

The 12 Steps for Anyone: Improving Conscious Contact (Step 11)

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Considering 12 Steps as a spiritual path. Think of spirituality as **exploring ways to connect with a Power beyond ourselves**. This idea is heart of AA/12 steps. AA born out of suffering of alcoholics at a time when no successful treatment. First a handful, then scores, now millions of people have discovered that turning their lives over to care of a Higher Power works miracles of recovery.

AA has a no-nonsense, approach to spirituality. All about what facilitates recovery. There's an understanding of God, but it's rooted in experience more than dogma. There's no "my God is better than your God" vibe. It's all about, "here's what we've learned that helps us stay sober."

There is a definite understanding of God imbedded in steps. Six of the 12 steps refer to God (highlighted in your handout). What do they tell us about this God, experienced in recovery? Step 2: a God with power to restore us to sanity. Step 3: a God we can safely turn our lives over to because he cares about us. Step 5: a God we can tell your secrets to and he won't use it against us. Steps 6 & 7: a God who can help remove our defects—once we've identified what they are. He won't remove what we're determined to keep. Step 11: that conscious contact with God is possible and helpful

STEP 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 it out.

Focus on "God as we understood Him." Also in Step 3, underlined both times. Nothing else is underlined in 12 Steps. **Back-story:** Bill W. just forming after Bill W.'s flash-of-light conversion. Started with **6 steps**, Bill W. wanted to break them into smaller bits. He wrote 12 out, presented them to group. Royal argument ensued—about God. How he was pushing God on the group, etc. Resolved by inserting & then underlining God "as we understood Him"

I love this posture: We're not here to argue for this/that view of God. No power move, no **jamming my God** down **your throat**.

Remember AA is a fellowship, a community seeking recovery.

As people learn things that help recovery, these things are shared in group. So I can benefit from your experience. You can be informed by my experience. How humans learn-thrive. We don't all have to invent the wheel.

And by this time in AA, a growing wisdom forming around how involvement with God can aid recovery.

Being intentional about conscious contact with God—taking steps to improve conscious contact with God, giving opportunity for conscious contact with God to flourish, aids recovery.

Step 11, Improving Conscious contact through prayer and meditation, is NOT about being religious or a mystic, etc.

It's about **getting thru the day!** We pray to get through the day.

I want to spend a little time talking about what conscious contact with God in the Jesus tradition **feels like**. So we can recognize it when it happens. And take steps to improve it.

It's **not a given that conscious contact** with God would be appealing or helpful. Conscious contact with a condemning God would be painful, add to our suffering, drive us into addiction.

Theology Alert! In Jesus tradition, "conscious contact with God" is **mediated** by Jesus. Jesus functions like a window, or a lens, or a channel and our contact with God comes through that window or lens or channel. It's even a little deeper than that: when we open ourselves to Jesus, we share in his experience of God.

And the nature or quality or feel of the Jesus experience of God is the feeling of a child with a wonderful parent who loves-cares for-delights in you. Super lucky to have a

taste of this kind of love from my mom, Blanche Wilson. **Inside my head** when I hear word “Kenny or Ken” it’s **in my mother’s voice** and it comes with a feeling of her regard (delight). Example: singing in shower (age 30) come out, Blanche says, “You missed your calling!” More about her delight in me than my voice.

The gospels indicate Jesus prayed a lot. But what he actually felt when he prayed is another thing. For that we have **one example**, referenced in all 4 gospels.

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; in whom my soul delights’” Mark 1: 9-11.

Difference between approval and delight. We can approve of people because they do something we like and we want to reward them [transactional]. Often a form of control. Do what I like and you get the M&M of approval. Delight is more like taking joy in someone. [Blanche while I’m singing]

The context makes this amazing: Jesus was “standing in for us” while this happened to him. John was doing a “baptism of repentance” for sinners. Riff-raff were all coming for baptism under the critical eye of the authorities. John was doing a very controversial thing, baptizing sinners—all comers—like this. Jesus insisted on joining the sinners being baptized.

And while he was standing if for us and with us, he had this love-delight experience. Luke’s account adds a clarifying detail, ***“And as he [Jesus] was praying, heaven was opened...”*** (Lk. 3:22) So this happened while Jesus was praying. That means this is a Step 11 example. Only example we have of what his conscious contact with God taking place in context of prayer & meditation felt like.

When Jesus is mediating the conscious contact, it has this quality—you feel like a child whose parent delights in you. 3 examples:

1. Christine Modey: *A long while ago, I was considering becoming a pastor. To do that in the Episcopal church, you have to take a year long course and at the end of it is a retreat. During the retreat, we had some quiet time to reflect on a Bible passage. And I found myself sitting in front of a sculpture. It was an image of God holding the body of Jesus, just taken down from the cross, in the way one might carry a child. God is heart broken and grief stricken. And as I continued to look at it, the image changed in my mind to become something else. It became an image of Jesus carrying me. At that moment, I had a gut-wrenching sense for the first time of what Jesus' love is like—and what it might feel like to abide in that love. Gathered up and held close, like a child.*

2. 2012 one of last times my late wife led Single Moms ministry she started at previous church (ended after Emily & I left). Record turnout: 60 moms, 80+ of their kids and about 50 men and women from the church to serve them all. Attending meal that night.

Round tables for 8 set for a feast. The menu: butternut squash soup, salad; pork tenderloin with an apple chutney and rice pilaf. And dessert. A crew of youngish people are hovering nearby—the waitstaff with white shirt and tie, and white aprons; the chefs, three men in their chef hats busy in the kitchen—the café filled with the aroma of the impending meal.

Nancy stands up to gather everyone's attention: "Ladies, you children are as far away from you as they can while remaining in the building. A team of responsible adults is feeding and caring for them. They will be fine. This time is for you. We are here to serve you. So, take a deep breath and relax." Nancy proceeds to pray grace, and while she's praying, I'm getting all choked up. And when she's done, I see I'm not the only one. One of the Single Moms at my table is in tears; she waves her hand next to her face and says, "Don't mind me; it's just that whenever I come here I feel so much love!" And it takes her about five minutes to collect herself from that conscious contact with love.

3. At Ypsi Pride last Friday. The scene: Washington/Mi Ave. Booths. Blue Ocean People. Guy holding our sign up. Raining but people there anyway. Warmth. Wide range of

people. Lots of people coloring outside lines. With Julia, needs more steps, can't find her. Ask around. Joy points across the way—look over there.

Funny moment. At certain point, sun comes out, while still raining, know there must be a rainbow somewhere. Feeling of God's love all over the place, in response to the people. A feeling of God taking delight in the people together like this.

I want to suggest that the feeling of being a child, and having a parent who takes delight in us, is the kind of conscious contact with God that aids our recovery from whatever ails us. And that this feeling is a reliable guide—what conscious contact feels like

STEP 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 it out.*

We don't take on burden of knowing God's will for everybody. It's enough to pray for knowledge of His will for us, and for the power to carry it out. Helpful antidote to our tendency to weaponize religion—use it to exert power over other people. When we do that, it's usually a sign we are avoiding something in ourselves.

QUIET REFLECTION

[Weekly time of prayer-meditation in Francis chapel?]
Drawing today's meditation on Step 11 in this book.

1. Pick a prayer and read it over several times.
2. Use your imagination to picture a peaceful scene (ocean)

Lord, make me a channel of thy peace;
that where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
that where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that where there is error, I may bring truth;
that where there is doubt, I may bring faith;

that where there is despair, I may bring hope;
that where there are shadows, I may bring light;
that where there is sadness, I may bring joy.
Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted;
to understand, than to be understood;
to love, than to be loved.
For it is by self-forgetting that one finds.
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven.
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life. Amen.

1 minute to review the prayer

1 minute to picture a peaceful nature scene (oceans)—focus on the various elements (sounds, sights, feel, smell)

1 minute to picture-present yourself as a channel of that oceanic peace-love-goodness, flowing through you to others (in small scale ways for starters). Behind you is the ocean, in front of you is the rest of the day.

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: 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.

Prayer of St. Francis: *Lord, make me a channel of thy peace; that where there is hatred, I may bring love; that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness; that where there is discord, I may bring harmony; that where there is error, I may bring truth; that where there is doubt, I may bring faith; that where there is despair, I may bring hope; that where there are shadows, I may bring light; that where there is sadness, I may bring joy. Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted; to understand, than to be understood; to love, than to be loved. For it is by self-forgetting that one finds. It is by forgiving that one is forgiven. It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life. Amen.*