THE JOURNEY
TO
wholeness

GUIDEBOOK ONE

Getting Directions
FINDING TRUE NORTH
Steps 1-3 of Christ-centered Twelve Step Recovery
The Journey to Wholeness is an Adventist Recovery Ministries resource based on the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

Created by Jackie Bishop and Shelley Weaver
Managing Editor: Katia Reinert
Design by 316 Creative
Page layout by Ginger Calkins

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The world in which we live is filled with broken people who are attempting to relate to one another using the tools they have learned up to this point on their life’s journey. For many, using these tools is not working well. Relationships are strained sometimes to the breaking point, self-defeating thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are well entrenched, and the cycle of dysfunction is unintentionally visited upon our children to the third and fourth generation (Deuteronomy 5:9). Given the statistics related to divorce, domestic violence, abuse and addictions even among our church family, there could be a tendency to become discouraged, but there is every reason for hope. Jesus promised that Elijah would come before He returns, and that when he comes, he will restore all things (See Malachi 4:5-6 and Matthew 17:11). The work of Elijah is to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, and that is the work of God’s church, or His people today. A large part of this work is the work of healing and cleansing the hearts of people so that the character of God’s love will be restored and reflected in them.

Adventist Recovery Ministries is an intentional effort on the part of the North American Division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide tools to assist its members in this restoration process. Building on the shoulders of pioneering programs such as Seventh-day Adventist Regeneration, Adventist Recovery Ministries seeks to respond to the needs of its membership who struggle with very real problems either prior to and/or after joining the church. Adventist Recovery Ministries first attempts to break the denial that has long held our church in its grip, a denial that such problems exist among us. It then seeks to provide solutions that are evidence based, biblically sound, and in harmony with the writings of Ellen G. White. Our confidence is that the same Jesus who healed “every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35), will complete in us and among us the work that He has begun (Philippians 1:6). This confidence is not misplaced because it is not based on our worthiness, nor even primarily on our need, but solidly on His unbreakable promise.

There is even better news, however. God’s grand plan for healing and restoration is not just for us. We are healed in order to become instruments of healing in the lives of others (2 Corinthians 1:4). The tools for the journey are, as God has always intended, to be used to bless others. This evangelism may not be done using traditional methodologies, but will be a touching of other human hearts with the healing encounter that will draw them to Christ, the Source of healing.

The first four volumes in The Journey to Wholeness series have participant guides and focus on a Christ centered Twelve-Step recovery program. These volumes will be followed by others which will focus on different approaches and evidence based interventions that can also contribute to prevention and recovery of addictive behaviors during the life course of an individual.

It is our prayer that through The Journey to Wholeness series, the body of Christ will experience a revival and reformation that has long been sought after with prayer and tears. May the power of the Holy Spirit attend every effort to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). It is God’s desire that each of us may experience a “full and abundant life” (John 10:10), and His desire can be a reality for each of us today.
Dear Fellow Travelers

We all start a journey for the same reason: We want to be somewhere different from where we are now. Long trips require some planning. When we are going somewhere new, we try to find out all the things we need for the journey. We follow a map, use a satellite-guided navigation instrument, or get good verbal or written instructions from someone we trust. Ignoring these steps means we risk wandering off course. We may end up taking costly detours, or even going in circles while making no progress at all.

However, in the journey of life, some of us have set out for parts unknown, equipped only with what we've learned from watching fellow travelers. Some of those leaders, teachers, and parents were no better equipped for the journey than we were. Using these old maps and borrowed tools has been dangerous. When traveling became really difficult, painful, or risky, we often chose to just quit trying to navigate or even follow directions. We closed our eyes through destructive behaviors, fantasies, drugs, or alcohol. We thought it would be easier if we didn't look at life's roadblocks. We chose to travel blind, or numb. Sometimes, we also had the challenge of parenting or teaching someone else during their troubled traveling. Our travel became even harder as we accepted responsibility for guiding someone on a trip which we hadn't mastered ourselves.

On the other hand, we may be travelers who have white-knuckled it, and traveled sober. We've become convinced that our way is the only way to travel safely. When our spouses, students, and children have their own ideas of how to travel, we feel terrified that they will get lost along their way. Our worry can take over our lives to the point that we can barely sleep; we forget to take care of our own needs. Worrying keeps us from our own journey, and we discover that we have little to offer to those we hope to guide.

A MAP FOR OUR LIFE JOURNEY

This study is a journey we will take together, and in the study of life as a journey,

During our journey to wholeness, we will look at ways that this journey can help us grow in experience, strength and hope. This study is a journey we will take together, and the course we will follow is based on a traditional Twelve Step approach to seeking serenity and sanity. This approach has guided many, many others while helping them and their families find their path, even when the whole family system had gone terribly off-course.

In the tradition of Twelve Step Recovery, there are leaders, mentors/sponsors, and supportive friends, but no “experts.” This study has been written and assembled by fellow travelers, active in the recovery journey, hoping to share their experience, strength, and hope. We have found the philosophies and practices of the Twelve Step program to be a wonderful guide and a tool to navigating life’s challenges.

At first, some of us feared that a Twelve Step program would be like steps in a staircase. The name reminded us of a hard and steep climb. A better view of the Steps is that of a journey forward. We are not trying to get to the top, or some perfect end-all destination. Instead, we look to find ways to make real progress in our spiritual journey. Using the Twelve Steps as tools, we learn to know ourselves, to know our best guide and Higher Power, and to clearly see all the different options and choices open to us. By doing this, we uncover the best way to continue our journey.

For those of us who have been traveling in circles of frustration, confusion and anxiety, this is good and wonderful news!

Welcome to the adventure, to the journey of your lifetime!
To make the travel easier, the TRAVEL GUIDE devotes one month of study for each step of the Twelve Step program. By choosing to study all five lessons in the space of one week, our travel together will develop an order and rhythm which will be very helpful to us individually as well as to our study group. At the same time, fitting five lessons into the space of seven days will allow for the unexpected interruptions life sometimes brings our way. We are aiming for progress, not some artificial picture of perfection.

If you are studying this travel guide as part of a Twelve Step recovery group, the order of the study will become important. One life-changing tool of the Twelve Step journey is a new focus on living each single day fully and purposefully. Daily use of this study and other recovery reading materials helps us get ready for each day. The reading is a part of our journey we treasure, and find we cannot do without.

With this in mind, the travel guide has a place to record the date on each day’s reading and journal section. Over the year we spend traveling through all Twelve Steps, you will be able to look back on the changes and discoveries that have happened along the way. It is an amazing blessing to be able to look back and see at which point you took your first steps in a new direction.

It can take a few different tries before a new idea or habit becomes part of our thinking and actions. Each month’s study shows a few different ways of looking at the step being studied. This allows each group member to be more likely to find a way of understanding the concept under study. You will notice that the headings repeat during each month, even though a different step is being presented. The following is a brief description of the focus of each of the weeks within the monthly study of Steps One through Three.

Approaches Within Each Week of Study:

1) MAP-GAZING & COMPASS-READING – A PEEK AT THE JOURNEY AHEAD:

This section appears as the first lesson in each week’s study. Its purpose is to introduce the Step to be studied, and the most important questions within each Step. The general readings and response questions will explore our current attitudes and outlooks on these issues. The section serves both as a glimpse of where we are headed, and a compass reading of where we currently stand.

2) TRAVEL LOG – A LOOK AT THE BOOK:

As believers, we’ve come to attach a significant value upon the word of God, whether or not we’ve ever actually accessed or fully explored its impact and power. Before we can begin to allow a reshaping of our attitudes and perspectives, we must fully explore the issues at hand as they appear in the stories and teachings of God’s word. Thus, the Bible comes to serve as a travel log, as the trustworthy journal of other travelers who have walked this way before us.
3) ARCHEOLOGICAL TOUR – DIG & DISCOVER:
At this point, we’ve established our location, our previously held thoughts and beliefs on an issue, and whether those beliefs match up with the reality of both God’s job and our own. At this point, we dig deeply into whatever issues and previously held ideas may be limiting God’s power and impact in our lives, as well as hindering our own work and will. As we uncover these ideas and issues, we examine each one carefully to learn the truth.

4) WISH YOU WERE HERE – PUTTING OURSELVES IN THE POSTCARD PICTURE:
This is the actual point of footwork in our journey, of stepping ahead and making an intentional move in the direction of God’s leading, having faith that we will receive sanity and guidance. Many of these steps are decisions, mind and attitude changes, while others require action. Each step is taken only when we are ready. Some steps are too big, but no step is too small.
As Christian believers and followers of Jesus, we have learned that every real change must begin with the power of God. No one says much about where our failed efforts, our old tries at “being good” must end. The end must come from us. To begin any real change, we must first admit that we have come to the end of ourselves. We have done all we know or have power to do, and we are still where we are now.

Those of us who have journeyed the way of recovery know that we have been healed only through the grace and power of God. However, we usually did not see that God was working at the time. All we knew was that we had tried everything, and that our very best efforts left us stalled or in horrible chaos. We had come to the end of our limited selves.

For those tired of the fight, it is such a gift to learn that Step One requires no big effort. There isn’t even any action required. Those of us who have failed again and again are now finished struggling. Step One of the Twelve Step journey is simply an admission: “We admit . . .”

Others of us may have a harder time getting excited about Step One, because the harder we’ve struggled and tried in the past, the harder this first step may be. We’ve worked endlessly to be good, to help others be good. For us, those simple words are so very difficult. In all our hard work and striving, we want them to be something bigger, something greater, some grand gesture on our part. Like Naaman, or Nicodemus, we want our part to be something spectacular. And like those two men, power, strategy, and maneuvering are the very things that have failed us. They do us no good - we are powerless.

Step One can also be a difficult Step, because it asks that we tell ourselves the truth. We have spent years denying that drugs or alcohol or sex or other struggles controlled us. Step One may not seem simple at all. It looks impossibly hard. To “admit we are powerless . . .” means we take a sharp U-turn in the journey. We must confess to others, most of all to ourselves, that we have lied. We cannot stop anytime we want. We do have a problem. Our lives are a mess, and, it isn’t going to get any better.

We are impatient with the idea of the time it will take to travel this journey. We are seeing a very long road ahead before we can reach sanity or sobriety. We want to get there now. We want to make everything all right, or we want to sink into the safety or power of our old habits. We want to do something. Instead we face a strange kind of beginning. In order to start this journey, we must admit, just admit, that we have reached the end.
## THE TWELVE STEPS

### STEP ONE:
We admitted we were powerless over our compulsions, obsessions and addictions, and 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 fearless and searching 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 that out.

### STEP TWELVE:
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.
DAY ONE
THE LANDMARKS AROUND ME:
The End of Our Own Efforts

To travel safely and well, we must know our starting point. Even professional buildings and shopping malls have directory maps with a marker stating: YOU ARE HERE. As we start this new journey, we may feel a little lost. We may have been detoured or off-track in our previous trek. As our fear and confusion grew, we may have turned to drugs, alcohol, or other destructive behaviors.

Some of us may have avoided drugs, or hurtful behaviors, but ran ourselves ragged trying to control and fix everyone and everything around us. Despite all this hard work, we only felt more stress and panic as nothing went as planned.

Our first step is to stop and take the time to see what areas of life trip us up as we travel. We may start to see certain patterns, the same problems repeating again and again. These burdens we’ve carried as we travel do not fit us well. We may never have had the right bag or pack to carry them, or they may just be too bulky or heavy to fit on our shoulders. It can help us to see how it looks to struggle with heavy burdens and difficult travel. Some struggling travelers look like this:

• Darlene works hard to raise her kids to be strong and confident. She has given them every physical and material need. In order to give them the best educationally, Darlene has devoted years of her life to home-schooling. No day has passed without Darlene telling her children that they are special and wonderful. She has paid close attention to teaching good manners, good values, and the best social skills possible so that her daughters will always be valued and appreciated by those around them. Despite all her hard work, the girls are struggling as they enter their teen years. Darlene sees her oldest daughter as impossibly shy and insecure, while the younger girl is rebellious, defiant, and very negative.

• Scott never used drugs or alcohol. He loved school and was a good student. While it was always easy for Scott to excel, he now finds himself competing with many smart and ambitious people in his business. Constantly worried about keeping pace in his career, Scott gets praise and attention by taking on extra work and overtime assignments. This causes trouble at home, and Scott feels angry that his wife and kids do not feel grateful for his hard work. He works hard to give them the best, and he can’t understand why they can’t be more patient.

• Pam lives near several of her high school friends. When they get together, they laugh about their crazy teen years. Each of them now hold jobs, raise families, and help out in their

“You don’t know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked”. – Jesus Christ
local churches. For most of them the past is a little embarrassing, and they feel lucky to have survived those reckless days. What Pam never shares is that she is still haunted by the “past.” No one else knows the hiding places deep in her dresser drawers, or behind her sweaters in the closet, where she hides the bottles. Each day, she hopes she will manage life and care for her family without that little “buzz” that helps her along. Most days she finds herself drinking again, even though she has promised herself she is through. Many nights she asks God why drinking controls her when her friends have all managed to leave it behind.

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**DAY TWO**

**THE SPOT WHERE I STAND: Fatigue, Frustration & Fear of Failure**

In the truest sense, some of us have really used drugs and alcohol. We have used substances to numb our pain. We have used them to mask loneliness. We have especially used them to avoid or ignore our experiences of risk and failure. This use may have actually helped us forget painful events for a short while. But long after the painful events have passed, we have continued to use, sometimes for no obvious reason at all. Because this is true, it’s important to begin our journey by looking closely at what triggers our substance use today. What sends us for the drugs or the bottle? What struggles make that choice more appealing?

For others of us, the crisis is less defined. We have no actual drug. We do not use narcotics or pain killers, and many of us have never even taken a single drink. We can honestly say we would have no idea what it would feel like to have a hangover. We have lived a “clean” life, and yet we often feel dirty, ashamed, and out of control. Just as stress or crisis may drive some to use drugs or drink, we know that a problem, or a fight with a loved one can send us into a state of panic. We have tried to be good Christians, to do the right thing, to live healthfully and honestly. Yet, we are still so confused and chaotic at times. The Christian soldier is supposed to be marching forward, but we may feel we gain little ground, and have very few moments we could call a clear victory.

All of us began this journey hoping and planning for the best. Even when we were small children, we looked for love and encouragement from parents and caretakers we trusted to teach and protect us. We had an honest right to expect these things. We have honestly tried to give these things to our children, to our spouses and friends. Instead we may now find those we treasure taking dangerous risks despite the care we’ve tried to give them. We agonize over how to help. What puzzles us most is that we hoped, planned and worked so hard for smooth travels. We bought all the right maps, and travel guides, we signed up for seminars and listened carefully to all the seasoned travelers offering advice. In other words, our bookshelves are full of self-help, parenting, marriage, and efficiency manuals. Our ears buzz with the invited and uninvited advice of friends and family. We’ve worked so hard, we’ve tried it all and nothing has changed.

We never wanted it to be this way . . .

**Which of my daily tasks eat up most of my time and energy?**

---

**TRAVEL ADVISORY:** We are digging deeply, but avoid the detours of searching for “deep” answers. List whatever comes to mind, and sort for importance later.
Which of my current relationships are the most draining?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

DAY THREE
CHARTING MY GLOBAL POSITION:
My Obstacles in the Big Picture

Of course, we may struggle in many other areas besides the two we named in yesterday’s exercise. However, looking at our two biggest areas of struggle will often give us insight into other conflicts. A look at addictions, obsessions and compulsions shows that they follow a certain path, known as the “addiction cycle.” Described briefly, it breaks down into five progressive steps which cycle back in a repetition. These five stages are: 1) Pain, 2) Reaching out to an addictive agent, such as work, food, sex, alcohol, or dependent relationships to relieve the pain, 3) Temporary anesthesia/relief, 4) Negative consequences (physical, mental, social and spiritual), 5) Shame and guilt, which result in more pain or low self-esteem, starting the cycle all over again. It is this cycle that keeps us locked into the pattern of our destructive behaviors.

Because there is so much potential for experiencing stress and pain in the areas of our work and relationships, we find them to be an important area of our lives to examine. Looking more closely at these two areas, work and relationships, answer as completely as possible, the following questions:

When I am not actively working on the demanding tasks I listed, how much of my time is still spent thinking about how to do this work?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

MAJOR LANDMARKS: Watch for connections! Some cause and effect is happening here

When I think about my most difficult jobs or responsibilities, what is it about each that I find the most concerning?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

At what points in the day do I think about difficult people or family members?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
What “people problems” have I faced before this, and am facing again?

How does this frustration affect my spiritual life, my faith, and my communication with God?

When have I used the challenging jobs or people problems as an excuse to drink, misuse other substances, or engage in some compulsive activity that negatively affects my health?

When do the difficult jobs or people problems cause me to doubt God’s leading, or feel that God is not listening to my prayers?

DAY FOUR
CONSIDERING NEW DIRECTIONS: Where Does One Go from “Defeat”?

Trying to learn which jobs belong to us may lead to opening our minds and to considering our struggles from different angles or viewpoints. As part of our mapping and compass-readings, let us think and write about the following questions:

Considering what problems repeat in my most difficult challenges, what would be different if I completely stopped all efforts in that direction?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What would happen with my challenging relationships if I stopped trying the things I've been doing to fix them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have the problems I've avoided by drinking, using, or engaging in my favorite addictive activity, changed during the time I was drunk or high?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would stopping the efforts to solve the problems in my tasks bring me more trouble or less trouble? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have the people with whom I struggle reacted to my using or engaging in out-of-control harmful behavior?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I let go of my efforts to solve the problems in my relationships, would the other people/person feel anxiety or relief? How would I feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I fantasize about starting a new life without the tasks or jobs that eat up my time and energy, what new tasks or jobs do I imagine?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CAUTION:** Honest answers help us the most, but be gentle with yourself, and share only in safe places and with safe people, especially at this early stage.
When I fantasize about life without the person whose problems most trouble me, how do I feel about these thoughts?

We've explored some hard questions and looked honestly at some of our most pressing current struggles on this journey. It's time for some Traveler's “Tender Loving Care (TLC).”

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change . . .”

So far, we've been traveling ahead to the best of our ability. This is a gentle reminder as we start the hard work of recovery, that we have been doing the best we can. Our use of alcohol, substances, or compulsive behaviors has been the result of searching for a tool to fix the unfixable. For a while, those tools helped to ease the pain of our struggles, but we are here today looking at our journey because the old tools are no longer working well. These old tools only cause more problems in our lives today.

Or, we may have worked hard to avoid mind altering substances, choosing to work and fight hard to make a good life for ourselves and our families. Instead, the harder we try, the more we may see true happiness escape us. Even with the best of intentions, nothing ever seems to come together completely under our control.

Take courage! Caring, loving hands and hearts surround us right now. All around us fellow travelers are posting caution signs to remind us: “Much of the baggage we’ve shouldered was never meant to be ours.”

In this journey, we first come to realize that what we’ve tried to fix is impossible to fix. No matter how deep the drunk, no matter how blissful the high, we awaken only to find the same problems from which we first ran. No matter how hard we work, we can never guarantee that we will still have a job or paycheck tomorrow, or that our health or life circumstances will allow our hard work to continue. No matter how much we try to protect and shelter our children, they will one day have to face trouble all alone, and we will never be able to travel their journey for them.

We are powerless over so very many things, but we are not without help. All around us are fellow travelers eager to share the gentle reminder that those things we can control come easily and peacefully to hand. We may also find that those things which cause us stress and struggle may belong in bigger hands, may well belong to Another . . .
TRAVEL LOG: A LOOK AT THE BOOK

“All is vanity” —Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

DAY ONE
STUDYING THE GUIDEBOOK - STEP ONE

The very first fateful choice in the Garden of Eden centered around human identity and limitations: what are we meant to know, experience, and control? As a result of the separation from our creator, we have a blurry picture of ourselves. Our job, our role in life looks either very small or very large.

Some of us may turn naturally to the Bible for some perspective. The Bible stories are comfortable and familiar to us. For others of us, the Bible has been a book of shame. That guilt-ridden reminder of our many shortcomings, gives us another reason to dive into our old pitfalls and preoccupations for relief. Today, the Bible will become a travel log on this journey. It will not command or condemn us. We will look at those old stories in a way that may be new to us. In the biblical accounts we will see and hear only the stories of travelers who have gone before us. In their struggles, faults and flaws, we will see God meet human weakness, incompleteness, and need. In looking closely at the real limits of human power and experience, we will come to know a God who is truly large and in charge. And we will begin to see ourselves drawn accurately to-scale on life’s map, no larger or smaller than we truly are.

The following overview of Step One provides a helpful beginning for looking at the Bible in a fresh new way. Read this section slowly and carefully. It will be the basis for the readings and verses that follow in the next few days.

12 STEPS TO RECOVERY – STEP 1

The key to recovery is a profound understanding that I am at my wits end. The term used is “Hitting Bottom”. The problem we have is - who wants to admit complete defeat? Practically no one, of course. We have practiced the self will approach for so long and failed so often that we must accept defeat to gain the victory. The folks in recovery programs have through experience and sharing (James 5:16) learned many lessons. One is that if you try and you fail enough times you can finally not try anymore. The first step, however, needs to be accomplished in order to build on the Rock not shifting sand.

The Honesty that there is a problem that needs to be addressed is the key to working Step 1. Proverbs 23:29-35 can be related to any dysfunctional dependency, not just alcohol or drugs. You see the same pattern of behavior continuing over and over as it says in verse 35 “They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.” Denial keeps us from identifying the problem which is our self will. You see it’s a selfish thing that has to be
admitted and that is: I want what I want when I want it and that is NOW! It is hard to accept this sort of thing about myself, however, if I don’t, the benefit of step 1 may be missed.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 accepted the fact that he had a problem (the thorn) and He asked for help out of weakness and got the answer in verse 9 “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” My thorn may be alcoholism and someone else may have pornography or drug addiction as their personal thorn but it will always come back to that Self-centered nature as the root of the problem.

The way to be willing to honestly accept the problem with all of its devastating results is to see the unmanageability that is taking place in my life. Paul explains it perfectly in Romans 7, he shows the powerless condition he is in and how evil can dominate when he is acting out his self reliance. I want to do right but just don’t seem to be able to do it. Remember what the Lord said to him about the thorn? What do I need to do to overcome? Admit I am powerless over my thorn - that my life has become unmanageable. The areas of unmanageability in each of our lives caused by dependencies are in our relationship with God and others, work related issues, financial issues etc. One of the ways that God helps us is to provide His grace and lead us to people who have practiced step 1 and are on the recovery journey. His will is that He wants us to have everlasting life and He has proved it by sending His Son our Savior in a completely surrendered condition to redeem us. Praise God!

Frank S.

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Additional Step One readings and explanations may be found in some Bibles and internet websites such as:

3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5o7l13Wzyw

NOTES ON THEMES & NEW IDEAS

DAY TWO
STEP ONE TEXTS

Today we pack our bags and travel in the footsteps of those who have traveled before. In this journey, we will meet many of the same questions and problems facing us today. How amazing to see that people at every point in history have struggled to learn to accept their powerlessness over life’s difficulties. Remembering this, please carefully document any new discoveries in the following readings and Bible passages.

READING ASSIGNMENT
FOUR STEP ONE TEXTS

The Main Ideas:
Record of what I noticed that was new to me.

The Main Ideas:

DAY THREE
MORE STEP ONE TEXTS

Many of us have important jobs or leadership roles that carry huge responsibilities with them. It can be hard to see our own limitations, or to see ourselves as “powerless” in the face of all we are able to accomplish. Many of the Bible writers and characters also had great wisdom and positions of leadership, yet they too had to come to a perspective of how little they actually controlled.

WEATHER FORECAST: Familiar texts may shadow our thinking. Read Step meditations first to clear our minds for fresh discovery.

READING ASSIGNMENT
FOUR MORE STEP ONE TEXTS
Matthew 9:36, Mark 10:13-16, Romans 7:18-20, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Record of what I noticed that was new to me.
DAY FOUR
STEP ONE REFLECTIONS

Although the journey of recovery is a very personal and individual trek, we often hear similar struggles, questions and discoveries as we gather with our group of fellow travelers each week. We are also blessed by our differences. In the group’s varied viewpoints and ideas, we collect discoveries we might have missed all on our own.

Read again the notes from this past week, and note those that still seem especially important. Sharing these with the group will help you remember them in the future, and we will all be blessed by your thoughts.

Thoughts for group sharing:

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“I don’t do the good I want to do, instead I do the evil I don’t want to do” —Paul (Romans 7:19).

DAY ONE
TODAY’S BIG FIND: Buried Feelings.

As we embark on this journey, we experience feelings which have been dormant a long time. We may become intensely aware of loneliness, anger, fear, sadness or even an overwhelming sense of vulnerability. As young children it was often not helpful to express our feelings. Sometimes we were told we weren’t supposed to feel a certain way, or that our feelings ‘were wrong.’ If our feelings weren’t evaluated or criticized, they were often ignored. When we feel that nothing good comes from sharing our feelings, we stop expressing them. As adults we may find we’ve deeply buried our past and our feelings about the things that happened in our childhoods. We underestimate the impact these hurts may have in our adult lives.

If this pattern happened in our family, we may have become adults who do not feel very good about ourselves and who have trouble trusting people. Adults who aren’t able to express feelings may end up feeling depressed, struggling with relationships and unmet personal needs. As adult children of these families, we may have a great fear of being rejected, and a resulting need to seek approval. Many of us are not able to enjoy our accomplishments and often fear ‘losing control.’ At the same time, we may try desperately to control the people and events around us. All of this conflict can ultimately lead to our finding other ways to ‘medicate’ or compensate for our difficulties and pain.

It is important to dig deep in order to gain a realistic view of what situations we truly have the power to affect. We who were raised in dysfunctional homes often view power to be a black or white issue: we believe we are either totally powerless or all-powerful. Leaving our pseudo-childhood, and assuming real adult responsibilities adds even greater pressure. Our fears and insecurities increase and we often experience a feeling of panic. Some of us revert to using substances such as food, drugs or alcohol to relieve our tension. In more subtle ways we may bury ourselves in church, work, relationships or other preoccupations in order to combat overwhelming anxieties.

A close look at how we were treated as children, at how our emotions and needs were considered and treated, will help us see where we may have adapted by embracing a role of power or helpless dependency on a behavior, substance or person. By reaching to other sources of strength, or by relying on our own strength, we lose our contact with our real God. When we lose contact with our Creator and Sustainer, we lose our grasp on our best plans, desires and dreams. We’ve lost touch both with God and ourselves. The unwelcome behavior and emotions in our lives have left us deeply buried, in need of recovery by the One who made us.
DAY TWO
LABELING THE ARTIFACTS

As we sort through the left-over pieces from our childhood, we may see connections between our ignored or criticized feelings, and the destructive behaviors and preoccupations we use to numb or bury those feelings. There truly are as many problems as there are people. Some labels we may assign our behaviors include: shopaholic, compulsive worker, compulsive worrier, generally unhappy or negative thinker, martyr, alcoholic, drug abuser, codependent, victim of abuse, relationship dependent, or sex addict. While this seems to cover a tremendously wide variety of self-defeating thoughts or behaviors, new types of obsessions continue to be defined and studied.

The danger in labeling is when the process takes us beyond recognizing areas of struggle, into a self-defeating viewpoint where we define ourselves solely in these terms. It is important in this journey to apply labels only where they are helpful, and only to the behavior or preoccupation itself. We are not our problems. We are created with hope and promise, and are not limited to the detours and obstacles we encounter. Realizing this will help us hold our problems at arm’s length, to separate our identity from our behavior. Our problem is not who we are, but what methods we have used to cope with life’s stresses, or to protect us from physical and emotional pain.

When does an action or thought pattern become a problem? One helpful tool is John Bradshaw’s definition of compulsive-addictive behavior, found in his book *Bradshaw On: The Family*. In it, he describes an addiction as “any pathological relationship with any mood-altering experience that has life damaging consequences.” If we constantly depend on a particular experience in order to feel good or to avoid feeling bad, and our personal growth and happiness is hindered in the process, then we have developed an addictive problem, a struggle over which we are powerless.

TRAVEL ADVISORY: Are these my conclusions, or things others have told me about myself or my behavior?

The following questions will take us through the first steps of identifying any of our current thought or behavioral struggles:

**What thought patterns or behaviors might I label as a problem in my life?**

**How long would I guess I have struggled with this problem?**

**What about this thought pattern or behavior causes me to believe it is a problem?**
What negative consequences have I experienced as a result of this problem?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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What benefits of these problem behaviors persuaded me to continue despite the consequences?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Who else knows about my problem?

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How often, and for how long have I been able to stop or control my thought patterns or behaviors?

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DAY THREE
FITTING PIECES: The Stories the Fragments Tell

We sometimes find clues to the way in which we take care of our mental and spiritual lives by looking at how we care for our physical selves. It only takes an urgent trip to the Emergency Room, to remind us that a physical illness can only be healed when we are able to acknowledge its presence. In this same way, our compulsions, obsessions or self defeating behaviors can only be healed when we honestly address their presence and impact in our lives. This healing begins when we can truthfully recognize and admit the effect of these thoughts and actions on our day to day journey.

Today, we ask ourselves what the broken pieces we’ve recovered are telling us about our mental and spiritual fitness on this rugged road trip.

What personal need brought me to this study?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
What is keeping me from recognizing my powerlessness and my life’s unmanageability?

What specific excuses do I use for my behavior?

What events in my life are causing me to recognize my pain?

Which unwelcome behaviors need to be eliminated?

In what area of my life do I experience the most unmanageability?

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**MAJOR LANDMARKS:** What I now see as trouble may be different from my old list of problems!

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**DAY FOUR**

**TRAVELING TOOLS: What to Carry in the Dig Kit**

Step One is an on-going commitment. It is important to add new tools to aid us whenever we find we need to stop and dig during our journey. These new tools will come to replace the unwelcome behaviors and damaging habits we’ve unconsciously used to deal with the stresses we encounter in life.
TOOL ONE: “HALT: H-ungry, A-ngry, L-onely, T-ired,” - Step One can act as a stop sign for us. It gives us new permission to stop and put a halt to our own efforts. It gives us permission to quit.

“HALT” is also a wonderful acronym to remind us to put on the brakes whenever we are H-ungry, A-ngry, L-onley or T-ired.

Waiting to make decisions or to move in any direction until we have met our basic needs is always a good way to avoid further pitfalls and potholes. Taking the time we need to realize our own limitations as well as sizing up what we can and cannot control helps us recognize potential chaos in our unmanageable lives.

When we rely on old survival skills, we can fool ourselves into thinking life is working. As we learn to have a new awareness of how we react, it is helpful to ask ourselves the following questions:

How has my reliance on old techniques blocked me from seeing my real problems?

What have been the results of my self-defeating habits?

In what area of my life do I feel the strongest need to be in control?

What is the worst thing I can imagine happening if I ‘let go’ and admitted I am powerless over an area of my life?

In what area of my life am I experiencing the most sadness?
In all reality, how likely is this worst case scenario?

Day Five
Traveler’s Tender Loving Care (TLC)

In Step One we come to grips with the reality of our lives. As we cautiously agree to begin this journey, we admit defeat and recognize that we need help. The way we’ve managed our lives has brought us to the end of our rope. “Hitting bottom” is just a way to say that our own ways and efforts have failed us.

This first Step in our journey provides us with a new view of this unmanageability. We are given the opportunity to face reality and admit that our life isn’t working with us in control. Step One is like a stop sign; it puts a halt to our efforts and gives us permission to quit, to give up. We embrace the truth of our powerlessness and we stop pretending. We decide that even if it means that our world crashes down around our ears, the chaos of our old life is no longer bearable, and we must change. We are tired of being a sole traffic director on a 10 lane interchange.

Why all this insistence that we must admit defeat, “hit bottom,” and confess our powerlessness? It is finally because very few of us will sincerely practice the Twelve Steps of this program unless we first come to our own end. As we progress through these steps, we discover that true and lasting change does not happen simply by trying harder to alter our life conditions. Outside adjustments cannot correct inside problems.

The healing we need from our compulsions, addictions and obsessions requires surrendering the belief that we can heal our lives by manipulating our environment. Our healing begins when we are willing to acknowledge our problems, and to admit the things over which we are powerless. In Step One we discover that recovery begins with the admission that we are powerless on our own to live life as God intends.

Today, we admit that we have tried to manage our lives and the lives of others and that this management has always met with failure. Surrendering to this idea is not an easy thing to do. Although our behavior has caused us nothing but stress and pain, it is the path we have always known. It is difficult to let go of that old familiar path, and trust that following a new path will lead to peace and healing.

It is important to remember that surrender requires a great deal of emotion and mental energy as well as determination. We must drop the masks and see things as they really are in order to cease making excuses for our behavior, and to adopt an attitude of humility which seeks guidance from our Creator and Savior, from the Higher Power. It is through this guidance that we stop on our journey just long enough to pick through the pieces and see the truth. Very gently as we learn to look with honesty, our selves and our lives begin to be rebuilt.

Trailmarkers from the Trailblazers: “Try recovery. If you decide it doesn’t work for you, then life will cheerfully refund all your misery!”
“I am utterly helpless” —Job (Job 6:13).

DAY ONE
DREAM DESTINATIONS: Self-Awareness

In the first week of our journey, a look at the maps and a quick navigation through our life’s progress may have shown that we are stalled in some areas. We may be circling around the same issues and struggles that we can never seem to resolve or finish.

Yet, it truly is a very different thing to admit that we are powerless over these issues or struggles. We have meant well, we have fought to the best of our ability, and we have been raised to believe that we should never give up on a challenge or a fight. Admitting powerlessness feels like giving up. On the most genuine level admitting powerlessness is giving up: giving up the frustration that comes from fighting the same fight the same ineffective way, giving up the shame that comes from all our failed tries, giving up the pattern of failure that defeats our hope and our dreams for the future.

We’ve worn slick ruts in a very steep hillside by trying to advance in this journey from only one angle. Recovery wisdom says that the definition of insanity is trying the same method over and over and expecting different results. Giving up the effort to control things over which we have no control is the first real, sane step in our journey. Most of all, it frees us to see a better way to meet our needs besides the fantasies we’ve constructed, the substances we’ve abused, or the gripping fear that has whipped us into trying to stay one step ahead of everyone else, to win every competition or argument.

In other words, giving up is telling ourselves the truth. We do not struggle because we are bad or lazy or careless. We do not fail again and again because we do not want to succeed. We fall short because we simply do not have the tools it requires to quit. We do not have the authority or power to conquer our need for a substance or behavior. It is time to pin down the spot where we are standing, to clearly and honestly admit where we are.

DAY TWO
BOOKING THE TRIP: Do I Know My Limits?

How do we feel when we first wake up, when we open our eyes to begin another day’s distance in this life journey? In a healthy state of mind, a person awakens with a sense of hope and optimism, with a curiosity to find what the day will hold. For many of us, however, the first rays of daylight are only a relentless annoyance. We only know that a day filled with struggle, stress, and danger has arrived. We may not even be sure why we feel this way. If the buzz of drugs or alcohol helps us steer through a day of great stresses or large hurdles, we might dread a chaotic day where that choice seems more certain.
sexual preoccupations sidetrack our idle moments, we may instead dread a day with few demands or appointments. It would be logical to dread a day which holds these hurdles, however many of our days fill us with a sense of gloom and doom for no obvious reason.

A close look at the details of our day may prove revealing. Are there certain people we avoid or fear? What are our reasons for doing so? Do we fear they will bully us? Or are we avoiding their neediness, their “to-do” lists, their pleas for help that we cannot afford to give? We can look closely in the same way at our assigned tasks for the day. Which ones aren’t we accomplishing? Do certain jobs go repeatedly back onto our list of goals? Whether we realize it or not, many of these stumbling blocks represent people and tasks which we are trying to control. Because we cannot really control them, we have a lingering sense of dread, knowing that we will never be done with this challenge. We know deep down that we will fail again today.

In the previous chapters, we’ve started to explore the things with which we struggle. Now, remembering the words of the Serenity Prayer, and asking Christ our Creator to help us see with clarity, let us list those struggles over which we now see we are powerless. For this experience, we will want to be as specific as possible in naming these sources of struggle.
DAY THREE
THE TICKET ARRIVES: Seeing ‘Powerless’ in Print.

Looking back at the listing we just made of the various “bumps in our road,” take a moment to consider what these things have in common. Because this is a workbook, we may want to circle similarities, or draw lines connecting items which belong together in some way. Do our struggles center around some aspect of our job, some household responsibility, or a conflict of roles within our marriage or family? Do relationships with certain types of people carry an overwhelming portion of the list? Are those relationships family? Coworkers? Authority figures? What does the nature of the task or relationship tell us about where we have no control or power over that part of life?

Looking at the list of compulsive and addictive processes, and the things we learned in week three, we can begin to see where most of the struggles we are having may fall into one of these categories. For some of us, the control of a substance or behavior may have an obvious name, and it will be easy to list. For others, only a careful look at our list of struggles on the previous day’s worksheet, will help identify more subtle struggles. These “clean addictions” include a dependency on, or need to control work, food, children, spouses, religious behaviors and a number of other preoccupations and pitfalls. We may want to write identifying categories next to those struggles which have a category in common.

We may wonder what it would look like to admit that we are powerless, that we are letting go of these struggles. It requires courage and awareness to take that step. The exercises in this week’s study aim to help us look at vague issues and worries in a concrete way. We are taking those nagging feelings out and finding their points of origin. Now we will pin them down on the map and see how each looks when written out in front of us. For each preoccupation and pitfall you have uncovered in the last exercises, write out a statement of release:

“I _______________ admit that I am powerless over________________________________, and my life has become unmanageable.”

“I _______________ admit that I am powerless over________________________________, and my life has become unmanageable.”

“I _______________ admit that I am powerless over________________________________, and my life has become unmanageable.”

DAY FOUR
SHUTTING MY FRONT DOOR BEHIND ME: Stepping Out Past Myself.

Now that we’ve looked at our areas of powerlessness, and have labeled some of the specific possibilities, we have a better map of the twists and turns in our journey. Those are obstacles with which we will likely always struggle. If we find these lists and statements to be true, we may now decide that these preoccupations and pitfalls have unfairly consumed our lives and energies.

If we feel that we are ready at this particular fork in the road, take some time now to ask Christ to help us accept these things we cannot change. Many of these things will be difficult to surrender. We will likely wrestle with them in many different ways in the journey to come. For now, the most important part is in recognizing them, in calling them by name. To take this step now, let us sign and date the page in the space below.

signed:______________________________________________

date: ________________________________________________
Identifying these areas of powerlessness will not automatically make us feel wonderful about releasing them. We may not feel anything even vaguely similar to hope or gratitude or even relief for a long time to come. For now, it is enough just to admit the struggle, and to admit we are powerless to control or do anything different about it.

It may help us to think about, and record the feelings we are having now as we surrender these areas of struggle. The space below is provided for us to write a sentence or draw a picture showing how releasing each of the preoccupations and pitfalls makes us feel at this time.

**TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS:** “Remember- no step is too small, but some steps are too big.”
DAY FIVE
TRAVELERS’ TENDER LOVING CARE (TLC)

We have come to this place in our journey because we had issues with power. Either we wanted to grab all the power from God and run life ourselves, or we feared the idea of power and responsibility, and tried to numb our awareness with the use of fantasies, substances, or other obsessions. Others who have journeyed before us explain that we are “all or nothing people.” In other words, we’ve wanted all the power, or none of the power. We’ve tried to become God, or to find a substitute God to take our pain away.

In the old days, that outlook was called Idolatry. All throughout the Bible we read stories of people setting themselves up to be worshiped, or building some symbolic object to worship. All throughout the Bible we see how idol worship takes away peoples’ connection to the only True Source of ultimate power. We can easily see why God spoke out against idolatry so many times. In our own age and culture, we’ve prided ourselves on abolishing idol worship, and yet we may have become unfaithful to God in the same way, with no carved image in sight.

Today, we are still fresh in our new decision to accept our powerlessness. We are right to enjoy the ironic celebration of our weakness; in the days to come, this letting-go will free us in so many ways. However, one last idol may tempt our allegiance. It is the false “all or nothing” outlook we developed in our “godlike or godless” days. We have developed a short fuse, often frustrated when we could not run things our way, or else quickly giving up all awareness of reality if the journey looked too painful.

So now again, we may be tempted to view our accepting powerlessness as a once-and-for-all proposition. Instead, we are better served by an ongoing awareness, that letting-go of our false power is a decision that must be made again and again. Even the decision to let go may tempt us with false power, with the temptation that we must force ourselves to take this step. Let us take shelter in the comfort that even the releasing is God’s work. God alone gives people the strength to smash their idols, and it is only through God’s strength that we can keep from building new ones.
“CAME TO BELIEVE THAT A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES COULD RESTORE US TO SANITY.”

INTRODUCTION TO STEP TWO

As we have now taken the first honest step toward recovering ourselves and our relationship to God, we must be honest yet again. We have never fully believed in a Power, any power, greater than ourselves. We may be squeamish about admitting this. We may have prayed and sung and preached hundreds of times on the topic of God’s authority, of God’s supreme power. We may also have buried ourselves in a haven of drunkenness, or a narcotic high, or the trance of fantasy or sexual preoccupation, just to escape the demands of a powerful God, who like everyone else in our lives, wanted us to “shape up.”

Didn’t all of this mean we believed in a Power greater than ourselves?

At the core of all our homage, in the secret spaces of all our hiding, we were alone. We gave God honor, without the real awareness that such honor belonged to Him whether we offered it or not. And so, Jesus reminded us that even the rocks would cry out. Or, we ran and hid from God, without the acknowledgment that no cave of stupor or sensation could hide us from the One who sees and is everywhere. This, Elijah discovered when the still, small voice of God whispered deep in the abyss of his secret cave.

We gave honor, we hid, and yet the power of God was not bought, bribed, or barred by any offering, choice or behavior we made. Because we have now come to our own end, we suspend our self-dependence, our in-grown focus, and truly believe that there is something beyond ourselves. We have ended, after all. We have discovered we are limited and finite, and unable to save ourselves. And so there must be something more, Someone more.

Someone more, who can guide our journey to a place we ourselves could never go: a place called Sanity.
## THE TWELVE STEPS

**STEP ONE:**
We admitted we were powerless over our compulsions, obsessions and addictions, and 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 fearless and searching 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 that out.

**STEP TWELVE:**
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.
Day One

The Landmarks Around Me: Faith and Fellow Travelers

Despite all our efforts to live as people of faith, our daily lives turned out differently. Our work and worry, our trying to control life, only produced more stress and tension. We have become people living in “survival mode.” Because “survival mode” requires such constant pushing and working, we’ve become very concrete, rigid, and narrow in our point of view. Viewing life only as a problem to be solved or avoided has made it hard to imagine an unseen God in charge of the world and everything that happens within it.

We may be able to “see” Christ working in the lives of people while he was on this earth, but it is hard to imagine that He can change and direct life from some unseen place in heaven. Some of our actions and efforts have shown this gap in our faith.

Cathy believes God loves us, but cannot understand why poverty and illness can exist in the world He has created. She wonders why it seems He does so little in response to the conditions caused by sin. Cathy volunteers at a homeless shelter because she has always been vocal about her beliefs, and committed to working hard to make a difference. Secretly, however, she often feels great anxiety and despair about the “wasted hours” she’s invested in this project. In the face of a world-wide hunger crisis, she feels she can make very little difference.

Ron is the pastor of a tiny rural church. He has been the pastor for just long enough to feel he’s run out of things to say. He wonders if anyone would notice if he began recycling sermons. He attends pastoral workshops where lectures center around community service and congregational outreach, but wonders to himself what a church and its pastor can really accomplish in a town where nothing ever happens. Far from growing, his church seems to be shrinking. Teaching youth classes was once his favorite thing — it refreshed and recharged him spiritually. Now, when he teaches the young people, all he sees are kids who will go off to college, forever leaving their tiny hometown. Ron is certain he must do something dramatic to turn things around, but each new big idea and flurry of activity only further discourages and wearies his membership.

What happens after we begin to see our own powerlessness? We have been taught the truth of a powerful God, but where can we find the connection between our powerlessness and Christ’s power?
DAY TWO
THE SPOT WHERE I STAND:
If Not Me, then Who?

There is an obvious and unavoidable mismatch that happens when people of faith work hard to act faithfully without considering the will and direction of the God of the Universe. Even for those of us who are longtime pilgrims in the Christian walk, this question will call us to sit down and look honestly at our views of God, and how we view God’s role in the daily events of our lives.

Have we taken the belief that “God helps those who help themselves” to an extreme that writes Him out of the equation entirely? Do we envision Him as a Creator and Sustainer of life, but too important and busy to be concerned with problems and details? Do we feel we have “given our all” to help others, to responsibly support God’s work, and yet receive little appreciation from those we are helping? If we were honest, do we sometimes feel that God does not even recognize or appreciate the sacrificial lengths to which we’ve gone to serve Him?

Or on the deepest level, do we think that “serving God” actually means doing his work for Him?

In the space below, list all the things you currently believe God does on a daily basis:

What things do not appear on your list that you wish God would do?

WEATHER FORECAST: This is good general discussion material! Ask friends, parents, siblings, or even your kids how they see God at work in the world.

DAY THREE
CHARTING MY GLOBAL POSITION:
Anyone Out There?

Perhaps we clearly see the evidence of God working on a personal level in our daily concerns, or in the lives of others. Those of us strong in this awareness, may have doubts and concerns in other areas. We may find that our greatest fears center on the safety of our nation, or with the conditions of our planet in its last hours. We may see no impact of God’s will on the struggle for world peace or in political decision-making.

We classify these fears in general terms as fears for the future, and they are based on very real economic, ecological and political actions and decisions. We may trust the God of the universe, but not the people in charge of life-altering decisions. How does God still work His will in people of free-will?

We can take this next step in this journey only by looking at those attitudes we currently hold where the power and direction of God is concerned.
What historical crises can I list that I can remember happening during my childhood or lifetime?

How did I feel about those crises?

What were the attitudes of my parents or other family members in the face of these crises?

Looking back now, do I think God had any impact on the resolution of these events? If so, how?

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**DAY FOUR**

**CONSIDERING NEW DIRECTION:**

*Where Would God Go?*

Our reflections and readings from last week, showed us the limited scope of our own power. So many things are beyond our control. So many things we used to give us power, have taken control of us instead. Controlling or drugging has “turned on us.” Rather than enforcing our ways of doing things, or numbing our pain and awareness, they have taken away what little power we could call our own.

We may have heard parents, grandparents, or other guides and teachers express the folksy saying, “God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.” Have we ever paused to consider the impact of this familiar saying?

How do I now see God working in situations where human weakness, or even the evil in humanity has blocked the most obvious outcome for good?

How have I always thought God viewed my personal pitfalls? What about the habits or addictions that have come to control me?
What would I think God’s “plan A” would look like, were my life to have never been affected by these pitfalls or preoccupations?

CAUTION: Placing your goals and plans aside, search deeper longings to see if God may be trying to inform your heart.

If I were to imagine God bringing a “plan B” into my life, a plan to restore what my previous choices have taken away, how would that plan look as I imagine it?

DAY FIVE
TRAVELERS’ TENDER LOVING CARE (TLC)

So far this week, we’ve taken a look at the vast range of God’s power, and how our long-held views and beliefs have limited our understanding of how God works. In our human tendency to fix problems, or numb ourselves, we’ve stunted our view of God’s power. This keeps us from seeing the many ways in which God is already working. With the beginnings of this new perspective in hand, it’s time for a little travelers’ TLC.

What a blessing it would be to take a deep breath, to lay burdens down for just a moment, and gaze across at a bigger view of the world. We might just see past the troubled, or crippled plodding of our own two feet. We may have just discovered that these heaviest burdens do not belong to us. We are giving ourselves a rest by setting them down. In this moment we stand straight, look around, and see how the whole world runs without our say-so. How many good things are happening that we haven’t even noticed before? We’ve been too busy shouldering our burdens. We’ve been too consumed with powerful distractions or substances to numb the pain of falling short.

We may not be ready to surrender our burdens completely. They feel familiar in our grasp. We have crooked arms and bent backs without any purpose other than carrying this weight. It helps us to admit we are stumbling, and that we are losing the battle to carry on. As we take this break, with our many burdens resting at our feet, we are willing just to watch and consider the way God moves the universe. We are willing to remember the troubles in our lives, in our nation, in our world, which seemed insurmountable and yet God guided anyway. We now look from our burden to the Creator, measuring with eyes that do not look at us at all, to see if our burdens might be something God could carry. We wonder, might this rough and heavy burden fit smoothly and effortlessly into God’s powerful hands?
TRAVEL LOG: A LOOK AT THE BOOK

“He is able to do exceeding more than we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us” —Paul (Ephesians 3:20).

DAY ONE
STUDYING THE GUIDEBOOK - STEP TWO

In this week’s reading, we will consider God’s role in the universe as well as in the lives of his people. In particular, we will remember the concepts of Step Two in our reading, and will look for ways in which God worked powerfully to restore order and sanity, even when the people involved made less-than-perfect choices.

By reading slowly and looking at these stories and passages as if for the first time, we will allow ourselves to see new viewpoints, and for God to speak powerfully through his word. As this happens, we will be better able to consider the possibilities of an ultimately powerful Creator.

The following overview of Step Two provides a helpful beginning for looking at the Bible in a fresh new way. Read this section slowly and carefully. It will be the basis for the readings and verses that follow in the next few days.

READING ASSIGNMENT
SERENITY BIBLE: Step Two reading, pp. 29-31.

NOTES ON THEMES & NEW IDEAS:

12 STEPS TO RECOVERY – STEP 2

Often we are like a sleepy driver who is powerless over an impending accident. A power greater than our drowsy, unaware brain, snaps us to attention as we drive off the road and hear the gravel from the roadside begin hitting the underside of our car. For

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this returning alertness, through a power greater than ourselves and beyond our control, we are most grateful.

In a similar way, we are very thankful for the process by which a Power greater than ourselves, is able to get our attention that something is wrong with our character and harmful habits. This God-given Power helps us get back on the road to life as we journey to wholeness, which is found in looking to Jesus Christ and the way He lived His life.

Recently, the subject of prayer was being discussed in a class. The teacher repeatedly emphasized what He considered to be a primary reason for Jesus’ prayer life. Jesus knew the necessity of staying connected to His Power source. Because of this, He was able to live a life free from sin. Staying connected I believe is vital and is at the root of our addictions.

The words (“came to believe”) at the beginning of the second step describes the process that most other people find in recovery,

First, I “came” to a place (a meeting, a person) where help was available.

Second, I “came to” my senses. I began to see clearly the effects of my character defects and harmful habits.

Third, I “came to believe” like others who found freedom through “a Power greater than ourselves” that I too might find restoration to “sanity.”

For some people their Higher Power is the group of people at the 12 Step meeting they attend. As participants “share their experience, strength and hope” they find GOD (good, orderly direction) to be valuable, hopeful and helpful. The wise man Solomon mentions the collective value in a “multitude of counselors” (see Proverbs 11:14; 29:6).

For me, I believe in the importance of learning from others and most importantly from the God of my understanding who is best revealed by the Son - Jesus Christ (who is now represented by the Holy Spirit). He is for me not just another Higher Power, He is my Highest Power.

Finally, I share one of my favorite promises. It is found in Paul’s letter to the Christian Church in Ephesus: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20 Ray N.

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Additional Step Two readings and explanations may be found in some Bibles and internet websites such as:
3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DzYy7vVZpM

NOTES ON THEMES & NEW IDEAS:

DAY TWO
STEP TWO TEXTS

Even the most heroic of Bible characters had a moment where they had to weigh the reality and power of God. Human experience tells us that even adventurous Abraham had to wonder about his very first conversations with God. He must have asked himself whether or not it was truly God speaking. Later, when God promised a great city and a great nation of descendants, Abraham had to weigh whether
the God he’d come to know had the power to deliver on these unimaginable promises. In the texts for this week, we’ll be learning these same lessons as well.

**READING ASSIGNMENT**
**THREE STEP TWO TEXTS**

**The Main Ideas:**

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________________________________________________________________________

Record of what I noticed that was new to me.

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**DAY THREE**
**MORE STEP TWO TEXTS**

Besides seeing God’s power and the considering whether the Creator can recreate a peaceful world within us, we are now reading to know God. In stories about the God/human relationship, we come to realize that a powerful God acting on our lives can be caring and personal. We can expand our focus as we read, reflecting on our own life story and the ways in which we can see God reaching out to us, offering His power and help.

**READING ASSIGNMENT**
**THREE MORE STEP TWO TEXTS**
*Romans 1:18-20, Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 2:13*

**The Main Ideas:**

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Record of what I noticed that was new to me.

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DAY FOUR
STEP TWO REFLECTIONS

Although the journey of recovery is a very personal and individual trek, we often hear similar struggles, questions and discoveries as we gather with our group of fellow travelers each week. We are also blessed by our differences. From the group’s varied viewpoints and ideas, we collect discoveries we might have missed all on our own.

Read again the notes from this past week, and note those that still seem especially important.

Read again the notes from this past week, and note those that still seem especially important. Sharing these with the group will help you remember them in the future, and we will all be blessed by your thoughts.

Thoughts for Group Sharing:

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TRAVEL ADVISORY: In group meetings, aim to share “heart knowledge” instead of “head knowledge” about God’s word.

DAY FIVE
TRAVELER’S TENDER LOVING CARE TLC

It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to be newly created, to be perfect without the flaws of a fallen self and sin-tarnished world. Imagine what it was to never wonder about the existence of God. How might it feel to awaken and know God’s immediate presence, to hear God’s voice in the first moments of consciousness? What were God’s first words to that man and woman in the first moments of their awareness?

The far greater miracle was the way which God made his presence clear to those born after the world became broken and imperfect. What creative ways did the Creator devise to continue communication with people unable to stand in the presence of Perfection?

We who have inherited this sinful world must also be grateful to those people who risked believing they sensed and knew an unseen God. Noah might have thought he was losing his mind when asked to build an ark in a time of no rain. Abram could have reasoned that the calling to leave Ur was a hallucination. Most of us, if asked to sacrifice our only son, would have argued that no loving God would require such a thing. And yet, without believing and obeying, Abraham would have missed witnessing a miracle of deliverance!

We were created by the miraculous power of God. Faith was forged and passed along by the same miracle. Today, by believing in God, by expecting God to run the universe and to use the power that God alone possesses, we are part of the chain of miracles!
ARCHEOLOGICAL TOUR: DIG & DISCOVER

“We will sing and praise your power”
—David (Psalm 21:13).

DAY ONE
TODAY’S BIG FIND: The Hope of Our Faith

Again we come to our digging deeper section. As we gathered the courage to take Step One, we came face to face with the truth. We were not equal to the task of changing any other human being. We admitted that we needed far more than our human abilities and intelligence to solve the problems, behaviors, and compulsions that we have come to rely upon so heavily.

Step One leaves us feeling empty. We are left saying, “If I am powerless and cannot manage my life, who can?” Now, embarking on Step Two reminds us that we are not alone with those problems, if we can come to believe in something bigger than ourselves. This step describes a gradual awakening in the perception that God, our Higher Power is ready and willing to help us as soon as we are ready to accept the guidance. In this moment of powerlessness, we can now clearly see that no one else can resolve our problems.

The second phrase in Step Two promises to ‘restore us to sanity.’ This can be a difficult thing to understand if we have always believed that it was other people who needed ‘restoring,’ and not we ourselves. Accepting that our own irrational choices have brought us to these difficulties, brings us to the understanding that we must either change or live with the unhappiness, chaos and confusion that surrounds our lives. We discover that acceptance and humility must lead the way in our journey.

Irrational choices often defy our best intentions, our brightest hopes and goals. It is difficult, for instance, for the wife of a compulsive gambler to realize that she cannot save her family, nor her husband from his behaviors, by valiantly struggling to scrimp and save to survive. The frantic parent, worried and sleepless over his nineteen-year-old’s drinking, cannot comprehend that “cracking down,” and “monitoring” his child may intensify the harmful behavior.

Those locked into their own immediate preoccupations and pitfalls suffer the same disconnect with reality. The would-be “faithful” husband rationalizes that his surfing porn-sites is not adultery, after all, and cannot recognize that he has checked out of any real or intimate contact with his wife even when he is physically present at home. Or a woman trapped in the middle of nasty divorce proceedings, may rationalize that her reliance on those little orange pills is only a necessary aid to being strong for her children.

Even the honorable intention of embracing a service career may leave pastors, teachers, and other social servants in the irrational role of spending so much time aiding church, students, and community, that these preoccupations rob their families of the time and involvement they require. These individuals may become so focused on their ministry to others, that they may even come to find their time at home almost painful, more stressful than their busiest work day, as family members fight for the scraps of their time and attention.

In the past we have placed our faith in our own abilities to run our lives. That faith proved worthless. It
was lacking in the ability to do for us what we thought it would. Step Two is about Faith – believing, hoping, trusting. Faith cannot be bought, it is from God. Faith cannot be earned – it is a gift. Faith is never optional – it is a must. God promises to put that faith in our hearts, so that when we begin to feel irrational and insane, we will know we already have the faith needed to believe that He is here and able to help.

DAY TWO
LABELING THE ARTIFACTS

Once we learn to see the situation as it really is, we begin to understand why it is necessary for us to turn to a Power greater than ourselves. Ironically, this step comes harder to those who have traditionally accepted faith than to those who never had any faith at all. We may feel we have given faith in God a serious try, and have found it lacking. Or perhaps we have tried both the way of faith and the way of no faith, and have decided with bitter disappointment that neither works. Our childhood faith behind us, we often lose the confidence of our youth. Although we are glad for a religious home and the values we learned there, we look honestly, and see that it may have had little real impact on the function of our families, and that there is seldom real positive benefit or power in what we were taught.

The faith that we recover, or grow fresh in Step Two is our most important compass in the recovery journey. Our direction in this program depends on our connection with Christ, our Creator. Believing that He can and will help us, offers direction for the remainder of our Steps. Perhaps the greatest gift of this step is to realize that no matter what we want or need in our lives, we do not have to do it alone.

As I begin this process of labeling and identifying the parts of my past that have been deeply buried, I will examine the following artifacts:

What experiences can I identify that have caused me to lose my faith in God?

For today, how do I define a Power greater than myself?

Faith is the evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for. For what do I hope?
In what ways do I hope God will improve my abilities to deal with life?

In what ways do I see my behavior as insane?

For which of my behaviors do I often blame others?

How have I trusted my own abilities up to now? How has that worked for me?

**DAY THREE**

**FITTING PIECES: The Stories that Fragments Tell**

We can begin to trust our Higher Power, we develop a relationship with Him. We also begin to rely on Him to help us become aware of the extent of our preoccupations and pitfalls. An active faith relationship has been the missing piece in our journey.

A close look at the other fragments leads us to consider the mental and spiritual stability we have been missing. The wording of Step Two implies that we are insane. A common definition of insanity within recovery programs, is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. In this sense, we label our ineffective, self-defeating behavior as insane.

Our new trust in Jesus shows us that we may be blaming everyone and everything else for our situation rather than being accountable for our own behavior. In addition, we may also be desperately trying to control another’s behavior, believing that if they would only change, our lives would then improve.
What do I have to lose by trusting in a Power greater than myself?

When we started this program, we expected instant results. Our childhood experiences caused us to become defiant, self-reliant, deluded and self-centered. As children we remember feeling anger or confusion when things didn’t happen right away. We will need new tools to help us dig into our new faith, to take ourselves out of the picture so that Jesus can work in His powerful way, instead.

In the recovery journey, we are learning that instant change is rare. The changes we seek require perseverance and patience. Each of us enter recovery for different reasons and at different phases of our lives. Personal humility is necessary in order for God to unfold this process within us. We become humble as we are slowly able to let go of our pride, ego and self-will. As we put our focus on a power greater than ourselves, we open ourselves to the possibility that we can be restored and we have begun the journey.

We learned **TOOL ONE: “HALT”** in Step One. Now we will acquire two more tools to replace our old unwelcome behaviors and damaging habits

**TOOL TWO:** “Progress, not Perfection,” is a slogan that reminds us that God’s working within us is gradual, gentle. In our ego-driven, self-sufficient lives, we have become “all or nothing” people, and our impatience has often derailed any progress we were making in our journey. For today, it is enough just to look and see that we have moved forward in a healthy, positive direction.

**TOOL THREE:** “No Step is Too Small, but Some Are Too Big.” As we learn to make healthy choices, this slogan reminds us that we may regress into our old “all or nothing” behaviors by trying to address all our poor decisions at once. Because we now view our personal and spiritual growth as a life-long journey, we know there is no rush. We learn, in fact, that real life change must not be rushed. Just as Christ appeared just at the right time, to teach just the lesson we needed to learn, so He will guide us gradually to look at our choices, and to act in more healthy ways.

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**TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS:** “One definition of insanity is trying the same thing over and over, and expecting different results!”

**DAY FOUR**
**SHUTTING MY FRONT DOOR BEHIND ME: Joy in the Journey**

When we started this program, we expected instant results. Our childhood experiences caused us to become defiant, self-reliant, deluded and self-centered. As children we remember feeling anger or confusion when things didn’t happen right away. We will need new tools to help us dig into our new faith, to take ourselves out of the picture so that Jesus can work in His powerful way, instead.
As I am learning to use these tools, let me examine my thinking in the following areas of my journey:

What does the slogan “No steps are too small to take, but some are too big”, mean for me?

Make a list of areas of your life in which you feel the need to be restored. Remember to center your goals around your own life rather than changes in another’s life.
DAY FIVE
TRAVELER’S TENDER LOVING CARE (TLC)

One Woman in recovery shares the strength, hope and experience gained from practicing Step Two:

“When I first arrived in recovery from codependency, I was completely sidelined by the behavior of the people in my life. All the time and energy I spent trying hard to get people to sober up, stop using, stop abusing, stop taking abuse, etc, was insane. I was out of control, all the while certain that I was the only one in control. The second step invited me to breathe, to relax, to come...to believe.

“Now that I have been in recovery for a while, I rely daily on the principle found in this step. Sometimes I need to be restored from chasing alcoholics or addicts around, trying to get them to stop drinking, to be restored to the sanity of living my own life. Sometimes I need to be restored from self-neglect to healthy self-care. Often I need to be restored from the illusion that I can control others to an acceptance of letting go and letting God. There are times I need to be restored from fear, shame and negativity to peace, confidence and a hopeful outlook. When I get stuck believing that my happiness is in someone else’s hand, I need help extricating myself and remembering that I am in the capable hands of a Power greater than myself.”

As this woman discovered, Step Two offers the hope of restoration to sanity regardless of our preoccupations or pitfalls. First, by practicing Step One, we stopped our frantic efforts and took a clear look at who we are, and who we are not. Now that we’ve gained this new perspective, Step Two offers hope in the face of our limitations by helping us come to a belief in something bigger than ourselves. Step Two gets us back on the road, following a new path that is rich in hope and faith. It offers the possibility of moving beyond where we have been, to the very place where we have longed to go. It is a transition step, offering all the direction and power that we have not managed to find within ourselves.

Accepting the fact that God has the power to work in a variety of ways, also opens up to us the wisdom and experience that may be shared by other travelers. Many of us find that we come to believe by seeing others with similar problems being restored to sanity. We see that as they join us in meetings each week, work the Steps and practice the principles we are learning, their lives improve, and self-defeating behaviors begin to fade. For us, seeing is believing. Attending meetings, finding partners in recovery, listening to the experience, strength and hope of others around us is how we learn to see, and come to believe. We often don’t realize that there is another way to think, live life, feel or react, until we listen to others with similar compulsions and needs who are also recovering. When first we watch and listen to others, we come to believe that what is happening for them can also happen for us. Then our faith continues to mature as we see many of those same small changes in ourselves. As many fellow travelers can attest: “We came, we came to, and we came to believe!”
DAY ONE
DREAM DESTINATIONS: “One Ticket to Someone-More-Than-Me, Please!”

For many of us, a look at the Creator’s power in our spiritual journey focuses mainly on life’s beginning and end. We are content to read in the book of John that Christ, “The Word,” was present and involved in our beginnings, in the first moments of humankind. We also accept the plan of salvation. We can gratefully believe our fate was sealed at the cross, and we are confident Christ is returning again for us in the end.

What troubles us is the many miles in between. We now see the chaos in our lives and know that we are powerless to control these challenges. We may wonder when God will deal with it all. We may doubt whether God’s power has any impact or ability to grant us day-to-day sanity.

In this month’s study, we’ve tried looking at ways in which our Creator is present, powerfully directing the events of our universe, world, nation, and ourselves. What we have found, is a creative God, our Savior present in the middle of trouble and poor choices, always working despite our worst missteps. Patiently, God guides us towards an ultimately successful journey. This bigger picture helps us confidently connect the beginning and end of our fate. No matter the detainments and detours, we know our Higher Power is working on our behalf. This is freeing, and gives us great hope. If our Creator is in charge of maintaining the order of the universe, then we are freed to drop the absurd pressures we’ve chosen to shoulder all on our own. We are given time and space, and even God’s blessing to shoulder instead those things well-suited to our talents, our interests, and our God-led impulses.

Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” We have seldom paused to think that maybe Christ’s burden is light because it is the burden assigned to Him by the very fact that he is the Creator and Master of the universe. This is not a title, not the yoke any of the rest of us are assigned to bear. Without that mistaken burden, look how easy and light our own yokes now appear!

DAY TWO
BOOKING THE TRIP: God’s Job is Non-Transferable

We’ve often missed understanding God’s ability to restore us to sanity, because we live with such a narrow view of our days and lives. In the past weeks, we’ve considered a larger scope, a view which includes our history, the workings of our world and economy. By the sheer scope of it all, we are reminded that our Creator and Savior is in control. Accepting that God can restore us to sanity is no longer a leap into the
unknown. By looking honestly at all around us, we realize it to be reality instead.

We have never controlled the people or events around us. Even in our moments of worry and our efforts to manipulate, the actual circle of our impact was small. If we have escaped, slowed, and stopped the crazy spin of our own lives with drugs, alcohol, or sexual fantasy, we have “come to” only to discover the world has gone on without us. We neither stopped nor paused anything.

Someone is in charge. Someone, somewhere, gives and directs life. It is not us. Now, just now, we are discovering it is our Creator instead.

What are the qualities of God I most imagine will come to my aid in restoring me to sanity?

MAJOR LANDMARK: New dreams can surface in the stillness of an open mind.

What do I hope or imagine people would most notice about me if Christ were to restore me to a sane and serene life?

If I could follow my heart’s greatest longing, if I knew I could not fail, how would I imagine myself using the hours I once spent in my preoccupations?
DAY THREE
THE TICKET ARRIVES: Travel Confirmation

We've become willing to believe that our Higher Power can run the universe, this world, our lives, and the lives of all those around us. Because this is now our accepted reality, we can pause and write a thank you note, a posting of our thoughts at this place in the journey. In the space below, I will write my Creator a letter thanking him for his power, and for his readiness to intervene in my life.

WEATHER FORECAST: An attitude of gratitude is contagious! Once we begin to thank our Creator for our blessings and new discoveries, we begin to see them in abundance.
It’s time to rest from our hard work for a time. For today, we will try to express our new focus in a creative way. In the space below, cut and paste a collage, write a sentence, or make a drawing showing what it feels like to hope in the power of God to change your life.

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**DAY FOUR**

**SHUTTING MY FRONT DOOR BEHIND ME: Joy in the Journey**

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FRIDAY
TRAVELERS’ TENDER LOVING CARE TLC

Our previous denial, the numb lack of self-awareness we once preferred, acted like a screen between us and a clear view of our source of struggle. It is as though we were assigned a plain canvas backpack for this journey. We know it to be heavy, but we have never looked inside to see why.

In these past weeks, we’ve taken a seat by the side of the road, and have courageously opened our packs. We’ve reached inside, and pulled out the numerous burdens put there by our past experiences, our coping choices, and our blurry picture of the role of the Creator in our lives. Now, as we pull each one from the pack, we may hear ourselves exclaim, “Wait, . . . this isn’t mine!” It is truly a joy to realize that something so heavy, something that has slowed our steps and caused us to stumble, has no reason to weigh us down. It doesn’t belong to us.

At the same time, we can envision Jesus leaning down next to us, and taking in his hands all of those burdens we’ve cast aside. Each one he lifts will lighten our load. As he holds them in his hands he tells us, “This belongs to me. You will be blessed if you let it go.” We are amazed to see how these troubles change in scope and size when he holds them. In contrast with all he carries, they look so very small. What was a boulder carried painfully on our shoulders, is barely a particle of dust in his hands.

TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS: “Change only happens when the pain of holding on is greater than the fear of letting go.”
Step Three

“MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILL AND LIVES OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM.”

INTRODUCTION TO STEP THREE

with the first Step of this journey, Step Three deals with one pivotal word: “decision.” It simply says that we decide. Again we may struggle with wanting to do something, or wanting to do nothing. It is important to realize that our part in this journey is defined by a decision. We have decided to turn our will and lives over to the care of God. It is an interesting exchange. God owns all power, and yet it is God who gives us the power to decide whether we will live in harmony with His plan. In effect, we actually get to decide whether or not to be part of creation. Will we resign to struggle on with our limited resources, or will we decide to fully become all we were created to be?

There is another phrase in this Step which cannot be ignored. It is the phrase, “. . . God, as we understood Him.” One of our biggest stumbling blocks in this journey, was our belief that we knew all about God. Because we knew all about Him, we felt we could muster our own strength and intelligence to follow His will; because we “knew” Him to be demanding and disapproving and critical of our bumbling behavior, we hid from His demands and condemnation.

Yet, here we are. To honestly say the phrase, “as we understood Him,” infers that the vista will change along life’s journey. It means that our understanding and comprehension of God will broaden and deepen, and still never be known entirely. If we were able to see God completely, we would limit God. God would have an end as we do. For this time, we may see God as Jesus caring for us here on earth as the Spirit moving powerfully in Creation or Pentecost, as a Father providing for His children, as a Lion of Rescue or a Lamb of Redemption, as a Mother Hen gathering her chicks, as a Nursing Mother feeding her child. God is all these things, and limitlessly more, able to meet every challenge of today or tomorrow. . .

For tomorrow and forever, the understanding will grow, mature, and guide us along our way.
THE TWELVE STEPS

**STEP ONE:**
We admitted we were powerless over our compulsions, obsessions and addictions, and 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 fearless and searching 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 that out.

**STEP TWELVE:**
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.
“Come to me and I will give you rest”
– Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:28).

**DAY ONE**
**THE LANDMARKS AROUND ME: The Bridge of Decision**

In our past weeks of study, we’ve charted and pin-pointed those few areas in life truly under our own control. One of these which remains indisputable is our freedom to choose. This power, as God granted it to us, has often been a source of distress rather than a blessing. We stand at an intersection in our journey, and agonize over which way to go. Sometimes instead of making any choice, we stall in the road.

Thomas has traveled through life making reckless choices, missing hours and even days in a drunken stupor, or an absent high. His swirling cyclone life matched his view that life itself was out-of-control, and that he was only being carried helplessly along. During those times he sobered up to please his worried family, Thomas found the unpredictability of life to be terrifying. He could never quite deal with the panic that set in with only the sight of a stack of bills waiting in the mailbox. He was usually unemployed, because the idea of walking up to an employer and requesting work seemed doomed and desperate. The one certainty he knew was the fuzzy comfort of his substance abuse, that comforting moment when he felt the panic, and his conscious self, slipping away.

Part of the distress occurs because we have never believed God was near and ready to help us. Because we viewed God as distant and unreliable, we may have used substances to buffer us against the jarring pain of traveling out-of-control in an unguided world.

Similarly, for those of us who avoided substances, the urge to control every circumstance, to hedge and manipulate every outcome, came from the same inner doubt that God was in control.

Frank, a young pastor in a large city on the East Coast studies regularly with a man who is interested in knowing more about the teachings of God’s Word. Although the pastor’s car is only a couple of years old, it has so many dents and dings it looks like a demolition derby survivor. One night, as Pastor Frank jumps into his car to head home after Bible study, he backs into a car across the street. He quickly leaves the scene of the accident - never to return. He is too afraid of dealing with the angry car owner, of having to face all the possible consequences relating to this incident. This accident may mean losing his driving privileges because he has been unable to get insurance. He already knows from previous experience that as the accidents accumulate the chances of keeping insurance with any company diminishes. The pastor’s fears are an indication that he thinks he alone must control all of life’s challenges.

Today, we recognize that the power of our free will is the power to choose to plug into the Creator’s plan. We are learning to trust that on the other side of our decisions, in the future which lies unseen, is our Creator, guiding and directing our way. To plug into that confidence and power, we must first choose.
DAY TWO
THE SPOT WHERE I STAND: Bridges I’ve Crossed and Some I’ve Burned

When we consider our past, we realize that the weight of our decisions has varied. Some decisions, we realize, would have brought us the same basic direction either way. Other decisions have been truly pivotal. Some of the bridges we’ve crossed led to a completely different place than we expected.

Today, we reflect on where these major decisions have placed us in this journey. We will have questions to ask as we reflect on the importance of each, and whether the choice changed our lives for better or for worse.

Which of my past choices do I view as my most pivotal or important?

What past or current circumstances motivated my decisions?

When do I remember feeling God was directing my choices?

Why do I continue to see these decisions as being so vital in my journey?

CAUTION: Painful emotions may arise when examining our past. Consider sharing these feelings in the safety of a group meeting.
DAY THREE
CHARTING MY GLOBAL POSITION:
Who Currently Builds My Bridges?

In the last day’s exercise, we searched our memories and listed our most significant decisions. Some of those more recent, remain a mystery to us at this point. Others left a definite impact, the lessons of which have become clearer as time went on. We may remember the frightening feeling of making these decisions all alone. Some of the most important choices may still carry the weight of the shame, guilt, or anger we felt as we were pushed or manipulated by others. Some of the guilt and shame may linger because we make harmful decisions all alone.

As we consider the power of our decisions, of the impact of willingly turning our lives over to our Creator, let us consider the following questions about our past choices:

Which of my major decisions do I now feel I made for the best?

What values or preferences most called me to make these decisions?

Which of my major decisions do I now most regret?

What things were in the picture of my life at that time that pushed me to make those decisions?
If I made them without any outside pressure, why did I?

What would change about my decision-making process if I felt God truly directed the outcome of my choices?

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D A Y  F O U R
CONSIDERING NEW DIRECTIONS:
A Bridge Connecting Our Path To God’s

For a moment, we stand at yet another bridge. This bridge is a choice that will lead us across to a trust in the Creator of the universe. For this moment, let us reflect on how our decisions might look if we believed that our daily steps and choices were being directed by the same Power who directs all things.

When I truly believe God is leading in my decisions, what fears can I set aside?

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**TRAVEL ADVISORY:** “Good” and “bad” are morally-loaded words. In this case, we are mainly asking what DOES and DOESN’T work well in our lives.
How would I feel about trusting my “gut instincts” if I felt God was directing my will and choices?

What values do I currently hold that might change if I believed God was now truly in charge of directing my life?

What weight would I give to the opinions of others, to the effect of those who try to change my mind and decision, if I now believed God was in charge of the direction of my life? What would my response to those people be now?

DAY FIVE
TRAVELERS’ TENDER LOVING CARE TLC

Author Anne Lamott writes that the most powerful prayer she knows is “help me!” So it is that the most powerful prayers of the Bible carry that same plea at their core. In words either elegant or simple, God’s people have humbly asked for God alone to direct their lives, to save them.

Now that we have become familiar with the first three Steps of this journey, we recognize those elements in the prayers as well. Notice in the prayers of Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and in the many beautiful prayers of David, an initial confession of their personal weakness, flaws and powerlessness, and that of their nation and people. These mighty men, these amazing heroes of faith, had all come to the end of their own power, answers and strength. It was only in facing their own ends, and letting go, that they were able to step forward and ask an unseen God for help. We see that great leap of faith in the next words of their prayers, in the statements of confidence in God’s
power, and in their requests for God to use that power on their behalf.

When we wrestle with the decision to take the first three Steps, it is reassuring to see that they have long been the essential parts of every believer’s prayer for help. How wonderful it is now to join in this tradition, to know at the end of our selves, that we too can expect God’s great and powerful action on our behalf!

**TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS:** “Prayer is asking God for help, meditation is listening for God’s answer.”
“The Lord is my refuge, in Him will I trust” —David (Psalm 91:2).

DAY ONE
STUDYING THE GUIDEBOOK - STEP THREE

Some of the life journeys recorded in the Bible are actual journeys. We see Abraham travel from Ur, Joseph carried miles in the Midianites’ camel train, the momentous return of the Israelite people in the Exodus. We are at the point of our own journey, where a decision has arrived. In the following Bible readings, we will consider the process Bible characters have taken, the promises they have claimed as they came to believe in God’s power, and to turn over to their Creator their very wills and lives.

The following overview of Step Three provides a helpful beginning for looking at the Bible in a fresh new way. Read this section slowly and carefully. It will be the basis for the readings and verses that follow in the next few days.

12 STEPS TO RECOVERY — STEP 3

We need always remember the word “Him” in Step 3. Therefore turning our will and lives over to the care of an inanimate object would not qualify. The reasoning for the suggestion made in many recovery programs that “God” could be anything more powerful than us is based on the general perception new candidates to recovery had of the God they knew. The perception of many newly recovering addicts is that God is punishing them, and that He perhaps has caused all their troubles. They want to stay away from Him at best or hate Him at worst. The addict has a relationship problem with God during his/her active addiction. The root of the problem is self-centeredness as stated in the book Alcoholics Anonymous page 62. The Bible calls it the carnal nature as described in Romans 7:14-24.

We who practice Christ-centered recovery specifically understand God to be God of the Bible expressed through the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus showed us many times how He surrendered His will to His Father’s. He did this in His life and death when He chose to be our example and Savior. The Bible tells us in Philippians 2:13 “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” Surrender implies growing in faith. I have grown in faith through my recovery program through the power of the Holy Spirit for over 26 years, Praise Him.

This surrender is not easy because of our fallen nature and it was not easy for Jesus. Remember the night in Gethsemane where he started the final trip to the cross for us? Luke 22:41-44 “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” He overcame and saved us using in part the method
we now call Step 3. Thank you Jesus for showing us the way! God’s will not mine, that’s the answer to overcome any dysfunction we have in our lives!

Frank S.

3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ36-qJ7v04

NOTES ON THEMES & NEW IDEAS:

DAY TWO
STEP THREE TEXTS

As we consider handing our lives and wills over to God’s leading and direction, we are strengthened by the stories of the travelers who have journeyed before us. The following texts bring to us the stories both of those long gone before us.

READING ASSIGNMENT
FOUR STEP THREE TEXTS

The Main Ideas:

Record of what I noticed that was new to me.
As people through the ages have chosen God to direct their lives and choices, they have noticed that while trouble does not disappear, God has an endless variety of ways in which he responds. We consider in the following texts how many of God’s provisions are unique and surprising.

**The Main Ideas:**

**Record of what I noticed that was new to me.**

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Although the journey of recovery is a very personal and individual trek, we often hear similar struggles, questions and discoveries as we gather with our group of fellow travelers each week. We are also blessed by our differences. From the group’s varied viewpoints and ideas, we collect discoveries we might have missed all on our own.

Read again the notes from this past week, and note those that still seem especially important. Sharing these with the group will help you remember them in the future, and we will all be blessed by your thoughts.

**Thoughts for Group Sharing:**
Author Anne Lamott writes that the most powerful prayer she knows is “help me!” So it is that the most powerful prayers of the Bible carry that same plea at their core. In words either elegant or simple, God’s people have humbly asked for God alone to direct their lives, to save them.

Now that we have become familiar with the first three steps of this journey, we recognize those elements in the prayers as well. Notice in the prayers of Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and in the many beautiful prayers of David, an initial confession of their personal weakness, flaws and powerlessness, and that of their nation and people. These mighty men, these amazing heroes of faith, had all come to the end of their own power, answers and strength. It was only in facing their own ends, and letting go, that they were able to step forward and ask an unseen God for help. We see that great leap of faith in the next words of their prayers, in the statements of confidence in God’s power, and in their requests for God to use that power on their behalf.

When we wrestle with the decision to take the first three steps, it is reassuring to see that they have long been the essential parts of every believer’s prayer for help. How wonderful it is now to join in this tradition, to know at the end of our selves, that we too can expect God’s great and powerful action on our behalf!

**TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS:** “Prayer is asking God for help, meditation is listening for God’s answer.”
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and don’t depend on your own understanding” —Solomon (Proverbs 3:5)

**DAY ONE**
**TODAY’S BIG FIND: Willingness to Surrender**

It is said that Step One is about recognizing our brokenness, Step Two is about the birth of faith within and Step Three provides a place to make a decision to let God be in charge of our lives. If we have not come to realize that we are powerless and our lives unmanageable, then we are not yet ready to take Step Three. This step is pivotal to all the other steps we’ll take. It is at this plateau, that we make a decision to turn our will and lives over to God’s care. Because of this, Step Three is a decision we will have to make again and again each day and in each decision in order to stay on course and work a total recovery in our lives.

These first three Steps also work together to help us make peace with God. Some of us fall easily into a clear and positive sense of our Higher Power. For us it is very simple to identify God as Creator, Father, Holy Spirit or Jesus. Others of us have no idea or personal experience as to who or what this Higher Power may be, but we resolve to keep our minds open to the possibility that God exists and holds ultimate power. We believe that we’ll learn more about God at the exact time we are ready to understand more. We show respect for the integrity of God, and for the power of God, when we are willing to let Him speak to each person as He wills. We no longer press our understanding on others as we may once have. We recognize that God will guide and direct each individual path in His time and His way. We are learning our limitations in light of His limitlessness.

Step Three invites us to examine our old self-reliant and determined efforts. Because our very best efforts fail us again and again, it only makes sense to try something different. Today we choose differently, turning our wants, needs, worries, obsessions, addictions, dreams, hopes, fears, relationships, our entire will and lives, over to the care of the God who daily reveals Himself. When we make this decision, we access the real source of direction and power, and avoid the detours and “missed turns” of our past endeavors.

When we were at the wheel, our efforts became a spinning chaos of manipulating people and events over which we had no control. We may have to remind our selves repeatedly that we can never truly control the drinking, the worries, the heartache or the outcome of any situation. We then ‘turn it over’ to the only real help in such matters: a Power greater than ourselves.

We do not have to look long or hard to find God’s will. God is not a prankster or trickster. He is not punitive or mean. He may ask us to wait longer than we want, or to accept an outcome that we don’t want, but only if that waiting process or outcome is in our best interest. We are so small and shortsighted in our limitations that we are unable to see beyond
present turmoil. God sees the big picture. God values the benefit of each lesson we are learning through the process. God’s plan for us is simply for us to take good care of ourselves in every situation. When a new direction needs to be taken, we are assured the signs will be clear, the opportunity readily at hand. He has promised that He will lead us directly in the new direction at the intersection, or sometimes, that the new option will “find us,” instead.

Step Three is about willpower. It is about the consequences and limits of our planning our life’s trip with only our own knowledge, and propelling ourselves with our own power and fuel. By using our own will, many of us come into this study lost, stuck, sidetracked, or unable to arrive at our originally planned destination. Step Three is a freedom step; it invites us to surrender. This process does not happen all at once but gradually as we choose again and again to place our will in His hands. Some days it feels as though nothing is happening and then other days there are so many opportunities for growth that we want it all to stop. When we turn it over to God, we can know that each day is well. We can trust the process and our higher Power to take us where we truly want to go, in Divine and Perfect timing.

DAY TWO
LABELING THE ARTIFACTS

“What Practicing Step Three is like the opening of a door to which all appearances is still closed and locked. All we need is a key, and the decision to swing the door open. There is only one key – willingness. Once unlocked by willingness, the door opens almost of itself, and looking through it, we shall see a pathway beside which is an inscription. It reads: “This way to a faith that works.” Step Three calls for affirmative action, for it is only by action that we can cut away the self-will which has always blocked the entry of God – or if you like a Higher Power – into our lives” (Twelve Steps And Twelve Traditions, p. 34).

CAUTION: Our concepts and feelings about God are very powerful, often passed down through many generations. Try tracing how you came to your beliefs about God.

What things in your life lead you to believe you need to turn them over to a Power greater than yourself?

What beliefs or ideas about God are standing in the way of your completely trusting Him with your life?
If you weren’t allowing someone or something else to control your choices:

What would you do today? How would you feel?

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How would your life change?

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DAY THREE
FITTING PIECES: The Stories the Fragments Tell

To everyone who ever entered a Twelve Step program for recovery from anything, this Step appears difficult, even impossible. No matter how much we may wish it, we all wonder, “exactly how do I turn my life over to this God, whoever, wherever He may be?” The fellow travelers on this journey can attest that the more willing we become to have our will aligned with His, the more clearly we see His will and not our own. We begin to see that the whole problem is our intention to bombard every problem with grit and self-determination, rather than to bring it willingly to God. We learn to believe that he already has a travel plan, a perfect provision to deal with each situation. In all times of crises, chaos, personal indecision, or confusion we can halt, surrender and willingly repeat Reinhold Neibuhr’s Serenity Prayer, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”
If you knew that you had no power to control a particular person, event or circumstance:

How would your behavior change?

How would you be spending your time?

What would you stop saying or doing?

What changes in your life can you see, that you can directly attribute to your efforts in working the Steps?

MAJOR LANDMARK: Writing is a natural prelude to sharing. Consider what you have discovered to share in the safety of a group meeting.

DAY FOUR

TOOLS TO TRAVEL: What to Carry in the Dig Kit

To help remember this Step and practice it within the context of each day, you may want to write down the following and place it in highly visible places with in your home and workplace: “I have turned my life and will over to the care of God today and ALL is well.”

Whenever you feel tempted to doubt His ability to map out the day for you, try speaking the affirmation out loud to yourself as a gentle reminder. Daily spoken affirmations are great tools to add to your kit in addition to the ones below:

Let Go and Let God - “Let go and let God,” is a slogan that people in Twelve Step recovery groups often quote. This philosophy urges us to realize that the harder we try to control a behavior, a person, or a creative endeavor, the less likely we are to succeed. The struggle to control is usually a futile exercise that brings craziness into our lives, and the lives of all those around us.
Serenity Prayer - “God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Veronica Ray, in her book Choosing Happiness: The Art of Living Unconditionally, makes the same point: “The most important thing to learn about happiness, I believe, is that it is a choice. We always have it available to us; it’s within each of us. What we need to remember is that there’s always another way of looking at anything. As the Serenity Prayer reminds us, this means changing what we can, accepting what we can’t, and knowing the difference. For people in recovery, for all of us, such knowledge is the heart of serenity.”

What does the slogan, Let Go and Let God mean to you?

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What circumstance is weighing the heaviest on your heart?

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How might applying the Serenity Prayer to this circumstance create a more manageable situation?

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In what situation in your life might you apply it today?

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When your thinking becomes clouded or lacking in perspective, what are your best/most effective tools?

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Those of us who travel before you know the meaning of exhaustion. We have spent so much of our lives trying, trying hard, trying harder. With us in the driver’s seat of our own lives, we have succeeded in driving ourselves and everyone else we know, completely crazy. When we came to this place of letting go, it felt like there was something wrong with us, like we didn’t care enough to try to go even one more mile. Things began to change when we learned that surrender is not failure.

The main thrust of our recovery is to attune ourselves to God’s will, struggling no longer to impose our own, but instead to surrender to His will and His plan. We are discovering that the pain that we find ourselves in most often is of our own making. We controlled situations, manipulated outcomes that we desired, only to realize that it didn’t offer happiness, instead only a bitter end to the struggling.

We don’t handle our drinking, we can’t deal with our drug problem, we aren’t capable of fixing the behavior of another or ourselves. We turn it over to God as we understand God. This is the time to get very clear on this point. We cannot stay out of another’s business, clean, sober, humble or grateful on our own. Our Higher Power keeps us on the right path through His plan, the fellowship of others in recovery and through the principles of the program. Our only job is to hand over our problem and let go.

All of us must admit defeat. Our problem is more powerful than we are. We begin recovery when we surrender.

Step Three invites us to surrender to God’s care, God’s love. When we turn our lives over to God, we find that He can take way better care of us than we can by ourselves. Once we have placed ourselves in the care of a Higher Power, the act is complete. Our will and lives now belong to God. When the road gets rough, we don’t have to wonder if God is there. God is there, He cares. His plan is one that we can participate in, one that lets us use each event and circumstance in our lives to bring about our highest good. Climb into

WEATHER FORECAST: We’ve come to know which preoccupations and pitfalls trip us up. Now is a good time to find supplementary Twelve Step meetings that specifically address our area of struggle. These groups have a wide variety of focus, from food to gambling and beyond.
“WISH YOU WERE HERE”
PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE POSTCARD PICTURE

“Whoever believes in Him (Jesus Christ) will not perish, but will have eternal life” —Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

DAY ONE
DREAM DESTINATIONS: Surrender

Trusting, even looking forward to the results of turning our life over to God is so much easier if we focus on the word “recovery.” The word brings many pictures to our minds. A gymnast who wobbles on a landing and regains his or her balance is said to have “made a good recovery.” A person improving after a long illness or a serious surgery is “making a good recovery.” In more adventurous terms, the coins and jewels and other treasures brought up from the remains of a shipwreck are part of a “recovery process.” Somehow it is comforting to think of an unseen power holding us steady when we wobble and stumble. For those of us who have been seriously sick in our preoccupations and pitfalls, it is encouraging to know the fever has broken. However, the most changing thought of all may be to weigh our value in this process.

It is exciting to realize we are Christ’s treasure. Beneath the scale and barnacles, hidden under layers of debris and tarnish, lies the precious, sparkling creation of God. We are reassured to imagine this. The recovery of treasure progresses very carefully so that nothing valuable will be lost. We can have this same confidence in knowing God will never rush or damage us. It is easier to trust the Creator, to willingly give God complete control, if we do not suspect He will carelessly scrap the many things about us that are truly good.

What “tarnish and barnacles” will I be most relieved to see Christ remove from my life?

What “tarnish and barnacles” will I be most relieved to see Christ remove from my life?

When Christ’s recovery process lifts me from my current depths, what changes in my surroundings, in the events of my days, do I most hope to see?

When Christ’s recovery process lifts me from my current depths, what changes in my surroundings, in the events of my days, do I most hope to see?
What personal treasure do I expect to see rise to the surface as Christ begins to identify and preserve the parts of me which are truly valuable?

TRAILMARKERS FROM THE TRAILBLAZERS: “The quality of your recovery is proportional to the quality of your surrender.”

DAY TWO
BOOKING THE TRIP: Abandoning All Other Options

One of the changes in a recovered life, as the Creator polishes and restores us to “mint condition,” is that for the first time, our outsides begin to match our insides. Before, when our preoccupations and pitfalls controlled us, we had to pretend to be more composed, more confident, more sane and sober than we actually were. Now, we know that those things entrusted to God’s care are no longer our worry or concern.

In a creative stretch, we will fill in each letter of the word, DECISION, with a part of life we are now deciding to surrender to God’s control.

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DAY THREE
THE TICKET ARRIVES: Non-Refundable and Worth Every Penny

Now that we are making a decision to turn our lives over to God’s complete control, we are at a place where our new view of our lives is most accurately reflected in Reinhold Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer. In the past weeks, we have located our place on the map, looked at the bumps in our road, at the ruts and reversals, then have weighed whether those things were really ours to manage.

Before this, we may indeed have prayed, but our prayers were directed by our own views of how the universe should run. Most of our requests directed God, or pleaded for a specific outcome. In light of our discoveries on this journey, we are learning instead that we do not always know what is best.

It may take only this simple prayer to break us out of that last pattern of control. As traveler’s seeking to
turn life over to our Designer and Author, we will find our fears steadied by these clear simple requests:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

As we surrender our right to chart our own course, we find there is still work for us to do. First, we ask for the power to let go of the things we cannot change, in confidence that God can give us that power. Second, we step forward to act where action is clearly required, and is our responsibility alone. Finally, as we go forward through our days and our journey, we continually weigh each challenge and encounter.

We ask for wisdom to know whether each new thing belongs in our pack or God’s. Reading the full version of the Serenity Prayer, will remind us of the final outcome of surrender, which is our treasured goal:

“Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is; not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.”

DAY FOUR
SHUTTING MY FRONT DOOR BEHIND ME: Letting Go, Letting God

In the area provided below, draw a picture of what you would imagine your luggage for this journey to look like before and then after your decision to turn your life and will over to the complete power and control of God. Remember to label and identify those items whose presence or absence makes the biggest difference in the two symbols. What burdens are eliminated by this decision?
DAY FIVE
TRAVELERS’ TENDER LOVING CARE TLC

It’s not like we’ve never heard it before. For those of us who’ve been long in the Christian faith, who have embraced or been raised in its traditions, the urging to “turn our lives over to God,” is very familiar. What we’ve not so likely heard, are the first two steps, the real weighing and measuring of our powerlessness, and of recognizing the supreme dominion that belongs to God. It is one thing to turn over to God all that was only God’s in the first place. Our struggle really began when we thought we were being asked to sacrifice something. We feared and resisted giving over to God anything that might have been ours. Now, we may be learning for the first time that so much of what we clutched was never ours.

There is a real sacrifice on our part, however. God did indeed give us a free will. It was created within us, and it belongs to us. However, in acknowledging that God runs the universe as its Designer, Creator, and Sustainer, we realize that our lives will only function as God designed them to if we focus our will and choices on the divine direction and plan. In the end, our sacrifice is one which only allows us to become our truest and best selves.

There is precious residue in this process. Like the sluice miner who washes sand, mud, and grit from his pan, we now begin to see a dim sparkle in what is left. We discover we can be most like Jesus when we choose to seek God every day, and to follow God’s lead in our journey. How eagerly we watch to see how our gifts will be used along the way. What sparkles in this is the golden truth that we are then freed to develop, enjoy, and use the many talents, abilities, and gifts that we alone uniquely possess. Rather than sacrificing what is ours, we are truly freed to focus on it for the very first time.