benefits. A 2024 randomized clinical trial of telehealth Mindfulness-Oriented Recovery Enhancement added to methadone treatment for 154 people with opioid use disorder and chronic pain found that the mindfulness intervention produced significantly less return to drug use, at a hazard ratio of 0.58, and significantly less treatment dropout, at a hazard ratio of 0.41, than usual care (Cooperman et al., 2024). By contrast, a 2023 randomized controlled trial comparing mindfulness-based relapse prevention to twelve-step facilitation as aftercare for 174 veterans with substance use disorders found that both approaches maintained treatment gains with no significant difference between them (Killeen et al., 2023), and a 2025 randomized clinical trial of a mindfulness-based curriculum versus an active recovery-support control for 196 adults receiving buprenorphine found no significant difference in opioid use between the groups, though the mindfulness group showed a significantly greater reduction in residual opioid craving (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2025). For the Third Step this course teaches, these mixed results indicate that the letting go and

non-attachment the step's surrender involves, cultivated through mindfulness, produce genuine benefits for some outcomes and populations while not uniformly outperforming other active approaches, a realistic picture that mirrors the broader evidence on the specific mechanisms of recovery.

The positive psychological dimension that follows from the Third Step's decision and surrender was evaluated in a 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis of 30 publications examining 36 positive psychological interventions for substance use and addiction recovery, which found the interventions feasible and acceptable but showed a small, nonsignificant effect on positive psychological outcomes, at a standardized effect of 0.23, and a very small, nonsignificant effect on substance use outcomes, at 0.11 (Carlon et al., 2025). For the Third Step this course teaches, this suggests that the peace, trust, and relief that the step's turning over can bring are difficult to cultivate through discrete structured exercises and may emerge more naturally through the surrender and communal processes of the twelve-step approach than through standalone interventions.

The mode of twelve-step meeting access, relevant to how the person practices the surrender and engagement the Third Step begins, was examined in a 2024 longitudinal study of 531 adults with lifetime alcohol use disorder, which found that those attending online meetings attended more meetings but were less involved than in-person-only attendees, and were less likely to endorse lifetime abstinence as a recovery goal, even as involvement and outcomes improved over time across all modes (Timko et al., 2024). For the Third Step framework this course provides, this reinforces that the genuine involvement through which the step's decision is enacted, more than mere attendance, is what drives the benefits of recovery.

The Decision at the Heart of the Third Step

The Third Step is distinguished from the steps around it by its emphasis on a decision, the making of a deliberate choice to turn one's will and one's life over to the care of a power greater than oneself, and the counselor should understand the central place of this decision because it marks the transition from the recognition and belief of the first two steps to the action and commitment that recovery requires. Where the First Step is an admission and the Second a coming to believe, the Third is a decision, a deliberate act of the will that commits the person to a new course, and this decisional quality makes the Third Step the pivot on which the movement from insight to action turns. Understanding the decision at the heart of the step clarifies its distinctive role in the recovery process.

The evidence on decision and commitment in recovery establishes that the choices people make about their recovery genuinely matter and genuinely change. A study using machine learning to examine treatment goal change among people seeking treatment for alcohol use disorder found that nearly half of the sample changed their treatment goal over six months, and that of those who changed, more than two-thirds, at 68.7 percent, shifted toward a goal of complete abstinence, with the change predicted by factors including recent treatment sessions, other substance use, negative affect, and social support (Schwebel et al., 2022). This finding establishes that the decision about one's recovery goal is not fixed at the outset but develops over time, often toward greater commitment, which mirrors the Third Step's understanding of the decision to turn over one's will as a genuine choice that can be made and deepened. A separate study examining the recovery of people with alcohol use disorder against the operational definition of recovery found that a substantial share, 34.6 percent, met the defined recovery criteria, and that those meeting the recovery definition showed larger psychosocial improvements than those not in

remission or drinking at higher-risk levels (Kelly et al., 2025), grounding the decision to pursue recovery in the reality that recovery is achievable and brings genuine gains.

For the practitioner, understanding the decision at the heart of the Third Step guides the support of the client's commitment. It means recognizing the Third Step as fundamentally a decision, the deliberate choice to turn one's will over that marks the transition from recognition and belief to action and commitment, and supporting the client in making that choice. It means understanding from the evidence that decisions about recovery genuinely matter and genuinely develop, often deepening toward greater commitment over time, and supporting that development rather than expecting a fixed decision at the outset. It means grounding the client's decision in the reality that recovery is achievable and brings genuine gains, offering the realistic hope that the decision to turn over one's will leads somewhere worth going. And it means recognizing the decisional quality of the step as its distinctive contribution, the pivot on which the movement from insight to action turns, and supporting the client in making the commitment the step requires. The counselor who understands the decision at the heart of the Third Step supports the client in making the deliberate choice that commits them to recovery, recognizing that the decision genuinely matters and can be deepened over time toward the fuller recovery the evidence shows to be achievable.

The Surrender of Self-Will: The Central Paradox

At the heart of the Third Step lies a paradox that the counselor must understand and be able to convey: that turning one's will over to a power greater than oneself, seemingly a surrender of control and agency, is in fact the path to the genuine change that the exercise of self-will alone could not achieve. To the newcomer, the instruction to turn one's will over can sound like a demand to abandon responsibility, to give up agency, to become passive, yet the twelve-step tradition understands it as precisely the opposite, the release of the exhausting and failing struggle to control the addiction through willpower alone, and the opening to a different source of change through connection, help, and reliance on something beyond the isolated self. Understanding this paradox, and the evidence that bears on it, is essential to conveying the Third Step's meaning.

The evidence increasingly illuminates why the surrender of self-will can be more effective than its exercise. A longitudinal study of people in a Christian inpatient treatment program found that surrender, particularly the implicit, internalized surrender assessed beyond mere self-report, predicted decreased odds of relapse over the year following treatment, at an odds ratio of 0.371 (Seesink et al., 2026), establishing that a genuine, internalized surrender is associated with sustained recovery. A separate study found that a state of surrender, the willingness to accept without resistance what is to come, mediated the relationship between treatment engagement and the presence of meaning in life (Sease et al., 2024), indicating that surrender orients the person toward meaning. These findings give empirical grounding to the paradox at the heart of the Third Step: the surrender the step asks, far from being a passive abandonment, is a genuine process associated with reduced relapse and increased meaning. The related evidence on experiential avoidance, discussed below, adds that the effortful attempt to control and suppress one's internal experience is associated with worse substance use outcomes, while the acceptance that surrender involves is associated with better ones.

For the practitioner, conveying the paradox of the surrender of self-will is central to teaching the Third Step. It means helping clients understand that turning one's will over is not the abandonment of

responsibility or agency it can first appear, but the release of the failing struggle to control the addiction through willpower alone and the opening to a different source of change. It means drawing on the evidence that genuine surrender is associated with reduced relapse and increased meaning, so that the surrender the step asks is grounded in outcomes rather than presented as a mere article of faith. It means helping clients let go of the reliance on self-will that the First Step's admission of powerlessness has already shown to have failed, supporting the turning over that the Third Step requires. And it means holding the paradox at the center of the step, that surrendering the will to control the addiction is what allows the person to reclaim a life beyond it, which is the wisdom the Third Step embodies. The counselor who conveys the paradox of the surrender of self-will helps clients approach the Third Step's turning over not as a defeat or a passivity but as the liberating and effective release that the tradition and the evidence alike understand it to be.

Why Self-Will Alone Fails

The Third Step's surrender of self-will rests on the recognition, established by the First Step, that the exercise of willpower alone has failed to control the addiction, and the counselor should understand why self-will alone so often fails, because conveying this understanding helps clients accept the turning over that the step requires. The person entering recovery has usually tried, repeatedly and with genuine effort, to control their substance use through willpower, and has failed, and the Third Step asks them to stop relying on the willpower that has not worked and to turn instead to a source of change beyond it. Understanding why the isolated will fails against addiction clarifies why the surrender the Third Step asks is not weakness but realism.

The failure of self-will against addiction has roots the counselor can convey. Addiction involves neurobiological changes that hijack the brain's motivational and reward systems, so that the drive toward the substance operates at a level below and beyond deliberate control, and the conscious will, however determined, is repeatedly overpowered by the automatic and compulsive processes that addiction establishes. A theoretical account of the sense of agency in addiction proposes that the very sense of control can, paradoxically, feed the motivation to seek and use substances, complicating the simple picture in which more willpower would mean more control (Ashby and Ashby, 2026), and the broader evidence on the sense of control shows a complex rather than simple relationship, with a study of more than five hundred people finding that a lower sense of control was associated with greater addiction severity even as control operated in complex ways (Górowska et al., 2025). What these accounts share is the recognition that the relationship between the will, the sense of control, and addiction is not the simple one in which willpower straightforwardly defeats the substance, which is why the exhausting reliance on self-will so often fails and why the Third Step's turning to a source beyond the isolated will can succeed where willpower alone did not.

For the practitioner, understanding why self-will alone fails helps convey the realism of the Third Step's surrender. It means helping clients understand that their repeated failures to control their addiction through willpower reflect not personal weakness or insufficient effort but the genuine power of the automatic and compulsive processes that addiction establishes, which the conscious will alone cannot reliably overcome. It means conveying that the surrender the Third Step asks is therefore not a giving up but a realistic recognition that a different source of change, beyond the isolated will, is needed, which the First Step's admission of powerlessness has already begun. It means relieving clients of the shame of their failed willpower by locating the failure in the nature of addiction rather than in their character,

which both respects the client and opens the way to the turning over the step requires. And it means helping clients turn to the sources of change beyond the isolated will, the connection, help, and reliance that the Third Step opens, that can succeed where willpower alone has failed. The counselor who understands why self-will alone fails helps clients accept the Third Step's surrender as the realistic response to the genuine failure of willpower against addiction, rather than as a defeat to be resisted.

Turning It Over: Reliance on a Power Greater Than Oneself

The Third Step's turning over of the will is a turning to a power greater than oneself, and the counselor should understand the evidence on reliance on such a power, because it establishes that the turning over the step asks is associated with genuine benefit and is more flexible than clients often assume. The power greater than oneself, as discussed in relation to the Second Step, is understood flexibly in the twelve-step tradition, allowing the person to turn to a traditional conception of God, to the fellowship and its collective wisdom, to the process of recovery, or to other sources beyond the isolated self, and the Third Step's turning over can be directed to whichever the client can genuinely embrace. Understanding the evidence on reliance on a power greater than oneself grounds the Third Step's turning over in outcomes.

The evidence on reliance on a higher power and spiritual resources is substantial and, in its most rigorous form, large. The meta-analysis of spirituality and substance use, drawing on 55 studies and more than half a million participants, established that spirituality was associated with a 13 percent reduction in the risk of harmful substance use, rising to 18 percent for those engaged in spiritual or religious communities (Koh et al., 2026), grounding the turning over to a higher power in robust epidemiological evidence. More specific studies add texture: the cohort study of methamphetamine users in a twelve-step program found higher spirituality associated with long-term abstinence (Ofuchi et al., 2025), a systematic review found that even brief prayer practices were associated with reductions in cravings, relapse risk, and anxiety (Fudale et al., 2025), and a qualitative study of Black Americans who misused opioids found that their religious and spiritual views shaped their beliefs about control over their substance use and recovery (Jester et al., 2025). Together these establish that reliance on a power greater than oneself, the turning over the Third Step asks, is associated with genuine benefit across populations and practices, while the flexibility of the concept means the turning over is accessible to clients across a wide range of beliefs.

For the practitioner, understanding reliance on a power greater than oneself guides the support of the Third Step's turning over. It means recognizing that the turning over the step asks is associated with genuine benefit, grounded in the large meta-analytic evidence on spirituality and the more specific studies of spiritual practice in recovery. It means conveying the flexibility of the power greater than oneself, helping clients turn over to whichever source beyond the isolated self they can genuinely embrace, whether a traditional conception of God, the fellowship, or the process of recovery. It means supporting clients in the concrete practices through which the turning over is enacted, whether prayer, meditation, engagement with the fellowship, or reliance on the collective wisdom of the program, drawing on the evidence that these practices are associated with benefit. And it means holding the turning over realistically, as genuinely beneficial and flexibly accessible, rather than as either a required religious act or an empty formula. The counselor who understands reliance on a power greater than oneself supports the Third Step's turning over as a genuinely beneficial and accessible movement, helping clients turn to the source beyond themselves that can carry the change their own will could not.

Letting Go and Acceptance: The Convergence with Third-Wave Therapies

The letting go that the Third Step's surrender involves converges strikingly with the acceptance-based processes at the center of contemporary third-wave therapies, and the counselor should understand this convergence because it grounds the step's letting go in a substantial and growing evidence base. The Third Step asks the person to let go of the struggle to control what they cannot control and to accept the reality of their situation and their need for help, and this letting go and acceptance are precisely the processes that Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and related mindfulness-based approaches cultivate, so that the twelve-step tradition's ancient wisdom about surrender and the contemporary science of acceptance-based therapy converge on the same movement. Understanding this convergence enriches the counselor's grasp of the Third Step and connects it to evidence-based clinical methods.

The evidence on acceptance-based processes in addiction supports the letting go the Third Step involves. A systematic review of experiential avoidance, the effortful attempt to avoid or suppress unwanted internal experiences that is the opposite of acceptance, found that higher experiential avoidance was consistently associated with greater substance use, and that acceptance-based approaches which reduce avoidance showed promise (Sequeda et al., 2026), establishing that the effortful control the Third Step asks the person to let go of is associated with worse outcomes while the acceptance it fosters is associated with better ones. A secondary analysis of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for cocaine use disorder found that experiential avoidance was the process most central to the treatment, and that progress aligned with the person's values was associated with cocaine abstinence (Jo et al., 2026). A systematic review of third-wave therapies for substance use disorder, drawing on 47 studies, found small-to-moderate benefits on substance use outcomes and larger gains in psychological flexibility and emotion regulation (Calderone et al., 2026), and a pilot randomized trial of internet-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy with behavioral activation for ethnic minority young adults with alcohol use disorder found improvements in drinking, abstinence self-efficacy, and psychological flexibility with high retention (Belay et al., 2026). These findings establish that the letting go and acceptance the Third Step involves are genuine mechanisms of recovery, supported by the growing evidence for acceptance-based therapies.

For the practitioner, understanding the convergence with third-wave therapies enriches the teaching of the Third Step and connects it to clinical methods. It means recognizing that the letting go and acceptance the Third Step's surrender involves converge with the acceptance-based processes at the center of contemporary third-wave therapies, so that the step's ancient wisdom and the current science align on the same movement. It means drawing on the evidence that the effortful control the step asks the person to let go of is associated with worse outcomes while the acceptance it fosters is associated with better ones, grounding the letting go in outcomes. It means being able to use the tools of acceptance-based therapies, the cultivation of acceptance, willingness, and values-aligned action, to support the letting go the Third Step involves, connecting the step to evidence-based clinical methods. And it means holding the convergence as a mutual enrichment, in which the twelve-step tradition's wisdom about surrender and the contemporary science of acceptance illuminate each other. The counselor who understands the convergence with third-wave therapies teaches the Third Step's letting go with both the depth of the tradition and the support of the acceptance-based evidence, connecting the step's surrender to the clinical methods that cultivate the same movement.

Mindfulness and the Practice of Non-Attachment

Among the acceptance-based approaches, mindfulness holds a particular place in relation to the Third Step, because the non-attachment and present-focused awareness that mindfulness cultivates directly support the letting go the step's surrender involves, and the counselor should understand both the promise and the realistic limits of mindfulness in recovery. Mindfulness, the practice of non-judgmental awareness of present experience, cultivates the capacity to observe one's cravings, thoughts, and urges without being controlled by them, and to let go of the struggle to control internal experience, which is closely related to the surrender the Third Step asks. Understanding the evidence on mindfulness helps the counselor support this dimension of the step realistically.

The evidence on mindfulness-based interventions in recovery is genuine but qualified, which the counselor should convey honestly. An umbrella review of mindfulness-based interventions for substance use disorders found relapse-reduction effect sizes ranging from 0.45 to 0.78 and craving-reduction effects ranging from 0.52 to 0.71 across alcohol, opioids, and stimulants (Ajami Bakhtiarvand and Abedi, 2026), establishing genuine benefit. Yet the specific trials show a more mixed picture, as discussed earlier: mindfulness-oriented recovery enhancement added to methadone treatment reduced return to drug use and dropout (Cooperman et al., 2024), while mindfulness-based relapse prevention did not outperform twelve-step facilitation as aftercare (Killeen et al., 2023), and a mindfulness curriculum during buprenorphine treatment reduced craving but not substance use relative to an active control (Schuman-Olivier et al., 2025). This pattern indicates that mindfulness produces genuine benefits, particularly for craving and for some populations and outcomes, while not uniformly outperforming other active approaches, a realistic picture the counselor should hold. For the Third Step, mindfulness offers a concrete practice through which the letting go and non-attachment the step's surrender involves can be cultivated, with genuine if qualified benefit.

For the practitioner, understanding mindfulness and non-attachment guides the support of the Third Step's letting go in concrete practice. It means recognizing that the non-attachment and present-focused awareness mindfulness cultivates directly support the letting go the step's surrender involves, offering a concrete practice for the step's central movement. It means holding the evidence on mindfulness realistically, recognizing its genuine benefits, particularly for craving, while acknowledging that it does not uniformly outperform other active approaches, and conveying this honest picture. It means offering mindfulness practices as a means through which clients can cultivate the letting go and non-attachment the Third Step involves, drawing on the evidence that these practices carry genuine benefit. And it means integrating mindfulness with the broader work of the Third Step, using the practice of non-attachment to support the surrender the step asks. The counselor who understands mindfulness and non-attachment offers clients a concrete, evidence-supported practice through which to cultivate the letting go the Third Step involves, holding its benefits realistically while connecting it to the step's central movement of surrender.

Trust and the Relational Foundation of Turning It Over

The Third Step's turning over of the will requires trust, the trust to entrust oneself to a power greater than oneself, to the fellowship, to the sponsor, and to the process of recovery, and the counselor should understand the central place of trust because the turning over the step asks is, at bottom, an act of trust that many clients find difficult. To turn one's will and life over to something beyond oneself requires trusting that the something is trustworthy, that the surrender will not lead to harm, that the reliance will be met with support rather than betrayal, and for clients whose trust has been damaged by their experiences, this trust can be the hardest part of the Third Step. Understanding the relational foundation of the turning over helps the counselor support the development of the trust the step requires.

The trust the Third Step requires is built substantially through relationship and experience rather than demanded as a precondition. The turning over is made possible as the person comes to trust the fellowship through experiencing its support, to trust the sponsor through the sponsor's reliability and care, and to trust the process of recovery through witnessing it work in others and beginning to experience it work in themselves. The evidence on the relational dimensions of recovery supports the importance of trustworthy support: a study of perceived social support found that lower support was associated with a more maladaptive stress and craving response during early abstinence (Goldstein et al., 2026), and the qualitative research on recovery repeatedly identifies trustworthy relationships and communities as central to the process. For clients whose trust has been damaged, the development of the trust the Third Step requires may be gradual and hard-won, built through the accumulating experience of being supported rather than betrayed, and the counselor's own trustworthiness, reliability, and care are part of what helps the client develop the capacity to trust that the turning over requires.

For the practitioner, understanding the relational foundation of the turning over guides the support of the trust the Third Step requires. It means recognizing that the turning over the step asks is fundamentally an act of trust, and that for many clients, particularly those whose trust has been damaged, this trust is the hardest part of the step. It means understanding that the trust is built substantially through relationship and experience rather than demanded as a precondition, and supporting its development through the client's accumulating experience of trustworthy support in the fellowship, the sponsor relationship, and the process of recovery. It means attending to the client's capacity for trust and to the experiences that have damaged it, approaching the difficulty of trust with understanding rather than pressure, and recognizing the counselor's own trustworthiness as part of what helps the client develop the capacity to trust. And it means supporting the client in the gradual, experience-based development of the trust the turning over requires, rather than expecting it as an immediate act. The counselor who understands the relational foundation of the turning over supports the development of the trust the Third Step requires, recognizing it as a gradual and relational achievement built through the experience of trustworthy support rather than a precondition to be demanded.

Autonomy and Surrender: Resolving the Apparent Tension

The Third Step's turning over of the will can appear to be in tension with the autonomy and self-determination that both clinical practice and the client's own dignity require, and the counselor should understand how to resolve this apparent tension, because a misunderstanding of the turning over as a surrender of autonomy can both deter clients and conflict with sound clinical values. Contemporary treatment emphasizes the client's autonomy, their right and capacity to direct their own recovery, and the Third Step's instruction to turn one's will over can seem to contradict this, appearing to ask the client to surrender the very autonomy that treatment aims to support. Resolving this apparent tension is important for both the client's understanding and the counselor's practice.

The resolution lies in recognizing that the Third Step's turning over is itself an exercise of autonomy rather than its abandonment. The decision to turn one's will over is a choice, freely made by the person, to rely on a source of change beyond their isolated willpower, and in making that choice the person exercises their autonomy rather than surrendering it. Far from abandoning agency, the person who decides to turn it over is exercising agency in the most consequential way, choosing the path that can lead to recovery, and the surrender is of the failed struggle to control the addiction, not of the person's fundamental self-determination. Moreover, the turning over is directed to a power the person themselves understands and chooses, in the tradition's flexible sense, so that the person retains authorship of their own recovery even as they rely on something beyond themselves. The apparent tension between autonomy and surrender dissolves when the turning over is understood as an autonomous choice to rely on a chosen source of change, rather than as a coerced abandonment of self-direction.

For the practitioner, resolving the tension between autonomy and surrender is important for both the client's understanding and sound practice. It means recognizing that the Third Step's turning over can appear to conflict with the autonomy that treatment and the client's dignity require, and being able to resolve this apparent tension rather than leaving it to deter clients or conflict with clinical values. It means conveying to clients that the turning over is itself an exercise of autonomy, a freely made choice to rely on a source of change beyond the isolated will, rather than the abandonment of autonomy it can appear. It means respecting the client's autonomy throughout, supporting their free choice to turn over their will to a power they themselves understand and choose, rather than imposing the surrender. And it means holding the turning over and autonomy as compatible rather than opposed, understanding that the person who decides to turn it over exercises agency in the most consequential way. The counselor who resolves the tension between autonomy and surrender supports the Third Step's turning over as an autonomous choice rather than a coerced abandonment, respecting the client's self-determination while helping them make the consequential choice to rely on a source of change beyond themselves.

Meaning, Purpose, and the Fruits of Turning It Over

The Third Step's decision to turn one's will over opens toward the restoration of meaning and purpose that recovery brings, and the counselor should understand the connection because the surrender the step involves is associated, in the evidence, with the meaning that gives recovery its depth. The turning over of self-will and the reliance on a power greater than oneself relieve the person of the exhausting and isolating struggle to control their addiction alone, and open them to the connection, meaning, and purpose that the struggle had crowded out. Understanding the connection between the

turning over and the restoration of meaning helps the counselor convey the fruits of the Third Step's surrender.

The evidence connects surrender and recovery to meaning and its benefits. The finding that a state of surrender mediated the relationship between treatment engagement and the presence of meaning in life connects the Third Step's surrender directly to the restoration of meaning (Sease et al., 2024). Research on meaning in life found, across two studies with more than a thousand and more than two thousand participants respectively, that higher meaning in life was consistently associated with lower psychopathology and reduced addictive behaviors, with depression and post-traumatic stress partially mediating the association (Gliksberg et al., 2026), establishing meaning as a genuine protective factor. And a study of recovery capital and psychological flexibility found that recovery capital predicted posttraumatic growth, with psychological flexibility partially mediating the relationship (Pyke et al., 2026), indicating that recovery can bring not merely the absence of addiction but genuine growth. These findings establish that the turning over the Third Step involves opens toward the meaning, purpose, and growth that give recovery its depth, so that the surrender is not an end in itself but a doorway to a life of restored significance.

For the practitioner, understanding the fruits of turning it over guides the conveying of the Third Step's promise. It means recognizing that the turning over the step involves opens toward the restoration of meaning and purpose that gives recovery its depth, relieving the person of the isolating struggle and opening them to connection and significance. It means drawing on the evidence connecting surrender and recovery to meaning, purpose, and growth, so that the fruits of the Third Step's surrender are grounded in outcomes rather than presented as mere promise. It means helping clients toward the meaning and purpose that the turning over opens, supporting the rediscovery of significance that recovery brings. And it means conveying that the Third Step's surrender is not an end in itself but a doorway to a life of restored meaning, purpose, and even growth, which the evidence shows recovery can bring. The counselor who understands the fruits of turning it over conveys the Third Step's promise realistically, helping clients see that the surrender the step asks opens toward the meaning, purpose, and growth that give recovery its depth, grounded in the evidence that recovery brings these genuine fruits.

The Self-Efficacy Question: Confidence Alongside Surrender

The Third Step's surrender of self-will raises, as the Second Step's did, the question of self-efficacy, the person's confidence in their capacity to sustain recovery, and the counselor should understand how confidence and surrender fit together, because the two can appear to conflict but are in fact complementary. Self-efficacy is among the strongest predictors of recovery outcomes, yet the Third Step asks the person to turn their will over rather than to rely on their own capacity, which can seem to devalue the confidence that recovery requires. Resolving this apparent tension clarifies how the Third Step's surrender and the confidence that supports recovery fit together.

The resolution, as with the Second Step, lies in distinguishing the failed self-efficacy of willpower against the substance from the genuine self-efficacy of working a program of recovery. The evidence confirms self-efficacy as a genuine predictor of recovery: a study of vaping cessation found that people with high baseline self-efficacy sustained abstinence substantially longer than those with low self-efficacy, at a median of 2.19 versus 0.68 days (Tian et al., 2026), establishing self-efficacy as a real factor in recovery outcomes. Yet the self-efficacy that matters is not the confidence in one's willpower to

control the addiction, which the First Step has shown to have failed, but the confidence, built through the program and the surrender, in one's capacity to sustain recovery by relying on the sources of change beyond the isolated will. The Third Step's turning over does not devalue self-efficacy but redirects it, from the failed confidence in willpower against the substance to the genuine confidence in the process of recovery that the turning over engages. Surrender and confidence, understood this way, are complementary: the person surrenders the reliance on willpower that failed and gains, through the program the surrender opens, a genuine confidence in a recovery that works.

For the practitioner, understanding the self-efficacy question guides the support of confidence alongside surrender. It means recognizing that the Third Step's surrender can appear to conflict with the self-efficacy that recovery requires, and being able to resolve the apparent tension. It means distinguishing the failed self-efficacy of willpower against the substance from the genuine self-efficacy of working a program of recovery, and helping clients redirect their confidence from the former to the latter. It means understanding from the evidence that self-efficacy is a genuine predictor of recovery, and supporting its development, not as confidence in willpower against the addiction but as confidence in the process of recovery the turning over engages. And it means holding surrender and confidence as complementary rather than opposed, helping clients surrender the reliance on failed willpower while gaining genuine confidence in a recovery that works. The counselor who understands the self-efficacy question supports confidence alongside surrender, helping clients redirect their confidence from the failed willpower the Third Step asks them to surrender to the genuine self-efficacy in the process of recovery that the turning over engages.

Working with Resistance to the Third Step

The Third Step, with its instruction to turn one's will over to a power greater than oneself, frequently provokes resistance, and the counselor should understand the forms this resistance takes and how to work with it, because the turning over the step asks touches on control, trust, and belief in ways that many clients find difficult. Some clients resist the surrender of control, some the spiritual language, some the vulnerability of trust, and some the apparent conflict with autonomy, and helping clients work through their particular resistance is an important part of supporting the Third Step. Understanding the forms of resistance allows the counselor to address each appropriately.

The forms of resistance to the Third Step correspond to its challenging dimensions. The resistance to surrendering control reflects the difficulty of letting go of the willpower that, however much it has failed, feels like the person's own agency, and it is addressed by conveying that the surrender is of the failed struggle rather than of autonomy, and that turning it over is itself a choice. The resistance to the spiritual language reflects the discomfort many feel with the higher power concept, and it is addressed by the flexibility of that concept, which allows the turning over to be directed to the fellowship or the process of recovery rather than requiring a traditional conception of God. The resistance rooted in damaged trust reflects the difficulty of entrusting oneself to anything, and it is addressed through the gradual, experience-based development of trust rather than its demand. And the resistance rooted in the apparent conflict with autonomy is addressed by the recognition that the turning over is an autonomous choice. Recognizing the particular form of a client's resistance allows the counselor to address it with the appropriate understanding, helping the client move through the specific obstacle toward the turning over the step requires.

For the practitioner, working with resistance to the Third Step is central to supporting it. It means recognizing that the Third Step frequently provokes resistance, touching on control, trust, and belief in ways many clients find difficult, and expecting and accepting this resistance rather than treating it as a failure. It means recognizing the particular form of a client's resistance, whether to surrendering control, to the spiritual language, to the vulnerability of trust, or to the apparent conflict with autonomy, and addressing each with the appropriate understanding. It means working with resistance through understanding and the conveying of the step's actual meaning rather than through pressure, helping the client see that the surrender is not the abandonment of agency, that the higher power is flexible, that trust develops through experience, and that the turning over is an autonomous choice. And it means supporting the client in moving through their particular resistance toward the turning over the step requires, at their own pace. The counselor who works skillfully with resistance to the Third Step helps clients move through the particular obstacles that the turning over provokes, supporting the surrender the step asks through understanding rather than pressure.

The Counselor's Role and Stance with the Third Step

Working with the Third Step's surrender and turning over places the counselor in a particular position that the professional should understand, because the step engages control, trust, and belief in ways that require a stance of respectful support rather than either imposition or detachment. The Third Step asks the client to make a consequential and personal decision, to turn their will over to a power they themselves understand, and the counselor's role is to support that decision and the surrender it involves without imposing it, respecting the client's autonomy and beliefs while helping them make the turning over the step describes. Getting this stance right is central to supporting the Third Step well.

The appropriate stance draws on several principles. It means supporting the client's own decision to turn it over rather than imposing the surrender, recognizing that the turning over is a personal and autonomous choice the client must make for themselves. It means respecting the client's beliefs and autonomy, helping them turn over to a power they themselves understand and choose in the tradition's flexible sense, rather than imposing a particular conception. It means conveying the meaning of the Third Step's surrender accurately, as the release of the failed struggle to control the addiction and the opening to a source of change beyond the isolated will, rather than as the abandonment of agency it can appear. And it means holding a stance of respectful support grounded in the evidence that the surrender the step asks is associated with genuine benefit, offering the client realistic confidence that the turning over leads somewhere worth going. This stance allows the counselor to support the Third Step's surrender authentically, serving the client's own turning over rather than imposing the counselor's agenda.

For the practitioner, occupying this stance well is central to working with the Third Step. It means supporting the client's own decision to turn it over rather than imposing the surrender, respecting the personal and autonomous nature of the choice. It means respecting the client's beliefs and autonomy, helping them turn over to a power they themselves understand and choose. It means conveying the meaning of the step's surrender accurately, countering the misunderstanding of it as the abandonment of agency. And it means holding respectful support grounded in the evidence that the surrender is associated with genuine benefit. The counselor who occupies this stance well supports the Third Step's surrender in a way that respects the client's autonomy and beliefs while helping them make the consequential turning over the step describes, serving the client's own decision rather than imposing the

counselor's convictions.

Common Misconceptions and the Wisdom of the Third Step

The Third Step, with its language of turning the will over to a higher power, is surrounded by misconceptions that can deter clients and mislead counselors, and the professional who understands and can correct them serves clients better. The misconceptions cluster around the surrender the step involves and the nature of the turning over, and correcting them clears away the obstacles that keep clients from the step. Understanding the wisdom of the Third Step requires distinguishing what it actually asks from the misconceptions that surround it.

Several misconceptions deserve correction. The misconception that turning one's will over means abandoning responsibility and agency is corrected by the understanding that the surrender is of the failed struggle to control the addiction, not of the person's fundamental agency, and that the turning over is itself an autonomous choice. The misconception that the Third Step requires a particular religious belief is corrected by the flexibility of the higher power concept, which allows the turning over to be directed to the fellowship or the process of recovery. The misconception that surrender is weakness or passivity is corrected by the evidence that genuine surrender is associated with reduced relapse and increased meaning, and by the recognition that turning it over is a realistic and active response to the genuine failure of self-will. And the misconception that surrender conflicts with the confidence and self-efficacy recovery requires is corrected by the understanding that the turning over redirects confidence from failed willpower to the genuine process of recovery. Correcting these misconceptions allows clients to approach the Third Step free of the distortions that might otherwise deter them.

For the practitioner, understanding and correcting the misconceptions is part of conveying the Third Step's wisdom. It means holding an accurate understanding of what the Third Step actually asks, distinguishing it from the misconceptions that surround its language of surrender. It means being able to correct the specific misconceptions that deter clients, that turning it over means abandoning responsibility, that the step requires a particular religious belief, that surrender is weakness, or that surrender conflicts with confidence, with the evidence and understanding that refute each. It means presenting the Third Step accurately, as a decision to release the failed struggle to control the addiction and to rely on a chosen source of change beyond the isolated will, associated with genuine benefit. And it means conveying the wisdom of the Third Step, the recognition that turning over the will to control the addiction is what allows the person to reclaim a life beyond it, as an accurate and evidence-grounded understanding. The counselor who understands and corrects the misconceptions conveys the Third Step's genuine wisdom, helping clients approach the turning over free of the distortions that surround its language and open to the surrender that the tradition and the evidence alike show to be effective.

Prayer, Meditation, and the Practices of Turning It Over

The Third Step's decision to turn one's will over is enacted and sustained through concrete practices, above all prayer and meditation, and the counselor should understand these practices and their evidence because they are the means by which the abstract decision becomes a lived reality. The turning over is not a single act completed once but a movement that must be renewed and lived, and the practices of

prayer and meditation are among the primary ways the person enacts the turning over day by day, cultivating the connection to a power greater than themselves and the letting go the step involves. Understanding these practices helps the counselor support the concrete enactment of the Third Step's decision.

The evidence on prayer and meditation in recovery supports their role as means of turning it over. A systematic review of short prayer practices found that these brief, structured practices were associated with reductions in cravings, relapse risk, and anxiety, and that participants frequently described prayer as a centering and stabilizing tool during high-risk moments (Fudale et al., 2025), establishing prayer as a concrete practice with genuine benefit through which the turning over is enacted. Meditation, particularly the mindfulness practices discussed earlier, offers a complementary practice through which the letting go and non-attachment the turning over involves are cultivated, with the umbrella-review evidence establishing genuine benefits for craving and relapse (Ajami Bakhtiarvand and Abedi, 2026). These practices give the Third Step's decision a concrete daily form, the means by which the person enacts the turning over, cultivates the connection to a power greater than themselves, and lives the surrender the step describes, rather than leaving the decision as an abstraction.

For the practitioner, understanding the practices of turning it over guides the support of the Third Step's concrete enactment. It means recognizing that the turning over is enacted and sustained through concrete practices, above all prayer and meditation, and helping clients engage the practices through which the decision becomes lived reality. It means drawing on the evidence that prayer is associated with reductions in cravings, relapse risk, and anxiety, and that meditation carries genuine benefits for craving and relapse, so that the practices are grounded in outcomes. It means helping clients find and engage the practices, whether prayer for the traditionally spiritual client or meditation for clients across the spectrum of belief, through which they can enact the turning over day by day. And it means understanding these practices as the means by which the Third Step's decision becomes a lived movement rather than an abstraction, and supporting their regular practice. The counselor who understands the practices of turning it over helps clients enact the Third Step's decision through the concrete practices of prayer and meditation, giving the turning over the daily form through which it becomes a lived reality with genuine benefit.

The Third Step for the Skeptic and the Secular Client

The Third Step, with its explicit language of turning the will over to the care of God, presents a particular challenge for skeptical and secular clients, and the counselor should understand how to help such clients engage with the step, because its turning over is more accessible in secular terms than the language suggests. The Third Step's reference to God as one understands God is the point at which many secular clients balk most strongly, hearing a demand for religious surrender they cannot make, yet the twelve-step tradition's flexibility and the evidence on how recovery works both establish that the turning over is accessible to the secular client in terms they can accept. Helping skeptical and secular clients find their way into the Third Step is an important part of the counselor's work.

The accessibility of the Third Step to the secular client rests on the same foundations as the Second Step's accessibility, applied to the act of turning over. The tradition's flexibility allows the power greater than oneself to be understood as the fellowship, the collective wisdom and support of the group, or the process of recovery itself, so that the secular client can turn their will over to these concrete sources

beyond the isolated self rather than to a traditional conception of God. For many secular clients, the turning over is, quite concretely, the decision to stop relying on their own failed willpower and to rely instead on the program, the fellowship, and the accumulated wisdom of others who have recovered, which is a turning over grounded in evidence rather than faith. The evidence that reliance on the fellowship and the process of recovery genuinely works, and that the effortful attempt to control one's addiction alone is associated with worse outcomes, gives the secular client sound reason to make the turning over in these concrete terms. The spiritual language, in this light, points to a movement, the release of self-will and the reliance on a source beyond it, that the secular client can make in their own terms.

For the practitioner, helping skeptical and secular clients engage with the Third Step means conveying its accessibility in secular terms. It means understanding that the Third Step's language of turning the will over to God presents a particular challenge for secular clients, and helping them see that the turning over is accessible in terms they can accept. It means conveying the flexibility of the power greater than oneself, helping the secular client turn their will over to the fellowship, the collective wisdom of the group, or the process of recovery rather than to a traditional conception of God. It means framing the turning over, for the secular client, as the concrete and evidence-grounded decision to stop relying on failed willpower and to rely instead on the program and the fellowship that genuinely work. And it means presenting the spiritual language as pointing to a movement the secular client can make in their own terms, the release of self-will and reliance on a source beyond it. The counselor who helps skeptical and secular clients engage with the Third Step conveys its genuine accessibility, helping the client who balks at its language of God find the turning over, in concrete and evidence-grounded terms, that makes the step possible for them.

Renewing the Decision: The Third Step and Relapse

The Third Step's decision to turn it over is not made once and finished but must be renewed over time, and the counselor should understand how the decision relates to relapse, because relapse can shake the turning over and its renewal is part of the return to recovery. A person who has made the decision to turn their will over, and who then relapses, may find the decision undermined, their reliance on a power greater than themselves called into question, and the renewal of the Third Step's turning over is part of the return to recovery after a setback. Understanding how the decision relates to relapse helps the counselor support clients through the shaking of the turning over that relapse can produce.

The relationship between the decision and relapse reflects the nature of the turning over as an ongoing movement. A relapse can represent, in part, a reassertion of self-will, a return to the attempt to control one's use or one's life through the willpower the Third Step asked the person to surrender, and the renewal of the turning over after relapse is the re-surrender of that self-will and the renewed reliance on a source of change beyond it. The evidence that genuine, internalized surrender predicts reduced relapse over time (Seesink et al., 2026) suggests that the depth and genuineness of the turning over matter for its protective effect, and that a turning over shaken by relapse can be renewed and deepened. The understanding of relapse as a common part of the recovery process, rather than a definitive failure, supports this renewal, since the person who understands that relapse is common and that recovery often follows a path including setbacks can renew their decision to turn it over rather than concluding that the turning over has failed. The counselor's role is to support this renewal, helping the client who has relapsed renew the turning over rather than abandoning it.

For the practitioner, understanding the renewal of the decision guides the support of clients through relapse. It means recognizing that the Third Step's decision must be renewed over time and can be shaken by relapse, and attending to the undermining of the turning over that relapse can produce. It means understanding relapse as, in part, a reassertion of the self-will the step asked the person to surrender, and the renewal of the turning over as the re-surrender of that self-will and the renewed reliance on a source beyond it. It means supporting the renewal of the decision after relapse, drawing on the understanding that relapse is a common part of the recovery process and that a shaken turning over can be renewed and deepened. And it means helping the client who has relapsed renew their decision to turn it over rather than concluding that the turning over has failed. The counselor who understands the renewal of the decision supports clients through the shaking of the turning over that relapse produces, helping them renew the Third Step's decision and return to the reliance on a source beyond themselves that the setback had interrupted.

The Serenity and Peace of Turning It Over

The Third Step's turning over is closely associated with the serenity and peace that the twelve-step tradition famously seeks, and the counselor should understand this connection because the peace that the turning over can bring is both a fruit of the step and a support for recovery. The serenity that comes from accepting what cannot be changed, at the heart of the tradition's best-known prayer, is precisely the peace that the Third Step's turning over can bring, the relief of releasing the exhausting struggle to control what cannot be controlled and entrusting oneself to a source of change beyond the isolated will. Understanding this connection helps the counselor convey the peace that the Third Step's surrender offers.

The connection between the turning over and serenity is both experiential and, in its mechanisms, evidence-related. The turning over relieves the person of the isolating and exhausting effort to control their addiction and their life through willpower alone, and this release is itself a source of peace, replacing the anxiety and strain of the futile struggle with the serenity of entrusting oneself to a source of change beyond the self. The evidence on acceptance and experiential avoidance bears on this, since the effortful attempt to control and suppress one's internal experience, which the turning over asks the person to release, is associated with greater distress and worse outcomes, while the acceptance the turning over fosters is associated with better ones (Sequeda et al., 2026). The serenity the Third Step's turning over can bring is thus not merely a pleasant feeling but the natural consequence of releasing a struggle that generated distress, and it supports recovery by countering the negative emotional states that drive relapse. For the person who has exhausted themselves in the futile effort to control their addiction, the peace of turning it over can be a profound relief and a genuine support for sustained recovery.

For the practitioner, understanding the serenity of turning it over guides the conveying of the peace the Third Step offers. It means recognizing that the turning over is closely associated with the serenity the tradition seeks, and that the peace it brings is both a fruit of the step and a support for recovery. It means understanding that the turning over relieves the person of the exhausting struggle to control their addiction alone, and that this release is itself a source of peace that counters the distress the struggle generated. It means drawing on the evidence that the effortful control the turning over releases is associated with distress and worse outcomes while the acceptance it fosters is associated with better ones, grounding the serenity in mechanisms. And it means conveying to clients the peace that the Third Step's turning over can bring, the relief of releasing the futile struggle and entrusting oneself to a source

of change beyond the self. The counselor who understands the serenity of turning it over helps clients find, through the Third Step's surrender, the peace that comes from releasing the exhausting struggle to control the addiction alone, a peace that is both a fruit of the step and a genuine support for sustained recovery.

The Third Step After Trauma

Many clients who approach the Third Step carry histories of trauma, and the counselor should understand how trauma bears on the turning over, because trauma can both complicate the surrender the step asks and be part of what the turning over helps heal. Trauma, particularly the interpersonal trauma so common among people with substance use disorders, can profoundly affect a person's capacity for the trust and surrender the Third Step involves, since trauma often shatters the sense that the world is safe and that others or a higher power can be trusted, making the turning over especially difficult. At the same time, the connection, meaning, and reliance the turning over fosters can be part of the healing of trauma, so that the Third Step bears on trauma in complex ways the counselor should understand.

The relationship between trauma and the turning over runs in both directions. Trauma can complicate the turning over, since the person whose trust has been shattered may find it difficult to entrust their will to anything, and the surrender the step asks may evoke the very powerlessness and loss of control that trauma involved, so that a client's difficulty with the Third Step may reflect trauma rather than mere resistance. The spiritual dimension in particular can be complicated for trauma survivors, especially those whose trauma involved figures or settings associated with the higher power concept. At the same time, the turning over, when it can be made, offers relief from the isolating burden of trying to control everything alone, a burden that trauma often intensifies, and the connection and reliance it fosters can be part of the healing of the trauma. The evidence that meaning in life is protective and that depression and post-traumatic stress mediate its relationship to addiction (Gliksberg et al., 2026) reflects the intertwining of trauma, meaning, and recovery that the turning over engages. The counselor who understands both directions can help trauma survivors navigate the Third Step with sensitivity.

For the practitioner, understanding trauma's bearing on the turning over guides work with the many clients who carry trauma histories. It means recognizing that trauma can complicate the turning over, affecting the capacity for the trust and surrender the step involves, and understanding a client's difficulty with the step as potentially reflecting trauma rather than mere resistance. It means being sensitive to the ways the surrender can evoke the powerlessness of trauma and the spiritual dimension can be complicated for trauma survivors, and helping such clients find an understanding of the turning over that does not evoke their harm. It means recognizing that the turning over, when it can be made, offers relief from the isolating burden that trauma intensifies, and that the connection and reliance it fosters can be part of healing. And it means holding both directions together, attending to the ways trauma complicates the turning over while supporting the healing the surrender can provide. The counselor who understands trauma's bearing on the Third Step helps trauma survivors navigate the turning over with sensitivity to how their trauma both complicates and can be healed through the surrender the step involves.

The Sponsor and the Support of the Turning Over

The Third Step's turning over is powerfully supported by the sponsor relationship, and the counselor should understand the sponsor's role because the sponsor embodies and guides the turning over in a way that makes it more accessible to the newcomer. The sponsor, having made the turning over themselves and having lived the recovery it opened, provides the newcomer with a living example that the surrender the Third Step asks is possible and leads somewhere, and guides them through the step with the individualized attention and accumulated experience that the fellowship's shared wisdom provides. Understanding the sponsor's role helps the counselor appreciate how the Third Step's turning over is supported and made accessible.

The sponsor supports the turning over in several ways. The sponsor embodies the turning over, demonstrating through their own recovery that the surrender the step asks is possible and beneficial, which makes the turning over believable to the newcomer in a way that abstract instruction cannot. The sponsor guides the newcomer through the step, helping them understand and enact the turning over, addressing their reservations and resistance, and supporting them in the concrete practices through which the decision is lived. And the sponsor provides a relationship of trust that both models and supports the trust the turning over requires, since the newcomer's growing trust in the sponsor is part of the developing capacity to trust that the turning over involves. In turning to the sponsor for guidance, the newcomer enacts, in a concrete and relational form, the turning over the step describes, relying on the wisdom and support of another who has walked the path rather than on their own isolated will. The counselor who understands the sponsor's role can encourage clients toward the sponsorship that supports the Third Step's turning over.

For the practitioner, understanding the sponsor's role guides the encouragement of sponsorship as a support for the Third Step. It means recognizing the sponsor as an embodiment of the turning over, whose own recovery demonstrates that the surrender the step asks is possible and beneficial, making it believable to the newcomer. It means understanding that the sponsor guides the newcomer through the step, supporting their understanding and enactment of the turning over and the concrete practices through which it is lived. It means recognizing that the sponsor relationship models and supports the trust the turning over requires, and that turning to the sponsor for guidance is itself a concrete enactment of the turning over. And it means encouraging clients toward the sponsorship that supports the Third Step, connecting them to a relationship that embodies, guides, and supports the turning over. The counselor who understands the sponsor's role encourages clients toward the sponsorship that supports the Third Step's turning over, connecting them to the embodied example, individualized guidance, and relationship of trust through which the surrender the step asks is most effectively supported and made accessible.

Sustaining the Turning Over Over Time

The Third Step's decision to turn it over, like the belief of the Second Step, must be sustained over the long course of recovery, and the counselor should understand how the turning over is maintained over time, because recovery is a long process and the decision must be renewed and lived rather than made once and possessed. The turning over is not a single completed act but the beginning of an ongoing reliance on a source of change beyond the isolated will, a reliance that must be renewed and

lived through the challenges, setbacks, and length of the recovery journey. Understanding how the turning over is sustained helps the counselor support clients not only in the initial decision but in its maintenance over the long arc of recovery.

Sustaining the turning over over time draws on the practices and supports that enact and renew it. The daily practices of prayer, meditation, and engagement with the fellowship, through which the turning over is enacted, maintain the reliance on a source beyond the self over time, keeping the decision a lived reality rather than a fading memory. The ongoing connection to the fellowship and the sponsor sustains the turning over by continuing to embody and support it. And the accumulating experience of the turning over's benefits, the recovery it opens and sustains, deepens the person's trust in the reliance and their willingness to continue it. The evidence that genuine, internalized surrender predicts reduced relapse over the year following treatment (Seesink et al., 2026) reflects the value of a turning over that is deep and sustained rather than momentary. The counselor who understands these means of sustaining the turning over can help clients maintain the decision over the long course of recovery, attending not only to the initial turning over but to its renewal and living over time.

For the practitioner, understanding the sustaining of the turning over guides the support of clients over the long arc of recovery. It means recognizing that the Third Step's decision must be sustained over time rather than made once and possessed, and attending to its maintenance through the long course of recovery. It means understanding that the turning over is sustained through the daily practices that enact it, the ongoing connection to the fellowship and sponsor that support it, and the accumulating experience of its benefits that deepens it. It means supporting clients not only in the initial decision but in the renewal and living of the turning over over the challenges, setbacks, and length of recovery. And it means recognizing that a deep and sustained turning over is more protective than a momentary one, and helping clients deepen and sustain their reliance over time. The counselor who understands the sustaining of the turning over helps clients maintain the Third Step's decision over the long course of recovery, supporting the ongoing renewal and living of the turning over through which the reliance on a source beyond the self is sustained.

Making the Decision Concrete

The Third Step's turning over, while a decision of profound significance, must be made concrete to be effective, and the counselor should understand how to help clients translate the abstract decision into concrete action, because a turning over that remains purely internal accomplishes little. The decision to turn one's will over gains its power through the concrete changes it produces, the engagement with the fellowship, the working of the steps, the practices of prayer and meditation, the reliance on the sponsor, and the daily choices that enact the reliance on a source beyond the self. Understanding how to make the decision concrete helps the counselor support the translation of the Third Step's turning over into the action that gives it effect.

Making the turning over concrete means enacting it through specific behaviors and choices. The abstract decision to rely on a power greater than oneself becomes concrete as the person attends meetings, works with a sponsor, engages in prayer or meditation, participates in the fellowship, and, in daily life, chooses reliance on these sources of support over the isolated reliance on their own willpower. Each of these concrete enactments gives the turning over effect, translating the decision into the changed behavior through which recovery actually occurs. The evidence throughout, that engagement and

involvement in the program drive the benefits of recovery more than disposition or belief alone, reflects the importance of the concrete enactment of the turning over rather than its remaining an internal decision. The counselor who helps clients make the turning over concrete supports the translation of the Third Step's decision into the specific actions and choices through which it takes effect, ensuring that the decision produces the changed life it aims at rather than remaining an abstraction.

For the practitioner, understanding how to make the decision concrete guides the support of the Third Step's enactment. It means recognizing that the turning over must be made concrete to be effective, and that a decision remaining purely internal accomplishes little. It means helping clients translate the abstract decision into concrete action, the engagement with the fellowship, the working of the steps, the practices, the reliance on the sponsor, and the daily choices that enact the reliance on a source beyond the self. It means understanding from the evidence that engagement and involvement drive the benefits of recovery, and supporting the concrete enactment of the turning over rather than its remaining an internal decision. And it means helping clients see that the turning over gains its power through the concrete changes it produces, and supporting them in making those changes. The counselor who helps clients make the decision concrete supports the translation of the Third Step's turning over into the specific actions and choices through which it takes effect, ensuring that the decision to turn it over produces the changed life it aims at.

The Third Step and Co-Occurring Disorders

Many clients who approach the Third Step carry co-occurring mental health conditions, and the counselor should understand how these conditions bear on the turning over and how to support clients with both. Depression, anxiety, and other conditions can complicate the surrender and trust the Third Step involves, and they interact with the substance use in ways that shape the client's capacity to make and sustain the turning over. Understanding how co-occurring conditions bear on the Third Step guides work with the many clients who carry them.

The relationship between co-occurring disorders and the turning over requires attention. Depression, with its hopelessness and its tendency to undermine the belief that anything can help, can make the turning over difficult, since the depressed client may doubt that reliance on any source of change will make a difference; anxiety, with its need for control, can make the surrender of self-will especially threatening. These are not merely resistances to be reasoned with but features of treatable conditions, and the counselor must recognize when a client's difficulty with the Third Step reflects a co-occurring condition requiring treatment. At the same time, the meaning, connection, and reliance the turning over fosters can support recovery from co-occurring conditions as well as from addiction, and the evidence that meaning in life is protective and that depression and post-traumatic stress mediate its relationship to addictive behavior (Gliksberg et al., 2026) reflects the intertwining of the mental health conditions, meaning, and recovery that the turning over engages. The counselor's role is to ensure that co-occurring conditions receive appropriate treatment while supporting the client's engagement with the Third Step, recognizing the two as complementary parts of the client's recovery.

For the practitioner, understanding co-occurring disorders guides work with the many clients who carry them. It means recognizing that co-occurring conditions such as depression and anxiety can complicate the surrender and trust the Third Step involves, and that a client's difficulty with the step may reflect a treatable condition rather than mere resistance. It means ensuring that co-occurring conditions

receive appropriate treatment, including medication where needed, rather than treating the difficulty with the turning over as merely a matter of willingness. It means recognizing that the meaning, connection, and reliance the turning over fosters can support recovery from co-occurring conditions as well as from addiction, so that the turning over can be part of the healing of the whole. And it means holding the treatment of the co-occurring condition and the support of the Third Step as complementary parts of the client's recovery. The counselor who understands co-occurring disorders supports clients with both conditions, ensuring their mental health receives appropriate treatment while recognizing how it bears on the Third Step's turning over and how the step can support their whole recovery.

Cultural and Community Dimensions of Surrender

The Third Step's surrender and turning over are shaped by culture and community, and the counselor should understand these dimensions because clients' relationships to surrender, higher power, and reliance are profoundly shaped by their cultural and community contexts. The meaning of turning one's will over, the understanding of a power greater than oneself, and the very experience of surrender vary across cultures and communities, and the counselor working with diverse clients must attend to how each client's cultural and community context shapes their relationship to the Third Step. Understanding these dimensions helps the counselor support the turning over in a way attuned to the client's cultural and community world.

The evidence reflects significant cultural and community dimensions of the spiritual surrender the Third Step involves. The large meta-analysis of spirituality and substance use found that the protective association was stronger for those engaged in spiritual or religious communities, at an 18 percent risk reduction, than for spirituality generally (Koh et al., 2026), pointing to the community dimension of the spiritual engagement the turning over involves. The qualitative study of Black Americans who misused opioids found that their religious and spiritual views, shaped by their cultural and community context, shaped their beliefs about control and recovery (Jester et al., 2025), and the cohort study of methamphetamine users in a twelve-step program in Japan found spirituality associated with abstinence in a cultural context far from the tradition's origins (Ofuchi et al., 2025), reflecting both the cross-cultural reach of the spiritual dimension and its cultural shaping. These findings establish that the surrender and turning over the Third Step involves are shaped by culture and community, and that supporting the step requires attention to each client's cultural and community context, including the community engagement that strengthens the spiritual dimension's benefit.

For the practitioner, understanding the cultural and community dimensions of surrender guides work with diverse clients. It means recognizing that the meaning of turning one's will over, the understanding of a higher power, and the experience of surrender vary across cultures and communities, and attending to how each client's cultural and community context shapes their relationship to the Third Step. It means drawing on the evidence that community engagement strengthens the benefit of the spiritual dimension, and supporting the client's connection to the spiritual or recovery community that can strengthen their turning over. It means being sensitive to the cultural shaping of the client's relationship to surrender and higher power, and supporting the turning over in terms attuned to their cultural world. And it means recognizing both the cross-cultural reach of the surrender the Third Step involves and its cultural shaping, meeting each client in their own cultural and community context. The counselor who understands the cultural and community dimensions of surrender supports the Third Step's turning over in a way attuned to each client's cultural and community world, drawing on the community engagement

that strengthens the spiritual dimension while respecting the diverse ways surrender and higher power are understood.

Assessing Readiness for the Third Step

The Third Step's decision to turn it over is best made when the person is ready, and the counselor should understand how to assess and support readiness for the step, because a turning over pressed prematurely may be shallow or resisted while one supported at the right time can be genuine and deep. The Third Step rests on the foundation of the first two, the admission of powerlessness and the coming to believe, and a person who has not genuinely made those first movements may not be ready to make the decision to turn it over. Understanding how to assess readiness helps the counselor support the Third Step's decision at the point where it can be genuine.

Assessing readiness for the Third Step means attending to the client's progress through the foundation the step rests on and to the factors that shape their capacity to make the turning over. It means recognizing whether the client has genuinely admitted their powerlessness and come to believe that a power greater than themselves could help, since the decision to turn it over rests on these foundations. It means attending to the client's readiness and willingness more broadly, which the evidence shows develop over time, so that a client not yet ready can become ready through the recovery process. The research on treatment goal change, showing that decisions about recovery develop and often deepen over time (Schwebel et al., 2022), reflects the developmental nature of the readiness the Third Step's decision requires. And it means recognizing the obstacles to readiness, whether unresolved resistance, damaged trust, co-occurring conditions, or a foundation not yet genuinely laid, and supporting the client in addressing them so that the turning over, when made, can be genuine and deep rather than shallow or coerced.

For the practitioner, assessing readiness for the Third Step guides the support of the decision at the right time. It means attending to the client's progress through the foundation the step rests on, the admission of powerlessness and the coming to believe, and recognizing whether the client is ready to make the decision to turn it over. It means understanding that readiness develops over time, so that a client not yet ready can become ready through the recovery process, and supporting that development rather than pressing the turning over prematurely. It means recognizing the obstacles to readiness and supporting the client in addressing them, so that the turning over, when made, can be genuine and deep. And it means supporting the Third Step's decision at the point where it can be genuine rather than shallow or coerced, meeting the client where they are in their readiness. The counselor who assesses readiness for the Third Step supports the decision to turn it over at the point where it can be genuine, attending to the foundation the step rests on and the development of the readiness it requires, so that the turning over is deep and freely made rather than premature or pressed.

The Third Step Within the Whole Program

The Third Step, while distinct in its emphasis on the decision to turn it over, is part of the integrated twelve-step program, and the counselor should understand its place within the whole because the turning over the step makes is enacted and sustained through the entire program of recovery rather than the third step alone. The twelve steps form an integrated sequence, each building on the others, and the Third Step's decision both rests on the admission and belief of the first two steps and opens toward the moral inventory, amends, and ongoing practice of the steps that follow, through which the turning over is lived out. Understanding the Third Step's place within the whole helps the counselor support it as part of the integrated program rather than in isolation.

The Third Step's integration into the whole program shapes how it is best supported. The decision to turn it over is not a standalone act but the pivot of the program's movement, resting on the foundation of the first two steps and opening toward the action of the later steps, so that supporting the Third Step means supporting the client's movement through the program rather than fixating on the third step alone. The turning over the step makes is enacted and sustained through the ongoing engagement with the whole program, the meetings, the step work, the fellowship, the practices, and the sponsor, so that the reliance on a source beyond the self that the step decides upon is lived out through the program as a whole. And the mechanisms the evidence identifies, the connection, meaning, surrender, and involvement, operate through the whole program rather than the third step alone, so that the client's benefit from the turning over depends on their engagement with the integrated program. The counselor who understands the Third Step's place within the whole supports it as part of the integrated program of recovery, helping the client engage with the whole program through which the turning over is enacted and sustained.

For the practitioner, understanding the Third Step's place within the whole program guides its support as part of the integrated program. It means recognizing that the Third Step is part of the whole twelve-step program, resting on the foundation of the first two steps and opening toward the action of the later steps, and supporting the client's movement through the program rather than fixating on the third step alone. It means understanding that the turning over the step makes is enacted and sustained through the ongoing engagement with the whole program, and supporting the client's engagement with the program as a whole. It means recognizing that the mechanisms that foster recovery operate through the whole program, so that the client's benefit from the turning over depends on their engagement with the integrated program. And it means supporting the Third Step as the pivot of the program's movement, the decision that carries the recognition and belief of the first two steps into the action of the later ones. The counselor who understands the Third Step's place within the whole supports it not in isolation but as part of the integrated program of recovery, recognizing that the turning over the step decides upon is enacted and sustained through the client's engagement with the whole program of which the Third Step is the pivotal turning point.

The Convergence of Tradition and Evidence

A notable feature of the Third Step, like the twelve-step tradition generally, is how well its enduring wisdom about surrender and the turning over of self-will has been borne out by contemporary evidence, and the counselor should appreciate this convergence because it lends both credibility and depth to the teaching of the step. The Third Step's insight, that recovery requires turning the will over to a power greater than oneself rather than relying on self-will alone, was developed through the lived experience of people recovering from addiction long before the modern research apparatus, yet the evidence has substantially validated it, confirming that genuine surrender is associated with reduced relapse, that spirituality and reliance on a higher power are associated with reduced harmful substance use across large populations, and that the acceptance and letting go the step involves are genuine mechanisms of recovery.

This convergence deepens the teaching of the Third Step. It establishes that the step's central insight, that turning over the will to control the addiction is more effective than the exercise of self-will that has failed, is borne out by the research on how recovery actually unfolds, in which surrender, acceptance, spirituality, and reliance on sources beyond the isolated self all figure as genuine mechanisms. It confirms that the paradox at the step's heart, that surrendering the will to control the addiction is what allows the person to reclaim a life beyond it, is supported by the evidence that the effortful control the person is asked to release is associated with worse outcomes while the surrender is associated with better ones. And it demonstrates that a tradition can accumulate genuine wisdom through lived experience that later research validates, which should give the counselor confidence in the Third Step's enduring insights even as they are enriched by the contemporary evidence.

For the practitioner, appreciating the convergence of tradition and evidence enriches the teaching of the Third Step. It means recognizing that the step's enduring wisdom about surrender and the turning over of self-will has been substantially validated by contemporary evidence, which lends both credibility and depth to the teaching. It means understanding the step's central insight as both traditional wisdom and evidence-supported finding, and conveying it to clients with the confidence that both the tradition's experience and the research support it. It means drawing on both the wisdom and the evidence in teaching the Third Step, enriching the traditional insights with the contemporary understanding of the mechanisms and outcomes that confirm them. And it means holding the tradition and the research as mutually reinforcing rather than in tension. The counselor who appreciates the convergence of tradition and evidence teaches the Third Step's turning over with both the depth of the tradition and the credibility of the research, offering clients an understanding of surrender that is at once time-tested and evidence-based.

The Counselor's Own Understanding of Surrender

The counselor's capacity to support the Third Step depends significantly on the counselor's own understanding of and comfort with surrender, and the professional should examine their own relationship to the step's central movement, because a counselor who misunderstands or is uncomfortable with surrender will struggle to support it well. Surrender is a concept easily misunderstood, and a counselor who hears in it only passivity, or who is uncomfortable with its spiritual associations, or who holds a professional stance that overvalues control and self-direction, may

inadvertently convey those distortions to clients or fail to support the turning over the step asks. Examining one's own understanding of surrender is thus part of supporting the Third Step well.

The counselor's understanding of surrender benefits from the grounding this material provides. The recognition that surrender is not passivity but the active release of a failing struggle, that it is an autonomous choice rather than an abandonment of agency, and that it is associated in the evidence with reduced relapse and increased meaning, corrects the common misunderstandings that might otherwise distort the counselor's support of the step. A counselor who has genuinely grasped that the surrender the Third Step asks is a realistic and effective response to the genuine failure of self-will, rather than a defeat or a passivity, can convey that understanding to clients and support the turning over authentically. And a counselor who has examined their own comfort with the spiritual associations of the step, and who has found a way to support the turning over across the range of clients' beliefs without either imposing or dismissing the spiritual dimension, can meet each client where they are. The counselor's own clear and comfortable understanding of surrender is thus part of the capacity to support the Third Step.

For the practitioner, examining one's own understanding of surrender is part of supporting the Third Step well. It means recognizing that the capacity to support the step depends on the counselor's own understanding of and comfort with surrender, and examining that understanding honestly. It means correcting in oneself the common misunderstandings of surrender as passivity or the abandonment of agency, grounding one's understanding in the recognition that surrender is an active and autonomous release of a failing struggle, associated with genuine benefit. It means examining one's own comfort with the spiritual associations of the step, and finding a way to support the turning over across the range of clients' beliefs without imposing or dismissing the spiritual dimension. And it means bringing to the support of the Third Step a clear and comfortable understanding of surrender that can convey the step's genuine meaning to clients. The counselor who examines their own understanding of surrender supports the Third Step from a grounded and comfortable grasp of its central movement, able to convey the turning over authentically and to meet each client where they are in their own relationship to surrender.

Integration: The Third Step as the Turning Point

The unifying lesson of the evidence assembled here is that the Third Step, the decision to turn one's will and one's life over to the care of a power greater than oneself, is the turning point at which the recognition and belief of the first two steps become the commitment and surrender that recovery requires, and that the surrender, trust, and letting go the step involves are genuine mechanisms of recovery that the research increasingly confirms. The Third Step transforms the coming to believe of the Second Step into the decision to act on that belief, and the surrender it asks, far from being a passive abandonment, is the active release of the failed struggle to control the addiction and the opening to a source of change beyond the isolated will.

The wisdom of the Third Step is deepened by the evidence. The step's central insight, that recovery requires turning over the will to control the addiction to a power greater than oneself, is borne out by the research showing that genuine surrender is associated with reduced relapse and increased meaning, that spirituality and reliance on a higher power are associated with substantial reductions in harmful substance use across large populations, and that the acceptance and letting go the step involves are genuine mechanisms supported by the growing evidence for acceptance-based therapies. The paradox at

the step's heart, that surrendering the will to control the addiction is what allows the person to reclaim a life beyond it, is confirmed by the evidence that the effortful control the person is asked to let go of is associated with worse outcomes while the surrender and acceptance are associated with better ones. The counselor who teaches the Third Step well conveys this wisdom, helping clients make the decision to turn it over that opens the way from belief to committed recovery.

Ultimately, the work this course describes is the work of helping people make the consequential decision to turn their will and their lives over to a source of change beyond their own failed willpower, whether understood spiritually or concretely as the fellowship and the process of recovery. The counselor who understands the evidence on surrender, spirituality, letting go, trust, and meaning, and who grasps and conveys the wisdom of the Third Step, brings to that work both the evidence that grounds it and the understanding that makes it effective. The competencies this course builds are the means of helping clients make the turning over that the Third Step embodies, and the counselor who masters them helps clients pass through the turning point that the Third Step marks, from the recognition and belief of the first two steps to the surrender and commitment that carry recovery forward.

Wisdom of the Twelve Steps

3rd Step Workbook

Simple Truth

David Walton Earle, LPC

**Dedicated to all those who suffer
and
are in need of healing.**

David Walton Earle, LPC

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- *What To Do While You Count To 10*
- *Professor of Pain*
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This book has four main parts.

Part I – This story is an illustration of some of the principles and dynamics in this step. When a story surrounds a lesson, learning is better retained and faster. *Simple Truth* provides that structure.

Part II – This section contains basic tenets, lessons, and the discoveries required by all Steps so they are included in all the Wisdom of The Steps workbook series.

Part III- This part focuses entirely on the 3rd Step with discussions, challenges, and provocative self-questions.

Part IV - Appendix

“Everyone thinks of changing the world,
but no one thinks of changing himself.”
Leo Tolstoy

The *Wisdom of the Steps* is a series of generic workbooks written to assist any person with an addiction to drugs, and/or alcohol. This workbook also helps a person suffering from compulsive gambling, sex addiction, love and sex addiction, eating disorders, compulsive shopping, internet or electronic obsession, and anyone who loves someone with any of these debilitating problems. All of these maladaptive behaviors stem from the same dysfunctional coping skills - *an external solution for an internal problem*. This workbook helps people heal.

The *Wisdom of the Steps* invites you to embark on a wonderful journey, your own Odyssey into the recovery waters of change. We promise days of bright sunshine, strong winds, and periods of smooth sailing. However, be forewarned, this is a stormy and demanding ocean; you will need all hands on deck to successfully pilot these waters. Fortunately for you, there are many who have already navigated these passages and know the way. There are also many eager sailors who will help you adjust your sails, mend your broken spars, and show you the stars for your steering.

You are not alone.

“Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.”
William James

Part I

Simple Truth

A fine rain slowly soaked the ground and fell upon my shoulders; I did not notice, as the moisture had not yet penetrated my clothing. As I walked slowly down the path, I thought to myself, *this must be the most beautiful walk in the world*. On both sides of a wide brick walkway were giant oak trees whose worn trunks were gnarled by many seasons. The trees' branches rose majestically up and away from the trunks, supporting a canopy of dark green leaves. Farther out, the branches curved haphazardly toward the ground as if the weight of the leaves was too much to carry. Many branches already touched the ground, lending to the oaks' majestic appearance. *A sign of old age*, I reflected. As I was beginning to feel the effects of aging on my body, I sympathized with these old oak trees.

A chill still permeated the air, as if winter was not yet willing to accede to the promise of warmth and new growth of the next season. *This is why I attend these silent retreats; it is a time for my new growth. This is how most poets would describe this experience: new growth after the painful coldness of winter*. However, despite the poets, scientists tell us the tree roots still grow in winter, getting ready for the leaves of spring.

I was enjoying a three-day silent retreat at Manresa Retreat House for Men, in Convent, Louisiana. This was a tradition I participated in every year, for it afforded me time to stop, to think, to experience the beautiful surroundings, and to be just myself with nobody's expectations or demands. This time allowed me to be close to my creator.

In silent contemplation, I turned my thoughts to my father, who had died a few months before. A sudden and unexpected sadness rushed in, and I felt a tear trickle down my cheek. We were very close and I was just beginning to allow myself to feel the hole in my soul where he had once been.

My father lived a very long life, beyond what he wanted for his last years, going deep into the agony of old age. His grandfather, as well as his father, experienced the slow decay of aging, and I then vowed to myself not to have that same experience. *What I want is to die just before the regret of others turns into their relief that I'm finally gone*, I chuckled to myself. *I don't want to be a burden to anyone. Just like my father*

and his father before him, I do not want anyone to have to take care of me. Struggling with that reality's weight, what I want may not happen, and during the last part of my life, I like my grandfather and father before me, may become utterly dependent on others. And yet, being dependent on others may be what I needed—I shuddered with the thought, a learning experience.

This made me reflect on my father's last visit, when I took Dad to church. Being hard of hearing, Dad wanted to sit close to the preacher, so we sat on the first row. Just as the preacher was about to begin the day's sermon, Dad suddenly said with fright in his eyes, "I have to go to the bathroom!" Quickly, I helped him up, and as fast as his old, crippled legs would take him, Dad and I shuffled toward the restroom. We did not make it in time!

Now Dad had never experienced incontinence before, so this was an embarrassing shock to him. In the men's room, I helped him clean himself up as best he could, threw away his soiled underwear, and then drove him home for a needed shower. He did not say much on the way home but when we turned into the driveway he turned and said, "Thank you, I'm glad you were there." He was always a private man and I sensed through his eyes how embarrassed he was.

I heard about others having that same experience, and before it happened to me, my reaction would have been, *how gross*. I always thought having to help parents clean themselves up would be an absolute horror and something I had feared. After the clean up, it occurred to me, this was a tremendously connecting experience with my father. It was not a dirty or reviling experience but a tribute to the love we shared. If my father had died before that experience, we would have missed a wonderful moment of bonding, now a cherished memory. *Life is funny like that*, I thought.

I reflected on many Sunday mornings I spent going to the hospital to visit with the sick and dying. As these visits became increasingly routine, I gravitated toward the Skilled Care Unit where most of the patients were old and dying. "Rendering," as one hospital patient called this unit with gallows humor. During those visits, there were many moments when I experienced a soul-to-soul connection with a patient. In those intense connections, my soul seemed to touch the soul of another, and for brief

moments, two souls - suspended in a profound bond. The patients in this ward taught me what people at the end of their lives desperately want: to connect deeply with another. I discovered I wanted this as much as the patients, to share moments of intense intimacy. *I believe this is a win-win*, I concluded.

During this experience, I learned a unique form of prayer I used with the skilled-care patients. A prayer not in the customary manner of the preachers I saw who would bow their heads and close their eyes. *No*, I observed, *closing the eyes and bowing becomes a way of disconnecting, breaking the intimacy of the moment. The dying did not want to be disconnected, but instead, sought connections.*

Those realizations led me to ask the people I visited if they would like to share some thoughts together. When they agreed, I would hold their hand, look them in their eyes, and say words of comfort in the form of a prayer. The words did not matter. What mattered most; someone was there for them, someone who touched them, and listened to what they had to say. Often for a few extraordinary moments, a deep interpersonal connection developed. *A spiritual connection*, I called it, *a moment in time where acceptance trumped any creed or particular religion.* A human soul touched another; this is what seemed important.

One Sunday, the nurse directed me to a man who had just had a paralyzing stroke and could not move his body. Blinking his eyes was the limit of his bodily movement; a terrible state of dependency, a mind locked in a body. Upon establishing a signal system of one blink “yes” and two blinks “no,” I began a series of visits to this patient and talked to him about the day, what the weather was like, and asked if he would like to share a prayer. Unlike all previous patients who I only visited with on Sunday, I felt compelled to return that next Monday, then Tuesday, and by Wednesday I was trying to figure out why this paralyzed man was so special; what was the draw that compelled me to keep returning? I went after work on Thursday only to find this patient’s room empty. “He died, just after you left, yesterday,” the nurse said.

I remembered how devastated I felt when I heard the news, yet also relieved. *A mind locked in a body—what a terrible place to be.* I concluded, *in a similar circumstance, I would be happy to escape that prison.* Yet, there was something

significant about what I had experienced with this person, and it was only after a few months of careful reflection before that lesson became clear.

What I discovered was this patient was a person who could not give me anything, no material possessions, no smiles, no sort of human validation, nothing; yet, this dying man gave me so much. Because of his terrible physical condition, this patient had allowed me to exhibit love... *unconditional love*. The patient had nothing to give in return, so the normal quid-pro-quo form of love could not work since the exchange could only be one-sided; my giving, and his receiving. With this completely disabled patient, I experienced the purest form of love: love with no conditions, no expectations, or demand for return. This patient, in an utterly dependent and non-productive condition, provided me the opportunity to understand a wonderful experience. I am truly grateful for that experience, and since then I have often mentally thanked my silent friend for this remarkable gift.

With these thoughts running through my head, I walked over to a wooden lawn chair conveniently placed close to the oak lined pathway, sat down, and began to ponder unconditional love. If the man in the hospital had a choice, undoubtedly he would not want to suffer living as a zombie after this paralyzing stroke. Most people would prefer instant death.

I suddenly had a startling thought, *what if being paralyzed was this man's last mission? What if he had to have this stroke to teach me this lesson? If the paralyzed man had the choice*, I wondered, *knowing that he would have to suffer this paralyzing, cruel death, would he have willingly submitted to this agony to teach me a lesson, a perfect stranger*. Now that would be unconditional love!

The afternoon was slowly fading into early evening, and the temperature dropped a few degrees as the sun's angle increased. I rummaged through my backpack and took out my grey sweater with a hood. As I put the sweater on I thought to myself, *I think my granddaughter, Courtlyn, calls hooded sweaters, 'hoodies'*. The light rain had ceased some time ago, and although everything was damp, I did not feel the need to seek shelter. I reached again into my companion knapsack and brought out a manuscript. After Dad died, I gathered my father's writings and made four copies, one for each of my

sisters, and one for me. When making these copies, it was my intention to read what my father wrote during some weekend retreat, and this seemed the perfect time to begin.

My father experienced a series of strokes causing progressive damage to his cognitive abilities and, most of all, his ability to express himself. If you tried to read this manuscript, it would seem to be a jumble of different thoughts often repeated and without a translator, very hard to follow. Since Dad kept these writings in several notebooks with many of the pages loose, there was no definite order with discernible continuity or flow. Most readers would have given up trying to make sense of the writing; however, since I had numerous conversations with my father before he died, I had a good understanding of the intent of Dad's writings.

Many of those writings concerned my Dad's near death encounter. Ten years prior, during his heart attack, he had a frightening capital experience. That life-changing event occurred while riding in the back of an ambulance rushing him to the hospital. To add even more drama to the story, it happened in the middle of a hurricane! Before the heart attack, he had been feeling his age and just wanted to die; hearing the sirens he thought, "This was my day." He told the EMS attendant, "Don't do any heroics trying to save me. I just want to die." He always was somewhat controlling, and that was his attempt to control the outcome. Then he passed out and had an out-of-body experience.

I smiled to myself, thinking of my departed father telling anyone who would listen, and many did not, that when he experienced floating outside his body, "I was actually in space with nothing to hold on to. I was not falling, not flying, just being in a vast empty space. It was the most frightening experience I ever had." When talking about this isolation, you could see his wide-eyed fear. With the passion of a religious conversion, he related to everyone about meeting his maker. His zeal was similar to a once starving man who now was trying to feed the hungry. As he related his out-of-body experience to me, "the only thing I could do was to close my eyes, relax, and give up. I knew I had to give up. When I gave up trying to control everything and just trusted, an intense peace came over me. I suddenly felt very connected to God." I smiled to myself, because even in his disordered manuscript, after hearing the story numerous times, I understood what Dad was saying.

By now, I was experiencing physical discomfort from sitting too long in the hard wooden Adirondack chair. This discomfort told me it was time for a change, and my stomach told me, *Walk toward the dining hall; let's eat supper*. Walking up the steps into the dining hall, I met many other men: faces of people I knew, but with the vow of silence, we did not speak nor acknowledge each other.

I stood behind my chair at the dining table, awaiting the evening prayer that would announce permission to sit and begin enjoying the meal. The food was always first rate, and since I had skipped lunch, my appetite was fully engaged. As I waited for the evening prayer, I thought back on my own life about how miserable I was at one time. Back then, I was married to a beautiful woman, had two great kids, had a powerful corporate job making good money, and was an elder in the church. I was doing all the right things, everything that society, friends, and Dad told me I needed to do to be happy. Yet, nothing was working; no part of my life was making any sense. My wife had finally acknowledged the ever-increasing fracture in our marriage that demanded healing. Separation was her only solution, so I left my home. At the same time, both kids were doing drugs, and I had just lost my executive position at work; they fired me! I felt the emotional scar I carried from those triple traumas and smiled with relief when I compared it to the peace I now felt.

My memory went back to when I checked my son into drug rehab; it was then that my life began to change. There, my son and I both entered into a new world, learning a different way of coping with life. I remember the suddenness when life began making sense, and the joy I had almost forgotten was now returning. I changed my thinking about the world, about how I related to others, but mostly beginning to value my most treasured gift – me. I smiled thinking, *I am now able to live in the moment and be okay*. That was a time of tremendous discovery and excitement; although change is often very painful, it brought a sense of direction and purpose, and I knew my joy came from the changes I had made. My thoughts concluded, *until you start to choose, you don't have a choice*.

The announcement of the prayer interrupted my thoughts, and then scores of male voices repeated a written prayer of thanks. At the prayer's conclusion, the only noise heard was the shuffling of many wood chairs, clanking of silverware against

porcelain bowls, the shuffling feet of the servers, and the ticking of the giant clock slowly announcing the movement of time. I eagerly filled my plate with steaming rice, then a couple of large spoonfuls of Louisiana gumbo. I bent my head close to my plate; it smelled wonderful and from experience, I knew the smell was only a tease when compared to the taste. For this, I smiled and gave extra thanks.

Between mouthfuls of the steaming gumbo, my thoughts returned to the after-care family program associated with my son's in-patient program. Long after the rehab hospital released my son and my family quit attending, I continued to attend every Saturday morning eager for more insights. I also attended a self-help program called Al-Anon, a Twelve-Step Program similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Instead of alcoholics, Al-Anon is for anyone with a friend or relative with a drug or alcohol problem. *When you think about it, I bemused, who in the world doesn't have a friend or relative with a drug or alcohol problem?*

When they released my son from the hospital, we found new tools of recovery, could now talk to one another, and developed a deep mutual respect. Before recovery, the insanity of my son's drug addiction magnified his hormone-driven adolescent tension, compounding my own fear-driven controlling nature. All that had now changed. Now my son asks me for advice, a relationship I treasure, which is in sharp contrast to the contempt he had for me before treatment. I also knew that the rage I felt toward him for all the lying, cheating, stealing, and abuse was now a distant memory replaced by the wonder of acceptance and healing.

During that same time, Dad was still alive but did not understand what recovery or Al-Anon was about. He did not comprehend the concept of tough love, enabling, or boundaries. "How can you let someone you love do drugs? You need to watch him like hawk," was some of my father's best advice. Letting someone you love experience the consequences of their actions did not fit with my father's definition of love. Dad often associated an element of control with his great love.

During that difficult time of recovery, my father's and my close relationship began to crumble. I had changed and thought differently. Dad misunderstood the changes I made and was angry I was not living his way. One day I told him of a

psychology course I was taking, and in a fit of rage he exclaimed, “I don’t believe in psychology,” and walked out of the room. As I recall, my own arrogance did not help our relationship. Since I was in recovery, I thought I had all the answers, and others, especially my dad, were not so enlightened. The gulf between my Dad and I increased, compounded by his lack of understanding and my arrogance.

As my tablemates passed bread pudding, I took my share, eagerly anticipating the first bite. Since I sat at the end of the table, my job was to stack the dirty dishes for removal, facilitating the clean-up process. After stacking the dishes, the dessert treasure was mine. I took small, deliberate bites, slowly enjoying my dessert as I sat waiting for the dining room to empty.

Over the many years of previous retreats, I had developed my own private tradition for Saturday night. After dinner, I would wait until everyone had left the dining hall and quietly help the kitchen workers clear the many tables. It was my way of giving back to the hardworking servers, helping them leave a few minutes early. I realized *my clearing the dirty dishes was a way of working on humility, keeping my arrogance in check*. Arrogance is something I struggle with and it felt good giving instead of receiving, doing instead of being served. That night, for the first time, another man stayed and followed my lead; we worked in shared silence, and two people greatly increased the rate of clean up. It was good to be able to give, and the other man’s help increased my joy.

Later that same evening, I rocked on the second story porch of the very large dormitory in a wonderful old rocking chair. St. Mary’s Dormitory is a very large and grand building with three stories and a spacious veranda supported by twenty large white columns. During the Civil War, this building housed union troops after New Orleans fell to the North in 1862. This stately veranda looked out over a large expanse of green grass. Many old oak trees surrounded the parade area and one could easily see the union troopers holding formations, raising and lowering the flag as their commanding officer stood on this second floor veranda and witnessed the review.

As I gazed out over that oak-lined parade area, my thoughts returned to my grief; I would never see my dad or hear his voice again. I was lucky to have had a father who loved me as much as he did. Although when I reflected on the distance we once

experienced, even during those troubled times, I knew he loved me. My heart then swelled with gladness at what we shared.

The distance between us began to thaw when my sister told our father, “Maybe you cannot understand what is happening or what your son is doing, but look at the result: Garrett and David have a new and wonderful relationship. Something is working.” Since my father was an engineer and understood results, that description made a lot of sense to him.

When my son relapsed and started using drugs again, Dad lived 1500 miles away tormented - desperately wanting to “fix” the problem, but he knew he could not. Thinking about his grandson suffering with addiction allowed Dad to reflect on his own smoking addiction. He wanted to experience what his grandson was suffering, so he quit a 40 plus year smoking habit! My son was greatly impressed that his grandfather thought enough of him to try to understand what he was dealing with. “Do you realize how hard it is to quit nicotine?” my son asked in amazement. His grandfather quitting smoking provided my son another powerful reason to change his drugging behavior, a change that answered many of my prayers.

I again smiled to myself remembering when Dad told me he did not understand what his grandson was going through so he wanted to experience the same pains of withdrawal. “That is the whole concept of Al-Anon, Dad,” I told my father. “Put the focus on yourself and change; trust the outcome.” Despite my father’s total denial and rejection of the concept of recovery, using this simple truth, he hit upon the key component of recovery...*changing yourself*.

I rocked on the porch enjoying the evening’s chill. The sun had long set and the stars were bright. It felt wonderful to be alive. When the night’s chill made me uncomfortable in the rocking chair, I decided to walk around the asphalt walkways surrounding the campus, another tradition I had developed over the years. The number of laps was not what was important; walking in silent meditation was. Each lap I passed two small outbuildings. *I had never seen them before*, I realized and then noticed candles burning in one. I immediately knew the use of that building. *Oh yeah, Catholics love to burn candles for the dearly departed*.

The door to the building opened to a comfortably sized room about the dimensions of my living room. *How calm it is in here*, I reflected. The walls were brick with windows on three sides and a door on the fourth. In the middle of the room was one chair. On the opposite side was a bank of red candles, three rows high. The flickering red candles battled the darkness and provided the only light in the room, just enough subdued light to see. The candles' glow reflecting off the red brick walls created the feeling of reverence in this hallowed place.

For a long time, I sat in quiet respect, thinking of the many friends who had died in the last few years, good friends whom I really missed. I laughed to myself thinking, *I had better start checking the obituaries, just to make sure there would be enough friends to bury me!* Then my thoughts turned to Dad who was now in a better place with all my good friends; they were probably telling stories about me at this moment, and Dad was laughing uproariously, "Did he do that!" Thinking of Dad laughing with my friends was a comforting thought for the sorrow I felt - knowing where he was tempered my sorrow.

Wouldn't it be a nice gesture to light a candle for each of my departed friends? I thought - so I lit several that burned with a nice red glow just like all the other candles on the three rows, these few among many. As I felt the warm glow and shared in the beauty of the burning lights I remembered my friends who are now gone and what they meant to me. Then I had a wonderful thought. *I need to light a candle for Dad!* I exclaimed to myself, almost aloud.

I picked out a candle and lit it from the flame of another, placed it on the rows of other lights, and returned to my chair to continue my meditations. I surveyed all those candles burning so brightly. I was shocked - realizing one was green; the one I lit for Dad! Green is my favorite color, and having one candle different was significant to me. I felt his presence.

Many times before he died, Dad and I shared our thoughts about his impending death. Those talks were comforting to me, especially when I realized we had already said everything to each other before he died. In those quiet, intimate talks, we shared our mutual grief over the day we both knew had to come. I was so glad I initiated those

discussions; because of those shared words, I no longer fear death, not Dad's death, or my own I will someday face. Remembering these cherished moments with my departed father, tears of joy and sorry mingled as they flowed down my cheeks. I miss my dad. For a long time, I sat quietly enjoying the flood of conflicting emotions that consumed my soul. *Having this chance to live this earthly existence is a great gift and part of that gift is death*, I thought. *I am so thankful for this life experience.*

It was later that night when the striking part of this story happened. In my room, sitting in my rocking chair, I was attempting to understand the jumbled thoughts written by my father in the manuscript compiled so long ago. I came to the part about quitting smoking, in words my father never shared with me. Here the manuscript became instantly clear, as if I had come upon a street lamp on a dark and rainy night. The writing was becoming easy to follow, and it seemed to be the reward for reading the many disjointed and jumbled previous paragraphs of my dad's writing.

Dad wrote how difficult it was for him to quit smoking, as he struggled with his own addiction. Try as he might, he had not been able to quit. Admitting failure was not in my Dad's vocabulary but he was out of his denial about his addiction. He wrote about a terrible powerful force consuming him. "I felt completely overwhelmed." One night in the basement of his Ohio home, amidst his misery of living with an active addiction, he admitted he was powerless over smoking. My father wrote about getting on his knees and saying, "I can't. I know you can. Please help me."

I smiled to myself, recalling how Dad always had to be in control and there he was, so desperate, he finally let go and turned the outcome to his God. I chuckled about the slogan, "Pull yourself up by your boot straps." (My wife makes an addition to that ancient wisdom, "You can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps unless you are bent over.") In his damp Ohio basement, so long ago, my father realized his addiction had bent him over, admitted his powerlessness, and became willing – he asked. With this help, he pulled himself up by his bootstraps.

In an abbreviated form, the first three steps of a 12-Step Program are: I can't; He can; and I think I'll let Him. In one simple, desperate prayer, Dad accomplished the first three steps of the program all at once. From a program he did not understand, rejected,

and felt threatened by, my father changed; from that moment on, Dad never smoked again.

From beyond the veil of death, on this silent weekend, my father taught me a valuable lesson. Whenever I am in dire weakness and pain – I am the strongest. All I have to do is ask.

Part II

Before Beginning

The Introduction, the Word of Warning, and the section entitled Understanding *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps* are included in all twelve volumes of this series. These sections are vital to understanding when studying the different volumes in this series. Since readers may choose any workbook at any time, this common information is included in all books.

Maybe you have already used this workbook series for a different step or are familiar with several of these volumes; however, consider this thought. You are now different than before and may see things a little differently. Some parts of your life, thoughts, and levels of awareness have changed. Working the steps changes people, your recovery has already changed you, so give yourself permission to reread this section and again answer the same questions.

The answers you record for Exercise 1-14 doing the 1st Step may be different from your answer to this step. Even if you use this series multiple times, review your previous answers; compare your first responses to the new answers for this step and explore what has changed and what remains. This comparison allows for new insights and often provides additional understanding. By answering the same question at different times in your change process, you can measure your growth and maturity as you journey through the *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps*.

House Keeping Notes:

This series of workbooks is for all addictions, drug, and/or alcohol, also people suffering from compulsivity such as gambling, sex, sex/love, eating disorders, internet/electronic, codependency, and a host of other maladies, find this material helpful. For the purpose of simplicity, whatever your misery, in this book to decrease confusion, they are all called *addiction*.

Especially in early recovery, two strange thoughts are common: “I’m different,” and “I can do it my way.” When you hear one (or both) of these echoing in your head, this is your addict brain attempting to keep you from recovery. Your addiction is “cunning, baffling, and powerful” and wants you to fail. If your addictive behavior worked for you, then you wouldn’t need a Twelve Step Program. Be forewarned and guarded when these thoughts echo in your head. “I’m different” and “I can do it my way” are samples of addictive arrogant thoughts blocking recovery. Trust what has been successful for others. Trust the process.

Promise

Your pain and misery have screamed for a long time, telling you change is necessary. For many years, you successfully ignored their messages, but now you are responding to the pain you know so well and the desire to change your life. You want something better. You are now in recovery and have embarked upon the journey of the Twelve Steps. Congratulations!

The Twelve Step journey provides a deep exploration of yourself, allowing you to find and claim the gift that is you. Thinking of yourself as something valuable may be hard to accept for persons beginning this process. Thinking of yourself as a gift might be stretching your self-definition to the maximum, perhaps even to the breaking point. Part of you wants to believe you are a gift, but another part is so entrenched in the shame of addiction that you want to reject something so alien. The level of your discomfort with this concept is directly proportional to the rocks blocking your road to recovery. Overcoming these obstacles requires you to utilize your sponsor, the fellowship, supportive friends and family, and the Twelve Steps. These large stones seem insurmountable until you successfully navigate past them. After you have successfully reached the other side, you will see that they are not the giant reasons for failure you once thought, rather, they are small pebbles, merely fragments of the boulders you once feared.

Here is the promise: start your study of the Twelve Steps and, by using this book or another like it as your guide, work with your sponsor, be honest, and share what you learn with others. *This is all you have to do to chase away the darkness, stay sober, and*

find serenity. This is not only the promise of this book, but also an echo of many thousands of men and women who would also wish you well and attest to the success of the Twelve Steps. Many of these people could not see out of their own black hole. By working the program, they became successful despite the blackness of their past. They now are rewarded for their hard work, live in the light, and are happy they chose to continue. Follow their lead and you *will* be successful.

Remember: you are the tip of the change arrow, poised on the edge of discovery. You stand at a crossroads now. What you do will substantially affect the rest of your life and the lives of many others. Once begun, your recovery sends ripples of change through the universe, affecting not only your life but also, the lives of those you love now, and for generations to come.

“Let go. Why do you cling to pain? There is nothing you can do about the wrongs of yesterday. It is not yours to judge. Why hold on to the very thing which keeps you from hope and love?”
Leo Buscaglia

Big Book - Promises

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellow. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.”

This excerpt from the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 83-84, is reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (“A.A.W.S.”) Permission to use this excerpt does not mean that A.A.W.S. is in any way affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only – use of this material in con-

nection with programs and activities which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems or concerns, or in any other non-A.A. context, does not imply otherwise.

The more work you do on the steps, the closer the promises become true for you. If this is what you want, you now have the path blazed by many others before you.

*“Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes.
Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow.
Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally
forward in whatever way they like.”*
Lao Tzu

Exercise 1

The second habit from the book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Covey, is “Begin with the end in mind.” Every time you pick up this workbook and begin your lesson, begin with the end in mind by reading the Big Book’s promises. Once you define your goals, the chance of success is unlimited. Write what you want...begin this step’s journey with your end in mind.

Where do you want your recovery to take you?

Exercise 2

At this very moment, what do you need out of your recovery?

Necessary Components

To make any change a person must have three components:

- **Desire to change**
- **Willingness**
- **Ability**

Exercise 3

What is motivating you to change?

*“If we don't change, we don't grow.
If we don't grow, we aren't really living.”*
Gail Sheehy

Desire to Change

The desire to change has a wonderful ally, motivating humans toward change. What ally do you have? Pain can be your friend. What!

If you put your hand upon a hot stove, what is your reaction? Even before the emphatic expletives come out of your mouth, you remove it quickly. What motivated you to move your hand so quickly? *Pain*. If it were not for the pain you would not know your hand was burned until you smelled the burning flesh...*much too late*. Pain is a message carrier providing communication between different parts of the body. Emotional pain acts the same way by telling us change is necessary. How long has your emotional pain been telling you change is needed? How long have you ignored its message?

Often people in emotional pain have physical ramifications or consequences such as ulcers, stomach problems, depression, etc. A woman I know said she always knew which of her two children she was worried about depending upon the location of her pain: her neck pain for her daughter and her shoulder pain for her son. People in pain often enter recovery only after trying all sorts of other home remedies; often recovery is a desperate step when all else has failed. In despair, they enter the change environment of relief. Different people obtain different results; some people continue a lifetime of growth, while others immediately leave. Some, when the pain ceases and the crisis subsides, return to their old way of living...back to the previous status quo of unhappiness. Have you experienced this? You taste recovery, and marvel at the flavor, but then do not choose to enjoy the entire 12-step meal. Pain's motivation is gone. You have found relief so you think this is enough and you stop your growth, and miss the beautiful journey awaiting you. This happens because your *addict voice* is so cunning, powerful, and baffling; so great in fact, your inner-addict can talk you into or out of almost anything.

Exercise 4

What tools do you plan to use to assist you in your recovery process? Example: In this discussion, A.A. is an example of a tool.

Exercise 5

What else do you need in order to be successful? How do you plan to fill these needs? Example: I need support of recovery people, or I need to make time to work a program, or I need someone to go home with me to help me clear out all of my drugs.

Note: Recovery allows the full expressions of all emotions, especially joy. To celebrate the freeing effect of happiness, several *smile* statements are included to lighten your burden. Although not designed to split your sides with uproarious laughter, in these jokes we see ourselves from a different point of view. When we can laugh, we spit in the eye of addiction with comic relief.

You might need recovery when...
you discovered that beer
is no longer just a breakfast drink.

Willingness

A man building a child's play house swung a hammer, missed the nail, and caught the full impact of the hammer on his thumb. Now, those of you who have done something like this can readily appreciate the word "ouch," and whatever he said following that.

The bleeding under the nail became worse, causing him to get closer to his pain threshold. He held his thumb high in the air, attempting to lessen the amount of blood pressure to his aching thumb. All day long, he kept his thumb high above his head for as long as he had the strength. When he lowered his arm, his damaged thumb began to throb and hurt even more. Even copious amounts of ice couldn't reduce the swelling enough...it just hurt!

Everything he did for rest of the day revolved around seeking relief from this ever-increasing pain. Finally, the pain was too much and he sought relief at the emergency room of the local hospital. Visiting the hospital became necessary after the pain battered down his natural resistance to parting with his money. Reaching this threshold, he rushed himself to the local emergency room seeking relief.

Until he finally obtained relief from this pain, he was totally *thumb-conscious*. Every thought, every action, and everything revolved around this pain. He was totally consumed by the throbbing, an aching reminder of his ill-aimed blow. It was not until the pain was so great that he chose to change by entering the hospital emergency room to find relief. He had to become willing to allow pain to guide him in his quest of relief.

Exercise 6

List or describe the pains and pressures you experienced with your old life style.

You might need recovery when...
you always seek bad relationships,
by expecting so little you are
never disappointed.

Ability

*“A boo is a lot louder
than a cheer.”*
Lance Armstrong

Ever hear words of wisdom for the first time, and know these words are true? There is great wisdom that others have already discovered, and it is available somewhere in the world’s collective subconscious. All you have to do is have the *desire* to seek it and the *willingness* to change, then almost magically the wisdom appears. You have that ability right now!

If your doctor said, “You have to drastically change your lifestyle or die a horrible death,” would you change? Most people would say, “Yes.” Statistics tell a different story; people seldom change their lives to a healthier lifestyle! Alan Deutschman, author of the book *Change or Die*, explains that people who make life or death decisions involving drastic lifestyle changes face tremendous odds for failure—nine out of ten return to their old destructive behavior within two years! Heart attack, stroke, addiction, and cancer victims face shortened life spans unless they change their lives. Most vow to change but only a few succeed; how come? Why is change so hard?

Change is like the breaking of an egg for breakfast. The egg will never be the same. The cooking process transforms the egg, and, upon eating the egg, the body changes this food into fuel. The shattering of the shell begins this chain reaction. Breaking eggs is always messy and so is the change process. Breaking out of your denial is cracking the egg of your change process. What keeps this process going? Why do some people experience success while others do not?

Your recovery involves changing from the old lifestyle, old friends, old ways of thinking and traditions. An often-unrecognized part of the recovery process is grieving your loss. For example, the alcoholic cannot drink like the “normal” person. It may not seem so, but this loss is really a grief issue. Intellectually, you know all you have to do is give up your addiction for 24 hours, and for this time, you have chosen abstinence. However, your old friends and drinking buddies have not; you cannot associate with them if you want to achieve your goals. No matter what your addiction or compulsivity, many changes are required for success. Giving up destructive behaviors and friends -

even when necessary for survival – represents loss. Recovery people have to feel these losses in order to progress. You must grieve to move forward.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankel, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, developed a theory that human beings can "...suffer any loss, make any change, and endure any hardship if the meaning is known...hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and meaning...we would...suffer proudly—not miserably—knowing how to die." Until you can answer several questions, recovery will not belong to you.

- What is the reason for change?
- What meaning does this change have?
- Where am I going; what's in it for me?

Until you find your answers, progress will be slow and relapse is likely.

Recovery requires psychological, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The reason lifestyle changes have such a dismal record, Dr. Dean Ornish, founder of the Preventative Medicine Research Institute writes, **"...motivation by fear is not enough to sustain the change."** He writes, **"...Death is too frightening to think about and denial is a trick our brain successfully plays unless the emotional component is solved."** Part of the solution has to be an effective expression of emotions. Meetings are a wonderful place for you to be truthful, to express deep feelings such as fear, sadness, regret, and sorrow. These are the same feelings your addiction prevented you from expressing. What you ran from before, you now need to own and share.

Returning to Alan Deutschman's example, for those with a life-threatening problem, statistics prove another dynamic. With a support group, instead of the dismal 1 out of 10 being successful, the rate dramatically improves to 9 out of 10. We in the recovery community prove this every day. Recovery requires the group process; to be fully present in the meetings by expressing your emotions as well as your story. Give yourself permission to be honest and gain the release you seek from your addiction.

Most alcoholics do not quit drinking out of fear of imprisonment, death, or significant loss; their denial system is ingrained, protecting their addiction. "Telling people who are lonely and depressed that they're going to live longer if they quit smoking or

change their diet and lifestyle is not that motivating,” Ornish writes. “Who wants to live longer when you’re in chronic emotional pain? Who wants to give up alcohol, a cherished habit, if you come out of your denial and really feel miserable?”

People addressing their feelings in the 12-Step Program can begin to think differently; in this group setting, the expression of honest feelings reduces denial and the recovery process begins. In the protective folds of the recovery program, you discover coping skills that work much better than your addiction. Your *need* for something outside of yourself to make you feel okay shrinks and begins to melt away. Your strength now comes from a place of inner tranquility instead of the contents of the bottle, etc. Breathe easily - you have a support group. Because of the group, your chance of success has dramatically improved!

The Twelve Steps creates a pathway that allows natural wisdom to appear. Hear the words, experience the wisdom of others, accept what you intuitively know to be true and this change can be yours. You already have the ability once you realize the power is within you...*trust the process*.

Exercise 7

Go back and read the second paragraph in this section about people having to change their lifestyle. If you had to change your lifestyle or face a horrible death, would you do it? How successful do you think you would be without a support system?

Exercise 8

What are the reasons for your willingness to change? What brought you into recovery?

Exercise 9

What meaning, what value can you obtain from the suffering you experienced from your addiction? Note: Many people have trouble with this question, so if you find yourself stuck do not ignore this question, but rather wait awhile and allow this concept to filter through your consciousness as you continue this workbook. This question seems very strange, but its answer is an important part of your recovery journey. Give yourself permission to explore this question and come back to it from time to time.

You might need recovery when...

You got kicked out of Gamblers
Anonymous when you said,
“I bet you can’t stop gambling.”

Exercise 10

Where am I going with my recovery? What is in it for me?

Exercise 11

Are you able to express your emotions? (See the Mood Chart on page 83) Do you use these words in your significant relationships, with your sponsor? Most people do not. Observe the next meeting you attend, how many people actually use feeling words? How comfortable are you using these words in your significant relationships?

Emotions

What is the definition of *cool*? *Cool* means to not show emotions, not express deep feelings, and without the honesty afforded by full expression of your emotions, creates a high degree of dishonesty. When you drank, drugged, and/or controlled others, you successfully hid from your emotions. You were by this definition absolutely *cool*! Being in an altered state completely divorced you from your emotions, so you achieved the ultimate of *cool*. Did being *cool* work for you?

In her book, *Positivity*, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson describes emotions as sailing. Positive emotions are the winds in the sail. Negative emotions are different; they are the keel that extends down from the hull allowing the sailboat to tack against the wind. Without the wind, sailboats are becalmed and do not move. Without the keel, the sailor could not follow the plotted course. Both types of emotions are necessary.

When hiding, ignoring, stuffing, or denying emotions, a person is helpless against the winds of this world. Using emotions correctly allows for progress in the direction the sailor desires. Are you going to continue to allow the chaotic winds to blow you all over the ocean or are you going to learn to sail?

Contrary to Dr. Fredrickson, describing emotions as positive or negative is incorrect. Since you have emotions, and need those to navigate, how can they be positive or negative? Instead, your feelings just are. Consider this different terminology. The so-called negative emotions are really for *warning* and positive emotions are the *healing* feelings. May the *healing* emotions fill your sails and may the gift of *warning* protect you as you journey.

Using this chart and identifying your emotions is the opposite of your addiction; you now are able to manage and use what you formerly denied and were so terrified of experiencing. You are now able to be free.

**You have two choices:
hide from your feelings
or
allow them to guide you.**

Exercise 12

Prior to recovery, you probably used one or more of these addictions and/or compulsions: alcohol, drugs, food, sex, work, the lives of other people, etc. One description of addiction is “an external solution for an internal problem.” Describe what you have used before (maybe still do) as an “...external solution(s) for internal problem(s)” How successful did this external solution fix your internal problem?

Sample - External solutions for an internal problem

Internal Problem	External Solution	Recovery Option
You lost the promotion at work.	You scream at your significant other.	Be honest and tell her of your disappointment.
You lost the promotion at work.	You drink.	Go to a meeting.
You lost the promotion at work.	You tell the boss to “stick it where the sun don’t shine.”	Explore your feelings (mood chart) get your center. If you still feel wronged express it a positive way.

I’m not happy so I buy a new car thinking this is what I need for happiness. No, that didn’t work, then perhaps a new girlfriend, or a move to an exotic place, make a million dollars, win the jackpot, and/or take a hit of that wonderful smelling joint will bring you the contentment you seek. Something has to fix this restlessness; you know you will be okay if you can just find it. Write about the external solutions that you use attempting to fix your internal problems.

*“When a pupil is ready,
a teacher appears.”
Buddhist Proverb*

Understanding the *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps*

W*isdom of the Twelve Steps* is a series of individual workbooks for recovering people to assist them in working the steps, one step at a time. The steps are a journey of change; they seem simple and straightforward - and they are - but at the same time, translating this simple wisdom into our complicated brains needs time, understanding, and the wisdom of others.

Wisdom of the Twelve Steps includes a recovery story related to each step. Following the story is information about how to work the step and each workbook concludes with a series of specific thought-provoking questions. These questions, when answered, provide understanding often overlooked without this process. If your goal is to have a happier and more productive life, then challenge yourself to find the answers to these difficult questions.

To gain the maximum benefit from your recovery process, attend 12-Step meetings, talk to your sponsor, and share with the recovering fellowship. Allow these wonderful parts of your program to be the catalyst for your change process. Without the energy and motivation offered by the recovering community, this workbook will sit on your shelf collecting dust...a sad reminder of the happiness you chose to give away to your addiction.

Think of your family on Christmas morning, when everyone gathers in their pajamas, drinking coffee or hot chocolate, and eating sticky buns. There is happiness all around, tension from the past is lessened, and there are many smiles of anticipation. We look at the Christmas tree and all the gifts arranged beneath its decorated branches. We are excited about seeing the people we care about opening their gifts as we anticipate tearing off the brightly colored paper from ours. What would Christmas morning be if we did not open the presents? Why would anyone not want to open his or her gifts? Excellent question, however, this is often what happens with people who attempt the 12-Step program but do not actively work the steps. They have the Christmas morning but without the gifts.

Christmas morning is similar to attending a 12-Step meeting. As wonderful and beneficial as these meetings are, we miss the presents under the recovery tree if we do

not work the steps or choose to open the presents awaiting our joy. Are you ready to open your presents? The best way to use this book is to read it completely; allow yourself to dwell on what you read for a few days. Then start on the questions and take your time processing your answers. Like the steps, this book works best when processing slowly and carefully.

In a day or two, reread the section entitled: Understanding this Step and write notes to yourself, underlining important concepts. Allow this description to spread through your consciousness. There will be areas you agree with, some you may not agree with, and hopefully much to challenge you. Remember you are okay as you are now and there may be areas where you may need to challenge your thinking. Not all your thoughts are wrong, misguided, or incorrect, but many are. Allow yourself permission to examine *all* your thoughts - what is working for you and what is not. Get input from those who you respect, ask questions in the meetings - be open-minded -*challenge yourself*.

After this section, there is a specific series of questions for each individual step with space to answer each. Spend the necessary time digging deep for understanding. It may help to read your answers to your sponsor, providing a wonderful place for additional learning. These questions and your answers will inspire you as you share with others.

Someone once said working the steps is like a healthy pregnancy; it takes at least nine months to work them all (if it takes longer, do not worry; work at your pace and in your own time). Congratulations, you are now ready to begin working another step. Join the many people over the years that have changed using the 12 Steps.

You might need recovery when...
no matter how low your self esteem
there are others who think even less of you.

Exercise 13

Are you fully using the program, making meetings, working with a sponsor, and reading the Big Book? Do you ask your higher power to keep you sober in the morning? Are you thankful at night? Are you working the steps? Where does your program need improvement as of this moment?

Exercise 14

More importantly, think about the unmanageability of your life. Is it something worth returning to? Of course not, so before you again allow your “self-will to run riot,” recognize that to be successful, you desperately need discipline and structure to help see you through recovery. If you do not have your recovery, what do you have? Your future requires you getting you back. Putting your program first keeps self-will at bay.

Working the steps involves time, energy, commitment, desire, and willingness. Are you ready to put this into your change process? If so, then declare to yourself:

- I have the *desire* to complete this step.
- I have the *willingness*.
- With my recovery program and my higher power’s help, I have the *ability to* complete this step.

Word of Warning

*“Holding anger is a poison. It eats you from inside.
We think that hating is a weapon that attacks the
person who harmed us. But hatred is a curved blade.
And the harm we do, we do to ourselves.”
Mitch Albom*

Others who are close to you may like the changes they see you making, but since you have hurt many or all of them in the past, they may not trust any positive change you make. You may be surprised to see doubt on their faces, disbelief in their eyes, and fear in their hearts as they await the other shoe to drop or for you to return to who you were before recovery. They have so long walked on eggshells around you; they no longer know how to walk differently. They may not acknowledge the changes in you because addiction is a family disease - affecting everyone. Allow others to believe in you again, in their own time – not your time. Change your behavior, get your happiness back, and eventually they will be able to accept the new you. Do not allow others to deter you from your appointed date with recovery as your life may depend upon it.

Self-improvement promises to be difficult, challenging, scary, and painful, but at the same time wonderful, fulfilling, empowering, and joyful. You will not regret the time you spend on making a lifetime of changes. After this process, you will have an improved zest for life, increased ability to love, and more self-esteem.

Many of the old time A.A. members say, “My program is the most important thing in my life.” This is wise council; your addiction does not want you to know this truth. Putting your recovery before your family, work, and even God seems selfish, mean-spirited, and heading in the wrong direction, but before you reject this sage advice, think about what you were before recovery. Did you really have your family, work, and a close connection with your higher power? Before recovery, didn’t you experience a lack of connection with yourself and others? Did you feel close to your creator?

Connecting with yourself is the cornerstone of a happy life; the greater the self-connection, the more you can connect with others. Make a decision to become an internal millionaire. In this enviable state, no one can take away your wealth or steal it, the IRS cannot tax it, and the people you love will receive your living inheritance. More im-

portantly, think about the unmanageability of your life. Is your old life-style something worth returning to? Of course not, so before you again allow your “self-will to run riot,” you desperately need discipline and structure to help see you through recovery. If you do not have your recovery, you have nothing - your future requires you getting you back. Put your program first and await the results.

A successful recovery program requires structure in order to change. Structure includes attending meetings, reading the Big Book, and working with your sponsor. Working the steps with others is a wonderful structure. The slogans are another form of simple discipline your wounded soul needs to hear. This book, the Big Book, and many others like it are a form of structure. Allow yourself to use the structure, the tools, and the thousands of other people already in the recovery community. These gifts are available to you and will help you achieve your goals.

Working the First Three Steps

The first three steps are often the hardest for several reasons. The first rock in the road is the lack of recovery maturity. Most people who begin to work the steps are new to the program and may be uncertain about recovery. If this is you, you do not know if recovery is going to work or if this is the *way* you want to go, *need* to go, or even *if* you can achieve the success you see in others. This awareness can be very unsettling.

Working the steps requires change and for most, this is another boulder blocking serenity. Change is hard. Having started this learning exercise of the Twelve Steps, you recognize you must change in order to achieve the peace you want in your life. Tighten your seat belt, breathe deeply, relax, and allow yourself the comfort of knowing...*change is hard, change is difficult*, but most importantly, *you are not alone*.

The third reason, your old behavior is a habit. It may be something you wish to change, need to change, but habits – even destructive habits - you know well and to replace them with something unknown, demands considerable awareness, energy, and support from others. It also demands trust. Is your new life in recovery going to be better than the old?

What is recovery going to cost you?

A summarization of the first three steps is:

I can't.

He can.

I think I'll let him.

1st Step - *I can't.*

The specific problem the first step often creates is the concept of powerlessness. Do you want to be powerless? No, of course not, but this step requires a unique understanding of power and powerlessness. After working this step, you will understand how you get power from the recognition of your powerlessness.

Your addiction tells you two strange thoughts (although you think yourself unique when they tickle your consciousness) that are common to most in early recovery:

“You can do this on your own.” And “You are different.”

Warning: When you hear one (or both) of these echoing in your head, this is your addict brain attempting to keep you from recovery. Your addiction is “cunning, baffling, and powerful” and wants you to fail. With messages like this, your addiction is trying to get you to quit your program and return to the “fun-times” you had before recovery. It is setting you up for failure. When you hear, “you can do this on your own” and that “you are different,” challenge that voice. Is this your rational brain speaking wisdom or is it your addiction trying to set you up for failure?

However, you can turn the tables on your demons by just agreeing. Say to yourself, “You know, dear addiction, you are right. I am special, different, and unique.” And, “Yes, I can do this on my own, in fact, no one will do it for me. I am the one who ultimately determines my success or failure. And with you or without, my addiction, I am going to work a recovery program.” Changing your thinking and speaking aloud like this reframes your thinking and allows you to take back the power you previously gave away to your addiction.

If your addictive behavior worked for you in the past, then you would not need a Twelve Step Program. So be guarded when these thoughts come, because it may be the

spider inviting you back into the web, an engraved invitation from your addiction. To be successful, consider exploring the path blazed by many before you. If you could achieve contented sobriety on your own, why has it been so illusive? Think about the many times you promised yourself something different. How many times have you succeeded without the loving support of the Recovery Tribe?

All people attending meetings can speak of their brokenness, their unmanageability. One member described himself, “I am a glow stick.” Everyone looked at him in wonder until he explained, “It was only after I was broken could my light shine.”

2nd Step - He can.

Is God keeping you from Recovery?

We understand if your idea of God or someone else’s definition may make you uncomfortable. Even the thought may make you want to flee recovery. Yet, you may yearn for the acceptance and understanding of others available from the fellowship. You may want to change and have a happy life but do not know how.

Welcome to Recovery.

Welcome home.

The second step often is the reason people do not go into recovery in the first place or ultimately leave the fellowship. Even if you already have a relationship with a creative force, the concept of a higher power can be difficult. The second and third steps ask you to let go of what you already know and explore new insights specifically available in your own personal journey of discovery, your inward journey using honesty to explore who you really are.

The difficulty often encountered with the second and third steps is the concept of a *higher power* and more specifically the word *God*. If this describes you, ask yourself this difficult question. Is your reluctance to acknowledge a “...power greater than yourself” about a true conviction of yours or – this is hard to hear - is this your addiction manipulating you again?

Here in this step, we have to consider the possibility of having a “He” or maybe your definition could be a “She.” The Second Step encourages us to accept that there is something or someone who is more powerful than you are. Give yourself permission not to reject this possibility. Maybe you too can connect to something more powerful than you are. Your addiction was more powerful than you were so maybe – just maybe - there is something positive that you may acknowledge as greater than you.

3rd Step - *I think I’ll let him.*

The truth of this step may not be available for you until after you complete it. In other words, give yourself permission to explore the unexplored and let go of what you previously held so dear. Have the courage to enter new places of healing. Only when you let go will you have arrived on the other side of this learning experience and be in a better place to answer this provocative question about your personal relationship with something greater than yourself.

Letting go is really just giving up control over something you never had control over in the first place. This concept can be terrifying but also very rewarding. At the end of the 3rd Step, you will be in a much better position to decide if this concept is something you wish to accept or reject. Give yourself permission to have this experience. It certainly will not harm you, and perhaps for you - like so many others – if you choose this journey, it will turn out to be wonderful.

Just because you start the steps does not mean you cannot return to your old life at any time. Recovery does not chain you to the Big Book. You will not have to face the guillotine at dawn if you choose to return to your old behavior and no Twelve-Step Nazi will hunt you down. Even if you are court-ordered, you retain the right to choose. In recovery, you still maintain your freedom.

Remember, when under stress, there is a tendency to return to our old habits. Unfortunately, relapse is common. Stop for a moment, what were your old habits like? If you must stop working the steps or leave the program, the recovery tribe will save your chair and welcome you back when you return home.

Good luck.

You might need recovery when...
you socialize with everyone else because
you don't want to be alone with you.

Part III

Two Word Trip-Wire

A trip wire sets off a land mine. In order to be forewarned and forearmed, it would be advisable to bring these two hazards--two trip wires--out of the shadows to explore. Both of these are double-edged swords. One side will work for positive change and the other limits progress.

The first trip wire is **arrogance**, and the second is **doubt**.

Arrogance

A large part of your addiction is arrogance - your arrogance. Here you might say, "I'm not arrogant." Perhaps this is true. However, ponder this question and allow space for self-exploration, perhaps even discovery.

Here are some sample places others have hidden from change. In the depths of your darkness, when you're all alone, see what may fit you.

- My way is better than yours.
- I am right and you are wrong.
- I am too wonderful to change.
- I have the answer and you do not.
- I am too intelligent to change.
- I am too powerful to change.
- I am too strong to change.
- I am too afraid to change.
- I am too weak to change.
- I am too different to change.
- My denial works better than reality.
- This is a bunch of bull.
- My God is better than yours.
- Nobody has it harder than I.
- Everyone wants me; I am so special.
- Nobody wants me.
- Nobody understands me.
- Nobody can love me.
- Nobody loves me.
- I am okay, and you are not.
- My parents did not listen to me.
- My parents abused me.
- My parents abandoned me.
- My parents controlled me.
- My parents did not have boundaries.
- My parents were too rigid.

Any of the above listed attitudes/beliefs are examples of your addiction trying to protect itself. Your addiction tries to keep you in the chaos you have grown so accustomed to and wants to keep you from the peace you desire and deserve.

The healthy side of arrogance is the pride we feel when overcoming a limitation. There are many roadblocks in recovery. When you successfully deal with one – go ahead - pat yourself on the back and enjoy some healthy pride.

Exercise 15

Questioning your own arrogance may be hard, but it is very necessary. Similar to a dentist performing a root canal, it is necessary for healthy teeth but quite discomforting.

Write about your arrogance.

Exercise 16

One recovery person said, “I did not drink nearly the amount most in this room drank, but I can match my arrogance with the best of you.” How has your arrogance affected your recovery? How has your arrogance affected your relationships?

Doubt

When using this workbook, separate your religion or lack thereof from this discussion. Spirituality is different. **Spirituality is the inward search to find and claim the gift of self.**

Using this definition of Spirituality helps to suspend a person from their faith or non-faith. Try to temporarily mentally divorce yourself from your faith or non-faith. You may return to your previous beliefs at any time as nothing in this series wants you to discard cherished beliefs or non-beliefs. These are yours and represent your best thinking to date. This exercise only seeks to allow a broadening of awareness, allowing for exploration into previously hidden parts of your being. Join this Explorers Club and in this search, you can add to what you already know.

1st Step Doubt

Before you walked through the door of your first meeting, part of you had hope. You hoped for something better than what you experienced in the past. However:

- You *doubt* this program will work at all.
- You *doubt* – since you are so different – recovery will work for you.
- You *doubt* if you really want to give up your addiction.
- You *doubt* you are willing to pay the price of change.
- You *doubt* how being powerless will lead you to power.

2nd Step Doubt

After working the first step, you now understand that, once a person lets go over that which they have no control, something happens. Energy you once wasted is now yours to spend on what you can control – mainly you. In order to accomplish that step you had to overcome many doubts. Use that success for tackling the difficult task of “...being restored to sanity.”

- In the midst of your misery, you *doubted* that “...anything could or would...” help you overcome your pain and suffering.
- You *doubted* if an unseen entity - some call God - could help, after all, how many of your prayers went unanswered.

- How many times did you curse God for your pain, and now you *doubt* recovery is the answer to your tirade?
- If you did not already believe in God, you sincerely *doubted* you could ever change your firm belief or *doubted* if you would want to trust anything outside of yourself ever again.
- Having been disappointed so many times in the past by anything of the spirit, you *doubted* that anything outside of a miracle of medical science could relieve you from your addiction.
- You *doubted* if you were ever “insane” but knew many others that were.

3rd Step Doubt

Congratulations! You are now on the 3rd Step, you already enjoy a vague awareness of what in the 2nd Step was called “He.” Even with the 2nd Step in your rearview mirror, your doubts may continue to haunt you as you progress. Hug your doubts, make them your own - after all, they are yours. Do not fear your doubts nor allow them to be your master; let them be your guide.

- You *doubt* you want to turn the control of your life over to the unseen, unmet, and unbelieved power.
- You *doubt* there is something outside of yourself worth trusting.
- You *doubt* there actually is something out there greater than you.
- You *doubt* there actually is something out there you could ever trust.
- You *doubt* if a “...God of your understanding...” would work for you.
- Just because others share how different they feel when accepting a power greater than they are, you *doubt* it will mean the same for you.

Healthy Doubt

Note: The healthy side of doubt is realizing the chasm is ten feet wide and your best leap is only eight feet. Your doubt keeps you from testing certainty with stupidity. Perhaps your doubt will turn out to be true, keeping you from falling into the abyss – “I don’t think I can jump that far.” Listen to your healthy doubt and assess the risk by asking others and doing the necessary research to determine if you can accomplish the task and decide if you are willing to pay the associated costs.

You might need recovery when...
your mother is the
travel agent for guilt trips.

Twelve Steps

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.

Note: Alcoholics Anonymous has not sanctioned this workbook; the author is responsible for its contents. There are as many ways to work the steps as there are sponsors. *Wisdom of the Twelve Steps* seeks to provide the recovering community another method.

Understanding the 3rd Step

**Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over
to the care of God *as we understood Him*.**

This step often gives people in recovery a great deal of trouble, for it involves two difficult concepts. The first is the concept of God and the second is letting go. Let us start with the difficulty of God. To people who already are believers, this may not present as big a problem as for others who have difficulty getting past the god-thing (believing in God). Recovery in the 12 Steps does not require any specific belief or any definition; whatever you believe or do not believe is okay. Your opinion is as good as anyone's.

When growing up, your parents were your first gods. They were more powerful than you were, had absolute control, and innately we knew our parents were what separated us from death. If your parents were accepting, nurturing, and loving, this was your first understanding of God. If your parents were controlling, demanding, and angry, your definition of your creator was probably similar.

People working this step tend to fall into two categories. The first category is those whose definition of a higher power is rather flexible, allowing exploration with the willingness to discover deeper meanings. The second group are those who hold absolute beliefs, set in stone, creating barriers that prevent exploring anything new. Here in the absolute belief section there are two subgroups: the first is the disbelieving atheist, while the second are those who cling to an absolute deity and their creeds with unwavering intensity.

The absolute believers have a strict definition of God with a capital **G** and their truth with a capital **T**. On the other end of the spectrum of this same group of absolute believers are people who cringe thinking about God and for them, "*there isn't*" is as far they are comfortable. These two subgroups often have the hardest time working this step, yet in a large way they have a lot in common.

Regardless of where you are on this continuum, read the entire presentation. Even if you disagree-which is okay because no one has all the answers-you will come out of this experience with a little more understanding and acceptance of others.

It is customary to capitalize the word God. Even those who do not believe or doubt the existence of God follow this tradition. What is the difference between writing God with a capital “G” and writing god with a small “g”? If the hair on the back of your neck suddenly stood up this is an indication there is a difference.

When God is written with a capital “G” everyone immediately has a meaning or definition they are comfortable with, which is often different from others. Surrounding the word God, we have built huge structures. Starting with the Tower of Babylon, humans have developed liturgies, alters, holy books, churches, temples, and mosques. We hire learned scholars, fund religious schools, and practice traditions, songs, prayers, rules, and customs, all surrounded by certain expectations, all demanding religious conformity and compliance. If you are comfortable with your capital “G”, this writing does not seek to take anything away from you. It does seek to help open you up to the possibility of exploring your capital “G” differently.

What would happen if you stepped back to view your creator from a less defined understanding? What happens if you allowed yourself to see this God without a capital “g”? Using god, you are now free to explore many spiritual paths previously closed to you when using the capital “G”.

With this new state of mind, atheists do not have to rebel against the institutional definitions they abhor and can now explore the concept of *maybe*. Agnostics are free to expand the spiritual grayness even deeper, wider, and perhaps in new directions and on firmer ground. This change frees you of others’ expectations allowing you to explore your own soul and develop a personal relationship not defined by the book of church order. All those who let go and allow the small “g” exploration are now free to doubt. Free to explore. Free to challenge. Doubt is *not* losing faith or giving up your strong opinions but trusting enough to let go and allow the creative force to teach you even more. You may wind up back at the very place you started with this different position of acceptance, but you will be wiser and more comfortable than when you started the small “g” exercise.

To facilitate the letting go of the capital “G” mindset, the word God is written hereafter with a small letter instead of capitalized. Your god may deserve a capital letter and this small “**g**” does not diminish or show any disrespect to anything you may believe. As discussed, many people struggling with this step have yet to (or may never) accept their higher power with a capital “**G**”. Small “**g**” allows you to create a space to be free to explore.

Having god spelled in this manner hopefully allows the recovery circle to include almost everyone regardless of belief or non-belief. Hint...to those still wanting a capital letter, give your creator credit to understand your reasons why this exercise is necessary. Is your definition of the creator so small He will be offended if you explored in new directions?

You might need recovery when...
you hit the Control Alt Delete
button of life...you disappeared.

Lets start with those who have a problem with the **god-thing**. By the time a person enters recovery, they have usually done many things they are ashamed of doing, often rightfully so. Many feel condemned by society, rejected by loved ones, alienated from their values, and judged by those professed followers of “god.” In order to recover from addiction and co-dependency, a spiritual awakening must happen. “Oh, wow,” says the atheist, “now someone is going to sprinkle holy water on me, judge me a sinner, and I must repent in order to be healed! Just what I needed!”

Many people leave or would never darken the doors of recovery in the first place because of the barrier they perceive from their lack of belief in a higher power. For them even the word, *god*, is fingernails scraping across a black board, something that rubs them in the wrong direction and greatly angers them. With this one word, they experience the judgment of those who would knock on their door, hand out religious tracts, find their behaviour unacceptable, and then shame them for their non-belief. If this word causes you problems, consider this possibility: (this may be hard to hear) sometimes your thought process is really your addiction talking.

Your addiction is cunning, baffling and powerful. Now, stop for a moment and answer this question. What is your greatest strength? Got your answer? The truth is your addiction will use your greatest strengths *against* you! Your addiction wants you to fail. It is capable of turning your great faith or non-faith into a reason to leave recovery. This mindset creates a wonderfully convenient reason to justify your refusing to change and return to your addiction. If this *god-thing*, this spirituality makes you want to flee recovery ask yourself this difficult question: does my discomfort come from a deep violation of my core beliefs *or* is this discomfort something I can hold in suspension until further investigation? Are these unsettling feelings *my truth* or is my *addiction manipulating me again*?

What most people have difficulty with is not spirituality, but religion. Religion is a set of beliefs and principles that members hold true. Spirituality is different from religion. Spirituality is the inward search to find and claim the best parts of yourself, to learn how to love without destruction and even love and forgive yourself. When you share your deep truths and are honest about yourself, this inward focus defines the direction of your spiritual journey. **Regardless of belief or non-belief, when you struggle to find self-love you are on a spiritual journey**, the same journey that will awaken you to accept yourself and ultimately the serenity you seek. Once connected in this way, you may find a creative force waiting for you - an unnamed entity that becomes your strength - *your* higher power. Whatever you find in the room of self-love does not require definitions, structure, or even a name; it is an overwhelming presence of love. It is yours and no one else's.

Atheists may cringe when told recovery is a spiritual journey, for it is hard for non-believers to accept this concept of spirituality when the holy water image and those who would judge them tends to block this possibility. If this describes you, then do not fight it, for your perception is real, valid, and just an indication of where you are at this moment. Even with this belief system, you can make progress -- everyone has to start somewhere and if you are on this inward journey toward self-discovery - spiritual journey - then new insights, awareness, and beliefs will constantly present themselves. In fact, there is a wonderful slogan the recovery community has...*Trust the Process*. Trust

what has worked for many before you. Maybe, *Trust the Process* can be your higher power.

To clear away the cobwebs of these preconceptions and to determine your relationship to the creative force, rid yourself of these initial images, positive or negative. Here is a suggestion: take what you know or ever heard about God, Buddha, Allah, the great void, or whoever...***do not reject it.*** This is your current understanding, which is valid. It is your meaning and therefore your understanding and is important. Instead of rejecting your beliefs or closing your eyes to other learning that may enrich what you already know, metaphorically place this knowledge in a cigar box, put a rubber band around it, and store it in the uppermost shelf in your mind's closet. Knowing that you have stored these beliefs in a special attainable place allows for easy retrieval at anytime. Once you have done this simple exercise, then...*Trust the Process.*

Walking into the fellowship you had a certain amount of hope. You hoped recovery had something for you and since then you've experienced many positive connections, experiences, and the joys of recovery. The initial hope you had in early recovery is beginning to change – slowly but steadily it is turning into belief. When your hope turns into belief, trust begins. You are now beginning to trust that this process has something for you. You trusted that if you follow what has worked for many others before you, it could also be true for you. By this step, you now trust this program has something you want and need. Take your newfound trust and with your previous learning, safely stored in your closet, realize...*more will be revealed.* When you accomplish this, regardless of belief or non-belief, trust can now become your higher power.

In order to work this step, you must find a higher power you are comfortable acknowledging. Note: Comfortable is a relative term; don't turn away from this notation just because you feel very uncomfortable at this moment. Once found, begin to trust this source of power and energy to help you “...*turn our will and our lives over...*”. Without this trust, you will still want to hang on. You will still want to be in control. What the 3rd Step is telling you is that if you want peace and serenity, you will have to give up your arrogance and trade it for trust. You will have to let go. You are not in control. This change is necessary to successfully work through this step and gain its benefits.

In recovery, the word “Higher Power” is commonly used. Many reject the concept that there is anything in their lives representing a “higher power.” When working the first step you accepted the fact that alcohol is more powerful than you are and by this awareness, alcohol is an example of a higher power. This puts many in a double bind. On one hand, you finally realize alcohol is more powerful than you are, but to turn your will over to a god you do not understand, feel close to, or even trust is just too much to handle. Take a deep breath and relax. Ever since the program first began in the 1930’s, people in the fellowship have been struggling to find their way out of this dilemma. Even if you cannot believe in the mystic vision of god, here are some things more powerful than you are, perhaps one can be your “god”. How about gravity, sunlight, cosmic dust, sunburst, speed of light, your addiction, or the fellowship of A.A. to name a few? Choose one of these or make one up suitable to your liking and understanding. It can be yours or you can just rent one by the hour. Some may even choose a black hole in space

In a fit of frustration, one man told his sponsor, “I’m not buying this higher-power mumble jumble!” His sponsor smiled and calmly said, “Well, you don’t have to buy a higher power; instead of buying, just consider leasing one.”

Another man in a meeting said, “My higher power is always watching me, just ready to jump on me when I make a mistake. He’s always judging me and telling me I’m going to hell.” After the meeting, a woman said to him, “You sure have a mean higher-power.” The man nodded in agreement. She thought for a moment and said, “If I had one like yours ... I’d *fire* Him and get a new one.” The man looked at her in shocked horror for the thought of choice had not occurred to him. She continued, “Mine understands me and accepts me as I am. I feel loved.” Now the man looked confused and lost. Sensing his discomfort she continued, “Tell you what, I’ll loan you mine until you can find a good one.”

For anyone still having difficulty with the concept of a power greater than they are, here are three additional ways to view it:

- Just consider the *possibility* you may have a higher power

Not working? Okay, Try:

- Be willing to consider the possibility you can *consider* the possibility you have a higher power.

Not working? Okay, Try:

- Consider the possibility you may be *able to* consider the possibility of considering you may have a higher power.

Although the last three questions are somewhat tongue-in-cheek, they allow a person enough room to step back and maybe now you are at least a tiny bit more open-minded than before. Doing this exercise allows you the freedom to having a definition uniquely all your own. Give yourself permission to adopt any position toward peace and serenity you wish. It's your journey...your decision.

Now to those who already believe and are on the other end of the spectrum from the atheist, the recommendation of storing all your beliefs for later retrieval and evaluation really fits well here. Suspending your long-held beliefs does not change them or make them go away, nor does it insult your religion. For those beliefs, do you trust your God? If you do, then trust Him enough to suspend your beliefs and pray for new insights. If you do not, then trust your message will arrive in a different form.

In recovery, the fellowship asks everyone to respect another's definition, but absolute believers learned that only their beliefs were correct and others were false, so acceptance on their part is often difficult. Both the atheist and the absolute believer have a definite set of beliefs; one believes *there is* and one believes *there is not*. The more absolute your belief the harder you may find it to accept another understanding. Here is your double blind: in order to hold on to your rigid beliefs you may find it necessary to judge other's beliefs, finding them unacceptable, thereby missing the healing available in acceptance. Both groups have a difficult time wrapping their minds around this higher power concept, so this step provides both extremes an opportunity to examine what they believe. With this new mindset, can you see any space for new learning? When our arrogance makes us think we are the center of the universe, **our addiction thrives**. When we think we have all the answers, learning stops. This examination is much easier if temporarily the seeker can suspend previous held knowledge and search for new truths allowed...*Trust the Process*.

Letting go is the second part of the 3rd Step which makes this step so difficult. Addictive people love to be in control, are in denial, and often blind to the power their addiction has over them. Their addiction convinces them they still maintain control over their lives. **This is the only illness that tries to convince the addict he/she does not have a disease.** When the truth finally emerges after hitting bottom, denial is cracked and surrender becomes the only option. In recovery you have to surrender yourself to this reality, however, the addict part of your brain has headed for the hills and now conducts guerilla warfare, fighting against your recovery. One A.A. participant said, “It seems like two dogs are fighting, one is the addict dog and the other is the dog of recovery.” That is a good description of your obsession...a fight between addiction and recovery.

When you first walked through the doors of recovery, you had hope. Hope that within these walls there was something better than the miserable life you were living. In recovery this hope began to turn into belief; you began to believe recovery and the 12-steps would work for you as it worked for thousands of others. This new belief came from a growing power called trust. As you gained confidence you changed from “...restless, irritable, and discontented” to “...happy, joyous, and free.’ The longer you stayed, the more you listened, the more you shared, the more your trust grew. In this third step, trust is required. Trust to let go of control...*Trust the Process.*

Now let’s make this simple. Complete success is not required when we “...turn our will and our lives over...” No, all this step requires is to just make a decision, the decision to “...turn our will and our lives over...” to a power greater than yourself. Make the decision, then trust...*Trust the Process.*

After the meeting, one man asked the other, “About those dogs you were talking about, which one is winning?” The first man paused, thought, and then answered, “Which dog? I guess it is the dog I’m feeding.”

Which dog are you feeding? Do you allow your previous views to be so rigid as to prevent your learning? Do you need to be in control so badly you will not let go? Are you so arrogant to exclude the possibility you need an enlarged point of view? Have you lived

your life so successfully you cannot travel inward on a spiritual journey towards self-love?

This step does not want to take away any previously held beliefs, understanding, perceptions, or values you have. You can hang on to any of these you wish, for they all have validity. This step seeks to expand your awareness into other possibilities. Giving up control and finally accepting a Higher Power is a significant turning point in your quest for serenity.

You might need recovery when...

you think the grass is greener
on the other side of the septic tank.

Maybe you have difficulty with the surrendering part of this step; maybe you still want to be in control. One man in Overeaters Anonymous said he did not want to trust his higher power, “I only trust me.” If this is also how you feel, think about the unmanageability of your life when you are in control; how has that been working for you? The OA man’s desire to be in control was really about his pride and his arrogance as he fought for control. “What if I surrender to this higher power and nothing happens?” This was a deep fear he finally acknowledged, “What if god doesn’t step up and make it all okay?” Does this ring true for you? “Surrendering sounds like a cop-out to me,” he lamented, “if I surrender then I no longer have to take ownership.”

Surrendering is not a cop-out but rather choosing to accept life on life’s terms. Surrendering is turning over the worry to a power greater than you are, so that you no longer waste energy on something you do not have control over. Letting go and focusing on what you do have control over changes the energy flow...instead of a drain-a waste of energy about what you have no control over-that energy now becomes fuel for positive change.

Surrender is like rip currents in the ocean. The tide entering and exiting a narrow passage between two sandbars creates strong currents called rip currents. If the rip current traps you when swimming, you panic when being swept out to sea and exhaust yourself struggling against the current to regain the safety of shore. To escape a rip current, you must stop struggling against the current and swim parallel with the beach, or just float on the surface letting the current take you to a calm area.

Once you get rid of the notion that something is going to magically come out of the sky, bubble up from your coffee urn, or jump out at you from a book, making your world okay, *you become free*. You are liberated to accept life, not as you wish it to be, but as it is! **Now you are only responsible for yourself.** Your feet are firmly on the ground of reality. Surrender the worry, give up trying to control the world, and focus on the next right step...here you will find your victory. Only the strong can surrender their will and accept the peace available with this decision.

Your struggling against the acceptance of a higher power is like a rip current. Maybe floating is like letting go and trusting the ocean of recovery to take you to calmer waters.

3rd Step Prayer

Give me the roots of belief, the wings to let go, and peace from connecting with a power greater than myself.

Higher Power Special

The train stopped at the small town station,
middle of nowhere - heading north.
Stretching my legs on the station's platform,
the cold penetrated my inadequate clothing.
The station's wall broke the bitter wind's full force.

Miserable and depressed,
I again tried to make sense of my life.
I was in charge of this train and try as I might
my directions were not working!
Huddled against the brick station wall,
I heard a train whistle.
As I walked to the end of the platform,
the full force of cold wind took my breath away
numbing my face.

Protecting myself, I walked backwards toward my train,
forcing my view in another direction.
Through the winter's darkness
I heard the conductor's, "All aboard."
The sound did not come from my train!
The voice came from another train!
"Where's this train heading?"
"South to where it's warm,"
said the conductor with a grin.
"Have you a seat?" "How much does it cost?"
"*We're not full and the price you must pay,
is to give up your train,*"
A puzzled look came over my frostbitten face.
He explained, "*This train is the H.P. Special.
God's in control of this train!*"

Ten years ago, in a much warmer climate, a friend
had offered me a ticket on this very train.
I'd refused for I wanted to be in control.
My best directions got me here,
freezing in the bitter cold - heading north!
"All aboard!" he yelled, "You coming?"

I did not look back as I boarded this train.
God's in control ...
take me south ... take me home.

This poem is from the book: *Professor of Pain*

Open in Case of Emergency

When all else fails and the *god-thing* threatens your recovery do not be discouraged. When you have tried the suggestions in this book, what others have told you, have read other inspiring literature, and in the quiet of your own meditation have yet to find a comfortable place for your awakening spirit...then it is time for the final insight.

You would not be reading this book, working the steps, going to meetings, and working with your sponsor if you were not serious about wanting a better life. The fact that you are honest about your difficulty with this *god-thing* shows you have the capacity of being honest. This strength will serve you well.

Therefore, here is a simple suggestion:

Continue your work on the steps. Keep up with your meetings, talking with your sponsor, reading the Big Book, and sharing with your sober friends but stop your focus on this *god-thing* ...let go, stop worrying. Whatever your relationship is going to be or is not going to be will come to you-all in your own time.

Instead of wishing or praying for some mystical divine puff of spiritual smoke to provide you the solution to your quest...instead...meditate; practice being quiet. In this calm state, the message awaits you.

At the end of the meetings, when everyone holds hands and says the Lord's Prayer, do not repeat anything you are uncomfortable saying. Instead of closing your eyes, keep them open, looking at everyone in the circle, one person at a time. Practice sending love or warm regards to each in the circle, connecting with them in the power of silence. Let this connection become your higher power.

The more you reconnect with yourself, others, and then to the physical world, the more your awareness increases. The deeper you go into yourself to find and claim the gift of who you are, the greater the joy you will experience. Your addiction creates walls - barriers between you and other people. Even more importantly, walls between you and yourself. Addiction is like living in a translucent bubble that everyone can see through but keeps you from connecting with others. Life is very lonely in your bubble. This feel-

ing of disconnection – this bubble - is what causes your addiction to thrive. Finding a connection to life allows your recovery to become real and your addiction to fade into the past as just a painful memory.

Many find difficulty with the word *spiritual* thinking it denotes some religious belief or another. Instead of looking for your higher power “out there” consider the possibility you may not find it “out there” but instead (pointing your finger to your heart) “in here.” Think instead of your spiritual journey as what is required to eliminate your bubble. The Greek word for breath is spirit and, as you take in a breath (spirit), it travels inward. You must travel in this direction to connect with who you are – your true self - becoming REAL. The spiritual awakening required for successful recovery is the elimination of these unnatural and false barriers and becoming connected – a rejoining of you with yourself. After that connection, you can unite in a healthy way with other people and finally make the necessary connection to the physical world. The healing of these disconnections is what is required for your recovery’s spiritual journey.

You cannot force these connections; they just come with an earnest desire and a letting go of what you hold tight. The decision to allow something different into your reality and to choose a way of living requires honesty and introspection that will serve you well in your journey home. Stay open and loving towards yourself and others.

You will be amazed when someday you look back on this part of your life, how you struggled to work out of your addictive bubble. You will be delighted when realizing how the big rocks in your road you once feared are now in retrospect merely gravel at your feet. You will smile with satisfaction about how far you have come in connecting with yourself and to others. Even though at this moment you do not realize it, your *uniquely personalized* invitation solving this *god-thing* was already in the mail. Someday you will find comfort in *your* solution of this *god-thing* - an answer in some unique form – personalized, specifically for you. In this solution, you will find comfort.

Trust the process.

You might need recovery when...
instead of embracing your inner child,
you cuddle your inner lunatic.

3rd Step - Exercises

Exercise 17

What are the messages your addictive self-talk gives you to justify, rationalize, and/or deny your addiction?

Exercise 18

Define what you think god or God *is not*?

Exercise 19

When you think of spelling God with a small “g” what are your feelings (use the Mood Chart page 83)

Exercise 20

Do you think the small “g” will decrease your faith or ultimately increase it? Write about how you got to your answer.

Exercise 21

Who would you be if you did not define your God with a capital “G?”

Exercise 22

What self-messages prevent you from connecting with your higher power?

You might need recovery when...
you met a water moccasin and thought
him cute. He promised to change his
skin so you brought him home but you
were surprised when he bit you.

Exercise 23

Describe how your hope is turning into belief in recovery. In this process, how has your trust in the program grown?

Exercise 24

What was it like for you when your addiction had control over you?

Exercise 25

Place yourself on a continuum between “...*restless, irritable, and discontented*” and “...*happy, joyous, and free*...” Where were you when you entered the program and where would you like to be? Where are you right now? What is it going to take you to achieve your goals?

Exercise 26

Do you want peace and serenity? Are you now ready to trust? Are you now ready to let go of control? What change in thinking do you have to make in order for you to let go of control?

You might need recovery when...

your daughter-in-law rejects
your valuable parenting advice
as she is already living with the
results of your child rearing.

Exercise 27

Which dog are you feeding: your addict dog or your recovery dog?

Exercise 28

What rigid points of view are preventing you from additional learning?

Exercise 29

What would you experience if you gave yourself permission to doubt? What feelings do you have when giving yourself permission to doubt (use the Mood Chart on page 83)?

Exercise 30

Do you fear change? How has this fear controlled your life?

Exercise 31

Do you need to be in control so bad badly that you will not let go? What has this control cost you?

Exercise 32

Are you hanging onto a signpost pointing toward the spiritual truth? Are you experiencing difficulty when attempting to let go to reach the next post? Look at the Mood Chart on page 83. When you think about letting go of your current “truths” to find new ones, what feelings do you have?

Exercise 33

What does your signpost look like and what do you see off on the distant horizon?

Exercise 34

Does your arrogance exclude the possibility you need another point of view? How has your arrogance limited your life?

Exercise 35

Describe the necessary changes you need to travel from arrogance to humility.

Exercise 36

Draw a picture of your beliefs. Now draw a circle around these beliefs. Visualize an even larger circle around your circle where you accept your beliefs as well as other's beliefs.

*“(They) drew a circle that shut me out –
heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
we drew a circle and took (them) in.”*
Edwin Markham, adapted

Exercise 37

Using the Mood Chart (on page 83), how does it feel to accept others as they are even when their beliefs are not like yours?

Exercise 38

Are you desperately swimming against the rip current, fearful of being swept out to sea?
What do you have to do to let go...let go and float on trust?

Exercise 39

Use your right brain to create a visual image of your higher power. Even if you struggle to accept a higher power, depict your struggle. It may be a picture, a word, a symbol, anything you wish to represent what you now face and struggle to overcome or accept.

Symptoms of a Spiritual Awakening

Based upon the work of an unknown author

- Tendency to let things happen rather than making them happen
- Frequent attacks of smiling
- Feeling for freedom
- Being connected to others
- Being connected to nature
- Being connected to yourself
- Attitude of gratitude
- Operating from rational thoughts than from past fears
- Increased ability to enjoy each moment
- Lost interest in drama of conflict
- Trusting instead of worrying
- Accepting others rather than judging
- Accepting yourself instead of self-abuse
- Ability to love without expecting anything in return
- Increased ability to manage your emotions
- People enjoying your company

Exercise 40

Where have you made improvements toward this definition of a spiritual awakening since entering recovery?

Exercise 41

What areas still need improvement?

The Richter Magnitude Scale

The Richter Magnitude Scale measures the intensity of earthquakes. These ratings are from 0 to 9 but have a magnifying effect as the numbers on the scale get larger. For example, a 5.0 is not just four plus one but on this scale, ten times more powerful than a 4.0.

The 12 Steps have this same type of dynamic. When finishing the second step it is not simply one plus one equals two. The second step magnifies the first step much more than the mere adding of two steps. Completing each new step makes the results much larger than what was before. With each new step, life becomes more understandable with corresponding increases in peace and serenity. You have completed the first three steps, welcome to the magnifying effect of the Twelve Steps.

Exercise 42

Have you experienced this accumulative effect of the first three steps? How are you different now compared to when you first entered recovery?

Part IV

Mood Chart

MAD	GLAD	SAD	FEAR	HURT
Agitation	Admiration	Abandoned	Alarm	Aloof
Angry	Affection	Agonized	Anxious	Ashamed
Annoyed	Confident	Bored	Apprehension	Belittled
Antagonism	Cordiality	Crushed	Bashful	Burdened
Arrogant	Curiosity	Deflated	Bewildered	Cheated
Bitter	Delight	Depressed	Cautious	Denied
Contempt	Desire	Disconnected	Confused	Deserted
Defiant	Devotion	Disparaged	Distraction	Disappointed
Disapproving	Ecstasy	Distant	Dread	Dismay
Disdain	Ecstatic	Distraught	Embarrassed	Exhausted
Disgust	Elation	Distressed	Envious	Guilty
Enraged	Enthusiasm	Downcast	Evasive	Humiliated
Frustrated	Excitement	Gloomy	Fearful	Insulted
Furious	Fervor	Grieving	Fluster	Lonely
Hostile	Flush	Helpless	Frightened	Pain
Indignant	Generosity	Hopeless	Horrificed	Pained
Irritated	Happy	Ignored	Hysterical	Regret
Livid	Hope	Isolated	Inadequate	Shame
Mischievous	Hopeful	Jealous	Insecure	Suffering
Rage	Inspiration	Melancholy	Overwhelmed	Shocked
Resentful	Passion	Miserable	Panic	

You might need recovery when...
 you explain your tendency for making the
 same mistake again and again as,
 “Some mistakes are just too damn fun not to repeat.”

About the Author

David W. Earle, LPC is a mental health counselor, helping clients with anger management, substance abuse, compulsive gambling, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and relationships. When he combines his Licensed Professional Counselor skills with his twenty-plus-years of executive management , he utilizes business coaching as a powerful matrix for transferring leadership skills. He is also a teacher, trainer, author, coach, and alternative dispute professional.

Earle earned a Master's of Science from Texas A&M and has held executive management positions in various fields including industrial construction, private investment banking, and corporate trouble shooting. He is now the president of the Earle Company, an organization dedicated to change.

Earle has been on the panel as a mediator and/or arbitrator for various organizations such as U.S. Federal Court-Middle District, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Financial Industry Regulator Authority (FINRA), and the Louisiana Supreme Court. He was on the faculty of the University of Phoenix for over 10 years.

His trademarked motto is *My Life Will Change... When I Change™*. He enjoys tennis and lives in Baton Rouge with his wife, Penny, their dog, Fletcher and cat, Hobbes.

You can contact him at lessonsbeforeliving@gmail.com

*“Owning our story and loving ourselves
through that process is the bravest
thing we will ever do.”*
Anonymous

Notes

Notes

Notes

You might need recovery when...
you tend to make a bad first impression
but after that – it's all downhill.

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Appendix A: WISDOM OF THE TWELVE STEPS – 3rd STEP

Directions: To receive credits for this course, you are required to take a post test and receive a passing score. We have set a minimum standard of 80% as the passing score to assure the highest standard of knowledge retention and understanding. The test is comprised of multiple choice and/or true/false questions that will investigate your knowledge and understanding of the materials found in this CEU Matrix – The Institute for Addiction and Criminal Justice distance learning course.

After you complete your reading and review of this material, you will need to answer each of the test questions. Then, submit your test to us for processing. This can be done in the following manner:

Submit your test via the Internet. All of our tests are posted electronically, allowing immediate test results and quicker processing. First, you may want to answer your post test questions found at the end of this appendix. Then, return to your browser and go to the Student Center located at:

<http://www.ceumatrix.com/studentcenter>

Once there, log in as a Returning Customer using your Email Address and Password. Then click on 'View Lesson Quiz' and you will be presented with the electronic exam.

To take the exam, simply select from the choices of "a" through "e" for each multiple choice question. For true/false questions, select either "a" for true, or "b" for false. Once you are done, simply click on the submit button at the bottom of the page. Your exam will be graded and you will receive your results immediately. If your score is 80% or greater, you will receive a link to the course evaluation. You will also receive a link to the Certificate of Completion. This is the final step in the process, and you may save and / or print your Certificate of Completion.

If, however, you do not achieve a passing score of at least 80%, you will need to review the course material and return to the Student Center to resubmit your answers.

NOTE: THE EXAM QUESTIONS AND /OR ANSWERS MAY BE IN A DIFFERENT ORDER IN THE ONLINE EXAM

Answer the following questions by selecting the most appropriate response.

1. In the story, the writer met a person who could not give him any-thing, no material procession, no smile, no sort of human validation, yet this man allowed him to exhibit love. What type of love was it?
 - a) Agape love
 - b) Conditional love
 - c) Unconditional love
 - d) Impersonal love
2. In the story the writer though a lot about
 - a) the future
 - b) his wife who left him
 - c) his father who died
 - d) his last relapse
3. In the story, the reader learned the dying did not want to be _____, but instead, sought _____.
 - a) bothered, solitude
 - b) disconnected, connections
 - c) company, enlightenment
 - d) prayed for, understanding
4. In the story, the reader thoughts concluded, until you start to choose, you don't have a _____.
 - a) prayer
 - b) life
 - c) choice
 - d) burden
5. The whole concept of Al-Anon, is to "Put the focus on _____ and change; trust the outcome."
 - a) your program
 - b) your sponsor
 - c) your higher power
 - d) yourself
6. In this story the father actually work the first three steps all at one.
 - a) True
 - b) False
7. Your addiction is "cunning, baffling, and powerful" and wants you to fail.
 - a) True
 - b) False

8. People in early recovery have little problem seeing themselves as a gift.
a) True
b) False
9. Trust the process means:
a) Trust what has been proven successful for others
b) Trust your sponsor
c) Trust science
d) Trust what your parents taught you
10. This book carefully separates the different types of addiction because they do not come from the same core issue.
a) True
b) False
11. The Twelve Step journey provides a deep exploration of all listed below except.
a) Yourself
b) Coping skills
c) Step explanation
d) Origin of addiction
12. There is great wisdom that others have already discovered, and it is available in the world's:
a) Collective subconscious
b) Libraries
c) The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous
d) Sponsors
13. All it takes is the desire to seek and the willingness to change, then almost magically the wisdom appears.
a) True
b) False
14. Intellectually, you know all you have to do is give up your addiction for 24 hours, and since you are working the steps, you have chosen abstinence. However, your old friends and drinking buddies have not; you cannot associate with them if you want to achieve your goals.
a) True
b) False

15. No matter what your addiction or compulsivity, many changes are required for success. Giving up destructive behaviors and friends - even when necessary for survival – represents loss. Because of the program, recovery people do not have to grieve to move forward.

- a) True
- b) False

16. 12 Step meetings are a wonderful place to be truthful, to express deep feelings such as fear, sadness, regret, and sorrow.

- a) True
- b) False

17. This workbook it tells the story of a man who hit his thumb with a hammer. It was not until the pain was so great that he chose to change and go to the emergency room. What had he become willing to do?

- a) Part with his money
- b) Seek relief with his sponsor
- c) Allowed pain to guide him in finding relief
- d) Came out of denial about his part of the problem

18. The ability to change has a wonderful motivating ally:

- a) Q.
- b) E.Q.
- c) Evolution
- d) Pain

19. Most alcoholics do not quit drinking out of fear of imprisonment, death, or significant loss because their denial system is so ingrained, protecting their addiction.

- a) True
- b) False

20. In Twelve Step Programs, people can begin to think differently. What is the key factor in reducing denial allowing the recovery process to begin.

- a) Attendance in a 12-Step program
- b) Quitting addictive behavior
- c) Expression of honest feelings
- d) The group setting

21. Emotions are mostly positive or negative.

- a) True
- b) False

22. The so-called negative emotions are really for _____ and positive emotions are the _____ feelings.

- a) warning, healing
- b) attack, correction
- c) healing, warning
- d) denial, building

23. In recovery people have two choices: hide from feelings or use them as a guide.

- a) True
- b) False

24. Not all addictive thoughts are wrong, misguided, or incorrect.

- a) True
- b) False

25. Recovery people who put their program ahead of all else are in jeopardy of the selfishness found in active addiction.

- a) True
- b) False

26. Here are some sample places others have hidden from change. All these are true except one.

- a) I am too strong to change
- b) I am too afraid to change
- c) I am too good of a person to act like this
- d) I am too different to change

27. Your addiction tries to keep you in the chaos to which you have grown so accustomed to and wants to keep you from the peace you desire and de-serve. All are examples of your addiction trying to protect itself except one.

- a) My parents controlled me
- b) My parents did not have boundaries
- c) My parents were too rigid
- d) I can choose to be happy or not

28. To explore spirituality one must temporarily mentally divorce themselves from your faith or non-faith.

- a) True
- b) False

29. Separating religion from spirituality broadens awareness, allowing for exploration into previously hidden parts of your being.

- a) True
- b) False

30. All the below statements are true about healthy doubt except one.
- a) Allows for testing certainty with stupidity
 - b) Allows for risk assessment by asking others
 - c) Helps decide the associated costs of a decision
 - d) No such thing as healthy doubt
31. The 3rd Step often gives people in recovery a great deal of trouble, for it involves two difficult concepts. The first is the concept of _____ and the second is _____.
- a) control, letting go
 - b) shame, God
 - c) will, understanding
 - d) God, letting go
32. Recovery in the 12 Steps ultimately requires suspension of some specific belief or any definition.
- a) True
 - b) False
33. People working this step tend to fall into two categories – those whose higher power definition is rather flexible and those who hold absolute beliefs.
- a) True
 - b) False
34. If person drops the capital “G” from their definition of God and instead defines God with a small “g” as in “god”
- a) it is sacrilegious
 - b) is just semantics
 - c) are free to explore many spiritual paths
 - d) should have no effect on a person's higher power
35. Doubt is losing faith or giving up strong opinions.
- a) True
 - b) False
36. By the time a person enters recovery, they have usually done many things they are ashamed of doing, often rightfully so. Many feel condemned by society, rejected by loved ones, alienated from their values, and judged by those professed followers of “god.” In order to recover from addiction and co-dependency, a _____
- a) recovery must happen
 - b) spiritual awakening must happen
 - c) a higher power is a must
 - d) program has to be followed

37. Unsettling feelings are sometimes a personal truth to rely upon and sometimes it is the person's addiction trying to manipulate.

- a) True
- b) False

38. When you share your deep truths and are honest about yourself, this inward focus defines the direction of your spiritual journey. Finding self-love is only a small part of a spiritual journey.

- a) True
- b) False

39. When finding a higher power, discard your current understanding and beliefs.

- a) True
- b) False

40. Walking into the fellowship you had a certain amount of hope. You hoped recovery had something for you and since then you've experienced many positive connections, experiences, and the joys of recovery. The initial hope you had in early recovery is beginning to change – slowly but steadily it is turning into _____.

- a) belief
- b) truth
- c) desire
- d) excitement

41. When hope turns into belief, trust begins.

- a) True
- b) False

42. Without trust, you will still want to _____.

- a) control
- b) get drunk
- c) hang on
- d) quit

43. Suspending your long-held beliefs insults your religion.

- a) True
- b) False

44. Both the atheist and the absolute believer have a definite set of beliefs.

- a) True
- b) False

45. When our arrogance makes a person think they are the center of the universe, thier addiction thrives. When we think we have all the answers,

- a) addiction multiplies
- b) learning stops
- c) heartaches begin
- d) relapse happens

46. In this third step, trust is required. Trust to let go of control...Trust the Process. All this step requires is to _____, the decision to "...turn our will and our lives over..." to a power greater than yourself.

- a) make a decision
- b) become willing
- c) get a sponsor
- d) practice abstinence

47. Many have difficulty with the surrendering part of this step. Surrendering is not a cop-out but rather choosing to accept (best answer)

- a) life on life's terms
- b) reality of the moment
- c) honesty in the 4th step
- d) the darkness

48. In the poem, Higher Power Special what forced the story teller view in another direction?

- a) Train whistle
- b) Cold
- c) Bad memories
- d) Threats

49. The fact that you are honest about your difficulty with this god-thing shows you have the capacity of being honest. This strength will serve you well. Whatever your relationship with your higher power is going to be or is not going to be will...

- a) be determined by others
- b) eventually come
- c) be accepted by your sponsor
- d) be like many before you

50. The more you reconnect with yourself, others, and then to the physical world, the more your awareness increases. The deeper you go into yourself to find and claim the gift of who you are, _____. (Best answer)

- a) greater the responsibility you now have
- b) more you will help others as yourself
- c) more motivation you will have to change
- d) greater the joy you will experience

51. The Greek word for breath is spirit and, as you take in a breath (spirit), it travels inward. You must travel in this direction to connect with who you are – your true self - becoming REAL. The spiritual awakening required for successful recovery is the elimination of these unnatural and false barriers but still maintaining a _____ with yourself and others.

- a) connection
- b) disconnection
- c) barrier
- d) love

52. All of these statements are a sign of a spiritual awaking except.

- a) Trusting instead of worrying
- b) Frequent attacks of smiling
- c) Tendency to make things happen
- d) Attitude of gratitude