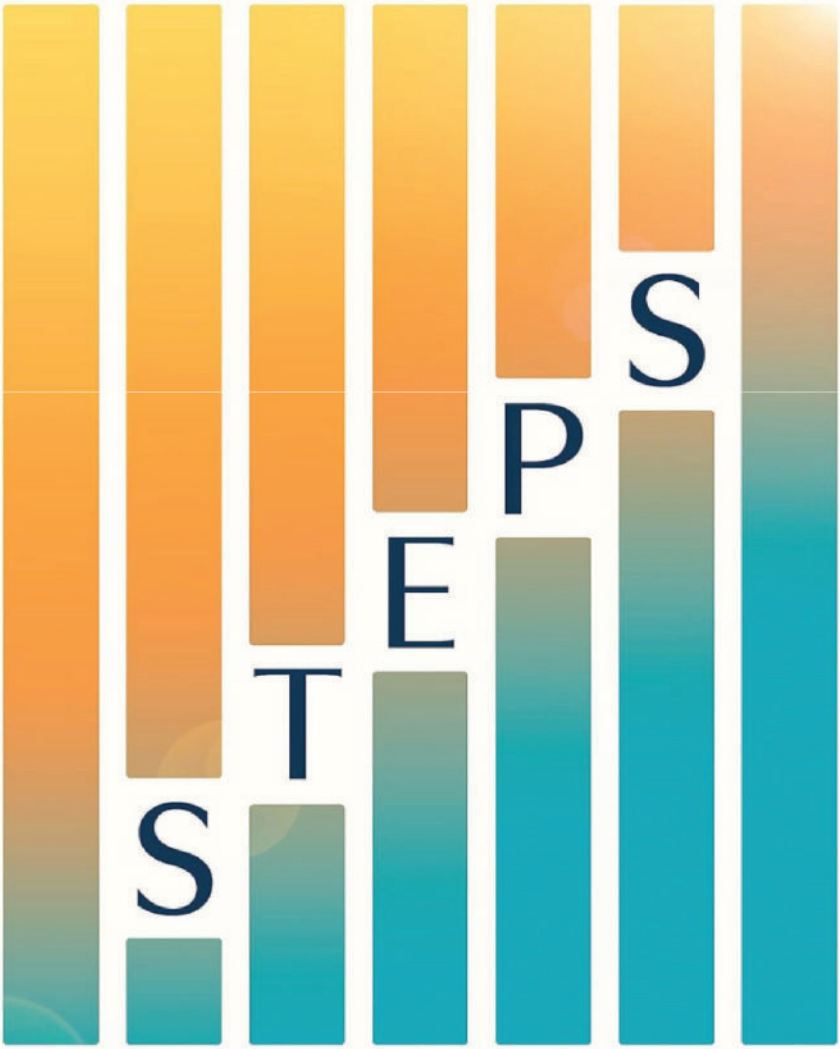

Companion Guide

Refer to this guide while reading each chapter.

ST. ANDREW'S
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Welcome!

We at St. Andrew's are pleased to invite you to take the next step of discipleship into Steps. This book by John Ortberg presents a way of life that makes spiritual growth possible.

What is special about the Twelve Steps?

- They are based on biblical and Christian spiritual principles.
- They are about a way of living, not just exercises to do.
- They involve a fellowship, a community of people who encourage one another and grow together -- this is the vision we read about in Acts 2. We cannot "do discipleship" alone, we need the fellowship of believers together.
- They have proven to foster spiritual transformation (i.e., "putting off the old... [and]...putting on the new self")

The philosopher and Christian spiritual writer/ theologian Dallas Willard mentioned in several places that the principles of the twelve steps could be applied to all Christians for their spiritual growth, helping them to live out the teachings of Jesus more naturally.

Individuals who are in 12-step recovery do not "work the steps" alone. Together, in small group community, we will be traveling through these steps.

This book companion is intended to help you to journey through the contents of the book as Ortberg elaborates upon each step. Keep this guide next to you as you read the book to refer back-and-forth. It is also suggested that you use a designated journal or pad of paper to keep your notes together.

STEP ONE (pages 11-31)

We admitted we were powerless over our deepest problems and our lives had become unmanageable.

The Problem: I Can't

Guiding Scriptures
Luke 6:6-11 and Romans 7:15

➥ What was Ortberg's point in using the story of the man with the withered hand?

➥ How do Paul's words in Romans 7 relate to the first step?

Engaging with the Book
Identify your "withered hand," i.e., where you are "not fine." (pages 14-17)

Keep in mind, admission means:
- being honest with oneself being humble (which sometimes comes through humiliation)
- being vulnerable – getting in touch with one's limitations

What gets in the way of admission:
- denial – no one likes to admit their own weakness
- self-deception – we can rationalize, "I'm not that bad."

A good way to think about powerlessness:
- We don't have "it." Rather, "it" has us!

It is easy for us to identify externals we are powerless over – the weather, other peoples' behavior, drivers alongside us on the 405, etc.

The First Step is about identifying the *internals* we are powerless over. It's saying, "I can't." It may be easy to say, "I'm not an alcoholic or addict, so this doesn't apply to me." Below are questions to consider and maybe journal about or talk with a trusted confidant to help you identify your "withered hand."

- Do I have a habit or behavior that betrays my values or has gotten "a hold" of me? Any habitual self-defeating behaviors? (drinking, eating, spending, gambling, promiscuity, hoarding, physical exercise, working, cheating, gossiping, procrastination, spending time on the internet, etc.)

- Do I have a pattern of thinking in which I've gotten stuck? (judgmentalism, negative self-talk, obsessive thinking or worrying, etc.)

- Is there anything to which I am attached that may have become more important to me than anything else? (striving for success, a dream for my future, an ideal I want to live up to, feeling needed by others, seeking approval, etc.)

- Is there a behavioral pattern that gets in the way of my relationships with others? (having to be "right," desiring to control others, anger or aggression, not being an active participant in a relationship, breeding resentment toward one or more people, "checking out" by binge-watching or playing video games or ignoring responsibilities, etc.)

Advice: Try not to get caught up on the words, "my life has become unmanageable."

Here are other ways to think about it:

Unmanageable = "This isn't working."

"I can't keep working at this pace…"

"I can't keep spending money at this rate…"

"I can't seem to control my angry outbursts…"

"I spend all week thinking about when I can go out and party…"

"No matter how hard I try, I just can't seem to…"

"This has become the most important thing to me, but I know there are better priorities in life…"

See page 20 for more help with this topic.

If admitting weakness is still a challenge for you, revisit pages 24-25 and spend time in prayer with God, asking him to give you the grace of clarity and honesty.

Taking the Step

Once you have some clarity about your powerlessness, you can take time here or in your journal to complete the first step with your own words:

I, _____, admit that I am powerless over _____, and that my life has become unmanageable (I can't do it on my own).

You might wonder why it is important to actually articulate these words. Recall the logic of the apostle Paul who explained in his second letter to the Corinthians that he had what he called a "thorn in the flesh." We do not know what it was, but when it just wouldn't go away, Paul learned an important lesson. When we are weak, God is strong. When we know our own inadequacies, weaknesses, imperfections it gives us access to God's strength and power. Ortberg says, "No one ever meets God on the basis of personal adequacy" (page 29). In other words, the Bible shows us again and again how God showed up in the biblical

stories and had encounters with people who had major flaws and inadequacies. It is almost as if God celebrates the inadequacies because his power can become manifest through and despite our human flaws. Ortberg says, "Paul's inadequacy tethers him to God in a way that adequacy never could" (page 30).

At the end of Step One, Ortberg stresses the importance of "celebrating" our inadequacies. The reason is because "inadequacy" is exactly why we need a Savior. We were personally inadequate to save ourselves, and Jesus has done that for us. And now, as we look closely at our addictions, self-sabotaging behaviors and habits, our unhealthy attachments, etc., we realize that we need saving again and again. We are inadequate to save ourselves, so we admit that and look to God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

➥Take time, preferably at the beginning of your day, to read and apply the section "Next Step" on page 31 to your day. Perhaps do this exercise more than once this week.

STEP TWO (pages 35-56)

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

The Solution: He Can

Guiding Scripture
1 Corinthians 1:26-28

➥ What is the significance of the words, "but God…"?

➥ What is one of your favorite "but God…" statements in the Bible?

Engaging with the Book
Ortberg says: "Everybody is inadequate. However, our inadequacy does not have to be the end of the story. A daily, interactive, experiential connection to a Power greater than yourself is now available to you." (page 39)

After making an admission in the first step, which points to our own inadequacy, step two tells us what gives us hope – a Power greater than us, who we call God. "We can't…but God can!"

For most of us participating in this church study together, believing in God (or even being willing to believe in God) is not an impossible task. Our knee-jerk reaction might be, "Of course I believe in God!" Our challenge, then, comes in two other ways.

First, we often want to try to take control of our lives back from God. Even though we just admitted that we're powerless, we may instinctually revert to trying to

take control back into our own hands. (Repeating the first step in our minds everyday is a good way to "keep it real.")

Second, we might wonder, "how much belief is enough belief?"
Ortberg answers this question and says, "The answer is short: not much." (page 43)

Abraham, one of the greatest figures of faith in the entire Bible, did not have perfect faith. In addition, the second step isn't just about believing in God, it's about believing that God will bring restoration and transformation to our lives. (We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to **sanity**.) If you get stuck at the word "sanity," consider these words from Ortberg: "Often people say that insanity is doing the same old things and expecting different outcomes…but it is soundness of mind, healthy perspective, good judgment, freedom from impulsivity, the ability to place what is good and right over what we happen to desire." (page 46)

Perhaps replacing the word "sanity" with "wholeness" or "flourishing" could be helpful to you.

Many of us do not have doubts that God can do powerful things in our lives, but rather we harbor doubts that God <u>will.</u>

➥ If you struggle with doubt (most of us do!), revisit pages 46-49 if you want to take a "doubt assessment" and take time to contemplate and pray about what Ortberg says on the bottom of page 48 – top of page 49.

Taking the Step

One of the major reasons believers struggle with doubt and lack of faith in what God can and will do, is because many believers know *about* God, but don't *know* God. It is challenging to trust someone you don't know well. Ortberg speaks about forming a secure attachment to God. Part of fully "working the second step" includes being with God, experiencing God, looking for God's presence, talking to God and listening to God. It is about cultivating deep relationship with God. The more our relationship with God deepens, the more the remaining steps will have depth and meaning.

 Three ways to practically practice God's presence this week:

- Spend 10-15 minutes each day in silence and solitude. Find a place that is as silent as possible, where you can be alone and uninterrupted or distracted. Sit in God's presence. Allow thoughts to come and go. Try to just listen. Just be.
- At the end of each day, recall one time over the course of the day when there was a "God-moment," or an answered prayer, or a little ''nudge" that let you know God was present (often comes through other people, through something you read or hear, some event in the day when you felt your best self or you felt energized).
- Put an alarm on your phone or calendar that prompts you at certain times of the day to stop what you are doing, take a pause, and just remember that God is present. Maybe say a little prayer of thanksgiving in those moments.

STEP THREE (pages 59-83)

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

The Decision: I Think I'll Let Him

Guiding Scripture
Luke 1:38

Jesus' mother Mary was visited by an angel and given some life-changing news. It was likely hard news to receive. And yet, what posture did Mary take when receiving this news?

Third Step Prayer
This is arguably one of the most important prayers to pray. Turn to it daily, especially when things just aren't going your way. Over the course of these weeks, try to memorize the prayer. You will be glad you did!

God, I offer myself to you – to build with me and to do with me as you will. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do your will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of your power, your love, and your way of life. May I do your will always!

Engaging with the Book
The third step is about surrender. It is about giving God our "all." We can fall prey to letting God take the reins on some of the aspects of our lives, while we want to hold onto and try to control other aspects of our lives. When the rich young man visited Jesus and truly wanted to experience the kind of life Jesus was preaching about, Jesus encouraged him to sell all his possessions and give it to the poor. Jesus knew that

there was one part of this man's life that he would not surrender. And sadly, the young man could not do it.

The third step is what the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous calls the "turning point." It is, as Ortberg points out, when we have already said, "I can't," in the first step; then, "He can," in the second step; and now we say, "I think I'll let Him."

The Big Book says, "We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not…half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon." (Ortberg, pages 60-61)

➥ Revisit page 62 to contemplate the benefits of completely surrendering to God.

The third step does not say that we do this perfectly, but rather that we make a decision to completely surrender to God.

➥ What might be keeping you from making that decision?

- For some of us, it is our concept of God that keeps us from making that decision. If our concept of God ("God as we understand God") is not aligned with who God really is, we run the risk of conjuring up a dysfunctional image of God. For instance, if we believe that God is a punitive God, it will be very difficult to surrender our will to a God who we think might punish us for any mistakes we make.
- For some of us, we are not in the habit of continually seeking to switch from "self-will mode" to "God-will mode." We may have grown up or adopted a mentality along the way that self-

reliance is the only way to get ahead in life. Or, we might never have learned how to relinquish our wills to God's will. Or, we might not know how to recognize the difference between our wills and God's will.

- For some of us, we just cannot seem to get to the point where we can truly "let go and let God." We are still clinging tightly to what we want and are not in a place to entertain the idea that God might have a better idea about our lives than we do.

Revisit pages 65-66 to spend time on the topic of willfulness vs willingness.

When the angel Gabriel visited Mary, Jesus' mother, to tell her that she was miraculously pregnant and going to give birth to "the Son of the Most High," Luke tells us that she was "greatly troubled" by the news. It is very human to be troubled when things in our lives aren't going the way we want. Mary decided to accept the new reality of her life, to release what she had planned for her own life, to surrender to God's will for her life, and to live into that plan. She said, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."

Ortberg points out the importance of understanding that surrender does not mean we become doormats. He says, "In surrender, we give up control, but we do not give up agency. Control is the ability to determine outcomes and circumstances. Agency is the exercise of our God-given, God-directed, God-empowered ability to take action. To use our agency is to initiate and create and take responsibility." (page 72)

If step three is about making a decision, then taking action on that decision is about going forward with the remaining steps. Don't overthink it.

Here is the prayer most people know as an AA prayer —the Serenity Prayer. The first sentence is almost always recited at all AA meetings. The second part of the prayer is the longer version. The prayer is written by a Christian theologian in the 1930's, Reinhold Niebuhr.

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.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
taking, as He did, the 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.

Taking the Step

Ortberg offers another prayer of surrender that also captures how we engage with step three: *"God, I give you my future. I abandon the need to have my own way. I'm not living for circumstances anymore. I'm not trying to control other people. I'm dead to all that. I have placed everything in your hands." (page 77)*

Can you pray this prayer earnestly this week?

Living Into the Step This Week

Revisit pages 78- 81 for great suggestions on how to think about surrendering self-will to God's will on a daily basis.

Practice Ortberg's suggestions on pages 82-83 this week.

STEP FOUR (pages 87-107)

We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Guiding Scripture
Psalm 139:23-24

➥This is one of many places in the Bible that stresses the importance of self-examination. However, this is not something done alone. According to these verses, who is our partner in taking a moral inventory?

Engaging with the Book
Ortberg lists many resistances we may have to doing this step (pages 88-92), and then the many benefits of this step (page 93).

Inventory is a word that is ripe for metaphor. The owner of a grocery store must regularly take inventory or else the shelves will be barren and the perishables will expire. Then, the store will not be good for anyone. It will not serve its purpose. We too must take stock of our "shelves" in order to purge the things "going bad" and restock with the things that are life-giving.

The fourth step helps us transfer ownership of our lives over to a new owner – God (in the third step we made that transfer) and now the new owner examines all the assets and liabilities of the business. God wants to partner with us in taking our moral inventory. And, an inventory isn't just about the bad stuff, but also the good stuff.

The Difference Between Introspection and Self-Examination

It is important to understand the difference between introspection and self-examination.
Ortberg makes the distinctions: "We do introspection all by ourselves. We do self-examination together with God. In introspection, our thoughts spiral downward as we ruminate on our guilt and inadequacy. In self-examination, our focus is on learning for the purpose of change and growth through God's power. In introspection, we condemn ourselves. In self-examination, we observe and do not condemn." (page 91) You can read more about the distinctions on page 92.

Taking the Step

How to Write an Inventory

Do not do this on your computer. Hand-write the various parts of this step. Use your journal or a designated notebook/notepad for this step. Lined paper is best since most of what you're writing in this step is a list and/or columns.

IMPORTANT: Find a time when you can be uninterrupted and alone. Allow yourself about 30-60 minutes for each part of this step. Block out time on your calendar and plan where you can be alone to work on this. When the time comes for you sit down to start writing, quiet yourself, and pray. Ask God to be with you and give you the strength and honesty to do your writing. Pray Psalm 139:23-24. Ask the Spirit to call to your mind the details you need to be thorough. Ask Jesus to attend to your heart as you sit and re-feel the resentments that surface while writing. And remember these words from Paul: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

1. Resentments

At the top of a page of paper, draw the following chart:

I'm resentful at:	Because:	Affects my:	My part:

While the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that we go back through our whole lives in taking an inventory, for this exercise, we suggest that you spend time in your current life situations. Think of family members (parents, grandparents, odd Uncle Billy, biological mom who gave you up for adoption, spouse, ex-spouse, siblings, etc. – living and dead); friends and acquaintances; co-workers, bosses, an entire corporation or organization for whom you work; neighbors, home-owners association, elected leaders, the IRS; the rude store clerk, the person who snubbed you at church, the parent of a child's friend who gossiped about you, etc., etc. If someone comes to mind, they are "fair game" for being on the list.

1. Start with the first column, going down it vertically until no one else comes to mind.

2. Then start at the top and fill in the second column: what they did to you. Some people will have more than one "offense." You might resent your boss because they humiliated you in front of others, they promised you a raise and you never got it, and they shamed you for taking a week of vacation. Those are three separate entries for your boss.

3. When the first two columns are complete, move

on to the third column and identify what this has affected for you. A spouse's snide remark could affect your self-esteem, your sense of security in the relationship, your desire to be intimate with them. A boss's bad evaluation of you could affect your financial situation, your relationship with your boss and/or co-workers. Harms to us typically affect our self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal relationships, financial security, sexual relationships.

Notice that the first three columns of the chart are all about what has been done to you. Who hurt you, what did they do, and what part of yourself was harmed. Fill the first three columns completely before moving on to the fourth column.

4. The fourth column is where you admit what you did to the other person and it has two aspects to it.

One aspect of the fourth column is considering what you may have done to initiate the wrong they did to you. For instance, you may resent a friend of yours because they didn't invite you to their holiday party. You feel wronged that you weren't invited. However, when you get really honest, you realize that two months before that, you had been quite critical of something they did. Perhaps you started the ball rolling with your critical remarks. It doesn't matter if their retaliation was the "wrong" thing to do, you already wrote about that in the first three columns. This column is about what you may have done first.

Ask yourself: What did I say or do that might have caused them to react the way they did?

A second aspect of "your part" in this scenario could be that you did nothing at all to "get the ball rolling,"

but rather once you found out you were not invited to the party, you snubbed the friend the next time you saw them instead of being honest with them and telling them that you were hurt. This is where we get honest about the unhealthy ways we have retaliated and the dysfunctional ways we have chosen to behave.

Ask yourself: What did I say or do in retaliation to what they did to me?

In this column, you need to put aside "what they did to you." You've already written three columns about that. Here, you get honest about what YOU did. Here are some potential parts you could have played in any of your given scenarios: giving someone the silent treatment; thinking negative thoughts about someone; talking about them behind their back; ascribing to a "tit-for-tat" mentality; waiting for them to apologize to you before admitting what you did; treating them – or anyone they're related to – differently; acting belligerently toward them; "telling on" them; withholding affection or any kind of favor toward them; instead of telling them how you feel, finding other ways to communicate your displeasure or hurt (this is being dishonest!); getting angry with someone because they won't do things the way you think they should do them or because you are not getting what you want; lashing out, calling names, making threats, not controlling what you say or how you say it (sarcasm has an undercurrent of anger); cutting someone out of your life; apologizing without any intention of altering behavior; telling "white lies;" etc., etc.

Remember: Don't obsess about it, just write. This is not about getting it perfect!

Prayer for this part of the fourth step: *Lord, be with me as I look honestly at my resentments. Help me to put out of my mind what others have done to me and resolutely look at my own mistakes. Save me from being angry and help me to look on the people on my list with the same tolerance, pity, and patience that I would cheerfully grant a sick friend. Show me how to take a tolerant and kindly view of each person. Your will be done. Amen.*

2. "Assets"

An inventory includes liabilities and assets. Now make a list of your positive qualities. This includes the things you have the ability to do well, the talents, skills, and gifts you have. These are character traits that bring out the best in you, the behavioral patterns in your life that make you feel alive and help you connect well with others. This includes the things you are and do that enrich the lives of others around you. Make this list and give thanks to God for all the goodness that you are, for the beautiful and unique way he has created you.

Prayer for this part of the fourth step: Lord, thank you for creating me in the way you have. I praise you that I am a one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-seen-again bearer of your image. Help me to feel how beloved I am in your sight and to rely more and more on how you have created me instead of focusing on how I would like to be different or "better." In the words of the psalmist, I proclaim that I am "fearfully and wonderfully made," and I give you all the glory. Amen.

3. Fear Inventory

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous says, "This short word [fear] somehow touches every aspect of our

lives. It was an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it. It set in motion trains of circumstances which brought us misfortune we felt we didn't deserve." (pages 67-68)

Our fears often dictate our actions. They can be suppressed or avoided through distractions and protective behaviors. It is important to name them, just as we named our resentments.

People often categorize the fears we have into two types: The fear we will lose something we have or the fear we won't get what we want. If, for example, we realize we are actually afraid of our boss, that fear could go into either category.

But sometimes we don't realize we are afraid of our boss. We just know that when he/she walks in our office, we feel on edge, we tend to put our best face forward, we lose our sense of self because we are trying to be something or prove something to our boss. When we look closer at that scenario, we realize there is a fear driving that behavior. It might not be that we are literally afraid of our boss, but when we get honest, we might be afraid that if we do something wrong, we could potentially look bad in his/her eyes, therefore on a downward slope of jeopardizing our job. Naming it as "fear of boss," or "fear of losing my job," makes it concrete. Now that it's named, we can see why we have acted the way we have and how it is indeed the "corroding thread" in our lives.

Start by making your list in your journal or on the same notebook with your resentment inventory.

I'm fearful of:	How it affects me:	Action to take:

1. List your fears no matter how colossal or silly. Fill the first column.
2. In the second column, if it is applicable, list how that fear is affecting your life and/or how there is something you've done to contribute to the fear.

For example, if you are afraid of being audited by the IRS, your part could be that you cheated on your taxes, or, if you were honest on your taxes, perhaps your part is that you are obsessing about something that isn't realistic. Or, it is causing you to procrastinate even doing your taxes.

3. Once you have completed the third column for each fear, go on to the fourth column. This is where you ask yourself, "Is there an action I am being called to take in this situation? Is there someone I should talk to, or information I should acquire, or some step I should take?" For example, if your fear of the IRS coming after you is because you have procrastinated on your taxes, the most reasonable action would be to do your taxes, request an extension and/or have a tax professional help you.

When we get this all on paper, in black-and-white, we can see either how irrational some of our fears are, or how solvable some of them truly are. We can take responsibility for our role in stepping out of living fearfully.

Remember: Don't obsess about it, just write. This is not about getting it perfect!

Prayer for this part of Step Four: Lord, help me to trust and rely upon You. I submit my fears to your infinite power and wisdom. Help me live into the role You have assigned me in this life and to humbly rely upon You. Match any calamity in my life with serenity. Demonstrate through me what You can do. Remove my fear and direct my attention to what You would have me be. Amen.

4. Other wrongs

There are times in our lives when we have wronged other people not out of resentment or fear. Sometimes there are prejudices and stereotypes that have worn grooves into our hearts and we have summarily treated other people unfairly. Sometimes we have made assumptions about institutions or organizations without knowing all the facts. Sometimes we have withheld lending a helping hand because we have just been selfish or lazy. We have said "no," because it was the easier thing to do, rather than experience some inconvenience just to help another person.

This part of the fourth step is an opportunity to get honest about these wrongs.
It is as simple as making a list that completes this sentence:

I have wronged _____ by _____, and I intend to _____.

As was done in the fear inventory, this is a place to specifically name who/what you wronged with the specific example of what you did, followed by the

intention to either apologize, make some kind of amends, or to stop treating other people differently. The last part of the statement should be a sincere intention to rectify the situation, and that is between you and God.

Remember: Don't obsess about it, just write. This is not about getting it perfect!

Prayer for this part of the fourth step: Lord, I admit my wrongs to you. And I know that nothing can separate me from your love. Heal parts of me that feel wounded or broken. Strengthen me and help me trust that You will always do for me what I cannot to for myself. May your grace and mercy fall upon me. May I know and feel your peace. Amen.

By the time you finish this step, you may have written quite a lot. And, you may feel that you're just scratching the surface. Or, you may have written just a little bit and simply can't go any deeper right now. ALL of this is perfectly fine.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous wisely says: "Do not be discouraged…We are not saints. The point is, we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." (page 6)

STEP FIVE (pages 111-131)

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

Guiding Scriptures

Luke 18:9-14; James 5:16; Proverbs 28:13

➥Jesus used the parable of two types of people to teach a lesson about "saving face." How does Jesus explain the importance of humility?

➥Both the Old and New Testaments lift up the importance of confession. And yet, we don't talk much about confession because it is often viewed as Roman Catholic practice. The major difference between confession in the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church is that we do not need an ordained individual to hear our confessions. We can indeed confess directly to God. Scripture tells us we are the "priesthood of believers," and part of that role is confessing to one another. What is so important about having another person to confess to?

Engaging with the Book

The why's:

- Scripture emphasizes the importance of confessing to one another.
- It helps us resist the desire to keep hidden, to "save face." As Ortberg says, "Hiddenness damages us, body and soul." (page 115)
- The fruits of this step are relief, forgiveness, healing and the gift of connection with another person who sees us, knows us, and does not judge us.
- We engage another person as a witness to our admission and as a reminder that we are forgiven.
- We are proactive in seeking accountability. While we are ultimately accountable to God, a trusted friend or confidant can be a representative of God's presence.

Ultimately, the fifth step is about taking the inventory made in step four and sharing it with another individual. This necessarily involves finding someone who is

spiritually mature, discreet, nonjudgmental, and respectful of confidentiality. Someone who provides a safe and comfortable space.

Taking the Step
Revisit pages 123-124 in order to make review of your relationships and determine who might be a good companion for hearing your admissions.

➥Over the course of this week, could you commit to at least picking that particular person and making an appointment with them? Is there someone in your small group who you might feel comfortable with?

You can consider also selecting a pastor, a spiritual director, a coach/counselor/therapist, a lifetime friend.

If selecting the person is not the difficult part of this step for you, then make an appointment with the person in a place where you can feel safe, comfortable and private. If time allows, schedule the appointment during the upcoming week and select at least ONE THING from your fourth step inventory to share with the person. In an ideal situation, you would share your entire inventory, and perhaps that will be possible for you. For the sake of making this step attainable, select something that you can share with the person as a starting point for a longer conversation on another day.

When you meet with the person, together pray this prayer before you begin: Lord, we are reminded of Jesus' words that wherever two or three are gathered, You are present among us. Come Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with peace and security. Help us to step into honesty, truth, compassion, and love. Amen.

In the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, at the end of the fifth step it says: "Once we have taken this step, withholding nothing, we are delighted. We can look the world in the eye. We can be alone at perfect peace and ease. Our fears fall from us. We begin to feel the nearness of our Creator. We may have had certain spiritual beliefs, but now we begin to have a spiritual experience…We thank God that we know Him better." (page 75) This is a major turning point in the twelve steps. Give thanks to God!

STEP SIX (pages 135-154)

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

Guiding Scriptures
James 1:6; Matthew 26:41

➥ James talks a lot about double-mindedness, which means we want to live obediently to God, but another part of us resists it. "God, give me this, make me that, change me – but not yet." (Ortberg, page 136) What does James compare this double-mindedness to?

➥ In Matthew's gospel, Jesus talks about a dichotomy between the spirit (the human spirit) and the flesh (how our bodies actually obey our spirit). What does he say about spirit vs flesh?

Engaging with the Book
Unfortunately, we may find internal resistances to being "entirely ready" to let God change us. It requires us to let go of "old habits, old grudges, old forbidden pleasures, old patterns of self-promotion and gossip and envy and judgmentalism." (page 135) The problem is that we cannot change ourselves, but the solution is that God can change us! But we have to be ready.

Ortberg points out the difference between being "almost ready" and "entirely ready." He offers two practices to help us become "entirely ready."

1. Look at our excuses. Honestly examine what our resistance to change is about.
2. Get sick and tired of being sick and tired – or – Don't just do something, sit there. Allow God to meet us in that place of resistance, that place that feels so painful to change.

Revisit page 140 and spend time naming your resistance/s if this is where you personally are a little "stuck." The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous advises that if we are unwilling to truly take this step, "we ask God to help us be willing." (page 76)

Taking the Step

Becoming willing doesn't have to be passive endeavor. If that were the case, we might be passively waiting for willingness for the rest of our lives! We can take actions in this step that will support our growth to become "entirely ready."

First, we can start what Ortberg calls "doing the opposite." While he makes this suggestion in step three of the book, it is actually more beneficial for us to focus on it here. Revisit pages 78-81. You can take simple, daily actions in the right direction. For example, if you found in your fourth and fifth steps that one of your go-to behaviors is bragging about yourself, begin practicing the opposite. When you find yourself in situations where you can start feeling the urge to boast about an accomplishment, your excellent sales record, or your athleticism, take a pause, ask God to help you control yourself, and instead of talking about yourself, ask the other person in the conversation questions about him/herself and practice listening instead of talking. Look over your fourth step and start thinking through how you might practically take opposite actions from the "my part" actions in your inventory. Instead of giving someone the silent treatment because your feelings were hurt, try telling the person that you feel hurt and discuss with them the situation. Instead of giving in to the temptation to start shopping online, therefore overspending, have a loved one put a password on your computer that only they have access to (if this is a serious problem for you), or put the

computer/device away and go for a long walk, or call someone to find out how they are doing.

In addition, if we are becoming willing to have God remove our "defects of character," it helps to have a greater understanding of what "character" means. Ortberg says, "Character is the internal, overall structure of our inner self. It is expressed in our long-term patterns of behavior. Our actions pretty much automatically arise from it." (page 141) The amazing thing about how God created us is that we have the power to work on our character. And this necessarily involves our habits. Ortberg says (and psychologists and neuroscientists would agree) that "True change must happen at the level of habit." (page 142) Our "character defects" are actually sin that has gotten into our habits. Ortberg explains this very clearly at the bottom of page 143. Another active way we can work step six is by building healthy habits, habits that align with our values.

➥ Over the course of the week, identify at least ONE way you could either start practicing "the opposite" or start "habit stacking."

Ortberg finishes his focus on step six by pointing out that often our character defects are rooted in lies or misbeliefs we have about ourselves. He identifies the three great lies from Scripture as "I am what I have," "I am what I do," and "I am what other people think about me." These are false identities. Our identity, as given to us by God, is not attached to any of those (those are the lies Satan tried to use when he tempted Jesus).

Earlier in the book, Ortberg quoted a famous A.W. Tozer quote: "What comes into our minds when we

think about God is the most important thing about us." (page 65) If we are to make progress in our spiritual life, we first have to have a healthy, biblical understanding of God, and then we also need to have a firm identity that is given to us by God. John Calvin, the father of our Reformed Tradition, starts his Institutes of the Christian Religion pointing out that all true wisdom consists of knowledge of God and knowledge of self. It is indeed of utmost importance to our spiritual lives that we continually revisit what we know to be true about God, and therefore what we know to be true about ourselves because of the identity God has given us.

➥ If you struggle with your identity and fall prey to one of the three lies, consider writing a "Beloved Charter" (Ortberg refers to this on page 153). At the end of this guide, you can find instructions on how to do so.

Prayer for Step Six: Lord, I desire the willingness for you to remove my defects of character. I now release my need for power and control. I now release my need for affection and esteem. I now release my need for security and survival. Help me to know that I am your beloved child no matter what. Amen.

STEP SEVEN (pages 157-175)

We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Guiding Scriptures
Matthew 23:12; James 4:6

➥ Why is humility so important?

Engaging with the Book
A key word in this step is "humbly." Humility is important because it facilitates God's transformative work in us to occur.

Ortberg says, "Humble yourself, and you grow ready for God to do in you and with you and for you what you could not do for yourself…Those of us who are "working on our spiritual lives" need humility more than anyone else…" (page 158)

Just asking God for help is a humbling act in itself. It is submitting a request. "God, would you?"

Ortberg goes on to say: "We are not in charge in any way. We're not in charge of the timing. Will God do this in a day, in a month, or in a lifetime? That's not up to us. Will it be easy? Will he just lift these character defects away? Or will the process be filled with effort and pain and embarrassment? We don't know. It's not up to us. God knows better than we do. That's why he's God and we're not." (pages 158-159)

Dallas Willard's approach to humility included "the Three P's:" pretending, presuming, pushing. He said that if we refrain from these three things, this is a "fail-safe recipe for humility." (pages 160-161)

➥Look at "Next Step" on page 161. Dallas Willard's challenge was to try it for one month. Could you try giving up one of the P's you struggle with for just one day? For a whole week?

Ortberg points out that we do not remove our own defects of character, but rather we "humbly ask God to do what we cannot do for ourselves." (page 163)

It is important to note that it is not a passive waiting for it to happen overnight. The theological term we use is sanctification and it is a process. God will continue to reveal to us how our defects of character rear their heads in the situations of life, usually when emotions "get the best of us."

Ortberg points out: "We may be afraid of getting in trouble, so we lie. We envy, so we gossip…We feel inferior, so we self-pomote…[etc.] Part of defect-removal involves learning a new way to handle troubling emotions." (page 164) This is not about making them go away, because willpower is not enough.

Ortberg teaches three actions to help navigate emotions, using the acronym OWN:

O – Observe. Pay attention to the feelings and thoughts that come up. Be mindful of them, notice them, get curious about them. But do not judge them. Accept them. Perhaps after noticing some anger, take a moment to pray to God about your anger. Ask God to help you understand it.

W – Welcome. Instead of resisting the negative emotion,

give it space. Allow it to be. Invite it to the table. Accept that this is how you feel.

N – Name. Identify the feeling for what it is. "If we can name it, we can tame it." (page 167)

This is the best time to turn to God in prayer and ask God to reveal to you what He would like you to do with the emotion.

Taking the Step

In the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, this is the Seventh Step Prayer: *My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding. Amen.*

STEP EIGHT (pages 179-200)

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

Guiding Scripture

Luke 19:1-10

➥Zacchaeus was a tax collector who was despised by many (they called him a "sinner"), and yet he did not play the victim. He focused on his part by admitting it and stating his willingness to make amends to those he may have cheated. How is Zacchaeus a model for the eighth step?

On page 184, Ortberg makes this profound statement about Zacchaeus: "He [Zacchaeus] realizes he cannot

be in a relationship of love with Jesus and continue to harm the people around him." How does this statement resonate with you?

Engaging with the Book
There are two actions in this step: 1. making a list; 2. becoming willing.

The list is the easy part. We have already done this in the fourth step. That is where we listed "our part" in the wrongs we have felt from others, the resentments we have harbored and the fears that have driven us to make decisions based on self. We also listed other wrongs we did to people even if they had no association with resentments or fears.

Step four started showing us how we can play victim to what others do to us without taking responsibility for our part in matters. Like the men in John's gospel who wanted to cast stones at the adulteress and were told by Jesus that they needed to admit their own sinfulness, we too must stop looking at the other side of the street and clean our own. Step eight furthers this movement…stepping out of playing the victim into taking a look at the list of people we had harmed in some way.

The second part of the eighth step is becoming willing to make amends to the people on our list. It is natural at this point to start imagining scenarios. We may balk at the prospect of sitting across from a long-time adversary, perhaps even someone we cannot stand, and admitting our part in the situation. This can make us bristle with resistance. The eighth step is only about becoming willing.

There is no wonder humility was covered in the

seventh step. It requires humbling oneself when even considering some of the conversations that you can imagine having with people. Again, Zacchaeus is a great example of the willingness that we have to choose because God never coerces us.

Ortberg identifies some key barriers or resistances we may have and how to get past them.

➥ Revisit pages 186-192 to identify any barriers that may be in you.

Taking the Step

This week, go back to your fourth step and on a separate page, convert the names of people you resented, feared, and harmed into one list.
Then add a second column to the list and name what you did. This should also have been in the fourth step column called "my part."
A third column is where you can identify what is at the core of what made you act the way you did. These typically fall into the following: dishonesty, people-pleasing, perfectionism, greed, envy/jealousy, lust, gluttony/hedonism, self-pity, brooding, selfishness, pride, apathy/laziness (not caring, not taking positive actions or letting negative actions unfold).

Person (or institution)	What the harm is	Character flaw underneath

For more help on this, see pages 192-193.
Ortberg suggests making a notation next to each person whether you are willing to make amends (yes/

no/maybe). Ultimately, as Ortberg says on page 189, it is not about wanting to make amends, it is about being willing to. Perhaps you're not willing to today, but ultimately God may place that person in front of you one day when you realize it is the right time to do so and on that day you will be willing. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that if willingness is not there, "we ask until it comes." (page 76) This step often involves a lot of prayer, asking God to help us become willing. The Big Book reminds us, "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us." (pages 76-77) In other words, while we are admitting our faults, it is ultimately so that we can be in collaboration with God's "shalom" intention for the world (human flourishing). Ortberg points out that "We cannot have a soft heart toward God and a hard heart toward our fellows. We each have only one heart." (page 190)

A helpful way to pray for willingness is to combine elements of the third step and seventh step prayers: God, I offer myself to you – to build with me and to do with me as you will. Relieve me of the bondage of self that I may better do your will… I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding.

STEP NINE (pages 203-222)

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

Guiding Scripture
Luke 15:17-20

The "prodigal son" realized that he had wronged his father and wanted to return home, not just to apologize, but to offer to work as a servant – to find a way to offer restitution. It doesn't matter what his motive is (some argue that he was selfishly trying to make his way back into the family)…what matters is how he approached his father, which is the spirit of amends. Did he ever say the words, "I'm sorry?"

Engaging with the Book
What is "amends?"
It is to repair something that has been broken. Often we see the sign in stores that have fragile goods: "You break it, you buy it." Buying the broken item is making amends for breaking it.
In the context of relationships, it is seeking to repair harm that has been done to someone else, therefore harm to the relationship. It does often include the words, "I'm sorry," or "I apologize," but at the heart of it, making amends "is to seek to undo what we did when we harmed someone." (Ortberg, page 203) Many people say "I'm sorry" multiple times but have no intention to actually repair or undo what was done to cause harm.

It is also important to note that working this step does not entail waiting until we *feel* forgiveness toward

the other person. This is about an "attempt to sweep away the debris what has accumulated out of our effort to live on self-will and run the show ourselves." (Big Book, page 76) These strong words reinforce what is at stake in resisting this step: "Reminding ourselves that we have decided to go to any lengths to find a spiritual experience, we ask that we be given strength and direction to do the right thing, no matter what the personal consequences may be…we are willing. We have to be. We must not shrink at anything." (page 79)

Types of amends: Direct amends and living amends

It is ideal to make direct amends to people, face-to-face, when possible. Ortberg suggests making notations on the eighth step list which indicate people you can make amends to now; people who will have to wait until later (you're not willing yet, or you simply won't see them until sometime in the future); people you would categorize as "maybe I will and maybe I won't," which is typically people you need to pray more about for various reasons; people who you could never see yourself making amends to (typically people who are abusive and you cannot see anymore, or people who you would harm more than help if you met with them). See pages 204-205, where Ortberg makes these distinctions.

"…wherever possible" – Perhaps there are people on your list who you would be willing to make amends to now, but they have died, or, you really don't know where they are these days. Perhaps you've lost contact with someone but if you were to cross paths with them again you would be ready to make amends. Or, sometimes, the other person does not want to have anything to do with us. They have cut us out of their lives. You cannot force someone to meet with you.

Instead, pray for them, asking God to soften their heart and make a way for the two of you to meet.

Consider this: if you have harbored ill-thoughts about someone or gossiped about someone, you should really pray about whether you should admit it to the person. It could potentially harm the other person if you were to reveal something to them just for the sake of admitting your wrongs. If the person knows you have gossiped about them, then of course direct amends is called for. But sometimes we can bring more harm than good.

This is where LIVING amends come into play.

Sometimes the best way to make amends to people is to do so in how we live. For instance, if one of your harms is stealing time from your employer (using company time to do personal things), then stop stealing time. Commit to working on company time. (see Step Six about doing the opposite of what has been done in the past.) In the case of harboring ill-thoughts toward someone or gossiping about them, the living amend would be to NOT harbor ill-thoughts and NOT gossip about them ever again. Living amends includes halting those internal and external ways that harm the other person. If you have been rude to a store clerk, but you don't know the person and haven't seen them since the rude act, then be careful to future clerks you come in contact with. Refrain from rudeness going forward.

Another aspect of living amends has to do with the post-amend relationship. If you meet with someone, admit where you have wronged them, and then do the same thing to them a week later, that is not truly making amends. Amends include amending how we live in relationship with people going forward. That doesn't mean it will be easy or that everything will be

perfect, but it will make it easier to quickly apologize if the harm or another one happens in the future. It also helps to adjust behavioral habits. For instance, if you are in the habit of being passive aggressive with your spouse instead of being honest and letting them know how you feel, it will take some time to get yourself out of that habit, but also it will be living amends to them by overcoming that habit as you go forward in your relationship.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous makes this great observation: "Our behavior will convince them more than our words." (page 83) Our words are important, but they have more weight when followed up with action.

Sometimes our amends include financial reparations. If we have cheated someone or borrowed something and subsequently lost the item, the amends should include the attempt to financially make reparations.

There is true wisdom in the Big Book: "There may be some wrongs we can never fully right. We don't worry about them if we can honestly say to ourselves that we would right them if we could." (page 83)

Taking the Step

➥ Select one person on your list who you can make amends to this week. Pick an easy one. The more we make amends to the people who are easy, the more we will be ready to make amends to the harder ones on our lists.

Revisit pages 206-207, and 210-215 for crafting what you want to say and how you want to say it (using the acronym CRAFT).

Amends often sound like this: "I am sorry that I yelled at you yesterday. I overreacted to a comment you made and it was not about you, it was because I was afraid that I had done something wrong. It was not how I would have wanted to react and I did not want to hurt you. I will do my best to be more honest with you about how I feel instead of reacting so harshly."

Ortberg makes suggestions about giving the other person the chance to tell the scenario from their perspective and add anything other information that could be useful and/or any kind of reparation that would help them going forward. (see pages 206-207)

These are important words from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: "We go to him [the person to whom we are making amends] in a helpful and forgiving spirit, confessing our former ill-feeling and expressing our regret [about certain behavior or actions]. Under no condition do we criticize such a person or argue…We are there to sweep off our side of the street…never telling him what he should do. His faults are not discussed. We stick to our own. If our manner is calm, frank, and open, we will be gratified with the results." (pages 77-78)

And finally, it is important to know that sometimes people won't react the way we'd like. They might not be quick to forgive, or they might heap more upon us than we were expecting to bear. It is important to let go of the results of these amends but keep focused on the goal in making amends. The Big Book says, "We have made our demonstration, done our part. It is water over the dam." (page 78)

NOTE:
There is something miraculous that happens at this point in the twelve steps. Facing people who have been our

"adversaries" or even those who are our close loved ones, and humbling ourselves to admit where we have been wrong involves a vulnerability that is most often met with an encounter with the other person that is often very healing in and of itself. Be ready to experience some amazing surprises at this stage of the "program" of recovery!

In fact, in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, the original authors of the book explicitly list several miracles that they experienced as a result of getting this far in the steps, and they "promise" others who follow suit that they will also experience these things. Here's what they say:

> "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.
>
> Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them." (pages 83-84)

There are two sayings in AA meetings. One is, "It works if you work it!" The second one is, "Don't quit before the miracle!" Thousands of hopeless alcoholics have

recovered from a terminal disease and it came through diligently working these steps. It is truly a miracle!

STEPS TEN AND ELEVEN (pages 225-233, 237-257)

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

Guiding Scripture
Matthew 6:34

Jesus offers these wise words because he knows that we humans can fall prey to taking our eye off the goal and falling back into old habits and behaviors, which often involve spending too much time living in the past or worrying about the future. But God is present now, today. Do these words of Jesus help you?

Engaging with the Book
Ortberg calls the tenth step the "one day at a time" step because it is about taking all that has been learned in steps 1-9 and practicing them on a daily basis. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous reminds recovering alcoholics of the importance of taking each day as it comes because "we have a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition." (page 85)

Because we have been forming a new habit of recognizing our resentments, fears, and harms done to others and have developed a way of admitting our wrongs and making amends to those we have hurt, the

tenth step encourages us to keep doing this on a daily basis. That is because the resentments and fears of our lives will continue to crop up. Therefore, taking "spot inventories" throughout the day are useful in keeping our "spiritual condition" in tip-top shape. We go to the gym to keep in shape. The tenth step is the treadmill or elliptical machine which keeps us continuing on the path of spiritual fitness.

See Ortberg's description of the importance of "now" and living the cruciform life on pages 230-231.

Taking the Tenth Step

➥ Ortberg offers a way to do a "spot check" during the day on page 233.

➥ Another way to take a tenth step on-going inventory is to write a quick forth-step. Follow the formats given in step four and write it out when you're experiencing it. That often brings clarity in the moment.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous suggests that an aspect of the tenth step throughout the day is continually turning to God in prayer saying, "How can I best serve you – YOUR will (not mine) be done."

Step Eleven is the perfect way to continue practicing the steps on a daily basis. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous offers suggestions on how to start each day and how to end each day.

MORNING

"On awakening, let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest, or

self-seeking motives…Our thought-life will be placed on a much higher plane when our thinking is cleared of wrong motives." (Big Book, page 86)

In this exercise and prayer-practice, we ask God to help us set our intentions for the day ahead. Our minds are of utmost importance to our discipleship. Ortberg recalls Dallas Willard's strong emphasis on mind discipleship (pages 238-240). Ortberg says, "Just as our wills are made for surrender to God, our minds are made for conscious contact with God. We are made to be mindful of God and so to flourish." (pages 239-240)

The eleventh step is about praying and meditating in order to grow more and more in our conscious contact with God.

EVENING
"When we retire at night, we constructively review the day…" (Big Book, page 86)

The eleventh step has an end-of-day component. This is taking a mini-inventory of the past day, again in the context of prayer to God and meditating on our motives and intentions over the course of the day.

Taking the Eleventh Step

➥Revisit Ortberg's practice of meditating on Scripture on pages 250-251. Practice this at least one morning this week.

➥Revisit Ortberg's practice on pages 228-229 at the end of the day. This is based on the Prayer of Examen, by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Take yourself through this practice at least one end-of-day this week.

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous gives these instructions to alcoholics in the eleventh step:

"As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves that we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day, "Thy will be done." We are then in much less danger of excitement, fear, anger, worry, self-pity, or foolish decisions. We become much more efficient. We do not tire so easily, for we are not burning up energy foolishly as we did when we were trying to arrange life to suit ourselves.

It works – it really does.

We alcoholics are undisciplined. So we let God discipline us in the simple way we have outlined [in the entire eleventh step]." (page 88)

STEP TWELVE (pages 261-277)

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

Guiding Scripture
James 2:26

This Scripture can appear to be contradicting the biblical conviction that we are not saved by our works/deeds but rather by our faith. And yet, James says our faith is dead if it is not somehow related to our works. This actually makes a lot of sense. When we have faith in something, our actions align with that faith. If we have faith that our airplane is going to take off at flight time, we follow up with the action of being at the airport on time and getting on board by flight time. Our actions were following up on our faith in something. Faith is active, not passive. Abraham, the great father of faith, backed up his faith with his action in obeying God even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his only son. Where have you experienced your faith growing and deepening because of an action or actions you have taken?

Engaging with the Book
Alcoholics Anonymous have a very important principle – "You have to give it away to keep it." One of the founders of AA, Bill Wilson, discovered how important it was to his own sobriety to help another alcoholic recover. The eleven steps did not have on-going efficacy in his life if he wasn't following it up by giving away what he had done for his own recovery. This is why the scripture from James is so important to alcoholics in recovery. Actively working the steps strengthens their faith, and, the faith they've gained through the first eleven steps really comes alive when alcoholics are at a place where they can turn from self-

centeredness to help others who are still struggling. It is reminiscent of Jesus words, "Whoever tried to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it." (Luke 17:33)

For alcoholics, helping others is a matter of their own personal sobriety. The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous stresses that helping other is "a vital part of your own recovery." (page 94) It also stresses, "Helping others is the foundation stone of your recovery. A kindly act once in a while isn't enough. You have to act the Good Samaritan every day, if need be." (97) The idea is that by this point in working the steps, one will understand how their own selfishness and self-centeredness has gotten in the way of being helpful to God and others. It has made life "unmanageable" for them. And now, on the trajectory of trusting God and seeking his will, self-forgetting is a natural end-step of the previous eleven.

Ortberg points out the benefits of helping others (and not just staying focused on ourselves):

- "We become less self-absorbed.
- Our mind dwells on how we can serve others and less on our unfulfilled demands and desires.
- We discover the joy of meaning and purpose that gives us energy from beyond ourselves.
- We have the dignity and even the thrill of being used by God.

If we focus inward on ourselves, we do worse. If we focus outward on others, we do better." (page 264)

This is the "paradox of generosity" which has empirically proven that generous people are healthier, happier, friendlier, calmer, live longer and die older than ungenerous people. As Ortberg says, "By giving ourselves away, we move toward flourishing." (page 264)

It is also interesting to note that when we "give of ourselves," especially in the context of the twelve steps, it is not about giving "out of our strengths," but rather helping "others because we ourselves need healing, and there is no healing without helping." (page 265) In 12-step meetings, they remind each other to share their "experience, strength, and hope" with each other. Those three things are born out of what God has done in and through their powerlessness.

Ortberg suggests, "Make the decision that you will not make 'hide the mess' your primary life goal." He says, "the cross – intended as humiliating death for a would-be Messiah – has become the ultimate expression of "make your mess your message."

So identify: What is one mess that has played a prominent role in your life?
How might you tell your story to another person – perhaps someone who has gone through a similar hardship – in a way that could be helpful to them?" (page 267)

KEEP COMING BACK. IT WORKS— IF YOU WORK IT!

The twelfth step indicates that a "spiritual awakening" is the result of the steps. This is a beautiful and powerfully energizing place to be. Anyone who has had a spiritual awakening, or felt a "spiritual high," knows that that feeling doesn't last forever. Life keeps on happening and problems, conflicts, emotions seep in. We can tend to stop certain spiritual disciplines and practices after time goes by and the "high" wears off. Ortberg points out that just as AA has the fellowship of other recovering individuals who meet regularly together, we need "community, spiritual friendships, and accountability partners – to remind us of

our values. We generally sin alone, but we heal together." (page 269)

The twelve steps offer a way of living that continues for a lifetime. Alcoholics believe they can recover, but they are never cured. We believe we are being sanctified (made holy), but we are never perfected on this side of eternity. Sin might no longer be our master, but, as God reminds Abel in Genesis, "Sin is crouching at your door." (Genesis 4:6)

Ortberg points out that our work in the spiritual life is "… never done. Spirituality is not a skill to be mastered but a life to be lived. Each day brings a new and fresh need for God's help. Each moment is a new opportunity for surrender. Each person is a new opportunity for service. Each sin is an opportunity for examination and confession. This is not a burden; it's a relief. We are not at the mercy of our defects. The more we work the program, the more God's power works in us." (pages 271-272)

And, when we get off "the path," or we "back step," all we need to do is get back on the path, reminding ourselves that it is one day at a time, one foot in front of the other.

Taking the Twelfth Step

An important part of this step is proactively looking for where we can be helpful and of service to others. Many opportunities present themselves during the day (holding the door open for someone, saying kind things to the stressed grocery clerk, doing the dishes for someone else in the family, etc.). Pray and ask God to help you be attentive to where these opportunities crop up. Ortberg suggests that we ask ourselves at the beginning of the day, "How can I joyfully serve God today?" (page 266) We can also decide not to wait for opportunities but pursue them. Who in our lives might need a listening hear, a helpful hand, a ride, a

favor? How can we make plans to help at church, the local shelter, etc.?

➥ It is important to think about how we will plan to keep these principles going in "all our affairs?" What will help us keep accountable? How can we create habits and rhythms in our lives to set us up for keeping the work going? Will our small group be a helpful place and community for us to encourage each other to grow?

Ortberg suggests reading "The Promises," which are found in the ninth step of the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. Read them in this guide on page 31, or in Ortberg's book on pages 275-276. Reflect on how you have seen some of these come to fruition in your life. Celebrate how God has done for you what you could not do for yourself!

Receive this blessing as you conclude the steps:

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his fice to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Addendum: Writing Your Beloved Charter

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Jesus knew his identity as the beloved Son of God the Father. We too, being in Christ, are the beloved sons and daughters of God. Jesus' identity is our identity.

Throughout the Bible we can find many scriptures which affirm our belovedness. There are many words and images throughout the scriptures which speak to us about our true identity.

A personal "Beloved Charter" is a statement which strings together some of your favorite scriptures that affirm your belovedness. These are words which help us see ourselves through the eyes of our loving Father. They remind us about how God feels about us. Once we've created our Beloved Charter, we can turn to it regularly as a reminder that God has a love and a purpose for us. And the more we truly believe our belovedness, the more we live into the people God created us to be, and we are free from the messages, labels, and lies that we tell ourselves or that others tell us about us. We are also reminded of the truth of who God is, since the statements are coming from Scripture.

Here is an example of a beloved charter:

_____,
I created your inmost being. I knit you together in your mother's womb.
You are my handiwork, in whom I take delight.
You are a holy, chosen, and beloved child of mine, after my own heart.
I have given you a unique purpose.
I have called you, and because I am faithful I will do it.
Know that nothing can separate you from my love.
I am with you until the end of the age.

Some favorite Scriptures to use for this: Psalm 139, Jeremiah 29:11, Ephesians 1:11, Exodus 19:5, Romans 8:38-39, Jeremiah 31:3, Isaiah 41:10, Hebrews 13:5

All quotes from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous come from the Third Edition, copyright 1976.

ST. ANDREW'S
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH