

*The 12 Steps for Anyone: Doing Hard Things with a Little Help from Our Friends (Steps 4–6)*

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Today Steps 4, 5, 6. Middle 6 steps (4-9) have to do with facing ourselves—ways we make life miserable for ourselves and those around us. AA is a spiritual path. Steps 4, 5, 6 each have a key word to describe this path: **fearless** (4), **admitted**, (5) and **ready** (6). The Spirit, the Higher Power behind the 12 Steps, summons us to be fearless, to face reality, and to get ready for something new.

Beginning with Abraham (1500 BC) Bible introduces a different **vision of deity** than anyone had known before: A God who leads us into a better future. This revelation **came to a thought-world** dominated by image of recurring **cycles**, everyone has a prescribed station/ role, which fate had determined. Everyone lived in a world of unchanging givens—born into a static identity, class, social role.

From roughly 10,000 BC to the time of Abraham the pace of change was almost imperceptible. Once humans had mastered fire, invented wheel, and started farming, their basic lifestyle didn't change for thousands of years.

Into this static thought-world comes a revelation: CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. Begins when Abram, living in Babylon, felt called to go to a place he'd never heard of let alone knew how to get to—except by the urging of a mysterious voice. He began a **journey of faith**—going from a familiar place to an unknown one by trusting a Higher Power. Influenced by the Voice of a Higher Power, he and his offspring caught the whiff of a better land, a promised land, a better way to live. **With this new vision of God**, more people could begin to imagine a different world and take steps to enter that different world.

The book of **Exodus** (the story of Moses and the emancipation of Israel from bondage in Egypt) is remarkable because slavery was such a **given** in ancient societies, slaves didn't imagine freedom.

Once this story got out, slaves started looking for a chance to be free. Bible is an expansion into this CHANGE-IS-POSSIBLE thought world—this God is seeking something better for humanity ...

12 Steps is a manifestation of this never-been-before spirituality. Addiction mimics that old thought world dominated by the cycle—life is a **merry-go-round from hell with ups & downs**, but no breaking out of the old patterns. 12 Steps trace a path for getting off

the merry-go-round, which feels very much like a faith journey into unfamiliar territory, guided, if at all, by a Higher Power.

STEP ONE: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable. STEP TWO: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. STEP THREE: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

STEP 4: *Made a searching and **fearless** moral inventory of ourselves.*

Why do we start going to a 12 Step group or start seeing a therapist? Because we know **we have to start facing ourselves**—we are stuck and need to consider how we may be contributing to our own misery. This usually takes a combination of **desperation** (tried to fix it myself and it ain't working) and **fearlessness**. *What the heck! I might as well! What do I have to lose?*

Making an **inventory** is pretty straightforward. To inventory a space--just need parameters [this room, not storage area-kitchen], a piece of paper, and a pen. Count chairs, identify tables, etc. write it all down. Taking inventory not rocket science.

Even taking a searching moral inventory not difficult **in principle**. We make searching moral inventories all the time—**of others**.

So why is conducting a moral inventory of ourselves so hard? (Wow, who would do that?) After all, it's great to be around people who know their own faults. Everyone **relaxes** around people who know their faults. And being a person who knows our own faults helps us to relax. Less energy into being defensive—defense involves clenching, not relaxing. [Paul S]

What is the feeling that keeps us from facing ourselves? Fear. For all sort of reasons we're afraid to face ourselves in this way.

Key spirituality word of Step 4 is "**fearless**." In practice "fearless" means "fear less rather than more, if possible" In practice: recognize the fear for what it is, so it loses power.

No fear has more power over us than an **unrecognized** one. Freedom from fear **begins with the thought**: *I wonder why I'm so afraid?* [Going to meet director of **Ferndale** LGBTQ group—trans woman, invite her to speak: felt twinge of fear—reflex from past]

This is where a one-step-at-a-time spirituality comes in handy. Step 4 is just inventory. Give names to the objects in the room

STEP 5: **Admitted** to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

In Step 4, we start with a simple inventory—taking stock of the things about ourselves that seem to be connected to our misery. But it gets more real as we seek to admit (to God, ourselves and another human being) **the exact nature of our wrongs**.

Avoid **euphemisms** or non-specific umbrella words to describe these things. Instead of “I get stressed”: I get fearful and irritable; instead of “I’m sensitive” say, I get upset-angry easily.

When I was newly married, Nancy didn't appreciate my sarcastic humor. What I called “funny” she experienced as “mean.” I remember how it dawned on me: my humor may be funny to me but if it hurts her, and I know it, and I still do it, then it is mean.

I didn't see myself as a mean person. Oh.

This more accurate understanding of ourselves doesn't come by **self-reflection** alone. It comes through **conversation**, with God, and with another person we trust, who can listen, ask questions.

Often, **in conversation with another person** (especially the right person) **we judge ourselves less harshly**. We regard ourselves more compassionately. And this helps us admit the exact nature of our wrongs—things about ourselves that contribute to our misery.

Talking about these things out loud with the right person, helps us admit them to ourselves, and to God. I notice in therapy when I say something to my therapist (who is not a judge, but with whom I'm trying to be honest, and who helps me sort and sift through my experience) ...it's as if I'm saying it to God and to myself.

Jesus said, “*Wherever 2 or 3 are gathered there I am among you.*”

STEP 6: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

I love the **genius** of the 12 Steps—how it works so well with our actual humanity. First, take an **inventory**—just identify stuff, write it down. Then you **share that** with other person...someone you trust, feel comfortable with, someone who won't judge you, who has had to face their own stuff...and in that process your stuff comes into better focus...your accuracy improves...**then you sit with it all for a while until you're "entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character"**

You're ready. It's time. Thing about being ready? You're not ready until you're ready. And sometimes you can't rush ready.

Ready for what? To buckle down and improve? No. To have God remove all these defects of character...as God chooses to. Maybe God won't start with the one that bugs you most, the one you're hyper-focused on. Maybe it will be some minor thing. Maybe you we are like a tangled-up pair of ear buds—just have to start untangling somewhere.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Have you noticed something about the 12 Steps of AA? Alcoholics Anonymous? There is no step that says, "Decided to stop drinking"

That's the reason someone joins AA: to stop drinking, yet there is no step that says, "Decided to stop drinking."

Isn't that counter-intuitive? Strange? And yet so adapted to our actual humanity. When alcohol or any other addictive behavior has you beat, it has you beat. If you could have stopped drinking by deciding, "I need to stop or reduce my drinking" you would have done so long ago and not needed AA.

Some things get worse with the wrong kind of mental effort. In golf, it's well known that you don't walk up to the tee thinking, "don't shank it into the woods on the right there." Because what registers in your brain is "shank it into the woods on the right there"—the "don't" is swallowed up by "the woods on the right."

It's like that old kinnard, don't picture a pink elephant. Your brain immediately conjures a pink elephant.

A more indirect approach is needed often.

Native American version of 12 steps, “Red Road to Wellbriety” —adaptation of 12 steps for native culture. Saying: **“The cure for the sick tree is the forest.”** The cure is the culture. *Hidden life of Trees.*

All the steps begin with observing others taking them, in a fellowship, at meetings. Here we learn to be honest, to avoid euphemism. Learn not to exaggerate our flaws or to minimize them. As we see others struggle for *accuracy in facing their own stuff*. This is a spiritual path we cannot take alone.

In order to do a good inventory, you have to be non-judgmental toward yourself. If you do this in a blaming-condemning spirit, you will tighten up, raise your defenses. Have to approach it in this mode: *we all have faults, I wonder what mine are?*

The culture of AA makes this possible, because everyone has their own stuff to deal with, which makes it easier for you to deal with yours. It’s the opposite of FB (putting your best face forward)

Culture of AA is one where nobody points out anyone else’s flaws—everyone is encouraged to identify, work on, their own.

That’s the kind of culture that helps us to face the things about us that contribute to our misery.

#### FOR REFLECTION

“Confession of Sins” in public worship is a ritual to remind us that we all have our own stuff.

Do it a bit more personally. Which of these items could you own?

Not something you feel awful about, or ashamed of

But something that you can own with a specific example

Circle it/initial it [my example, refusing to forgive my uncle]

Pass it in (if you like) and we will add this to communion table

## THE TWELVE STEPS

STEP ONE: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

STEP TWO: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

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

STEP FOUR: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

STEP FIVE: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

STEP SIX: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

STEP SEVEN: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

STEP EIGHT: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

STEP NINE: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

STEP TEN: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

STEP ELEVEN: 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 it out.

STEP TWELVE: Have 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.

Most holy and merciful Father:

We confess to you and to one another,  
and to the whole communion of saints  
in heaven and on earth,  
that we have sinned by our own fault  
in thought, word, and deed;  
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and  
strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We  
have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.  
We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us.  
We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved  
your Holy Spirit.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the  
pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation  
of other people,

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those  
more fortunate than ourselves,

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and  
our dishonesty in daily life and work,

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to  
commend the faith that is in us,

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done:  
for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our  
indifference to injustice and cruelty,

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our  
neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those  
who differ from us,

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of  
concern for those who come after us,