

Kicking the Habit: 12 Steps to Recovery



**ADDICTION
RECOVERY**



Christopher News Notes

“I had reached the end of the line. I was powerless to save myself from an evil force that was stronger than I was. One night I cried out to God. I begged Him to let the great healing wind of His Spirit blow through me and make me clean once more. And He heard my cry. I never touched alcohol again.”

*—Bill Wilson, co-founder of
Alcoholics Anonymous*

EVERY DAY, PEOPLE WITH SOME FORM OF ADDICTION are learning what it means to be free of compulsion through reliance on the simple 12-step program formulated by Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The two managed to stay sober by helping other alcoholics and by attending meetings of the Oxford Group, an international movement that preached a return to the simple faith of the early Christians. Bill W. and Dr. Bob used basic spiritual principles to formulate their guide to recovery. Here are the 12 Steps with commentary we have added to illustrate their spiritual basis.

1. We admitted we were powerless over (problem), that our lives had become unmanageable.

"I was so lost, I knew I was dying. One rainy day in March, I knelt in the mud on a bluff overlooking the Chattahoochee River. I just prayed to let me die or get better." (A cocaine addict from Arkansas)

Myth: I am a hopeless case.

Fact: You are a child of God. There is no such thing as a hopeless case.

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live."
—Dt. 30:19

2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

"My compulsive eating overwhelmed me. To me, trusting God to solve my problem wasn't logical. Strong people take control of their lives and solve their own problems. I wasn't sure I even believed in God. One day, everything changed. I suddenly understood that relying on God for strength was not a sign of weakness...that His power was really there. I could feel Him." (A member of Overeaters Anonymous)

Myth: I am too weak to control my addiction.

Fact: A Higher Power exists to supply for your weakness. Your addiction can be brought under control by seeking help from God as you understand Him.

The "Big Book" of A.A. teaches that total dependence upon a Higher Power is an absolute condition for maintaining sobriety: "On one proposition these men and women strikingly agreed. Every one of them has gained access to, and believes in, a Power greater than himself."

"Father, I thank You for You have heard my prayer."
—Jn. 11:41

3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

"I admitted I was helpless, and that my habit had licked me and I couldn't do anything about it. The next thing I did was to honestly surrender my life and put my problem in God's hands." (A recovering alcoholic)

Myth: I should be able to solve my own problems.

Fact: Even the strongest will is no match for some addictions. Unless you reach out for help and accept it, you will make little headway. "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you always got."

"In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who live in darkness...and to guide our feet into the way of peace."
—Lk. 1:78-79

4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

"When I attended my first meeting, I was frightened. I didn't believe that prayer or some religious program could help me. I certainly didn't want to reveal myself to anyone. But gradually, the openness of those attending got to me, and my negative feelings softened. It wasn't long after that I began enjoying the meetings. I also had a new sense of hope." (A member of Gambler's Anonymous)

Myth: Looking back on past mistakes only makes me ashamed and discouraged.

Fact: Self-examination enables us to get in the habit of taking responsibility for all our actions. This is a necessary step in attaining self-respect.

"The day came for them to be purified." —Lk. 2:22

5. We admitted to God, ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrong.

"Each of the 12 Steps is crucial, but the 4th and 5th Steps have special importance for me and my recovery as I look back at my healing from sexual addiction... As I prepared my list, I made an entry on a page I titled 'Shame' each time I had feelings of shame recalling a certain event. I was very gentle with myself recalling these memories, and I asked my sponsor for some special support." (A member of Sexaholics Anonymous)

Myth: If anyone knew the truth about me, they would reject me.

Fact: You will feel freer and happier once you break the cycle of isolation and begin to trust another human being. Isolation destroys objectivity.

"Help carry one another's burdens, in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." —Gal. 6:2

6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

"It came as a great relief to me to learn that my drinking problem was more a biochemical dependence than a sin. My shameful drunken behavior was incompatible with my role as a minister of the gospel...Step 6 opened

If some compulsive behavior has you in its grip, make up your mind to get help. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Admit you have a problem:** the hardest part is to stop denying the fact that you're not managing your life well.
- **Turn to God:** tell God about your pain, worry, and shame. Ask for His help in finding a way back.
- **Find the group that best meets your needs:** there are Anonymous groups for Alcoholics, Narcotics, Gamblers, Sexaholics, Emotions, Overeaters, etc. Al-Anon and Al-Ateen exist to help the non-alcoholic friends and relatives of alcoholics. Families Anonymous and Nar-Anon do the same for the non-addict friends and relatives of drug addicts.
- **Attend a meeting:** you don't have to say a word. Just sit and listen. End the cycle of isolation and shame that has caused you so much grief.
- **Be patient:** the 12-step program is not something you do in a day. You proceed at your own pace, one day at a time. And remember, a lapse is not an irrevocable failure. You can begin again.

my eyes to the idea that God could do what my will was unable to do." (A recovering alcoholic quoted in *The Rehabilitation of Clergy Alcoholics*)

Myth: No one can change their character.

Fact: Character defects and bad habits can be changed. Ask God for help.

"I will come Myself and heal him." —Mt. 8:7

7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

The "Big Book" makes it clear that God responds: "That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows...Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change...We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves."

Myth: It's degrading to grovel.

Fact: Humility is not humiliation. Asking for help is an act of humility which makes sense.

"Ask and it shall be given to you." —Mt. 7:7

8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make direct amends to them all.

"I didn't believe I was harming anyone except myself.

I was way overweight because I couldn't handle rejection. I turned to the refrigerator every time I needed consolation from hurt feelings. What I didn't face up to was that my own self-pity was destroying me and making the lives of those around me a living hell." (A member of Overeaters Anonymous)

Myth: It's crazy to make amends to someone who has hurt you and who keeps on hurting you.

Fact: You cannot risk emotional and spiritual suicide by holding on to resentments. Freedom begins from within.

"Forgive whatever you have against anyone so that your Father in heaven may forgive your failings, too."

—Mk. 11:25

9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

"For me, the words 'wherever possible' were a loophole. I gave myself permission to interpret them in my own way...My sponsor put me straight...Since the whole purpose of this was to get me to take responsibility for my actions...I had to find a way to do the right thing. I felt so much better when I finally reached out and started making amends." (A recovering drug addict)

Myth: Those I've hurt will never forgive me. Why bother?

Fact: Making an honest effort to make amends has nothing to do with how people will respond. Just reaching out will reduce your feeling of shame and give you a new sense of control.

"Be kind to one another and mutually forgiving."

—Eph. 4:32

10. We continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

"The thing I had to learn was that the 10th Step only said we should admit our wrongdoings. It didn't say we

should punish ourselves for them." (A member of Sexaholics Anonymous in *Hope and Recovery*)

Myth: I can never forgive myself.

Fact: You can forgive yourself once you accept God's forgiveness. Recovery depends on your willingness to change and on your honest efforts to make progress. Let go and let God.

"Happy are those who put their trust in the Lord."

—Ps. 40:4

11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.

"In the 12 Steps, the word 'God' is mentioned seven times, but the particular addiction—alcohol, drugs, gambling, etc.—is only mentioned once, in the 1st Step. After a while, you become so close to God, you really depend on Him not just at prayer time but all day long." (A recovering alcoholic)

Myth: I don't know how to pray well.

Fact: The only way to pray well is to pray often. Anyone who asks for guidance to know God's will and the courage to follow it is praying very well.

"Live as children born of Light. Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth."

—Eph. 5:8-9

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to (others) and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Bill Wilson said that he never could have made it if he hadn't launched into an effort to help other alcoholics. Part of the healing process is to stop seeing yourself as a victim and start seeing yourself as a healer. Healers commit themselves to helping and supporting others, either responding to emergency cries for help or simply by being there.

Myth: I made a mess of my life, so I'm not qualified to counsel others.

Fact: The best guides are those who have traveled the path because they know all the pitfalls and obstacles. Besides, it's an important step in your own recovery, an assurance that you won't falter at this stage.

"Encourage one another and build one another up."

—1 Thess. 5:11

"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

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President: Mary Ellen Robinson

Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

The Christophers

264 West 40th Street, Suite 603, New York, NY 10018

212-759-4050, ext. 241

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

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