

The 12 Steps for Anyone: On Amend-Making (Steps 7–9)

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What we can all learn about a Jesus shaped spirituality thru 12 Steps. While 12 Steps are non-sectarian—the Higher Power of steps is as anonymous as the identity of those in any 12-step group—the steps didn't come out of thin air. Bill W., co-founder of AA, had a profound spiritual experience in his hospital room—a bright light, waves of love pouring over him, the whole bit. And he drew the principles of the 12 steps from his participation in the Oxford Group—an evangelical group with roots in the Anglican (Church of England/Episcopal) world. As one who loves the Jesus of the gospels and believes a faith community is essential to follow Jesus, I can say there is more of the Spirit of Jesus in AA than can be found in many churches.

Focus steps 7–9. [Get 9 people to read?] STEP 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

STEP SEVEN: Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

UBAN DICTIONARY: True humility is to recognize your value and others value while looking up. To be humble is to serve others and be for their good as well as your own. To be humble is to have a realistic appreciation of your great strengths, but also of your weaknesses Moses *is an example of a man possessing true humility. He realizes his grandeur and importance as a leader of an entire nation, but also looked up to something greater than him-self in G-d and realized how much more there is than who we are.*

IN AA spirituality, humility is doorway to serenity. To recognize a Higher Power is to take a lower position in relation to that Power.

I can control much less than I think I can. Life is a gift from a Higher Power. The spiritual practice of humility is gratitude.

Humility related to, humus (top-soil/dirt.) Hebrew picture of humility is second creation story of Genesis—the non-gendered human molded by YHWH out of dirt, then with a breath from the human becomes a living soul. To be human (another word related to humility) is to stand between the dirt and the divine.

Without an awareness of God as Higher Power, we take on more responsibility than we can bear—the weight of the world is on us. We tighten up, try to control more than we can possibly control. We our serenity and any hope of serenity.

The Spiritual Move of Step 7 (Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings) is not to screw up our self-improvement efforts (if we could improve by self effort we would have done that a long time ago)...it is to relax into the Higher Power asking—a humble thing to do—for God to remove our shortcomings.

This move takes practice because it's counter-intuitive. *I can fix it!* Is intuitive. *God remove my shortcomings* is counter-intuitive. One is a tighten up move, other is a relax-into-a-Higher-Power move.

***I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments (Ps. 119:176)***

Psalm 119 is 176 verses, longest chapter in Hebrew Bible. This is the very last verse. A perfect example of Step 7 spirituality.

I have gone astray like a lost sheep—not absence of moral brow-beating. Gone astray is not, I'm a horrible person! I wandered away, I lost contact with the flock and the shepherd, I lost focus.

It's humility because the psalmist in relation to God (not in relation to other people) is a sheep. Not as smart as the shepherd—not as nimble on the feet, not as aware of its surroundings, etc. IN a position of dependence.

Experience of being truly lost—can't find your way. Only hope—that someone who misses you will come looking for you. (My experiences getting lost)

***I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant,
for I do not forget your commandments (Ps. 119:176)***

So the psalmist has lost focus, wandered off, is now lost, hoping God, missing him will search for him...all this without morally brow-beating himself (John Candy SNL)...and stating "I do not forget your commandments"—I care about you, I care about being good, doing right, but I've lost my bearings.

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

12 steps is a spirituality of noticing things about ourselves. Not a tighten up, brow-beating move, but a simple act of awareness, noticing things about ourselves. In STEP 4, character flaws that make us/people around us miserable. Notice, write 'em down.

Here in STEP 8, we make a list of all person we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.

I submit, this too is a process of relaxing into God—in particular relaxing into God’s love, for you, and for the people you may have harmed. AS we do this—not brow-beating ourselves, not tightening up, but relaxing into our Higher Power-God, we will, over time, become willing to make amends to them all.

Remember as a one-step-at-a-time spirituality, you can only go as fast as your turtle-nature will allow you to go. That’s humility. We can only become willing to make amends when we are helped by God to be willing to make amends.

You will find there is hope in the word “amends.” Founders wrote constitution—that like all documents included some original flaws (only landowning white men can vote, only White People are persons with full rights under the law. These wrongs were amended by constitutional amendments (13th/ 19th)

I’m a writer and all writing is editing—getting something down, then amending it, correcting it, improving it. 19th given women right to vote) You’re only as good a writer as you are an amender.

BIG BOOK, edited by friends of Bill W.

Everything human is a work in progress, especially our lives. Our human DNA is constantly getting damaged and repaired—health is not perfection but making amends.

In this STEP we settle into this notion (a function of humility): perfection not a human trait; we are human; only God is perfect, we are human; we stand between the dirt and the divine; amends will be necessary. But we can make ’em! Good news!

And that’s all this STEP is, relaxing into that awareness...and as we do we become willing to make amends.

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

End by demonstrating how possible amends are, how beautiful they can be, and how they can be part of bringing a new world into being. I’m going big scale here.

We, this church, is beautiful in a human way. That is, not perfect, but a result of making amends. We are an amend! Amen?

First, we're beautiful—and I refer not to our astonishingly excellent preaching, music and announcements. I refer to our effect. This is from one of the Serendipity doo dah moms who tunes in:

Blue Ocean has really helped me to start to rebuild my relationship with God. I am not ready to walk back into a church building, but I can watch your services and get something out of each one... it makes a difference to me. Thank you.

If I started telling you stories of people who have thanked me for what we are doing and what it means to them, I would be here a long time. One young man told me recently after coming out to his conservative parents who were crushed and I told him I was so sorry, "Yes, but the fact that Blue Ocean exists and that so many people paid a social cost for doing this...has sent a powerful message to me...What?...that I am valuable, not a piece of junk. And that I am valuable to God"

So in the way that human things standing between the dirt and the divine can be beautiful we are beautiful—and that beauty is bound up with the fact that we are an amends.

How many us have practiced a form of Christianity, that like the US Constitution, was deeply flawed, and those flaws were hidden? Until God revealed them...and we faced them, and were given the willingness to make amendments?

When I was a pastor in my 30s, I believed women couldn't be pastors and LGBTQ people were outside God's will. This was an obviously self-serving belief given my gender and orientation. It also allowed me to rise in the ranks of my profession. It wasn't insincere, but the self-serving aspect was hidden to me. Until it wasn't anymore. By 1994, I made amends on gender flaw—said, sorry, wrong reading, my bad, of course women can be pastors.

And many years later made amends on the sexuality flaw. IN the meantime, people were harmed, and I couldn't undo that harm.

But I was given the help from a Higher Power to make direct amends where it was possible. That's all we can do. That's all that is expected of us. We're not God, we can't save, redeem, rescue, reconcile all things. We can't even clean up all of our own messes. But we can participate with God in undoing some wrongs, and when we can it

is a high honor to do so. And it's satisfying, liberating...in its own way joyful, even if the joy is tinged with sorrow for what we can't undo, or correct.

All that is a dispassionate description, but the actual working it out—making a searching and fearless moral inventory (Step 4), admitting to God, myself, and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs (Step 5), becoming entirely ready to have God remove these defects (Step 6), humbly asking God to remove them (Step 7), making a list of all those harmed and becoming willing to make amends (Step 8), then making the direct amends when possible (Step 9)—that was a process that included agony.

But it was the agony of labor, of childbirth, of bringing something beautiful into being.

So we are together proof that amends are possible, amends are ultimately satisfying to make, and something beautiful is born through them.

When people regard the spirituality of the 12 Steps, spirituality-lite, it's a sure sign that it is for them a road untraveled. Because this is an arduous spirituality, as all genuine spirituality is. But there is communion, fellowship, connection—with God with ourselves, with others, with the wider world in this path.

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.